

## BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP YEAR 2000

### WEEK 51 Dec 18-24, 2000

#### Monday Dec 18 12.00

The river remains high, but the level of water in the lower meadow (or balancing pond) has fallen since the weekend. The causeway path is very muddy. Two black dustbin bags of rubbish have been dumped – they are now just south of the sluice gate. I could not remove them since they were in deep water.

#### Wednesday Dec 20 11.00-11.30

##### River level:

The river is lower than it was at the weekend, though it is still running very high and is going over the sluice gate into the lower meadow which is partially flooded.

##### Birds (singing or calling):

Robin (7), Wren (7), Dunnock (3), Blue Tit (2), Long-tailed Tit (4), Song Thrush, Magpie and Carrion Crow. Other birds seen: Collared Dove, Wood Pigeon, Black-headed Gull.

##### Flowers:

Yarrow – several on the Seagull Lane patch, Hogweed and White Dead-nettle - widespread, Ivy - on Willows on North Bank and Winter Heliotrope - along main river bank. The single plant of Hedge Mustard is still flowering along the A259 footpath.

##### Other observations:

A couple of small holes have been dug along the north bank by the north bridge – presumably by a fox.

The feathers of at least two birds were scattered along the east path by the back gardens of the cottages in Lumley Road, presumably also a sign of fox activity. One bird was certainly a Magpie – the second such discovery in the meadow this winter.

The other feathers were a lovely rich brown colour, which I could not find in my Tracks and Signs book so I assume they were from a domestic fowl caught in the Lumley Road cottage gardens.

Laminated posters were pinned to posts at the three entrances to the meadow advertising the existence and work of the Brook Meadow Conservation Group – thanks to Ted Aylett.

#### Sunday 24 December 2000 (Frances)

Time: 2 p.m. Weather: raining. Not much to report.

Southern part no longer flooded. Water no longer going over sluice gate. Paths still very muddy. Water level in Ems well below GAS marker.

People: 2 on riverside walk.

Birds: not much bird activity, 6 mallard on river Ems, a few gulls flying over, robin in meadow.

## WEEK 50 Dec 11-17 2000

Monday Dec 11 12.00

Mallard 4 on the river, Great Tit, Blue Tit and Blackbird active by the Lumley Gate.

Thursday Dec 14. 12.00 (Richard Bishop)

People:

3 x dog walkers. 1 Fly tipper with a sack of garden rubbish who went elsewhere with his rubbish off when I challenged him!

Fauna:

Plenty of common birds: Mallard x 2. Little Egret on the overflow south part of the flood area

Great (5) & Blue (4) Tits, Wren, Robin x 3, Wood pigeons galore, Starling x 6, Magpie x 2, Blackbird x 3, Song thrush

Friday Dec 15 11.00-12.00

The floods:

The River Ems is running higher than I have ever known it. The footpath through Palmer's Road Copse was flooded and the water from the river was rushing over the concrete sluice gate completely flooding the lower meadow or balancing pond adjacent to Gooseberry Cottage to a depth of a couple of feet at least. Both paths were impassable. I popped into Gooseberry Cottage to see how the Ingrams were coping. They told me they had 12 inches of water in the cottage on Tuesday night and had to get the fire brigade to pump the water out. They were in remarkably good spirits in view of the damage to their carpets and furniture and the awful smell of dampness in the house. They are convinced the water came from the Ems via the balancing pond and not from the tide flooding Peter Pond. They also commented on how perfectly clear the flood water was; this is something I have noticed in other flooded areas. This clarity presumably reflects the origin of the water from the chalk hills of the downs.

Wildlife:

The lovely spring-like morning had encouraged the local birds to break into song. Two Song Thrushes were singing away in the meadow, much as they were last year, no doubt establishing their respective territories in Palmer's Road Copse and Lumley Road Copse on opposite sides of the meadow.

Other birds singing were 4 Robins, 4 Wrens and a Blue Tit. I also noticed 2 Collared Doves, 2 Dunnock, 4 Blackbirds and 2 Carrion Crow.

The only flowers I could find in the meadow were Dandelion, White Dead-nettle, Yarrow, Hogweed and Ivy. Berries of Hawthorn, Ivy and Dog Rose were also present.

Bramble on the meadow. There seems to be 4 main patches: North bank, mid main meadow (north), east meadow adjacent to Lumley Road cottages gardens, around Gooseberry Cottage garden.

People:

4 young lads walked down the main western path, discarding a chocolate box as they went. One lady with a dog. One man with a dog. Everyone used the causeway and out of Lumley gate.

Litter:

A bike frame is in the grass just east of the north bridge. Bits of wood (blown by wind?) along the north bank. Shopping trolley by the corner. The black bag of litter from

Sunday's clear-up was still by Lumley gate. Later Tony Wilkinson phoned to say he has removed it and collected other litter off the site.

Saturday Dec 16 11.30 (brief walk through)

Song Thrushes are now in song and the two regulars in Brook Meadow were singing well. Also, a Goldcrest was feeding on the seedheads of Hogweed in the lower meadow (or balancing pond) which is still under 2 feet of water. Several other small birds were seen flitting around this flooded area which seems to be particularly attractive to them.

Sunday Dec. 17 (Frances)

Water level:

River Ems is still high (level going through the word GAS opposite the gasometer) and the southern part is flooded. This seems to have attracted a lot of bird activity. Water in millstream just hitting underneath of bridge.

Birds seen (and a lot more heard): robin, gulls, blue tits, magpies, 2 large unidentified birds flying south.

Plants: dandelion, yarrow, hogweed, white dead nettle, winter heliotrope in flower, alder catkins, ash fruits, wild rose hips. The elderflower tree on the east bank of the Ems is starting to produce shoots.

Insects: midges

People: several young people with dog walking along riverside path. Met 1 man with dog.

General observations:

Paths still very muddy. Logs we put during the last practical session near pond at Lumley gate end have disappeared. Evidence of mountain bike tyre tracks on this section of the path. There is still a lot of rubbish including a bike near the northern gate and some plastic bags have been thrown into the river at the bend near the willows. The trailer is no longer under water.

## WEEK 49 Dec 4-10, 2000

### Birds:

19 species of bird were seen on the meadow this week. Little Egret, Mallard (6 on the river), Black-headed Gull, Herring Gull, Wood Pigeon, Collared Dove, Magpie and Carrion Crow (all flying over), Grey Wagtail. Birds singing: Song Thrush (Palmer's Road Copse), 2+ Robins and Wren. Dunnock and Blackbird. A flock of Long-tailed Tits were frequently seen and heard feeding in the trees around the south bridge along with Blue Tit. Chiffchaff, Goldcrest and Goldfinch (one of each) were also seen on a couple of occasions feeding in the Alder and Willows around the south bridge.

A half-eaten Grey Heron corpse found on the Seagull Lane patch last Thursday has gone, except for a few feathers. The mystery of how it was caught and by what remains.

Also of interest were the feathers of a Magpie on the main meadow with some fox droppings nearby. Again, the question is raised of how a fox could manage to catch a fairly large and sprightly bird like a Magpie.

### Flowers:

8 plants were in flower this week: Common Gorse along the causeway, Dandelion and Yarrow mainly in the Seagull Lane patch, Hogweed several large plants, Ivy on the Crack Willows along the north bank, Winter Heliotrope along the main river bank and White Dead-nettle generally. Russian (or Common?) Comfrey – one plant in flower in lower meadow. PS There was also a member of the cress family - was it hedge mustard?

### Fruits/Seedheads

Dog Rose hips, Ivy berries, Teasel, Grasses, Hogweed, Alder, Ash (also).

### Insects:

2 ant hills, midges.

### Environment:

1. The small fenced plantation close to the main river path opposite the gasholder has a large number of willows, the branches of which have a warm orange glow and 10 Alders spaced along its length. The fencing is very sturdy and will not be easy to remove.

2. The river was high and flooding the path through Palmer's Road Copse. It was also overflowing the concrete sluice into the lower meadow (balancing pond). The Millstream was very high.

3. Conditions underfoot: paths very muddy, paths in southern part are under water, central part of meadow squelchy with some standing water

### People = 6 (on Sat)

man + woman; woman + child with fishing net (approx. 10 years); man + dog; man + dog

### Items requiring attention:

1 litter near Seagull Lane entrance

2 several vertical slats in side of northern bridge are missing

3 shopping trolley in meadow on north-east boundary

4 low branch over path near brick bridge on north-east boundary

5 A washing machine is in the river by the S-bend.

6 Sumac tree in north eastern part needs removing?

7 access from Lumley gate onto path is very slippery

8 numerous articles dumped on other side of river between riverside walk and gasometer

9 aluminium factory has dumped waste on other side of Ems

### Workday Sun Dec 10th 10.00-12.00

Six hardy souls turned out on this very wet morning for the 4th workday of the Brook Meadow Conservation Group. In fact, we had a suprisingly productive morning with little

rain though the ground was sodden. The river was running very high and was flowing over the sluice gate into the lower meadow which was serving its function well as a "balancing pond" to Peter Pond.

We cleared some bramble to widen the path from the causeway leading to the Lumley gate to allow walkers to avoid the slippery slope that had developed. We also trimmed branches off a Goat Willow which had been uprooted near the south gate in the storms, but we decided to leave a White Willow nearby, which was on its side, since it was still alive and probably would continue to sprout. We also filled two dustbin bags full of litter. A male Blackbird took advantage of our bramble clearance to feed on small organisms that we had no doubt disturbed. A Grey Wagtail came down to the big puddle just inside Lumley gate to display to us its white underparts and bright yellow vent.