

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 51-52, Dec 14 – Dec 27, 2010**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS - by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work session**

Thursday 17 December – report by Wally Osborne. Ten volunteers turned out in cold but dry conditions, for the last workday of the 2009 year, in full knowledge that after work, Mince Pies and Mulled Wine were being provided by Penny & Ted Aylett.

The main task for the day was to cut and remove the arisings from the 'Orchid area' of the north meadow, this job having been delayed by bad weather on recent workdays. However, the early arrivals first set about the creation of a better route down onto the meadow from the Lumley Gate by cutting back the brambles and hedgerow plants, by-passing the nearby puddle. As others arrived, this task was quickly completed and, at a later date, a gravelled ramp will be laid to finish off.

We all moved off to the central meadow with Tony Wootton on the Power Scythe making a selective cut of the wild flower area, followed by Pam Phillips, Frances Jannaway, Patrick Murphy, Lesley Harris, Gaynor Wells, Penny Aylett plus our recent recruits Margaret Martin and Marian Harland-Jones, raking up and removing the arisings. It was a difficult job due to the wet ground conditions but the team stuck at it, mindful of the refreshments to come! To protect this important area from excessive visitor footfall, the same team scoured the meadow for brushwood of all sizes, and used it to create barriers along the northern and southern boundaries of the cut area. This tactic proved to be very helpful in the winter of 2008 and we hope to have the same effect this winter.

After all that effort we cleared up, whilst Penny rushed home to get the refreshments underway. All of us gathered in Penny's kitchen and had a good chat about things whilst being plied with good seasonal food and drink. We welcomed Richard Jannaway and Jennifer Rye a little later and they joined in the fun. Our sincere thanks go to Penny & Ted for their hospitality and Frances proffered a gift to them from all of the BMCG Members. We all really appreciate their efforts as long time custodians of the Group tool stocks. Thanks to all for a great mornings' work and hope to see you all on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2010 for the first (rescheduled) workday of the New Year.

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions:

Care of young trees, especially Rowans, Oaks and Alder Buckthorns; Remove broken and/or overhanging branches; Create a dry ramp down onto meadow from the Lumley gate; Plant up the new hedgerow along Seagull Lane patch.

Forthcoming work sessions:

The first work session of 2010 has been moved forward a week to **Sunday 10 January** as we do not have a leader available to lead the work session on the scheduled 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month.

#### **Lumley entrance also requires attention**

Access to the meadow from the Lumley entrance needs improving as walkers are creating paths through the valuable sedgey area to avoid the muddy 'Lumley puddle'. One suggestion is to create a dry ramp to the east. Work on this has already been started by clearing away some of the undergrowth on the eastern side.

The existing wooden fence along the boundary with Gooseberry Cottage is falling down and forms a danger to health and safety. The poor condition of the fence has been reported to Rob Hill of HBC who has been asked to remove the fence and replace it with a new one.

#### **Friends of Emsworth Waysides**

Report by Brian Fellows - Things are moving along nicely for the new conservation group.

Council workers, Les and John, made an excellent job of the first annual cutting of the grass verge on the new Bridge Road Nature Reserve on Dec 14. They also volunteered to rake up and remove the cuttings. Both expressed enthusiasm for leaving certain waysides in the town as mini nature reserves. Photos of the work are on the web site – see below.

It has been decided to create a wild flower area on the small verge at the southern entrance to Bridge Road car park where the planted flower bed is at present. We shall use an annual cornfield seed mix supplied by Rob Hill of Havant Borough Council, which he also uses for the meadow in Warblington Cemetery. We shall also plant a native Rowan tree donated by Frances Jannaway.

The Council have agreed to move the parking post to make way for the new interpretation board. This board will be purchased in the New Year with from donations from the ERA, the EBA and Ray Bolton's Hampshire Councillor's fund. Another donation has also been received from the Brook Meadow Conservation Group, for which many thanks. For all the recent news go to the web site at . . .

<http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/emsworth-waysides-NEWS.htm>

## **LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

### **Harbour news**

Black-tailed Godwits are flighty birds, here today and gone tomorrow. They returned briefly to Emsworth Harbour during the recent cold spell, abandoning the frozen inland fields of the Arun Valley and elsewhere, for the delights of the mudflats. We had over 100 in the harbour for about a week, but now the weather has warmed up they have gone. But we still have plenty of other birds to delight in, such as, Dunlin, Redshank, Lapwing and Curlew. The regular Spotted Redshank still comes to feed in the stream at Nore Barn, sometimes with Greenshank. A Grey Wagtail was also there on Dec 20.

There are plenty of Brent Geese and exceptionally good gatherings of Wigeon and Teal in the channels off Western Parade. Look out also for Pintail in the channels. The winter gathering of Coot in the harbour below the Emsworth quay reached a record high of 90 on Dec 22.

### **Garden birds**

Over the past week I recorded 14 species of bird in my Emsworth town garden. Goldfinches are the most frequent visitors, though Blue Tit, House Sparrow and Greenfinch are also regular visitors to the sunflower heart feeders. Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Starling Dunnock, Collared Dove and Woodpigeon prefer to feed on the ground. A Little Egret sometimes perches on the fence at the bottom of the garden looking for fish in the Westbrook Stream. Amazingly, Woodpigeon is up to 3rd in the BTO garden bird league table, behind Blackbird and Blue Tit. Goldfinch continues to rise, but House Sparrow and Starling are falling. Patrick Murphy had a male Pheasant in his garden this morning.

### **Other bird news**

The cold weather brought the first pair of Red-breasted Mergansers of the winter onto Emsworth Millpond on Dec 16, along with up to 20 Tufted Duck of both sexes. On the same day, I watched a male Kestrel chase a squawking Carrion Crow across Brook Meadow, an unusual sight since one usually sees Crows chasing off a Kestrel.

On Dec 19 members of the Havant Wildlife Group enjoyed wonderful views of the very elusive Bittern at Titchfield Haven reserve. Tony Wootton got some excellent photos, one of which is on my web site. There have been widespread reports of increased numbers of Blackbirds and Song Thrushes flooding into this country to escape the frozen farms on the Continent. Look out for them in your garden.

### **The vane Pied Wagtail**

On Dec 19, I happened to see a Pied Wagtail repeatedly jumping up to the patio window of Brendan Gibb-Gray's house which overlooks Slipper Millpond. See my web site for a photo. Brendan told me the little fella has been there most days during December. They put bread crumbs out, but he spends most of his time either looking at himself in window, or jumping up against it. It is well known that many species of bird will appear to attack their reflection in windows and car mirrors, presumably mistaking it for a rival male in its territory. For more examples of this behaviour go to . . .

<http://www.wildaboutbritain.co.uk/forums/british-birds/9840-question-bird-expert.html>

### **Barn Owl**

A Barn Owl was hunting over the first large field west of the footpath from Havant Road to Nore Barn Woods. I watched it for about 15 minutes in all at around 4pm today, sometimes flying low, occasionally hovering and even sweeping close to where I was standing, giving me probably the best view I have ever had of a Barn Owl. I believe it is a regular. Well worth a look.

### **Molehills**

There has been a recent surge in Mole activity on Brook Meadow, with fresh earth being pushed up through the frosty ground. Ralph Hollins thinks this activity is a response to the behaviour of earthworms in cold weather. Freezing makes the ground too hard for the worms to penetrate and they go deep down to where the frost cannot penetrate (and where the Moles cannot follow them) so the Moles have to excavate new tunnels in places where the ground is softer and worms can still be found.

### **Mystery tree solved**

Frances Jannaway says the mystery tree with the gnarled and corky bark on Lumley Road is a Maidenhair Tree (*Ginkgo biloba*). This tree has distinctive fan-shaped leaves in the spring and one is due to be planted at the end of Bosmere Gardens near Victoria Road by Hampshire County Council as part of the Emsworth Tree Wardens street tree planting project.

**Emsworth Wildlife web site for all the local wildlife news and photos . . .**

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 49-50, Nov 30 – Dec 13, 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS - by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work sessions**

Due to a number of factors, mainly the very wet weather, I decided to cancel the work session on Sunday 6 December. At about 10am and almost on cue, the rain stopped and the sun came out which prompted Jennifer and Pam to do a thorough litter pick of the meadow and Palmers Road copse. Litter picking was the only task which could have been completed due to the very wet and muddy conditions. Many thanks to you both.

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: Cut and remove vegetation from Orchid area in North Meadow, leaving clumps of uncut grasses and other plants; Care of young trees, especially Rowans, Oaks and Alder Buckthorns; Remove broken and/or overhanging branches; create a dry ramp down onto meadow near Lumley gate and put up new hurdle fence on boundary with Gooseberry Cottage.

#### Forthcoming work sessions:

\*\*Please note that after the last work session in 2009, on Thursday 17 December, homemade mince pies and mulled wine will be kindly provided by Penny and Ted Aylett.

\*\*Please also note that the first work session of 2010 has been moved forward a week to Sunday 10 January as we do not have a leader available to lead the work session on the scheduled 1st Sunday of the month.

#### **Membership for year 2009 / 2010 – report by Wally Osborne (Membership Secretary)**

Total Membership is 289 (9 December). This is a substantial decrease compared with last year (336). After all our efforts to get renewals, it is very disappointing that our Membership is below 300 for the first time in many years. We urge all lapsed members to continue their membership of BMCG because we greatly value their moral and financial support which is very important to the continued survival of the group.

#### **Bat survey results – an update by Graham Walsgrove**

Nik Knight rang Pat to discuss the recordings taken on 16th October. The first three were definitely Soprano Pipistrelles, but the final one, although 'fuzzy', indicated it was of the 'myotis' species. These comprise Daubentons, Natterers, and three rare ones, Bechsteins, Whiskered and Brandts. These appear to have been detected around the Constant Springs area.

As these recordings were not of a high quality any accuracy is in limbo. Nik has offered his time and services next year to try again and so we may be luckier then. Very interesting and exciting.

#### **Butterfly survey 2009 – taken from a report by Wally Osborne (full report will be on website soon)**

The 4th BMCG Butterfly Transect was as usual conducted in accordance with the Butterfly Conservation (BC) organisation standard procedures. Seven recorders covered the 26-week period from early April through to late September. The rota ensured that we had at least 2 Recorders assigned to each of the possible 26 weeks and occasionally 3 Recorders.

Results – All of the volunteer recorders did a great job, particularly Heather Archer who made inputs for 18-week periods, by far the most and our grateful thanks go to her.

The following is a summary of the recordings:

- 18 different species of butterfly were seen over the 26 weeks
- The total number of butterfly's recorded was 580
- The most common species was the 'Large White' with 212 seen
- Meadow Brown was the next most common with 89 seen
- The most rare was the Small Copper and Ringlet with just 1 of each seen.
- Surprisingly, the huge influx of the Painted Lady species, seen across much of the UK, was not evident in recordings with only 47 noted.

A series of charts (to come on the group website) displays all of the results.

Year by year comparison – For interest, the total number of Butterflies recorded on each of our 4 transects is as follows:- Year 2006 – 359 of 16 species; Year 2007 – 433 of 19 species; Year 2008 – 296 of 14 species; Year 2009 – 580 of 18 species.

#### **BMCG - 10th Anniversary in 2010**

The BMCG committee are planning a number of events to celebrate our 10th Anniversary next year. These include publishing the 'Brook Meadow Through the Ages' booklet, a Herb Walk by Steve Taylor in May, an Open Day on Sunday 20 June (with willow weaving & bat/bird box workshops, herb walk, butterfly survey, nature trail & hunt, homemade cakes, etc.), taking part in Hampshire Water Festival (July) & Emsworth Show (August). Look out for more details nearer the time.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### **Water Voles**

I was more than a little concerned about the total absence of Water Vole sightings on Brook Meadow over the last two months. I mentioned this to our ace vole spotter, Caroline French, who promptly went on the hunt and in no time discovered one munching bramble leaves on the river bank opposite the AD Williams building. So, they are still there! This took the year's total sightings to 123, which is not bad, but well behind last year's total of 161. So, keep looking!

### **Birds**

Bird song is picking up with Wren, Song Thrush, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Dunnock adding their voices to that of Robin, which has had the stage largely to itself. Three Song Thrushes were singing lustily at dusk in Palmer's Road Copse on Dec 9. Yesterday, I heard a Blackbird "singing softly to itself" from the garden of The Rectory in St James Road, my third Blackbird sub-song of the past two weeks. A pair of Blue Tits have been visiting the nest box on the tall Sycamore tree in Palmer's Road Copse. Early nesting activity? They did not actually enter the box, but appeared to be pecking around the hole. While walking through Southsea Rock Gardens on Dec 9, I was surprised to see a leucistic female Pheasant wandering around. An escaped pet maybe, or on the run from shooters' guns?

### **Harbour news**

Black-tailed Godwits have completely gone from Chichester and Langstone Harbours. They do often move onto inland flooded fields at this time of the year and record numbers were on Amberley Wild Brooks, plus at least 1,500 in the Avon Valley. Greenshank are still with us, as is the 'famous' Spotted Redshank at Nore Barn. A cluster of 25 Knot feeding on the mudflats on Dec 8 were remarkable, the most I have seen in Emsworth since Feb 11, 2008.

Meanwhile, Brent Geese are also moving onto grassland sites, which will not please the farmers. There is an impressive gathering of Coot beneath Emsworth quay at the bottom of South Street. They are regular winter visitors and seem like that particular area. I counted 76 on Sunday Dec 13.

Goldeneyes are attractive wintering ducks and I was pleased to see 11 of them off the South Moor shore on Dec 4, along with a distant view of a Great Northern Diver (or Loon).

### **Millpond news**

Tufted Duck numbers were up to 16 on the town millpond on Dec 8. I have not seen the Red-breasted Merganser there for a while, though plenty can be seen out in the harbour where they usually fish in a line. A Great Crested Grebe was gracing Slipper Millpond on Dec 6 along with a couple of Little Grebes. Lynn Kelly saw the Mute Swan cygnet with the deformed bill, which was on Emsworth Millpond for a while, on the Hilsea Lines moat on Dec 2, and still looking healthy.

### **Other bird news**

BTO reports a crash in Goldcrest numbers, probably due to the very cold weather last winter, but an increase in Firecrests, which tend to winter further south. Bitterns have also done well this year, with a minimum of 82 booming males on 43 sites in the UK, compared to 75 boomers on 41 sites in 2008.

### **Plant news**

Hogweed is still going strong on Brook Meadow. There is one with pretty pink flowers on the main river path, on which I found five Yellow Dung Flies on Dec 9. Feeding or waiting for prey?

The Strawberry Tree on the east side of Slipper Millpond is covered with white blossom and has many round fruits, ranging in colour from yellow to bright red. Ralph Hollins identified the blossom along the shore to the south of Nore Barn Woods as Blackthorn. Ralph has also seen Hawthorn and Hazel flowering in the past week. His December wild flower total currently stands at 77 species.

### **And, finally . . . the 'static' spider**

The spider, that has been on its web on the inside of our kitchen window for the past 10 weeks, is still there! It hardly moves from one week to the next, but is ever alert. To my knowledge, it has only had a couple of meals in this time. But, it had some excitement last week when a dozy House Fly became entangled in the web. The spider responded immediately, but the fly managed to disengage itself before the lethal bite was delivered, leaving the web in a sorry mess. As it has done before, the spider, in true recycling spirit, consumed what was left of the web and constructed another one in roughly the same place. We really must find it a meal for Christmas!

**Emsworth Wildlife web site for all the local wildlife news and photos . . .**

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 47-48, Nov 16-29, 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS - by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work sessions**

Thursday 19th November – report by Mike Probert. A bumper turnout of 16 volunteers tackled one major and several minor tasks on a sunny if windy morning. The main task was to cut and rake the south section of the central meadow. Despite much previous rain the power scythe coped well and a large amount of material was collected and removed to the nearby dump. One small but very wet area was left uncut. Litter was picked from Palmers Copse and the north end of the Meadow; overhanging branches trimmed from the paths; and the base of the Alder Buckthorns cleared. A large leaning willow trunk in the central row was cut down and cleared. Pam provided welcome refreshments to the group in the relatively warm and humid conditions. A very hard working and productive morning!

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: Cut and remove vegetation from Orchid area in southern part of North Meadow, leaving clumps of uncut grasses and other plants; Care of young trees, especially Rowans, Oaks and Alder Buckthorns; Remove broken and/or overhanging branches.

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 6 & \*Thursday 17 December\*

Please note that after the last work session in 2009, homemade mince pies and mulled wine will be kindly provided by Penny and Ted Aylett.

#### **Membership Renewal for year 2009 / 2010**

Report by Wally Osborne (Membership Secretary) - Total Membership at end November 2009 is 282 and this figure includes 19 new members who have joined since July 2009. This means that we have 65 lapsed members in 54 lapsed households, spread quite evenly across our 6 localised areas.

The Committee has spent a lot of time and effort sending out personalised reminders, either by hand or by e-mail, to each of the households over the last 2 months and these actions have been only partially effective. In this regard, the 28 households who have opted for 'e-mail' communications have just been sent a 'final – final' e-mailed reminder, whilst we have decided to not deliver any further reminders to the other 26 households who normally receive our bi-monthly newsletters by hand. It will be most disappointing if we get no more renewals from these efforts and will leave our Membership below 300 for the first time in many years. We urge all lapsed members to continue their membership of BMCG because we greatly value their moral and financial support which is very important to the continued survival of the group.

#### **Hampshire Wildlife Trust Watch Group visit Brook Meadow**

The weather was fortunately mild and dry for the Watch group (6 children and 4 adults) who came to Brook Meadow on Saturday 21 November. Four Brook Meadow volunteers (Frances, Pam, Barbara and Richard) were on hand to guide the practical conservation work. Richard started off by using the power scythe to cut several areas in the central meadow. The children and adults soon set to work raking and removing the arisings to the dump near the Lumley gate. Evidence of small mammals was found in the form of numerous small holes, probably field voles. Several frogs were also disturbed and were moved to a safer place in the undergrowth. The next task was to carry various logs and branches from around the meadow which were stacked up along the edge of the main causeway path to deter walkers from going onto the meadow. Several children used a bow saw to cut longer branches so they would fit into the gap. Many thanks to Sally Church of HWT Watch group for a most enjoyable and useful morning.

#### **Clearance work at Seagull Lane**

I met John Blamire at Seagull Lane last week to get an estimate for clearing a strip of mainly Bramble from the footpath side of the Seagull Lane patch. The work will involve removing the old post and wire fence, clearing a strip of Bramble, digging out the ditch which runs along the edge of the footpath and putting up new fencing. The work will hopefully be completed early in the New Year so that we can plant a native hedgerow along the footpath which we will allow to grow and manage as a traditionally laid hedgerow. The aim is to improve the biodiversity as well as the appearance of this entrance so that it will discourage people who fly tip here on a regular basis.

#### **Lumley entrance also requiring attention**

Access to the meadow from the Lumley entrance needs improving as walkers are creating paths through the valuable sedgey area to avoid the muddy 'Lumley puddle'. One suggestion is to create a sort of ramp to the east. The existing wooden fence along the boundary with Gooseberry Cottage is falling down. We would like to put up a hazel hurdle fence here and have asked Pete Hodges to tell us what is possible at the next work session.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### Harbour birds

Black-tailed Godwit numbers are falling in Emsworth Harbour; 64 was the most I could find at Nore Barn in the past week. They may be moving inland to feed on flooded fields; a record 245 were seen on the eastern side of Amberley wildbrooks on Nov 26. However, there are still plenty of other birds in the harbour, with over 500 Brent Geese, 50 Wigeon, 13 Greenshank and 25 Lapwing on the mudflats to the west of Emsworth. The local Spotted Redshank can be relied on to turn up in the small stream at Nore Barn near high water and keep a look out for a Sandwich Tern fishing in the area.

### Millpond News

A handsome male Red-breasted Merganser has been a regular visitor to the town millpond over the past week. This bird probably migrated here from its breeding grounds in northern Scandinavia. They are regular winter visitors to both the town millpond and Slipper Millpond, though they did not turn up last winter. Tufted Duck are also regular winter visitors to the town millpond, though strangely, not to Slipper Millpond. Last week, there were 4 males and a female, though numbers will increase as winter kicks in. Last week, I watched 7 Cormorants fishing on Slipper Millpond along with 3 Little Grebes.

### Garden birds

Goldfinches still dominate the feeders in my garden in the centre of Emsworth, though reports indicate that many are on their way to warmer winter quarters. Other birds in my garden this week include Blue Tit, Robin, Blackbird, House Sparrow, Starling, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Greenfinch, Collared Dove and Woodpigeon. Tony Wootton was lucky to have a good view of a Fieldfare feeding in a Rowan tree in his neighbour's garden. This was the first garden Fieldfare of the winter that I am aware of, though others will be here if the weather turns cold. Tony's photo is on the web site.

### Wild flowers

Ralph Hollins's November flower list already stands at an amazing 123 and includes his earliest ever Dog's Mercury. Ralph is still puzzling over a flowering bush on the shore of Nore Barn Woods. Blackthorn or Hawthorn? There are plenty of flowers out on Brook Meadow, including a very fine pink flowered Wild Angelica. Hogweed is still going strong and others noted recently were Common Comfrey, Wood Avens, Petty Spurge and Dove's-foot Cranesbill. There are now over 100 flower spikes of Winter Heliotrope on the embankment east of the roundabout in Emsworth and so aromatic.

### Yellow Dung Fly

I found a hairy ginger-coloured fly on a Hogweed flower on Brook Meadow on Nov 27. Ralph Hollins helped with its identification as a Yellow Dung Fly (*Scathophaga stercoraria*). See my web site for a photo. Apparently, dung flies use cowpats not only to lay their eggs, but also to prey on smaller insects. Ralph thinks this one had been blown onto Brook Meadow in a gale and, not finding any cowpats there, waited in the Hogweed in the hope that other smaller insects would be attracted to it.

### Puzzling tree

There is a tree on Lumley Road, outside the house called 'Brook' with a gnarled corky bark, which I thought at first might be due to Dutch Elm disease, but the tree does not look like Elm. It has no leaves and looks dead, but the flesh beneath the bark is green. Can anyone throw any light on the identity of this tree? A photo is on my wildlife web site diary for Nov 27.

### Friends of Emsworth Waysides

This new conservation group has received a donation of £250 from the Emsworth Residents Association to match the same sum promised by the Emsworth Business Association. The money will go towards an information board for the Bridge Road Nature Reserve. Several other roadside verges have been proposed as wayside reserves in Emsworth which Andy Paffett of HBC will be looking at. See our web site for all the news . . . <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/>

### Other news

A nature study centre is among the projects planned for the redevelopment of the Emsworth Centre in South Street. This venture will need the help of local naturalist volunteers, so watch this space. The RSPB seems likely to take over the management of the Pagham Harbour Nature Reserve from the West Sussex CC. This is a good move which would secure the reserve for the future as well as making necessary savings for the Council. Plans to redevelop the visitor centre have been put on hold.

**Emsworth Wildlife web site for all the local wildlife news and photos . . .**

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 44-45, Nov 2-15, 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS - by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work sessions**

Weather permitting, the southern part of the Central Meadow and the Orchid/Yellow Rattle area of the North Meadow will be cut with the power scythe and the arisings raked off and removed to the sacrificial dump. Grass tussocks and islands of other plants will be left uncut. Other tasks which need doing at this time of year include cutting off broken branches after the storms; pruning lower branches of Oak tree in North Meadow plus other formative pruning and care of young trees such as Alder Buckthorn. In addition, a thorough litter pick needs to be carried out especially in Palmers Road copse.

Students from Glenwood Special Needs School, Washington Road, Emsworth may well get involved in some of this work either before or after the Christmas holidays.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 19 November, Sunday 6 & \*Thursday 17 December\*

Please note that after the last work session in 2009, homemade mince pies and mulled wine will be kindly provided by Penny and Ted Aylett.

#### **Storms and water levels**

On a walk round Brook Meadow this afternoon, I was pleasantly surprised to see that the Meadow had survived remarkably well after the gales and heavy rain. There were a few broken branches especially near the south entrance and the SE part of South Meadow was under water as well as several of the occasional paths. The River Ems is flowing very well but does not seem to have flooded its banks to any appreciable extent.

#### **Membership Renewal for year 2009 / 2010 - Wally Osborne (Membership Secretary)**

This is a final reminder for the '43 Households' receiving these e-mailed notes, who have NOT yet renewed their Membership for the year 1st September 2009 through to 31st August 2010, that this could be your last fortnightly transmission of local news. So far we have 259 members for 2009 / 2010, comprised of many renewals and some new members. This compares with 336 members for last year and the Committee are very keen to at least equal this 2008 / 2009 total.

If you are unsure whether you have renewed your membership, please feel free to contact me by e-mail [wjn545@homecall.co.uk](mailto:wjn545@homecall.co.uk), landline phone on 01243 375433 or mobile phone / text message on 07787 966162 and I will quickly check our Membership Listing. Alternatively, you can just knock the door at 545 Southleigh Road or leave a message and I will contact you.

Your continued support will be very much appreciated and will enable us to preserve, maintain and improve this fine meadow as a public facility, close to the centre of Emsworth and the Chichester Harbour area of outstanding natural beauty. Voluntary conservation groups like BMCG rely on the support of its members, both moral and financial and a strong membership is very important to the continued survival of the group.

#### **Clearance work at Seagull Lane by youth training scheme**

The clearance work at Seagull Lane did not take place on 10 November as planned. This was not because of poor weather conditions nor the failure of the young people turning up but because the organiser of the youth training scheme had not got her act together. Rachel Moroney (BTCV supervisor) and I were waiting all ready and raring to go on Tuesday morning but nobody turned up. After waiting about 15 minutes, Rachel phoned and was told that the coordinator had failed to organise the youth trainees in time and what is worse had not left a message for Rachel that the session had been cancelled. Ho hum – 'the best laid plans of mice and men oft gang awry!'

The BMCG committee need to decide whether we still want to do this project and if so who we can get to do the clearance work as the ditch which runs along the edge of Seagull Lane needs clearing and the post and wire fencing needs sorting out. It has been suggested that we get John Blamire to do this as he still has a couple of sessions left. I will ask Rob Hill of HBC about the possibilities.

#### **Hampshire Wildlife Trust Watch Group visit Brook Meadow**

A group of children of various ages and their parents are coming to Brook Meadow on Saturday 21 Nov to help with some of the conservation tasks given above under work sessions. The Watch Group, organised by Sally Church, have been coming to Brook Meadow at least once a year since 2002.

#### **Friends of Hollybank Woods AGM**

The AGM will be held on Friday 20th November at 7.30 pm at the Community Centre in Spencer's Field. Followed by a talk by local expert John Pile on 'The Forest of Bere'

## **LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

### **Harbour news**

This is the best year for Black-tailed Godwits in Emsworth Harbour since 2006, with up to 130 regularly on the mudflats to the west of Emsworth. They include several colour-ringed birds, including our old friend RYL+RLY which commutes between Emsworth and the Medway Estuary, though I expect it to be with us until Feb-Mar 2010. See my web site for full details.

The Spotted Redshank still turns up regularly to feed in the small stream at Nore Barn when high water is due, sometimes in company with a Greenshank. Others to be seen in the Nore Barn area include Wigeon, Teal, Shelduck and Lapwing. There are now over 500 Brent Geese in Emsworth Harbour, though there are very few youngsters, indicating another poor breeding season for them. Two families of 4 and 3 juveniles often congregate near the shore at Nore Barn.

### **Millpond news**

I am fairly sure that the cygnet with a deformed bill on the town millpond came with a family of 6 cygnets from the Langbrook Stream. This accounts for the recent influx of cygnets onto the millpond. The bird seems none the worse for the condition and has been feeding happily with all the other swans.

Slipper Millpond has a new raft, with "No Mooring" printed on its side and a nest box for the Coots. Two Cormorants have been fishing in the pond this past week along with a Little Grebe.

The interpretation board on Peter Pond was uprooted some weeks ago and flung into Dolphin Lake by vandals. David Gattrell hopes a new board will soon be in place, using the original art work of Marian Forster. The board was erected in March 2000 – photo of the ceremony is on my web diary for Nov 14.

### **Garden Birds**

My garden birds are at last picking up after several weeks of seeing virtually nothing on the feeders, but numbers are still well down on previous years. Goldfinches are my number one bird at present, which is amazing since I hardly ever saw one 10 years ago, when I first introduced niger seed. Now they prefer sunflower hearts, but are terribly messy eaters! Sadly, Greenfinches are rare, having not yet recovered from the crippling trichomonosis disease which decimated the species in 2006.

### **Disabled Dunlin**

Tony Wootton sent me some interesting photos of a Dunlin with a cockle attached to its foot. Tony consulted the RSPB who said the poor bird had probably trod on the cockle causing the shell to close over its foot. Happily, they said the cockle should drop off when it needed to feed, which would be long before it caused the bird any problems. If this happened over water, the cockle would be able to make its way to the shore line again, but if it happened over land, that would mean the end for the cockle.

### **Rare fungus**

In my last wildlife news I mentioned some fungi that Keith Wileman found growing on the grass verge in Danbury Court, which looked like charred lumps of wood when I saw them. Ralph Hollins was unsure and consulted Stuart Skeates, the Fungi Recorder for Hampshire who, after some deliberation, declared they were examples of Neolentinus lepideus, which is a very rare fungus and only recorded once before in Hampshire. The official common name is Scaly Sawgill, but Ralph prefers 'Train Wrecker' which comes from its ability to turn railway sleepers to powder and thus derail trains. Photo on my web diary for Nov 11 at . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>

### **Plant news**

Winter Heliotrope is flowering early on the embankment just south of the main roundabout in Emsworth with 35 flower spikes showing. It seems to thrive on car fumes! Ralph Hollins has listed 85 plant species flowering in the first half of November, including the first Cow Parsley in Pook Lane, Havant.

### **Friends of Emsworth Waysides**

The news from the new reserve in Bridge Road car park has gone from bad to worse. Following the severe clearance of the Westbrook Stream by the Environment Agency, we subsequently learned that they want to clear all the soil from the stream, banks, bed, the lot leaving just an ugly concrete channel with no wildlife value. But we are hoping for a compromise, particularly as the clearance would take out many valuable plants, such as, the local rarity Narrow-leaved Water-plantain.

Meanwhile, we have proposed several other possible wayside reserves in Emsworth which Andy Paffett, the Open Spaces Manager at Havant Borough Council will be looking at in the near future.

See our new web site for all the news . . . <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/>

**Emsworth Wildlife web site for all the local wildlife news and photos . . .**

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 43-44, Oct 19 Nov 1 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS - by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work sessions**

The work session on Sunday 1 November was cancelled by Mike Probert because of bad weather.

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: cutting grassland areas such as parts of Central and North meadows; pruning lower branches of Oak tree and other formative pruning and care of young trees.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 19 November, Sunday 6 & \*Thursday 17 December\*

Please note that after the last work session in 2009, homemade mince pies and mulled wine will be kindly provided by Penny and Ted Aylett.

#### **Membership Renewal for year 2009-10** - report by Wally Osborne

Just a reminder that the new Membership Year began on 1st September 2009 and runs through to 31st August 2010. I am pleased to report that many of you have now renewed with some very generous donations. Thank you. Membership now stands at 237 compared to membership of 336 for last year.

However, quite a few of our 'long time' members have not yet renewed. If you are unsure whether you have renewed your membership, please feel free to contact me by landline phone on 01243 375433, mobile phone / text message on 07787 966162 or by e-mail [wjn545@homecall.co.uk](mailto:wjn545@homecall.co.uk) to check the Membership listing. A final renewal notice is attached with these email notes for those people who have not yet renewed. Please return it to me together with your subscription of £3 per person.

Your continued support is very much appreciated and will enable us to preserve, maintain and improve this fine meadow as a public facility, close to the centre of Emsworth and Chichester Harbour Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Voluntary conservation groups like BMCG rely on the support of its members, both moral and financial and a strong membership is very important to the continued survival of the group.

#### **Annual grassland cut**

John Blamire will be returning for another 2 sessions to do some more cutting in the north meadow and also cut back some Willows in the central meadow.

#### **Clearance work by BTCV volunteers**

On 10 November, a group of young volunteers (16-18 years) will be doing some clearance work in Brook Meadow under the supervision of Rachel Moroney of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV). The group of 6-8 young people will be clearing a short section of Bramble about 1 metre wide along the boundary of Brook Meadow with Seagull Lane. HBC have promised to put up a new post and wire fence behind which BMCG volunteers will be planting native hedgerow plants to add to the biodiversity of the Brook Meadow Local Nature Reserve and improve the appearance of this area. Funding for the plants comes from a Tree Council hedgerow grant.

#### **Butterfly Transect for year 2009** - report by Wally Osborne

We had 6 recorders participating in the 2009 Butterfly Transect, which takes place over the same 26 weeks between April and October of each calendar year. Results for all but 3 of the weeks are now on hand and first analysis shows that 373 Butterflies of 15 species have been recorded over 23 weeks.

A report will be given in the next Newsletter with a full report on our website. These figures are sent to Butterfly Conservation and form part of the national butterfly records.

If you would like to take part in this very worthwhile and enjoyable exercise in 2010, please contact me and I'll explain what we do. It is a very simple procedure, takes about 30 minutes to complete and you can choose your week dates.

#### **Friends of Emsworth Waysides** – Report by Brian Fellows

It was not a good start for our first wayside reserve in Bridge Road car park, when the Environment Agency came and blitzed the Westbrook Stream of all its vegetation. They even took out a fine stand of Bulrushes. The same thing used to happen to the River Ems on Brook Meadow before the Conservation Group got them to do a restricted 'conservation cut'. I shall be discussing future cuts with the EA, but hopefully no permanent damage has been done and everything will grow again next year. Meanwhile, the grass verge will have an annual cut this winter.

If you have a verge near you that you would like to see conserved for wildlife please get in touch with me at [brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk)

The next meeting of the Friends of Emsworth Waysides is on Monday November 2nd at 7.30pm in the upstairs room at The Crown Emsworth.

See the new web site for more news . . . <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/>

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### **Spotted Redshank returns**

The big news of the past week was the return of the famous Emsworth Spotted Redshank to its favourite stream at Nore Barn, hopefully after having a good breeding season in Northern Scandinavia. This will be its 5th successive year wintering at Emsworth and it is 2 weeks earlier than usual. It is looking healthy and sprightly and in full winter plumage. It is best seen on a rising tide about 2 hours before high water. As usual, it is quite 'tame' and provides excellent views and photo opportunities. It was joined by a second Spotted Redshank on October 26th, but less confiding. The locally colour-ringed Spotted Redshank W+GY can be seen in the small stream at Nutbourne Bay.

All the local Spotted Redshank news with photos are on my Emsworth wildlife web site:

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/ew-spotted-redshank.htm>

### **Other local bird news**

Over 100 Black-tailed Godwits have been regularly feeding in Emsworth Harbour, the most we have had for a couple of years, and best seen on the mudflats south of Nore Barn Woods on a rising tide. They include several colour-ringed birds including some old friends and some newcomers.

A Cetti's Warbler was singing from the bushes at the northern end of the Gooseberry Cottage garden (close enough to be counted as being on Brook Meadow) - probably up from Thorney Island.

One of the young Mute Swan cygnets on the town millpond has a deformed bill, but appears none the worse for the condition. See my web site diary (address below) for Nov 2 for photos.

### **Fungi**

Fungi are popping up all over the place, not just in woodlands. Jill Stanley was pleased that the fungi growing in her garden in Helston Drive were Glistening Ink Caps and not the dreaded Honey Fungus. I found a good crop of Parasols in the fields between Emsworth and Westbourne, but they turned out to be Shaggy Parasols, not the edible Common variety. The grass verge outside No 13 Beacon Square is a good place for fungi with Brown Birch Bolete and Sulphur Tufts showing well at present.

I found my first Agrocybe cylindracea since 2006 on Brook Meadow, a small cluster is growing beneath the eastern access ramp to the south bridge,

Keith Wileman sent me photos of two puzzling fungi on the grass verge in Danbury Court. They could be Blackening Russula, as they looked two charred lumps of wood when I checked them yesterday, but the gills are wrong. The photos are on my web site diary under Nov 1 if you can help.

### **Insects**

The warm weather over the past week brought out a few late insects. Two Speckled Wood butterflies were chasing each other near the south bridge, one of which perched on the hand rail for a photo. I have also seen Red Admiral and Painted Lady. Tony Wootton told me the very rare Queen of Spain Fritillary had been seen again recently in Brandy Hole Copse.

Caroline French had a Hummingbird Hawkmoth in her north Emsworth garden this week, the first time she had seen them there. Ralph Hollins has had four reports of them this month and says they are now here all year, hibernating when it gets cold and popping out in January like the Red Admirals.

Two male Common Darters were on Brook Meadow on Oct 31. And, finally, the 'static spider' is still on the inside of our kitchen window after 4 weeks, though it has enjoyed 3 meals in the past week.

### **Plants**

Not many wild flowers remain on Brook Meadow, though Hogweed is still going strong, with some very tall plants. Large Bindweed flowers are out among the Bramble bushes at the end of Seagull Lane and the Brambles along the north path have some pink flowers. Meadowsweet is in flower on the river bank in Brook Meadow and Ralph Hollins also found one in flower near Barton's Road playing fields.

The Common Gorse bush on the causeway is looking very good as is the Strawberry Tree on the east side of Slipper Millpond, which is covered in white flowers with lots of yellow fruits, yet to turn red.

Cock's Eggs is rare plant in Hampshire, but it is growing in quantity against a garden fence on Hayling Island Sea Front Road, directly opposite the junction with Staunton Avenue.

### **Thorney Road clearance**

Just what is going on in the fields to the west of Thorney Road? Trees, bushes and hedges have been bulldozed and an enormous drainage channel dug out with old car tyres stacked in it. This was previously an excellent wildlife habitat for birds. Fortunately, Chichester District Council have put a temporary stop notice on the work. Local residents are rightly very concerned.

**Emsworth Wildlife web site for all the local wildlife news and photos . . .**

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 41-42, Oct 5-18 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS** by Frances Jannaway

#### **Work session Thursday 15 October** – by Pat Walsgrove

A marvellous total of fourteen volunteers turned out on a day that was slightly overcast with some sun, but with a slight chill, and soon started on the morning tasks. A general nettle clearance was undertaken with the strimmer. At the same time a litter pick all over the Meadow was carried out. The rest of the volunteers continued with a cut of the Lumley wet area. This consisted of mowing with the power scythe leaving islands of vegetation for small creatures to utilise. Two field voles were seen, one of which disappeared down a very small hole and the other into the grass. Two wasp nests were uncovered and the wasps seen coming out of their holes in the ground. The arisings were deposited on the area near the Lumley gate. Thanks to Pam for the half time refreshments. Very nice.

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: cutting grassland areas such as parts of Central and North meadows; pruning lower branches of Oak tree and other formative pruning and care of young trees.

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 1 and Thursday 19 November

#### **Annual grassland cut**

Last Sunday, John Blamire tackled the rather overgrown Seagull Lane patch using a strimmer, raking all the arisings onto the northern end of the area. He will be returning to do some more cutting in the north meadow and also cut back a Willow in the central meadow.

#### **Annual river cut** – by Mike Probert

Last Thursday, I had a useful walk up the river with Adam Cave (Environment Agency Conservation and Wildlife officer). John Ridge is the Operatives' team leader whom I met briefly and will do the work. In general their main aim is to ensure a 70/30 channel along the stream but not (this year at least) to disturb the bankside habitats too much. They will clear the spillway to the sluice although Adam thought that it was unlikely to be used; lop willows hanging in the water; and consider removing the fallen willow on the S-bend. The untreated Japanese Knotweed was noted. Overall, and in particular since I have now seen the river through a winter, Adam's proposals seemed reasonable to me. I went down on Friday mid-afternoon and they had cut channels through the weed patches but had done little else as far as I could see. Maybe they are coming back to do a bit more.

#### **BMCG membership due for renewal**

Current membership stands at 224 (including standing orders). If you have not yet renewed, please fill a membership form and send it together with your membership fee, still only £3 per person, to Wally Osborne, our secretary.

#### **AGM** - Wednesday 7 October

At our 9th AGM, there were record numbers with more than 45 people attending, 4 new members and lots of renewals. After reports by me and Pam, our Treasurer, a new committee was elected for the year 2009 –2010. This will be the same committee as last year apart from two resignations from Jennifer Rye and David Search and one possible new committee member, Caroline French. We sold a number of FSC ID guides and most of the cards donated by local photographer, Sharon Perrett. After a much needed refreshment break kindly provided by Rosemary, Barbara and Jil, we were enthralled by a very interesting talk by Bryan Pinchen, a freelance entomologist, about the 'Plight of the Bumblebee.

#### **Bat Survey No. 6** - Friday 16th October – by Pat and Graham Walsgrove

The walk started from Palmers Road car park at 6.27pm (sunset: 6.11pm) and included three volunteers (Pat & Graham Walsgrove and Margaret Martin). This evening Nick Knight of the Hampshire Bat Group joined us, as he had expressed a wish at the AGM to offer his services and the use of a specialised bat detector/recording device which he had on loan. The first detection was at the south bridge, and the next two in the vicinity of the causeway seat. Then there was some activity at the bridge by Constant Spring. All were Soprano Pipistrelles. Nick took the recordings and will analyse these on his computer, and hopefully give us an idea of the accuracy of identification.

#### **What is happening on Thorney Road?** – by Brian Fellows

Does anyone know anything about the massive clearance of scrub, bushes, hedgerows and even large trees from the fields to the west of Thorney Road? All we know is that the Environment Agency have given land drainage consent for agricultural improvement and that the current works are to install drainage in the form of used car tires! Does that make sense?

## **LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

### **Brents have arrived**

Brent Geese are now flooding into our local harbours in their thousands. Listen for their throaty rolling “kr...runk” as they chat together. This is quite different from the noisy honking of Canada Geese. There are already youngsters in the harbour, unlike last year when breeding failed completely. Hopefully more are on the way. Families tend to stay near the shore, well away from the large flocks further out. Juveniles are easy to spot with white bands on their wings. I found a family of 2 adults and 5 juveniles on the near shore west of Emsworth only this afternoon.

### **Other harbour news**

Also on the western mudflats this afternoon were 18 Shelduck including 16 youngsters and 54 Black-tailed Godwits, the most I have seen for some years. Most adult Shelducks migrate to northern Germany to moult, leaving crèches of young birds in the charge of one or two adults. Among the Godwits I was particularly pleased to find the Kent-ringed Godwit RYL RLY, an old friend, which regularly winters in Emsworth Harbour and also commutes between Emsworth and Kent.

Up to six Greenshank can usually be seen feeding in the low water marina channel, some with colour-rings. Oystercatcher, Curlew, Redshank, Dunlin and Grey Plover can also be seen in the harbour.

### **Millpond news**

A record 92 Coot were on the Slipper Millpond – Peter Pond complex on Oct 11, which is the most I have ever counted in 20 years. It will be interesting to see if they stay. These will be post-breeding birds from other parts of Britain. The new Mute Swan pair is now patrolling the two Hermitage ponds. The first Tufted Duck of the winter (2 females) were on the town millpond this week.

### **Woodlark song**

My wife, Jean, and I were fortunate to hear the beautiful song of a Woodlark while walking along Locksash Lane towards West Marden on Oct 8. Woodlarks are known to breed in this area, but to hear one in October seemed odd. However, I have subsequently heard from others who have heard them in October, so listen out. Skylarks are also currently singing, try the fields on the east side of Chidham.

### **Butterfly news**

The most astonishing news of the week, as reported by Ralph Hollins, was the successful breeding of the very rare Queen of Spain Fritillary butterfly in Brandy Hole Copse, possibly the first ever record of this butterfly breeding in Britain! There are strong populations along the Normandy coast and it is thought that is where the original migrant female came from. Apart from that, the presence of good numbers of Clouded Yellows, along the coast, was the only other main news of the week. Today, I saw a Painted Lady basking in the sunshine perched on the beech hedge on Bridge Road. On the way back to Africa I presume?

### **My ‘static’ spider**

I have been watching a Garden Spider on the inside of my kitchen window for the past 2 weeks which I have been careful not to disturb. It has moved from one side of the window to the other a couple of times, building a new web each time and, I assume, consuming the old one, as it disappears. The only sustenance it has had was a dead fly that I tossed into its web, feeling sorry for it. Ralph Hollins tells me spiders can happily survive for months in a bottle without food, so I am in for a long wait!

### **Waysides news**

The next meeting of the Friends of Emsworth Waysides has been changed to Monday November 2nd at 7.30pm (from Tues 3rd). It will take place in the upstairs room at The Crown Emsworth. All are welcome. See our web site for more information . . . <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/>

I am afraid there is not good news from our first reserve in Bridge Road car park. The Westbrook Stream has been totally blitzed of vegetation, presumably by the Environment Agency this weekend. Even the Bulrushes have gone. What is the point in that? The same thing used to happen to the River Ems on Brook Meadow before the Conservation Group persuaded EA to do a restricted “conservation cut”. They now have a job to get them to cut anything at all on the Ems! We should have told the EA about the new reserve and will need to communicate more in the future. Hopefully, no permanent damage has been done and all the plants will grow again next year.

**Emsworth Wildlife web site for all the local wildlife news and photos . . .**

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 39-40**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

**Work session Sunday** 4 October 2009 – report by Pat Walsgrove

A nice but slightly chilly autumnal day greeted the work party, which comprised six regular and two new volunteers. A warm welcome to Margaret and Marion - good to see new faces. Everybody took up tools and was soon beavering away. The sign cases were given a good clean and in the Seagull Lane patch, the brambles and nettles were pulled up round the young trees. The stakes and tree guards in the new hazel coppice had come loose, and were given some care and maintenance, with the nettles around them being cleared. Meanwhile the paths in the south meadow including the lollipop area and north meadow were trimmed and the cherry tree was given a prune of the lower branches.

After a welcome tea break provided by Pam and as the sun was warming things up, the volunteers set to work cutting a small patch in the Lumley wet area with the arisings going to the nearby sacrificial area.

Tussocks of grass were left to allow small animals to hide from the power scythe.

Photos on the web site at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2009.html>

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: cutting grassland areas such as parts of Central and North meadows; pruning lower branches of Oak tree and other formative pruning and care of young trees.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 15 October & Sunday 1 November

### **Annual cut**

John Blamire is scheduled to carry out another cutting session on Brook Meadow next Tuesday. This time he will be tackling the rather overgrown Seagull Lane patch.

### **Steps near North bridge**

Three of the rotten wooden rails on the steps near the North bridge were replaced by HBC last Friday. Many thanks to HBC for responding so promptly.

### **Willows overhanging footpaths**

Several branches of an Osier which were overhanging the footpath near the south entrance to Brook Meadow has been removed and put in the undergrowth. Andrew Skeet has agreed to pollard the longer branches of a large Crack Willow in Palmers Road copse.

### **Water levels in River Ems**

Due to the lack of rain over the last few weeks coupled with abstraction by the pumping station at Walderton, levels in the River Ems have fallen dramatically over the last few weeks. In fact, the northern section of the river in Brook Meadow is nearly dry apart from several ponds in the river where the water is deeper. This section of the river also dried up in autumn 2007 but not in 2008 because of rainfall in summer and autumn.

### **BMCG membership due for renewal**

Current membership stands at 173 (including standing orders). This is considerably less than at the same time last year when membership was 211. Please fill the membership form and send it together with your membership fee, still only £3 per person, to Wally Osborne, our secretary. Or you can renew your membership at our AGM on 7 October.

### **AGM**

This year's AGM will take place next Wednesday, 7 October at 7pm in the Emsworth Centre on South Street. Please come along and look at our lovely displays of photographs, listen to the annual reports and elect a new committee. In addition, a variety of FSC ID plant and animal guides will be on sale. Tea/coffee and biscuits will be provided after which guest speaker, Bryan Pinchen, a consultant entomologist, will give a talk about the fascinating subject of the 'Plight of the Bumblebee.' We look forward to seeing you there.

### **Friends of Emsworth Waysides**

All is going well with our brand new local conservation group, the aim of which is to conserve roadside verges and other small areas in the town. With thought and care, many verges or 'waysides' could become havens of wildlife. The first such reserve has been set up in Bridge Road Car Park and already shows the amazing effects of stopping cutting and spraying for just one season. Wild flowers are everywhere. And it will save the Council money. It costs nothing to leave alone! To support the project just send an e-mail to [brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk) Andy Brook has set up a web site for the new group at . . . <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/>

## **LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

### **Local bird news**

Patrick Murphy had an amazing six Buzzards soaring over his garden in Christopher Way on Oct 1, that must be a record for Emsworth. Patrick also had a male Bullfinch on his sunflower feeder and tells me his neighbours get them regularly. Lucky people, I have not seen one for ages.

The low level of the River Ems at present is ideal for Grey Wagtails and several have been spotted on the river over the past week. These birds are probably the result of post-breeding dispersal from other areas, rather than locals, since none have been seen here during the summer.

Frances and Richard Jannaway saw a Treecreeper searching for insects on an old Crack Willow tree in Palmer's Road Copse Sep 26, amazingly, the first one seen on the Brook Meadow site since 2004.

### **Little Egret roosts**

Little Egret numbers along the south coast always peak at this time of year, as birds return from their breeding sites wherever. They spend the daytime feeding on the mudflats in the local harbours and in the evening head for well established roosts. Currently, there appear to be two local roosts, one is in the trees behind Langstone Mill Pond, which Ralph Hollins keeps an eye on, and which holds about 120 birds. The other one is on Thorney Island, where the huge roosts of the 1990s got established. On Sep 24 Barry Collins counted 174 Little Egrets going into the trees near Thorney Little Deeps.

### **Harbour news**

Brent Geese are late to arrive in local harbours this year. Jason Crook thinks the ultra-mild conditions in northwest Europe could be the main reason. But, looking on the bright side, their late arrival could mean there are lots of young, unlike last year when there was almost none. Other winter migrants may also be affected. All indications of climate change? Other news this week was of 85 Great Crested Grebes in Langstone Harbour along with two Black-necked Grebes and two Red-breasted Mergansers.

You can now keep up with all the news from Langstone Harbour on Jason Crook's excellent new wildlife blog at . . . <http://langstoneharbourwildlife.blogspot.com/>

### **Butterflies**

The recent warm weather has prompted a good number of butterflies out for a final fling before the winter sets in. Plenty of Clouded Yellows have been seen on the coasts. Ralph Hollins thinks these are probably adults emerging (and then dispersing) from eggs laid here by earlier arrivals. Peacock, Red Admiral, Comma and the Whites have been taking advantage of late flowering plants, like Ivy, but, sadly, no Small Tortoiseshells. Speckled Woods are still chasing each other around in the shaded areas, while Painted Ladies must be girding themselves for the trip back across the channel.

### **Hollybank Woods**

What a beautiful woodland this is at this time of the year. The Wood Small-reed which grows in the western section of the woods was almost totally covered by a jungle of Bracken, which I had to force a way through to get to it on Sep 29. I was surprised to find two plants of Pampas Grass nearby. Just how did they get there? Holly bushes have a good crop of berries, though Sweet Chestnuts are of poor quality. The Japonica bush on the old Holly Lodge site has masses of quinces, more than I recall seeing there before. Andy Brook has completely revamped the Hollybank web site so take a look for all the news at . . . <http://www.hollybank-woods.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **Saltmarshes**

I have spent a good amount of time over the past couple of weeks mooching around the saltmarshes in Chichester Harbour, and very fine they are too at this time of the year with colourful plants. Here in Emsworth we only have a small saltmarsh area at Nore Barn, but at Copperas Point near Dell Quay I found 12 different species, including Lax-flowered Sea-lavender and Sea Rush. For a truly impressive sight you must see the area of deep red Glasswort in front of the lake at Farlington Marshes.

### **Autumn fruits**

It looks like a mixed year for autumn fruits. I found a good crop of very sweet Blackberries on Compton Down last week. The Rowans on Brook Meadow still have lots of red berries shining brightly in the afternoon sunshine. As for nuts, there are masses of acorns on the ground, but conkers seem scarce. The Oaks on the shore at Cobnor Point are loaded with large brown acorns.

**Emsworth Wildlife web site for all the local wildlife news and photos . . .**

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 37-38, Sept 7-20, 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **Work session Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September – report by Mike Probert**

On a lovely sunny day, twelve equally sunny volunteers gathered for a variety of productive tasks. One team dealt ably with the branches from a fallen Goat Willow near the South entrance and dragged them to the North Meadow to make barriers across adventitious but unwanted paths. Southern paths were clipped and tidied; and the young, well grown Hawthorn hedge on the South western edge of the North Meadow was relieved of much bindweed and other ingrowings. The power scythe was used to increase the cut area to the west of the Central and Northern Meadows and the large volume of woody arisings raked up and transported to the central dump. Palmer's Road Copse was cleared of litter. As the day warmed so did the labouring volunteers and Pam's refreshments nourished us all.

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: cutting grassland areas such as parts of Central and North meadows; pruning lower branches of Oak tree in North Meadow and care of young trees.

Forthcoming work sessions: **Sunday 4 & Thursday 15 October**

### **Annual cut**

John Blamire is scheduled to carry out another three cutting sessions in Brook Meadow during September and October. The areas to be cut include the Seagull Lane patch and several areas in the Central and North Meadows as well as minor tree pruning work on the central line of Willows.

### **South bridge**

You may have seen that urgent repairs have recently been carried out to the surface of the south bridge over the River Ems. The work has been carried out by HBC. It is hoped that these repairs will last a bit longer than those which were carried out about two years ago.

### **Steps near North bridge**

Some of the wooden rails on the steps near the North bridge have broken or will soon break up. HBC has been requested to repair the steps as a matter of urgency.

### **Willows overhanging footpaths**

Several branches of an Osier (type of Willow) are hanging very low over the footpath near the south entrance to Brook Meadow. In addition, the large trunk of a very tall Crack Willow along the riverside path in Palmers Road copse is leaning lower over the footpath. HBC have been asked to deal with these appropriately. It is hoped that the larger Willow will be pollarded (the longer branches pruned to reduce the weight) and not removed completely.

### **Fire on Meadow again**

Pam Phillips reported another fire on the sacrificial area near the central line of willows early last Saturday morning. The fire must have been started late Friday night as most of the arisings had burnt away and part of the Bramble hedge was also singed. It was not necessary to call out the fire brigade and several members of the committee monitored the situation over the weekend. As this is the second time in three weeks that there has been a fire in this area (first time was on 31 August), we have decided to report the incidents to the police.

### **Pollution into River Ems**

Yesterday, Brian Fellows reported another pollution incident by RSM Anodising on Seagull Lane. They appear to be washing down their aluminium products and the process water is draining into the road and into the surface water drain which outlets into the River Ems. The last incident was on 4 August this year which I reported to the Environment Agency and the company was paid a visit by the patch officer, Trevor Page. I reported Sunday's incident to the Environment Agency this morning. If anybody sees this happening again, please take a photo and or report it to me.

### **BMCG membership due for renewal**

Your BMCG membership is now due for renewal. Please fill the membership form - copy on web site at <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-membership-renewal-form.html> Please send it together with your membership fee, still only £3 per person, to Wally Osborne, our secretary or you can renew your membership at our AGM on 7 October. If you renew your membership by standing order or if you joined after June this year, please ignore this renewal notice.

### **AGM**

This year's AGM will take place on **Wednesday 7 October** at 7pm in the Emsworth Centre on South Street. Our guest speaker is Bryan Pinchen who will talk about the '*Plight of the Bumblebee*'.

**'Goodbye to the Cuckoo'** – A talk by Mike McCarthy of 'The Independent' in Havant on October 2. For more info go to at <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/ralph.hollins/Diary.htm>

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### House Martins

House Martins are increasingly rare nesting birds in our area. As far as I am aware, they have not nested in Emsworth for at least 15 years, though they used to be fairly common. They have even disappeared from Stansted House. Michael Prior says it was the first time in his memory they have not nested there. Sadly, Spotted Flycatchers have also not nested at Stansted this year, though two Cuckoos had been regularly seen and heard. The nearest place I have seen House Martin nests this year was on the cafe overlooking the harbour at Bosham. Caroline French also found a site in Chichester near the cemetery on the east side of Chichester (Church Road). Have you seen any?

### Other bird news

Brent Geese are back! They were first seen in Chichester Harbour on Sep 15 and today (Sep 20) someone reported 19 to the east of Thorney Island. The rest should be here in the next few weeks, depending on what sort of breeding season they have had. There were 68 Coot on the two Hermitage millponds today, which means these birds are moving to the coast for the winter. Kingfishers are also on the move and can often be seen around streams and millponds in Emsworth.

Some late breeding news came from Tony Wootton who photographed a young Mistle Thrush near the south bridge on Brook Meadow. This was good news, since they have not nested here since 2005.

### Autumn fruits

Blackberries have had a good (though not a bumper) year and the remaining berries are very sweet. Rose Hips and Hawthorn berries hang like Xmas decorations, while the Rowans on Brook Meadow still have clusters of red berries despite the regular attention of the local Blackbirds. Meanwhile, the leaves of the Crack Willow trees are turning a rusty brown with a typical mottling effect.

A walk through Stansted Forest last week suggested a bumper year for Sweet Chestnuts, with the trees loaded with fruit. There are also plenty of conkers on the ground and I can never resist collecting a few, though I was a little concerned to see the Horse Chestnut leaves apparently withering. However, Ralph Hollins says the culprit is a moth larva which do not unduly harm the trees.

### Plant news

There are still lots of flowers to enjoy in the autumn sunshine including Common Fleabane, Hoary Ragwort, Creeping Thistle, Water Mint and Michaelmas Daisies on Brook Meadow alone. However, the best source of nectar at this time of the year is provided by Ivy flowers. I have a wall of Ivy in my back garden which is currently covered with bees and other insects, including four Red Admirals and three Commas. Gorse is also out on Slipper Millpond, so kissing is back in season!

I was delighted to discover Galingale growing on the roadside in Birdham, a new plant for that area. Galingale is a rare native plant, though increasingly an escape, which probably accounts for this one. This yet another example of the value of roadside verges for wildlife. A photo is on my web site.

### Insects

This is also a good time of the year for many insects, though hover flies appear to have largely disappeared as the nectar in the umbellifers becomes exhausted. Dragonflies are now on the wing. Common Darters seem to be particularly attracted to the raised gravel paths on the meadow, I saw at least 15 last week. I also had a good view of what I assume was a Southern Hawker flying, though it did not perch for a photo.

Emily Laurens had an Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar on some Great Willowherb by her garden gate in Washington Road, Emsworth. "Stunning, and it was there for several days, what a treat!" Emily's photo of the beast is on the web site and in the Brook Meadow signcases.

### Waysides news

Things are moving on well for the new Friends of Emsworth Waysides group. Support is growing for this exciting project. The Bridge Road Nature Reserve has already been set up and is looking very good. We could soon have a number of these mini-meadows across the town. Brendan Gibb-Gray is looking for funding for an information board like those on Brook Meadow.

Why not join in? It will cost you nothing. Just send me an e-mail with your name and address to [brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk) and I will put you on the list. In the meantime, please examine the verges where you live and let me know about any promising areas for a reserve.

News and photos about the Bridge Road site can be found on my web site at . . .  
<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/bridge-road-nature-reserve.htm>.

**Emsworth Wildlife web site for all the local wildlife news and photos . . .**

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 35-36, Aug 24 to Sep 6**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work session Sunday 6 September**

It was a cloudy but rather humid morning for the 8 volunteers (Wally, Jennifer, Frances, Dave, Patrick, Debi, Jil and Barbara) who turned up for the Sunday work session. The main task for the morning was to cut the SE corner of the South Meadow. Wally expertly used the power scythe while Patrick, Debi, Dave, Frances and Jennifer raked up and moved the arisings to a sacrificial dump out of sight in amongst the stinging nettles. This was very important to do as we did not want a repeat of last year's fire when a pile of arisings were set alight, we think mainly because we had not hidden them well enough. See also the report on 'Fire in North Meadow' below. Meanwhile Jil and Barbara did a thorough litter pick of Palmers Road copse as well as cut back stinging nettles overhanging the paths.

After a well-earned refreshment break provided by Jennifer, we completed a variety of tasks in the central and north meadows. These included reducing the height of the green willow hurdle near the sluice gate, by partially breaking the branches and bending them over, and further north along the riverbank (Jennifer, Dave and Patrick). Wally strimmed back the new growth of nettles on the western side of the central meadow cut by Tom about a month ago, Debi made her debut with the power scythe and cut the occasional paths as well as cut a path through the area previously cut by Tom on the western side of the North Meadow. Dave and Jennifer removed a mass of bindweed from the Osier plantation on the eastern side of the North Meadow and Jil, Barbara and Patrick cut back vegetation from around the Rowans. Many thanks to the small band of volunteers for achieving such a lot in such a short time.

Report and photos are on the group web site.

Go to . . . .

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: cutting meadow areas such as Seagull Lane patch and parts of Central Meadow; pruning lower branches of Oak tree in North Meadow; care of young trees.

Forthcoming work sessions: **Thursday 17 September & Sunday 4 October**

#### **Annual cut**

Tom is scheduled to return again next week for another cutting session in Brook Meadow. This time we have selected several areas of the Central Meadow to be cut with a strimmer used as a hand scythe as has been done successfully before. Large grass tussocks and some flowering plants will be left while the rest of the grass is cut at a height of about 15cm, creating a mosaic pattern. The cuttings will be raked and removed to the sacrificial area to reduce soil fertility.

#### **Fire in North Meadow – taken from a report by Jennifer Rye**

On August Bank Holiday Monday, some lads (about 17-18 years old) set fire to the sacrificial dump in the North Meadow at about 5 pm. Fortunately, Christopher and I were walking through the meadow at the time, and promptly called the fire service, who between them (local station and a land rover from Chichester fire service) put it out, raked over the burnt vegetation and damped it all down thoroughly. They had to cut through the chain on the vehicle gate at the Lumley entrance as I couldn't locate a key holder. I think we owe them a letter of appreciation at the very least, and maybe a donation to the Firemen's Benevolent fund?

The fire was probably due to a careless cigarette butt rather than deliberate fire setting. The fire has burned most of the arisings from the recent annual cuts. The padlock and chain have been secured again but we may need to think of a better arrangement for this in future - as the chain is getting shorter every time it is cut!

#### **BMCG membership due for renewal**

Your BMCG membership is now due for renewal. A membership renewal form is attached with this email. Please fill it in and send it together with your membership fee which is still only £3 per person to Wally Osborne, our secretary. If you renew your membership by standing order or if you joined after June this year, please ignore this renewal notice.

#### **AGM**

This year's AGM will take place on **Wednesday 7 October** at 7pm in the Emsworth Centre on South Street. Our guest speaker is Bryan Pinchen who will talk about the '*Plight of the Bumblebee*'. A formal notice inviting you to the AGM is also attached with these email notes.

## **LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

### **Friends of Emsworth Waysides**

The most exciting news of the week was the formation of a new conservation group in Emsworth at a meeting at the Crown Hotel on Thursday September 3. The purpose of the meeting, chaired by Brendan Gibb-Gray and attended by nine local residents and Andy Paffett of HBC, was to set up the Bridge Road Nature Reserve. This was duly achieved. Then Andy Brook proposed a more broadly based group, covering all such roadside reserves, of which Bridge Road Nature Reserve would be the first. Andy's proposal just blew everyone away and was accepted unanimously. This new 'umbrella group' would be known as 'Friends of Emsworth Waysides'; the term 'waysides' seemed to capture what we have in mind, with a throw back to the days when roadside verges were really full of wildlife. Emsworth could become a truly 'green' town with wild flowers everywhere (and no plastic bags, to boot!). Look at the grass verge in Bridge Road car park to see the effects of stopping cutting and spraying for a couple of months. The flowers are all there, just waiting to come up! As Andy said, a series of nature waysides would produce 'wildlife corridors' across the town, to the benefit of all wildlife. There will be a web site for the new group, but in the meantime visit my web site for all the news at . . .

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/bridge-road-nature-reserve.htm>

If you are interested in joining this exciting venture contact me at . . . [brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk)

### **Bird news**

Bird song is scarce at present with only Robin, Woodpigeon and Collared Dove singing consistently, with occasional bursts from Wren and Great Tit. I have had two sightings of a Kingfisher in the past week, both around the north of Peter Pond. Ralph Hollins caused a stir among local birders when he saw what appeared to be a group of migrant Quail on the South Moor at Langstone. Sadly, they turned out to be no more than a family of young Pheasants. Caroline French saw a Nightjar perched on a fence at Pagham - photo on web site. It reminded me of Terry Piper's photo of a Nightjar on his garden shed at Eastney last year. Nightjars are moving south and clearly are not over fussy where they rest.

### **Hayling Oysterbeds**

Jason Crook's end of the season report from Hayling Oysterbeds indicates a good breeding year for Black-headed Gulls and Common Terns, but a poor one for Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover and nothing for Little Terns. However, 45 pairs of Little Terns did nest on the RSPB islands in Langstone Harbour, but only 5 young were raised. Proposals are being finalised for habitat creation and development on the Oysterbeds to improve the situation for summer ground nesting birds and winter roosting waders. Jason still hopes to see the creation of new potential sites for Little Terns.

### **Insects**

There are plenty of white butterflies around, but not a great deal else, but for Speckled Woods in Palmer's Road Copse. Common Darters can usually be seen beneath the south bridge and may perch on the handrail. There are not many insects left on the white umbellifers. Nectar all gone?

### **Hedgehogs**

Several people responded to my request for Hedgehog sightings which is very good news for the species. Jane Emery has had a Hedgehog nesting in her garden in Selangor Avenue Emsworth for the past two years, producing a broods of 4-5 youngsters. Jane says it is currently re-building the nest.

### **Plants**

Common Fleabane and Hoary Ragwort are flowering well on Brook Meadow, but most other flowers are on the wane. However, Michaelmas Daisies will give a welcome splash of colour in the next month. Ralph Hollins reminded us that we have now reached the time of year when the rules about when plants flower are forgotten and everything is possible with all species taking advantage of any second chance to perpetuate itself. I noticed several Buttercups flowering on Brook Meadow. Ralph also reminded us to look out for Ivy flowers which are such an important nectar source for late flying insects.

### **Other wildlife**

Shoals of large Grey Mullett are now a common sight in Slipper Millpond and Peter Pond as they move in from the harbour at high water. Ruth Portwin and I saw a large Trout from the small footbridge to the north of Peter Pond. Fred told us it was probably a Sea Trout coming upstream to spawn. I had sightings of a Water Vole from both the north and south bridges, after several weeks of seeing nothing.

**Emsworth Wildlife web site for all the local wildlife news and photos . . .**

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 33-34, 10 to 23 August 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Workday Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> August – report by Wally Osborne**

Twelve volunteers turned out in mainly dry but cloudy conditions, for the first of the new '3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday in the month' scheduled workdays. Tasks for the day were many and varied and we immediately set about the tasks centred on the South Meadow. Mike Probert operated the power scythe on the occasional paths, preparing the way for cutting back and clearing tall overhanging vegetation by Jennifer Rye, Gaynor Wells, Patrick Murphy, Pam Phillips and Dave Lee. Jennifer also gave the Weeping Willow tree a much-needed prune. The outcome is that all paths are now clear.

Meanwhile, Lesley Harris and Tony Wootton cleared around and cleaned all of the sign-cases, meadow steps and carefully clipped the Butterbur leaves overhanging the main paths.

Graham Walsgrove donned his waders and, under Pat's watchful eyes, cleared litter from the river in Palmers Road copse. Pat and Frances were also busy in the copse, clearing the vegetation overhanging the main path and around the Water Vole sign-case. After all this, the refreshment break provided by Pat, was most welcome for all of us.

The second half tasks were centred around the central and north meadows where Mike mowed off the nettles on the 'annual cut swathes to keep them short and also widened the most easterly of the north meadow occasional paths for cutting back and clearance by Pam, Gaynor, Dave and Patrick.

Graham and Frances retrieved the vandalised hurdle material from the river, with one of the posts used to support a leaning Rowan tree in the plantation.

Meanwhile, Jennifer and Tony did some careful 'weeding' around the new Hazel plantation near to the north bridge, moving on to do the same work to the new plantation near to the Seagull Lane entrance.

Finally, Lesley, Frances and Patrick attacked the tall nettle patch next to the kissing gate. Throughout the morning, great efforts were made to leave and preserve any flowering plants.

A great morning's work by all of the volunteers who worked with great enthusiasm and to huge effect.

**Photos on web site . . .** <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2009.html>

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: cutting meadow areas eg SE corner of South Meadow; pruning green willow hurdles; pruning lower branches of Oak tree in North Meadow; cutting occasional paths.  
Forthcoming work sessions: **Sunday 6 & Thursday 17 September**

#### **Annual cut**

Tom is scheduled to return next week for another cutting session in Brook Meadow. We have selected several areas of the North Meadow to be cut with a strimmer used as a hand scythe as he did most successfully last time. Large grass tussocks and some flowering plants will be left while the rest of the grass is cut at a height of about 15cm, creating a mosaic pattern. The cuttings will be raked and removed to the sacrificial area to reduce soil fertility.

#### **Strimming along main paths**

The edges of all the main paths will be strimmed by Les Foster of HBC next week as the paths are becoming very narrow in places. Special attention will be given to stinging nettles and brambles. Les will grade the cutting so that taller nettles will not flop over the path when the adjacent vegetation is cut short. The path edges next to the river will not be cut as wide as the ones on the meadow side.

#### **Annual river cut**

I have been in contact with the Environment Agency to discuss the river cut which the EA carries out each year. A site visit is planned towards the end of August between Adam Cave (EA's Fisheries, Recreation & Biodiversity, Solent and South Downs Division), John Ridge (EA's East Hampshire Operations Delivery) and Mike Probert (BMCG committee member). The actual river cut is likely to take place sometime in October and will hopefully include cutting sections of riverbank vegetation, removing large branches overhanging the river and cutting and removing a percentage of in-stream vegetation.

#### **BMCG membership due for renewal**

BMCG membership is due for renewal at the beginning of September. Our apologies to all those members who usually renew their membership at the Emsworth Show on August Bank Holiday Monday. The committee have decided to have a rest from this year's Show! A membership renewal form will be sent out with the next email notes at the beginning of September.

#### **AGM**

This year's AGM will take place on **Wednesday 7 October** at 7pm in the Emsworth Centre on South Street. Our guest speaker is Bryan Pinchen who will talk about the fascinating subject of Bumblebees. A formal notice calling the AGM will also be sent out with the next email notes at the beginning of September.

## **LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

### **Local bird news**

Birds are slowly returning to Emsworth Harbour, though not in great numbers as yet. Just 22 Black-tailed Godwits were on the mudflats yesterday along with some colour-ringed Greenshank, constantly calling to each other. Caroline French reported 295 Black-tailed Godwits on Farlington Marshes.

Meanwhile, the nesting season has finished at Hayling Oysterbeds, with the final Common Tern chicks almost fledged. It will be interesting to see if the Little Terns ever come back. I doubt it with the Black-headed Gulls so dominant on the islands.

This is a quiet time for birds in our gardens. I had an Song Thrush singing for a couple of mornings, and a Sparrowhawk rushed through on another occasion. Woodpigeon and Collared Dove are regular. Robin, Greenfinch and Goldfinch also visit. I am seeing far more butterflies in my garden than birds.

### **Millpond news**

On the local millponds Mute Swans are moulting and Mallards are in eclipse plumage. Coot numbers are building up on Slipper Millpond, where I counted 32 last week. A pure white Coot was reported on Hayling Island recently. Three late Mallard families with between 5 and 7 ducklings were on Slipper Millpond last week, but are unlikely to survive. But Brendan Gibb-Gray tells me the Moorhen family with three chicks are still alive and well on Dolphin Lake.

### **Butterflies**

Good numbers of butterflies have been on the wing this past week, particularly Large and Small Whites, which are absolutely everywhere. They love the Perennial Verbena in my garden; what a great plant that is. However, I have yet to spot a Green-veined White. On Brook Meadow in the past week I have seen Speckled Wood, Comma, Red Admiral, Holly Blue, Common Blue and, of course, Painted Ladies. Following their mass invasion in late May, they spread throughout Britain and Ireland and even got to St Kilda, where no butterfly of any description had been seen for the past two years! By June, hundreds made it to Iceland. Next stop, the North Pole? What is surprising is that no other species were caught up in this massive movement.

### **Other insects**

On Brook Meadow, the large white umbellifers are still attracting insects, mainly flies and wasps, though not in the numbers of a couple of weeks ago. Nectar exhausted? However, the grassland is still teeming with mostly Meadow Grasshoppers which hop away as you walk through.

I got a good photo of a Light Emerald moth on Brook Meadow which was a new insect for me. These moths quickly lose their green colouring, though this one was fairly fresh. The moth has a red tip to the forewing, sometimes extending as a line along the outer edge of both fore and hind wings.

After a few poor years it seems that Wasps are making a comeback. There are plenty on the flowers on Brook Meadow and we were plagued with them during my birthday lunch at Stansted on Aug 12. The manageress told us they had found five nests in the new embankment around the garden centre.

### **Plant news**

On Brook Meadow the bright yellow daisies of Common Fleabane create a fine spectacle, as well as providing a good nectar source for bees and other insects. The huge plants of Wild Angelica tower over all others on the south meadow. Hoary Ragwort and Water Mint are flowering well on the west side of the north meadow (a new site) and I counted 14 plants of Pepper-saxifrage in the usual place on the eastern side of the Lumley area, in. A good year for them.

Ralph Hollins told me where to find Pale Toadflax (*Linaria repens*) at its only known location on Hayling Island. See my web site for Aug 16 for details and photo. Ralph also showed me a good site to see Lax-flowered Sea-lavender on the sea wall at Langstone. I was also pleased to find again the rare Slender Hare's-ear on the Wickor Bank on the west side of Thorney Island. See web site for Aug 12. Ralph found hundreds of Devil's Bit Scabious on the ungrazed 'orchid field' on the South Moor where he had never before seen more than half a dozen plants. Shows the value of letting things be.

### **Bridge Road Reserve**

The proposed roadside nature reserve near the Westbrook Stream in Bridge Road car park is looking very good with a profusion of wild flowers, attracting lots of butterflies and other insects. Only this morning I watched two pairs of Common Darters flying in tandem over the stream. Two new plants this week were Flax and False Fox Sedge (our first sedge) taking the list to an astonishing 93, which is a very high density for such a small area (roughly 500 square metres). Small and beautiful. Take a look.

**My Emsworth Wildlife web site . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>**

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 31-32, July 2 to August 9, 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Workday Sunday 2 August**

It was very pleasing to see nine volunteers (Frances, Pat, Pam, Graham, Richard, Dave, Patrick, Jill, and Lesley) turn up on the first Sunday in August for the first of the newly arranged work sessions. The weather was sunny but not too warm - just right for carrying out conservation work. The first task was to cut all the paths in the South Meadow with the power scythe and then the edges were cut back with shears to remove overhanging nettles and brambles. All the arisings were raked and removed to the sacrificial area. Other paths in the rest of the meadow were also cut with the power scythe as well as trimming overhanging Butterbur leaves. The second main task was to rebuild one of the willow hurdles near the S-bend to restrict access to the river and damage to the water vole habitat. Other tasks completed included selectively weeding round recently planted Hazels and other hedgerow plants at the Seagull Lane entrance and planting a Goat Willow at the south entrance and some Comfrey plants on the western edge of the Central Meadow. Much appreciated refreshments were amusingly provided by Pat and Graham with some interestingly flavoured coffee!! Many thanks to all the volunteers who worked so hard.

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: removing willow branches overhanging footpaths; cutting edges of occasional paths; cutting some of meadow areas; pruning green willow hurdles.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 20 August & Sunday 3 September

#### **Annual cut**

In contrast to previous years, in order to reduce the impact on wildlife, such as small mammals and amphibians that live in damp grass, smaller areas are being cut at any one time using a variety of machinery and hand tools. The first cut took place on 28 July when Tom, equipped with strimmer, cut the western edge of the central and north meadows mainly removing Stinging Nettles. The arisings were raked and removed to the sacrificial area. The second cut was on 3 August with Tom using a small forage harvester to cut the north-western corner of the North Meadow. This machine has a cutting width of 1.50m and is quite flexible in that it can cut small areas quite quickly. Again it was Stinging Nettles that were mainly cut and removed. A second area in the North Meadow was given a different treatment, a strimmer was used as if it was a hand scythe leaving the grass quite long with tussocks left uncut. A number of other sessions have been booked for August and September.

#### **Japanese Knotweed invasion**

Some months ago, I noticed a patch of Japanese Knotweed in Palmers Road copse and reported it to HBC. This very invasive plant was growing at an alarming rate in the Brook Meadow Local Nature Reserve, so I obtained permission from HBC for Mike Probert who has a licence to use herbicides in public places, to treat it. He followed the approved method of injecting glyphosate into the hollow stems. The herbicide is absorbed and kills off the rhizomes of the plant without coming into contact with other plants as might happen if they were sprayed. We will monitor any new growths and treat them accordingly.

#### **Vandalism**

Fortunately, incidents of vandalism in Brook Meadow have been infrequent over the last year but last week two were reported. The first was damage to quite a large Hazel near the Seagull Lane entrance, planted earlier in the year, the stem was broken off at the base. It may grow again, we will have to wait and see. The second was some black graffiti on the main interpretation board in Palmers Road car park. This was removed last week.

#### **Fallen Willow tree**

On Friday evening, Pam Phillips reported hearing the loud noise of a Crack Willow tree splitting and falling over the River Ems just south of the S-bend. She said the noise was deafening and sounded like a series of gunshots. The tree has not fallen over the footpath but is now across the river. I will report this to the Environment Agency on Monday.

#### **South bridge in need of repair**

I have been concerned for some time about the state of the surface of the south bridge which is cracking up in several places and poses a hazard to pedestrians and cyclists. I reported this to HBC some months ago. The surface was only installed less than 3 years ago as part of the Liveability award. I have recently heard that HBC will be replacing several of the sheets which cover the bridge as a matter of urgency.

### ***Bird news***

This is a relatively quiet time of the year for birds after the end of the breeding season. So, it is always good to hear the first autumn song of the Robin. This is quite different from the bright and confident spring song. The autumn song is produced by both sexes, which is a rare occurrence in British birds. The only others I have heard recently are Wren, Coal Tit, Woodpigeon and Collared Dove.

Swallows nest each year in the stables in the old Marina Farm and they seem to have had a successful year, judging from the youngsters that are now on the wing around the stables. You can usually find them perching on the overhead power cables, begging for food from their parents.

Black-tailed Godwits are back in Emsworth Harbour, though not in the numbers that they used to be. There are currently 200 or so on Farlington Marshes. Greenshank are also in the harbour and look out for Common Sandpiper and Whimbrel which are currently passing through. Meanwhile over at Hayling Oysterbeds, the great the Black-headed Gull show is over, with all the gulls and youngsters having dispersed. However, several pairs of Common Terns are still tending young.

### ***Water Voles***

In early July, grass stems were found on Brook Meadow that had been neatly cut up into 20cm lengths and arranged in piles. We wondered if the cuttings were from Water Voles, though they were well away from the river. Graham Roberts from the Hampshire Wildlife Trust said they were probably the work of Field or Bank Voles and not Water Voles. He referred to an article by Kate Ryland in British Wildlife June 2009 which indicated that all three Voles produce feeding remains which are indistinguishable. Graham stressed that droppings and latrines are the most important signs indicating the presence of Water Voles and not food ladders. Meanwhile, Water Vole sightings continue to come in from the River Ems, taking this year's total to 119. My wife and I also saw one swimming in the channel between the reeds to the north of Peter Pond on Aug 7, only the 11th sighting from that area this year.

### ***Insects***

This is a peak time of the year for butterflies as the summer broods start emerge. Painted Ladies are absolutely everywhere, with the offspring from huge invasion in late May now on the wing. There surely has never been anything like this before? Whites are almost as numerous, but Small Tortoiseshells remain very scarce. I saw my first (and probably only) one of the year in the Dutch Garden at Stansted, where incidentally there is a magnificent white-flowered Buddleja that is a magnet for butterflies. Graham Walsgrove also had a Small Tortoiseshell in his garden. His photo is on the web site.

On Brook Meadow, the white flower heads of Hogweed are literally covered with hundreds of insects, mainly hover flies and soldier beetles, all busy feeding. Bumblebees seem to prefer the bushy flowers of Hemp Agrimony, while butterflies go for the yellow flowers of Common Fleabane.

On Saturday, I and other members of the Havant Wildlife Group were fascinated to see a female Bush-cricket emerge from the shell of an earlier stage. Orthopterans, which is the order containing grasshoppers and bush-crickets, have no pupal stage and the youngsters pass through several nymphal stages before reaching maturity. We also had a cracking view of a female Wasp Spider (*Argiope bruennichi*) in the centre of her web with the vertical stabilimentum.

All photos are on my web site – address below.

### ***Plants***

On Brook Meadow, the huge plants of Wild Angelica are towering to 8 feet tall on Brook Meadow. The 20 Rowans planted on Brook Meadow in memory of Gwynne Johnson in May 2005 have masses of red berries. These are a fine spectacle for visitors, but also are a valuable food source for birds. Maybe, we shall get a visit from Waxwings this winter.

Tansy is flowering as usual beneath the railway arch on Lumley Road in company with Hemp Agrimony and Grey Sedge. Is this the only wild flowering Tansy in Emsworth?

I was pleased to find Giant Fescue on the path through Palmer's Road Copse, the first I have seen on the Brook Meadow site for 3 years. Golden Samphire is in full flower around the coasts and millponds.

### ***Bridge Road reserve***

Sadly, someone has cut down the apple tree in Bridge Road car park. The motive for this act is very puzzling. Better news is that wild flowers are flourishing on the grass verge following the suspension of the cutting/spraying. The site will soon be surveyed by HBIC for possible SINC status. Brendan Gibb-Gray will be arranging a meeting for all people interested in the scheme (possibly on Thursday Sept 3rd at The Crown) to get the ball rolling. More details later. [brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk)

**See my Emsworth Wildlife web site . . . for more local wildlife news and photos . . .**

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 29-30 - July 13-26, 2009**

Web site . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Workday Sunday 19 July – Abbreviated report by Jennifer Rye**

Wally widened the extreme easterly path in the central meadow, making butterfly transects easier, using the power scythe. Later, the arisings were collected, bagged and taken to the sacrificial area.

The river was cleared of litter and obstructions by welly-booted enthusiasts. Some of the larger branches removed from the river were re-used to create temporary barriers alongside the raised paths, to discourage dogs from entering the water in the water vole territory. Young trees were cleared of invading plants, particularly bindweed which is rampant in the north meadow this year, and the rowans and horse chestnuts seemed much relieved. In all, the six of us got a lot done.

Editor's Note: Jennifer's full report can be seen on the group web site.

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: removing willow branches overhanging footpaths; cutting occasional paths; possibly clearing up after first cutting session by new contractor.

Forthcoming work sessions: **Sunday 2 & Thursday 20 August**

#### **2009 Hampshire Water Festival Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 July**

The 7<sup>th</sup> Hampshire Water Festival was held in Staunton Country Park, Havant, which is the first time that the event has been held in this part of Hampshire. Leigh Park Gardens was the amazing venue for more than 50 exhibitors including WWF, Environment Agency, RSPB, Ecover, HWT, HBC, Portsmouth Water as well as Havant Friends of the Earth, BTCV, Havant Conservation Forum, Havant Borough Tree Wardens and of course Brook Meadow Conservation Group. The theme of the BMCG displays was the River Ems with lots of photos of Water Voles and the river through the seasons. Many thanks to Ray Cobbett of Havant FoE for persuading me to have a stand and for paying the booking fee. In addition to numerous water-themed stands, there was a good variety of entertainment for both children and adults, including Dr H2O and Pirate Pete, and also a good selection of food and drink on sale. It was a fantastic event with at least 10,000 visitors with free entrance to Staunton Country Park, including the gardens, glasshouses and farm. People came from far and wide for example from London, Bognor and Somerset. I estimate that our stand attracted more than 700 visitors over the weekend and I sold lots of Field Studies Council ID guides and most of Sharon Perrett's photos and cards. This sort of event is just what Havant Borough needs to raise its profile to become a 'green borough'. Many thanks to all the people who helped out over the weekend. It was well worth the effort.

#### **Two Ems valley walks**

As well as having a stall at the Festival, BMCG organised two lower Ems valley walks on the Sunday as we have done in the previous 4 years. Eight people were on the morning walk led by Brian Fellows and seven turned out for the afternoon walk led by Jennifer Rye. None were existing members of BMCG, but took away leaflets to consider joining, and maybe helping with workdays as well.

#### **Annual Cut**

This year's annual cut will be carried out by John Blamire, an environmental contractor, and will be very different to previous years. John will not be using a cut and collect machine drawn by a tractor but will use hand scythes and/or trimmers. He will be cutting much smaller areas than in previous years and weather permitting will start on July 28 cutting swathes along the western side of the central and north meadows. The cuttings will then be raked up by hand and taken to the sacrificial area to reduce fertility. We hope that this small-scale, manual 'cut and collect' method will minimise the impact on wildlife.

#### **Forthcoming events**

*Please note: The BMCG committee have decided NOT to have a stall at the Emsworth Show this year.*

**Wednesday 7 October, 7pm, Emsworth Centre – AGM** with guest speaker Bryan Pinchen who will talk about Bumblebees.

#### **Roadside wildlife reserve – by Brian Fellows**

I was pleased to see there had been no spraying or cutting of the grass verge in Bridge Road car park when I got back from two weeks holiday (in a much wetter than usual West Wales), resulting in array of attractive wild flowers and grasses. The plant list for the area stands at 82 and is growing.

Brendan Gibb-Gray and I will be getting together soon to set up an inaugural meeting of the 'Friends of Bridge Road car park'. If you would like to support this new project and/or have other ideas for roadside wildlife reserves please let me know. You do not need to live in Emsworth, or commit yourself to any work, to support the project. E-mail me at . . . [brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk)

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### Local bird news

Brendan Gibb-Gray has been keeping an eye on a Moorhen family with three tiny chicks in Dolphin Lake. They came from a nest on the Eyas boat and are about 2 weeks old. Look out for them on the mud at low water. Brendan also saw a Common Tern fishing on Slipper Millpond in the past week.

Ralph Hollins reports Little Egret numbers along the south coast are now increasing rapidly as birds return from breeding elsewhere. Early arrivals of Golden Plover and Dunlin have also been seen. It was good to find Swifts still flying around the houses in Bridge Road when I got back from holiday, though they will soon be on their way back to Africa. Last to arrive, first to leave. Numbers appear to be down again this year. The BTO reports a 29% fall in this bird from 1995, partly due no doubt to lack of suitable nesting sites. The following web site gives information about installing Swift nest boxes . . . <http://www.londons-swifts.org.uk/Nestboxes&Attraction.htm>

### Gull and Tern colonies

Chris Cockburn reports a generally poor breeding season for gulls and terns on the RSPB islands in Langstone Harbour, with the notable exception of Mediterranean Gulls with an overall productivity of c70%. As for Little Terns Chris reports just four fledged young and one 'almost fledged' bird from over 35 nesting pairs. The main problems for the terns were high winds, 'piracy' by Black-headed Gulls of fish-prey intended for tern chicks and predation of small chicks and eggs by Mediterranean gulls. Although Little Terns did not nest on Hayling Oysterbeds this year, Jason Crook reports excellent results for Black-headed Gulls with 450 pairs raising many hundreds of youngsters. Common Terns also did well with many youngsters on the islands and some birds still sitting for a second try. For Jason's full report along with some delightful video clips go to . . . <http://www.hwt.org.uk/news.php/187/test-news>

### Insects

I saw a number of butterflies on a walk around Brook Meadow and the millponds this weekend, including Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Red Admiral, Painted Lady and several whites.

Ralph Hollins reports that the offspring of the first wave of Painted Lady migrant arrivals are now on the wing in good numbers; about 500 seen on thistles on the eastern lakes at Chichester on July 20.

Patrick Murphy photographed a male Banded Demoiselle on Brook Meadow on July 25.

On July 13 Michael Prior (Head Forester at Stansted) described a Bumblebee nest he had recently found comprising entirely of larch needles in a neat dome above ground.

### Plant news

Late flowering plants give a splash of colour on Brook Meadow, notably the yellows of Common Fleabane and Common Ragwort, whites of Hogweed, Meadowsweet and Bindweed and pinks of Great Willowherb and Spear Thistle. Our Wild Angelicas are also growing fast.

Golden Samphire, Pellitory-of-the-wall and Prickly Sow-thistle are flowering well on the inside of the Hermitage Bridge wall overlooking Slipper Millpond, where I also noticed a single plant of Gipsywort for the first time. Prickly Lettuce is also in flower (mornings only) on the east side of the pond. Sloes are out on the footpath behind Lillywhite's Garage where Dark Mullein and Stone Parsley are flowering.

The Havant Wildlife Group had a good find of Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*) during their regular Saturday morning walk on July 12 on a footpath near East Ashling. This plant usually grows in tidal stream mouths but this site (which has some 50 plants) is a good 2 kilometres from the harbour.

### Hedgehogs

With no reported Hedgehog sightings in the first five months of the year Ralph Hollins thought these delightful animals had vanished from the local scene. However, following my report of two sightings in Emsworth, Debbie Robinson was out with her dogs one evening last week when a fine Hedgehog appeared in front of them on the pavement in Victoria Road. Debbie comments that when she first moved to Emsworth 8 years ago she regularly saw them in her garden, but now rarely sees one. I would be interested to hear about other local sightings.

### Water Voles

Water Voles are getting difficult to see with the tall vegetation hiding the river for most of its length through Brook Meadow. However, Tony Wootton and Penny Aylett and Caroline and Ray French saw some on the river last week. These make 117 sightings for the year so far, which is about the same number that we had at this time last year.

**My local wildlife web site** – For more local wildlife news and photos please go to – <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 27-28 June 29 – July 12, 2009**

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### ***Work session 2 July***

It was stifling hot morning with hardly any breeze for the 10 volunteers (Frances, Pat, Graham, Pam, Mike, Barbara, Jenny, Patrick, Leslie and Gaynor) most of whom fortunately came decked out in a varying assortment of hats to keep off the sun. If not, they put on sun cream. In spite of the hot weather, we managed to complete a large number of tasks, most of which were in the shade and included:

- Selectively weeding and watering the young trees, such as Hawthorns and Hazels at the Seagull Lane entrance (Patrick and Pam);
- Weeding the Hazel copse near the north bridge (Pat); Cutting back with shears, raking and cutting with power scythe the Bramble and diagonal paths in the south meadow (Leslie and Gaynor);
- Weeding and watering Honeysuckle and Holly near the south entrance (Pam and Jenny);
- Litterpicking in Palmers Road copse and cleaning the signcases (Jenny and Barbara);
- Building a new willow hurdle near the s-bend in the river to prevent erosion of the riverbank (Mike and Graham) using willow cut down by Environment Agency near south bridge..

Very welcome refreshments both hot and cold were provided by Pam. Many thanks to all the volunteers for their exceptional effort. During the work session we saw Peacock, Marbled White, Gatekeeper, Small Copper, and Common Blue butterflies.

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: Maintenance of young trees; cutting back nettles and brambles along occasional paths; removing willow branches overhanging footpaths; cutting occasional paths; possibly clearing up after first cutting session by new contractor.

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 19 July, Sunday 2 and Thursday 20 August. From August, work sessions will be held on the First Sunday and Third Thursday in the month.

#### ***Forthcoming events***

Saturday 25 & Sunday 26 July—Hampshire Water Festival at Staunton Country Park, Middle Park Way. 10am to 5pm. Free entry to park with free activities and workshops. BMCG will be represented.

Sunday 26 July – Two Ems Valley walks as part of the Hampshire Water Festival. Meet 10am and 2pm by the Brook Meadow information board in Palmers Road car park. Both walks take about 2 hours.

Please note: The BMCG committee have decided NOT to have a stall at the Emsworth Show this year.

#### ***Quadrat plant survey***

Pat, Graham and Frances, with support from Brian, have continued with the plant survey over the last two weeks spending about 12 hours in total so far. We have surveyed most of the central and north meadows and hope to complete the survey next week. I will write a report of our findings.

#### ***Puzzling grass cuttings***

While conducting quadrat plant surveys we discovered number of grass stems had been neatly snipped off at a height of about 30cm from the ground and then further cut up into approximately 20cm lengths and arranged in piles. These could be the work of a Water Vole though it was a good 40 metres from the river and the chopped stems were longer than one would expect from Water Vole (10cm). Graham Roberts of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust has been consulted.

#### ***Bridge Road Nature Reserve – Report by Brian Fellows***

Andy Paffett of HBC has agreed to cease the current programme of cutting and weed spraying in the Bridge Road car park area with a view towards creating a more natural managed area utilising the knowledge and skills of volunteers. Andy will ask the area supervisor and maintenance teams not to visit the site until further notice, to give us time to work out a way forward with the proposed nature reserve.

This is very good news indeed, for with proper care and management this small area has the potential to be one of natural beauty and provide a good habitat for diversity of wildlife. Maybe, it could be the catalyst for other roadside nature reserves to be set up in Emsworth, with people caring for their local environment and not just “leaving it to the Council”. As well as being “green” it would save the Council money!

Now, we need to get people involved to support the new conservation project. Local Councillor, Brendan Gibb-Gray has agreed to arrange an inaugural meeting of the ‘Friends of Bridge Road Nature Reserve’ when I get back from a 2 week holiday. The Brook Meadow Conservation Group will be discussing their involvement with the project and Rob Hill of HBC has put it on the agenda for the next Havant Conservation Forum meeting. We are on the way, so, let’s keep this ball rolling!

I would love to hear from you if you would like to support us. Please let me know, so that we can get things moving quickly as soon as I get back to Emsworth. And watch this space!

**LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

**Brook Meadow**

I love walking through the avenues of tall grasses on Brook Meadow in high summer, with the white umbels of Hogweed and the pink flowers of Great Willowherb towering over everything. I like to smell the aroma of Meadowsweet as I walk and feel the rustle of the brown seed heads of Yellow Rattle. I also enjoy tasting the first Blackberries, which are now almost ripe along the north path, but never very sweet at first. Those are some of the things I enjoy! I had almost given up on the Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea, but a few pink flowers have struggled through a jungle on the Seagull Lane patch.

### ***Butterflies***

The hot weather certainly brought the butterflies out. This is the season of the browns, with Meadow Browns absolutely everywhere, but they so rarely settle that it is a job to find the Ringlets. Gatekeepers are fairly easy to pick out, but the Skippers really need to rest to distinguish Large and Small. There are also masses of whites, mainly Large and Small, with one or two Green-veined. Others seen on Brook Meadow this past week include Painted Lady, Comma, Red Admiral, Peacock, Common Blue and Small Copper (the first one on Brook Meadow since 2007).

### ***Other insects***

Ladybirds have been everywhere on Brook Meadow, mainly 7-spots, but also a few Harlequins. Cinnabar moths are also on the wing, though we don't have much Common Ragwort for them. The red Soldier Beetles congregate in great numbers on the large flower heads of Hogweed, some paired and mating. Meadow Grasshoppers, with hind wings absent, are also abundant on Brook Meadow, particularly on the short grasses of the north meadow. They are the only flightless grasshopper in Britain. I spotted a female Short-winged Conehead with a long sabre-like ovipositor. Andrew Millea who lives in Palmer's Road was surprised to find two female Glow-worms on his driveway on July 3, the first I have heard about in Emsworth. Only the females glow to attract males.

### ***Other plant news***

Meanwhile, Prickly Lettuce is flowering on the eastern bank of Slipper Millpond and Golden Samphire is out on the Hermitage Bridge wall overlooking the pond. In Havant, Ralph Hollins has found both Blackberries and Cherry plums ripe enough to eat and on the Langstone South Moors Ralph found Marsh Ragwort and Hoary Ragwort in flower for the first time. Further afield, Hemp Agrimony was flowering in Bosham churchyard. There is a fine display of Goat's-rue in the overflow car park at Hayling Oysterbeds, where you can also see Lesser Burdock, White Melilot and Teasels in flower. Common Ragwort is often dismissed as an unwanted, even dangerous, weed, but, in full flower, it is a fine plant and a valuable nectar source for insects and food for the caterpillars of Cinnabar Moth.

### ***Millpond News***

Young Black-headed Gulls are now appearing on the Emsworth millponds. They are delightful gingery-brown birds, but look nothing like their parents, so beware of mistaking them for waders. A Lesser Black-backed Gull, with a very muddy face, was on a raft on Slipper Millpond while two adult Cormorants were also back on the pond, indicating the end of their breeding season. The three Coot families have two mature chicks each, but it looks as if there will not be any second broods this year.

### ***Godwits return***

The first of the Black-tailed Godwits were back in Emsworth Harbour this week. Yes, winter is coming! They included one colour-ringed bird new to Emsworth. Over 250 Godwits were on the lagoon at Farlington Marshes on July 9, mostly up to their bellies in water, making colour-ring reading difficult. A fellow Godwit spotter in Kent, Dudley Hird, told me that RYL+RLY was back on the Medway Estuary on July 3, and hopefully should be with us in Emsworth by late September. Meanwhile, Pete Potts is checking the nesting Godwits in Iceland and ringing a few, I guess (not their necks!).

### ***Other local news***

Swifts are a common sight over Emsworth at this time of the year. The most I have seen is about 30 flying high over the town. Ten or so often scream around the houses in Bridge Road, occasionally clinging to the eaves on my neighbour's roof - youngsters exploring potential nesting sites? I was pleased to see House Martins nesting under the eaves of the cafe on the harbour at Bosham. After years without seeing a Hedgehog, I have seen two in the past two weeks, one in my back garden and the other narrowly avoiding a car while crossing Warblington Road.

**Local wildlife web site** - Emsworth Wildlife (for local news and photos) - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## ***BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 25-26 June 15-28, 2009***

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### ***Work session, Sunday 21 June*** - report by Wally Osborne

There was a good turnout of 11 volunteers on a dry bright morning with the meadow looking particularly lush with summer growth, making us reluctant to cut anything down. The first 2 tasks were to cut and rake the Community Area and a new Wishing Tree site. Mike Probert manned the scythe with Jill Meeson, Barbara Wrigley, Dave Lee and me raking, bagging and removing the arisings. Graham Walsgrove and Debbie Saunders marked out the Wishing Tree site and removed all the nettles, ready for final cutting with power scythe, this time by Dave Lee, who also cut the occasional paths in north and central meadows, as necessary.

Meanwhile, our youngest volunteer Martha Rye Lees and her grandma, Jennifer Rye did a super job on the South Meadow bramble path, making sure that child height hazards were cut back. Pam Phillips and Jenny Lloyd Edwards did a similar cut back of the North Meadow paths and then cleared the whole length of the path from the North Bridge to Lumley Gate of the 'hay-like arisings' remaining from the recent HBC strimming job.

Tasks for forthcoming work sessions: Weeding and watering recently planted trees and shrubs at Seagull Lane and South entrances as well as other places around the meadow; building new hurdle fences along the riverbank to prevent access; cutting back nettles and bramble along occasional paths; removing willow branches overhanging footpaths.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 2 & Sunday 19 July

#### ***Changes to Work Session dates***

Please note, the BMCG committee has decided to change the dates of Brook Meadow work sessions because of conflicts with walks and other events held by other conservation groups. From August, work sessions will be held on the First Sunday and Third Thursday in the month. So the first work session in August will be on Sunday 2 August and then on Thursday 20 August and so on.

#### ***Visit by Northern Parade Junior School*** - report by Wally Osborne

The annual visit by Northern Parade Junior School, Portsmouth, took place on Thursday 25th June and we were blessed by fine sunny weather together with a gusty cooling breeze. Eighteen children from years 5 and 6, each with their parent or guardian, plus 3 staff members, arrived by coach at 10.15am and gathered on the community area with some excitement. This is the sixth year that we have been organising a programme of events for the school.

After a brief introduction by Wally, the programme started off with a nature trail designed by Frances, and Jennifer giving captivating feedback. In between times, Barbara served cold drinks and biscuits to the excited and parched children.

Next, the party was split into 2 groups of 9 pupils, one group explored the meadow collecting as many different grasses as they could find. The other group had fun at the north bridge in a modified version of 'Pooh Sticks'. Graham, Frances and Brian provided the expertise on grasses, whilst Dave, Jennifer and Wally had fun in the rather low river water, with the children using 'ping-pong' balls instead of the traditional 'sticks'.

Again in their 2 groups, the ever-popular 'wishing tree' activity and the 'mini bug hunt' were scheduled to close the programme. Jill and Barbara organised the first one, where stars or butterflies were decorated and a 'wish' penned onto the back, before being ceremonially hung onto the 'wishing tree'. Many thanks to all of the BMCG volunteers who supported this very worthwhile event by preparing the site and clearing up afterwards. This annual visit is highly valued by the children and staff

#### ***Quadrat plant survey***

In order to monitor how the plant populations change from year to year, we have been carrying out plant surveys over the last few years. With a new GPS recorder to record the 'quadrats', Pat, Graham and Frances started the survey last Friday when they surveyed the Lumley wet area. They divided this area into homogenous sections and then marked out a number of 2m<sup>2</sup> areas with canes. All the plants growing in these quadrats were identified and given a percentage cover. This survey method is being repeated in other areas of the meadow over the next few days.

#### ***Forthcoming events***

Sunday 26 July – Two Ems Valley walks as part of the Hampshire Water Festival (this year at Staunton Country Park). Meet 10am and 2pm by the Brook Meadow information board in Palmers Road car park. Both walks take about 2 hours.

Please note: The BMCG committee have decided NOT to have a stall at the Emsworth Show this year.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### **Water Voles**

The Emsworth Water Voles are having another good year on the River Ems, with over 100 sightings already. Several young voles have also been seen. All the Water Vole news can be found on the Brook Meadow web site at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>  
Please send any sightings to [brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk)

### **Emsworth bird news**

The local Mute Swan pair did not breed this year, but the three pairs of Coots on Slipper Millpond did successfully raise families, with at least two youngsters per family.  
Local bird surveys have shown that House Sparrows are doing well, particularly around Emsworth. That is good news in view of the dramatic decline in this once familiar town bird over the last 30 years.  
Of the summer migrants, Whitethroat, Blackcap and Chiffchaff have all been active on Brook Meadow, while Reed Warblers have been singing from the reedbeds of Peter Pond and Slipper Millpond.  
Up to 10 Swifts were hunting for insects in the sky above Emsworth in the past week and occasionally screaming around the houses in small groups. I wonder where they nest?  
Swallows are nesting locally, but there is still no sign of any House Martins in Emsworth.  
Sadly, no further sightings of either the Turtle Dove or the Cuckoo that briefly visited a few weeks ago.

### **Hayling Oysterbeds**

Over at Hayling Oysterbeds, the great Black-headed Gull show goes on with hundreds of chicks of varying levels of maturity on the two islands in the lagoon. The first juveniles are ready to leave the colony and soon we should see these cute gingery birds on our local millponds, There was no chance of Little Terns nesting at the Oysterbeds this year with so many gulls occupying what used to be called "tern islands". However, Little Terns are nesting on the RSPB islands in Langstone Harbour, so they haven't deserted us. As for Common Terns they are busy feeding young and are constantly coming and going with small fish. If you visit just don't expect a quiet experience!!

### **Spotted Redshank returns**

The Spotted Redshank that was colour-ringed (W+GY) by the Farlington ringing group last autumn on Thorney Island was recently seen and photographed on its breeding grounds in Sweden. Now it is back on Thorney Island, where it was seen by conservation warden, Barry Collins, last Friday. Its early return could mean it did not breed successfully, but nevertheless it is welcome back 'home' to our area after its long journey. Meanwhile, we look forward to the return of our 'tame' Spotted Redshank to the stream at Nore Barn, hopefully in early November for its 5th successive year.

### **Butterfly news**

The last week has been good for butterflies in the local area. Meadow Browns are absolutely everywhere and Commas were also numerous on Brook Meadow, along with Speckled Wood, Common Blue, Large Skipper and Red Admiral (my first for some while).  
Patrick Murphy was the star of the week in seeing the first (and maybe the only) Small Tortoiseshell on Brook Meadow on 22 June on the path north of the north bridge. See my web site for his photo!  
Marbled Whites are also out in large numbers; I saw at least 30 on Nore Down near West Marden on Saturday and there was even had one on Brook Meadow on Friday (a rare occurrence). Also, on Nore Down I had my first Ringlet of the year and Graham Walsgrove saw one on Brook Meadow last Friday.  
Gatekeepers have been reported, though I have not seen them as yet.  
Most of the Painted Ladies which arrived in their thousands in late May have now moved north, but there are still a good few in the local area which should produce a late summer brood. Andy Brook reports that White Admirals are flying in Hollybank Woods and probably Silver-washed Fritillaries.

### **Other insects and spiders**

Damselflies are also flourishing in the warm weather with male and female Banded Demoiselles common around the streams on Brook Meadow. For the rare Beautiful Demoiselle you need to visit Hookheath reserve on Portsdown Hill where there are literally hundreds to be seen. Quite amazing!  
7-spot Ladybirds have been abundant on the nettles on Brook Meadow in the last week, along with larvae and pupa. Patrick Murphy sent me a photo of a Harlequin Ladybird larvae on Brook Meadow.  
'Thigh Beetles' (*Oedemera nobilis*), ie beetles with swollen thighs, can now be seen on the white flower heads of Hogweed and on the trumpets of Bindweed.  
As always at this time of the year, "Nursery-web spiders" (*Pisaura mirabilis*) are very prominent in the long grasses. They are so called because the female spins a silken cocoon into which she secretes her eggs and stays on guard nearby until the spiderlings emerge.

### **Orchid news**

Orchids are having a good season with bumper crops of Southern Marsh Orchids at Fishbourne Meadows (500+) and South Moor (4142). On Brook Meadow, we have a more modest showing of orchids, though Common Spotted, Bee, Southern Marsh and Pyramidal Orchids have all come up as last year. On Saturday I led a walk for the Havant Wildlife Group on Nore Down, near West Marden, which is a fine example of an unspoilt chalk grassland, with lots of downland plants, including the rare Fragrant Orchid as well as lots of Pyramidal Orchids. Well worth a visit.

### **Other plant news**

Another rather good local chalk grassland is on Portsdown Hill (!) where you can still see Common Valerian in flower below the main observation area, though Dropwort is largely over.

Meanwhile, on Brook Meadow, Yellow Rattle is spreading fast, hopefully discouraging the coarse grasses, and encouraging more delicate plants, like Red Bartsia which is now in flower on the North Meadow, a good three weeks earlier than last year. We could probably do with some Yellow Rattle on the Seagull Lane patch which is incredibly overgrown this year. I was very surprised to find some Corncockle flowers in there recently, until I learned they had been planted by Jennifer Rye.

One new arrival (unplanted) on Brook Meadow this year is Sharp-flowered Rush which is already flourishing on the Lumley area. The smaller more familiar Jointed Rush can be seen nearby for comparison. Newly flowering grasses on Brook Meadow include Timothy, Common Couch and Tufted Hair-grass. The rare Festulolium Hybrids (*Festulolium loliaceum*) are also doing well.

Two rare plants are in flower again in Emsworth; Narrow-leaved Water-plantain on the Westbrook Stream behind Bridge Road car park and Least Yellow Sorrel is flowering on the pavement in Victoria Road, all the more reason to stop 'weed spraying'.

### **Bridge Road nature reserve?**

Following the recent weed spraying of plants around Bridge Road car park by Council contractors, I have been onto the local Council to see if this can be stopped. Brendan Gibb-Gray has been very supportive and has gone one step further by suggesting designating the area between the car park and the Westbrook Stream as a nature reserve. This is an area rich in wildlife, where many valuable wild plants grow and birds feed, but they all need protection. West Sussex has a number of these reserves on roadside verges, though I am not aware of any in Havant Borough. This is all in the early stages, but I have already had several people signing up for a the prospective Friends of Bridge Road Nature Reserve. This could be the start of a more widespread involvement of local people in their immediate environment. I can envisage a network of such roadside reserves around the area. If you are interested please let me know.

### **Rabbits return to Hollybank Woods**

Andy Brook reports that there has been an increase in Rabbit numbers in Hollybank Woods this spring, following a severe decline over the last 5 years due to an outbreak of myxomatosis. Andy says this is very good news as they keep areas of grass both in the clearings and alongside paths tidy as well as dealing with invasive weeds. Rabbits are also important for both Stoat and Weasel which rely on them as a year round source of food. Andy's full report on this issue can be seen on the Hollybank Woods web site blog at . . . [http://www.hollybank-woods.hampshire.org.uk/woodland\\_blog.html](http://www.hollybank-woods.hampshire.org.uk/woodland_blog.html)

### **Bat survey on Brook Meadow** – report by Graham Walsgrove

June 27th 2009 2135 to 2250 Weather: After a hot sunny day, the evening was pleasant. Bat activity was noticed in places previously quiet during the April and May surveys. The walk started at Palmers Road Car Park, and immediately at the south bridge, Common Pipistrelle was detected, and occasionally along the path to the causeway seat. Pipistrelles were detected between the seat and the 'S' bend, and at the industrial site and opposite across the Meadow. They were also seen at both these places. The Seagull Lane gate and two places along the path to Constant Springs provided further Common Pipistrelle activity, and also at Constant Springs itself. The final detection was at the Rookery area and there were no signs over Peter Pond, nor back to the car park.

### **Local wildlife web sites**

Emsworth Wildlife (for local news and photos) - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

Brook Meadow Conservation Group - <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

Hollybank Woods (newly designed with a blog) . . . <http://www.hollybank-woods.hampshire.org.uk/>

Nore Barn Woods - <http://www.norebarnwoods.org.uk/>

Ralph Hollins (for more comprehensive wildlife news) . . . <http://ralph-hollins.net/index.html>

John Goodspeed (for more local wildlife news and photos) . . . <http://www.havantnature.net/>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 23-24 June 1-14 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work session**, Thursday 4th June - report by Jennifer Rye

It was a bit cooler on Thursday, thank goodness, for the 9 members who came to the workday. Most tasks were the regular seasonal ones for early summer, cutting occasional paths on both the North and South meadows, including a new cross path east from the gravelled path to the Bramble path. We also cut a narrow path through the Seagull Lane patch to make observational walks there easier. The prolific Butterbur on the main causeway path was cut back prior to Havant's expected strimming there. Tree maintenance near the north bridge included replacing one of the newly planted Hazels which had unfortunately been cut down in a previous HBC strim. Flowering Hemlock Water-dropwort was cut back where overhanging paths as well as in the Lumley wet area to control its spread. The River Ems was cleared of logs, branches and other litter by the south bridge after the Environment Agency's tidying of the fallen Willow, a nice cool job in waders on a warm day. All 3 signcases were cleaned, in honour of the newly updated contents; this is a very important part of our public relations. Newly planted Holly and Honeysuckle by the south entrance were given tender loving care in the form of clearing surrounding vegetation, and much needed watering. Palmer's Road copse was cleared of litter - not much this time, a welcome change. Thanks from all the volunteers to Pam for very welcome refreshments, mid-morning.

#### Tasks for forthcoming work sessions:

Preparing Brook Meadow for the Northern Parade School visit on Thursday 25 June, including cutting and raking the community area and around the 'wishing tree', cutting the occasional paths and trimming back overhanging stinging nettles and Bramble along the main paths, cutting round signcases, bins, steps, bridges.

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 21 June, Thursday 2 & Sunday 19 July

#### **Changes to Work Session dates**

Please note, the BMCG committee has decided to change the dates of Brook Meadow work sessions because of conflicts with walks and other events held by other conservation groups. From August, work sessions will be held on the First Sunday and Third Thursday in the month. So the first work session in August will be on Sunday 2 August and then on Thursday 20 August and so on.

#### **Path Strimming by HBC**

The edges of all the main paths through Brook Meadow will be strimmed on Monday 15 June by Les Foster as some of the paths have become overgrown and in time for the school visit on 25 June.

#### **Fallen Willows**

Pam Phillips tells me that the Environment Agency have moved the pile of branches from the riverbank near the south bridge into the undergrowth. The branches were removed from the fallen willow on the southern side of the south bridge and left on the riverbank. The EA were requested to remove them. Last Friday, Mike Probert alerted Andrew Skeet of HBC about a fallen Willow hanging over the path through Palmers Road copse as it could pose a danger to pedestrians if it breaks off.

#### **Dog bag dispensers**

The pole on the dog bag dispenser at the south entrance has been replaced with a taller one and the pole and dispenser at Seagull Lane entrance removed completely as bags were ending up in the river.

**Saturday 13 June** – Sussex Day Fete at Southbourne recreation ground. Lovely setting and glorious weather for the first Sussex Day fete in Southbourne. BMCG had a stall at the fete with our photographic displays and wildlife photos for sale thanks to Sharon Perrett. There was some interest and a few curious questions to tax the volunteers who attended – Frances, Pam, David Search, Pat and Graham Walsgrove.

#### **Forthcoming events**

Sunday 26 July – Two Ems Valley walks as part of the Hampshire Water Festival (this year at Staunton Country Park). Meet 10am and 2pm by the Brook Meadow information board in Palmers Road car park. Both walks take about 2 hours.

Please note: The BMCG committee have decided NOT to have a stall at the Emsworth Show this year.

## **LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

### **Water Voles**

We do not get many Water Vole sightings from the Lumley Stream but we had two in the past week. Fred Portwin and Mary and Jim Colbourne had good views of up to three voles from the small footbridge to the north of Peter Pond. The sightings being in the early evening, when Bats can also be seen flying around. The only sighting from the River Ems was by Roger Mills who had a 5 minute viewing of one on Friday morning. That takes the total number of sightings for 2009 so far to 105.

On Saturday, members of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust saw a Water Vole on Fishbourne Meadows.

### **Local bird news**

This afternoon, while walking along the Bramble path on Brook Meadow, I heard the distinctive purring of a Turtle Dove from the garden of Gooseberry Cottage. This was the first I have heard here since May 19. I wonder if it is the same bird that was with us for 6 weeks last year?

Whitethroat are amazing birds. The three on Brook Meadow seem to sing non-stop all day long.

This morning, I watched three young Swallows being fed by their parents, while perched on telephone wires outside the house of Ruth and Fred Portwin on Lumley Road. I wonder where they nested?

Chris Berners-Price reports that the Sparrowhawk is nesting in Nore Barn Woods again in a new spot.

This morning, six Swifts were screaming around the houses in Bridge Road, probably a family party.

Ralph Hollins reported that the Little Egrets have now fledged at Wade Court in Langstone.

Sadly, I have seen no sign of the 11 Mallard ducklings which valiantly made their way with their mother from a nest in Frances Jannaway's clematis in Bosmere Gardens to the town millpond.

### **Botanical vandalism**

I led a walk at Fishbourne on Saturday morning for members of the local Hampshire Wildlife Trust. We were all looking forward to seeing a fine display of the rare Spiked Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum pyrenaicum*) and the unusual Hairy Bindweed (*Calystegia pulchra*), on the road embankment on Appledram Lane (south) both totally new plants for us all. However, to my utter horror, they had been strimmed into oblivion. Two posts with plaques stating "Wildlife verge" were plain to see. How could anyone sanction strimming at this time of the year with plants in full bloom. It beggars belief!

### **Better plant news**

The rare Narrow-leaved Water-plantain is spreading in the Westbrook Stream behind Bridge Road car park and is currently in flower. Let's hope the Council weed sprayers give it a wide berth.

The blue flowers of Skullcap are showing well on two plants in the regular spot, on the retaining wall of the Lumley Stream in front of house No 3 Raglan Terrace in Lumley Road.

I found what I think is the pure version of Blue Water Speedwell (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica*), not the hybrid, on the stream on Fishbourne Meadows.

Dropwort, the downland version of Meadowsweet, is now in flower on Portsdown Hill, along with Burnet-saxifrage and lots of other goodies. See my web site for details.

Other newly flowering plants include Bristly Ox-tongue, Meadowsweet, Perennial Sow-thistle, Perforate St John's-wort, Ground-elder and Common Ragwort. Crow Garlic bulbils are out on Slipper Millpond.

Have you noticed all the Palm trees in flower? Maybe, we shall be getting dates in the shops next?

### **Local orchids**

Southern Marsh Orchids are having a good year on Fishbourne Meadows where 500 were counted this week. However, Ralph Hollins only found 230 flowering spikes in the Warblington Farm SSSI, where in the past he had had as many as 800. The count on South Moor Langstone takes place next Saturday. Meanwhile, here on Brook Meadow, we have just three Southern Marsh Orchids and three Common Spotted Orchids, with no sign as yet of the Bee and Pyramidal Orchids that we had last year. Bee Orchids are out on North Thorney and Hayling Oysterbeds and Pyramidal on Portsdown Hill.

### **Insects and spiders**

Meadow Browns are back on the wing and should soon be the most common butterfly. Large Skippers are also out and Small Skippers should follow soon. Others seen locally include Painted Lady (of course), Red Admiral, Comma, Speckled Wood and Common Blue.

I saw a male Scorpion Fly at Fishbourne yesterday with its tail raised. This morning, two Broad-bodied Chasers were chasing each other near Slipper Millpond. This afternoon, an appropriately white coloured Crab Spider was waiting for its prey on the flowerhead of Burnet-saxifrage on Portsdown Hill.

### **Local wildlife web site**

For more information and photos of the wildlife mentioned in this report plus other local wildlife news please go to my web site at - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 21-22, May 18-31 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work sessions**

Tasks to be completed at forthcoming work sessions include:

- \* Cutting the community area in time for the Northern Parade School visit by end of June;
- \* Cutting a path through the Seagull Lane patch;
- \* Clearing vegetation from around young trees;
- \* Keeping River Ems clear of litter and branches, especially near the south bridge;
- \* Trimming back edges of main paths;
- \* Cutting the occasional paths and strimming round bins, signcases, steps, etc.;
- \* Cleaning signcases and litterpicking.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 4 & Sunday 19 June

#### **'Get to know the Helpful Herbs of Nature': herb walk led by Steve Taylor**

It was a beautiful sunny late spring evening – just right for a gentle stroll around Brook Meadow. Seventeen people arrived in the Palmers Road car park with 9 new members. Steve Taylor was in his element, clearly passionate and enjoying sharing his subject - extolling the virtues of herbal medicine from ancient times to the present day. The many ways man has experimented with taste and smell, triggering the appetite or how man came to learn about for example the power of Common Nettle to detoxify and how Willow had a strong connection with fertility and healing, including a remedy for Fen Fever and in our present day we still frequently use the salicylic acid of Willows in our Aspirin. Steve's talk ranged widely as we walked around the meadow, with many comparisons between plants for healing purposes. The connections he made throughout his talk were very interesting, informative and I feel enjoyed by all. – report by Barbara Wrigley

#### **Bank Holiday Monday on the Meadow - report by Jennifer Rye**

On the late May Bank Holiday, we welcomed a group of some 20 naturalists from Exeter (South West Naturalists Union) to Emsworth, a group who combine their AGM with a series of field trips and visits. It was a brilliantly hot and sunny afternoon, after a rainy morning. We divided them into 2 groups according to their particular interests and energy levels.

Brian took half around the millponds and coastal areas, with a brief visit to the meadow to finish, concentrating on birds and wildflowers. Frances and I took the others on a shorter route down Queen Street into the southern part of the meadow for a brief overview of the history of the mill stream, the river and Brook Meadow. They were all grateful for the time we spent with them giving the group a donation of £21, and went on their way to Chichester later in the afternoon.

#### **Bat survey and shopping trolley**

At the start of our bat survey last Thursday evening, Graham Walsgrove pulled a Tesco trolley out of the River Ems and Pat and I took it back to Tesco's. We spoke to the manager who said that they lock all the trolleys inside the store at night and there was not much else they could do about it. The manager did say we could phone him if we saw a trolley in the river but this would not help much as they could not spare suitably clothed staff to go and fish it out of the water!! We saw and heard (with a bat detector box) three different types of bats during the evening: Common and Soprano Pipestrelles and Serotine. Certain places seemed to be favoured by bats and included the south bridge, around the central meadow, along the River Ems just north of the S-bend – an industrial unit had its outside lights on which attracted insects and therefore also bats; on the small footbridge next to Lumley Mill and down Lumley Road. We did not record any bats over Peter Pond as during the previous survey in April.

#### **Quadrat survey and fixed-point photos**

Pat, Graham and I will start the quadrat survey of plants on Brook Meadow on 9 and 11 June. We will be assisted with plant identification by Brian on the Thursday. I will be taking fixed-point photos as usual in June.

#### **Forthcoming events**

Saturday 13 June – Sussex Day Fete, Southbourne recreation ground, 12 – 4pm. BMCG is having a stall at the fete with the theme of our stall will be Biodiversity and include recording and management methods.

Sunday 26 July – Two Ems Valley walks as part of the Hampshire Water Festival (this year at Staunton Country Park). Meet 10am and 2pm by the Brook Meadow information board in Palmers Road car park. Both walks take about 2 hours.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### **Painted Lady invasion**

I have never seen anything like it. I led a walk in Emsworth for a group of naturalists from the south west of England on Bank Holiday Monday (May 25) and they, ie Painted Lady butterflies, were absolutely everywhere. On Brook Meadow alone I counted a good 50, many rising up from the paths. There were reports from all along the south coast of thousands of these large, strong flying, brown butterflies arriving and moving north. Quite amazing.

It is not unknown for Painted Ladies to invade in this way; the last one was back in 1996 though Martin Warren, of Butterfly Conservation, said that this year's migration could be one of the biggest ever. Rumours of an impending invasion began circulating in late winter when hundreds of thousands of Painted Ladies emerged in Morocco, after heavy winter rains triggered the germination of food plants suitable for their caterpillars. Aided by favourable winds, large numbers migrated to Spain during April and then to France. It is thought that many of the Painted Ladies we are now seeing are the offsprings of these migrants. Many of them will breed in this country, hopefully some in Emsworth though we don't have all that many thistles which is what the caterpillars like most. The new adult butterflies will emerge in August and then this British-born generation of Painted Ladies will begin their return journey south towards Africa.

### **Other insects**

Apart from Painted Ladies butterflies have been fairly scarce on Brook Meadow with Common Blue and Speckled Wood being the most frequent. I saw the first Banded Demoiselle (a female) of the year on May 23 near the Lumley Stream.

Other interesting insects I have seen in the local area were a brown-bodied Crane-fly (*Ctenophora atrata*), a Long-jawed Spider (*Tetragnatha extensa*) with very long legs, a Hedgerow green spider (*Araniella Cuccurbitina*) with a bright red spot under the tip of its abdomen and a Pale Tussock Moth caterpillar with four yellow tufts of hair along its back, nibbling the leaves of a Witch Hazel in my garden.

### **Millpond news**

The three Coot families that nested on the rafts on Slipper Millpond have gone down in the past week, but they are still doing rather well with 5, 3 and 2 chicks surviving. The new Mute Swan pair on Peter Pond will not be nesting this year, despite a couple of play nests. There has been no news about the Swan injured in the fight that led to the abandonment of the nest on Peter Pond. Another pair of Swans is on the pond by the Emsworth deckhouses, but with no sign of nest building. Reed Warblers are still chuntering away on the two millponds. A Sandwich Tern was fishing on Slipper Millpond on May 28.

### **Other bird news**

Recent news of the dramatic decline in Cuckoos made my hearing of two singing in Stansted Forest on May 25 all the more enjoyable. Turtle Dove is another rare and threatened migrant so it was good to hear one for the second time this year near Peter Pond on May 19. I wonder if it was the same bird that was here for 6 weeks last summer? Watch this space!

Jason Crook reports on an impossible situation for Little Terns on Hayling Oysterbeds where 450 Black-headed Gulls are nesting on the "tern islands". Common Terns are holding out but the prospects are not good. Jason is planning to construct a "new tern island" in the north of the reserve, but how long before the gulls discover that one too?

Michael Prior had a great surprise to see a Hoopoe in front of Stansted House on May 26 and wondered if it had arrived with the Painted Ladies or had escaped from its aviary.

### **Plant news**

A final count of 166 Ragged Robin on Brook Meadow was a big improvement on the last two years when the count did not reach 100, but well short of the record count of 332 in 2006.

There are now three Common Spotted Orchids flowering on Brook Meadow and the first Southern Marsh Orchid is also opening up. There is a good display of Creeping and Meadow Buttercups on the north meadow with the less common Celery-leaved Buttercup now in flower near the Lumley gate.

Three Hemlock plants are flowering on the east of Slipper Millpond, but don't eat them or you will end up like Socrates! A visiting botanist identified Toothed Medick (*Medicago polymorpha*) on Peter Pond.

West Hayling beach is worth a visit for displays of Sea Kale, Yellow-horned Poppy and Tree Lupin, A walk round the glorious meadows of the Newtown Nature Reserve on the Isle of Wight over the weekend produced a totally new plant for me, namely Mousetail. Details and photo on my web site.

### **Local wildlife web site**

For more information and photos of the wildlife mentioned in this report plus other local wildlife news please go to my web site at - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 19-20, 4 to 17 May 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work sessions**

##### **Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May 2009 – report by Jennifer Rye**

Ten regular volunteers turned up. A group tackled the first cut this year of the community area, and also cut the occasional paths in the south meadow. The bramble cut was scallop-cut in places, and a small, new, lower-cut space was added west of the bramble path to encourage diversity, and to provide shelter for butterflies. This will be monitored, and further such peninsulas added if successful. All arisings were raked up and dumped on the sacrificial area by the Lumley gate. Regular tree maintenance was done by cutting back overgrowth around the newly plants Hazels in the North Meadow and the Horse Chestnuts in the South Meadow. A small group of "shearers" cut back the overhanging Nettles along the causeway path, prior to the Havant Borough Council cut, to encourage sensitive cutting by their operatives rather than a total blitz. Finally, a new dead hedge was constructed by the S-bend in the river, where a regular 'dog slide' was developing, to protect the water voles in that area from intrusion. A welcome coffee break was enjoyed mid-morning (thanks Pam).

##### **Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2009 - report by Mike Probert**

In light of early and prolonged heavy rain, I decided to cancel the session. However, 'Sod's Law' prevailed in a positive way: at least one message of cancellation (to bell ringing refreshment provider Pat and husband Graham) fortuitously failed to reach home and the onset of bright sunshine fifteen minutes before the scheduled start encouraged a reversal of the initial decision, subject to abandonment of use of the power scythe in the wet conditions! Sunshine with occasional cloud then prevailed during the session. A hard core of seven enthusiastic volunteers plus two smaller helpers proceeded to clip back the overhanging edges of the paths in the South Meadow and later along the raised paths and to collect an impressive haul of litter.

Amongst many observations of natural historical interest during the session, I was pleased to note a consistently rising, approx. ten inch Brown Trout in the Ems, swathes of Yellow Rattle in the North Meadow and many flowering Ragged Robin plants in the 'Lumley wet patch' as well as an assortment of variously spotted Ladybirds.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 4 & Sunday 19 June

#### **Dog bag dispensers and hand rails**

Pam Phillips has reported problems with the two new dog bag dispensers. The problem is that they have been put on poles which are far too low. It is difficult for her to fill them up and what is worse she found a load of bags dumped in one of the litterbins with another load thrown in the river near the North bridge. As the dispensers are the same height as the dog bins (approx. 3 ft. 6inch) they are low enough for young children to remove the bags which is what must have happened. I have asked HBC to replace the poles with longer ones and remove the dispenser on the Seagull Lane patch. Pam is not putting any more bags in this dispenser as it is a waste of bags and her time and energy, and it is polluting the river. She is currently putting about 100 bags every 4-5 days into the Lumley dispenser and 50 every 4 days into the one at the south entrance.

#### **Fallen Willow**

Last week Pam Phillips informed me that a willow had fallen over near the South bridge, obviously blown over by the easterly winds. On inspection, it is a relatively young willow growing out of the old tree stump on the south-eastern side of the bridge which has fallen diagonally with its branches just touching the metal railings on the A259. It is not in the river yet but I contacted Matt Wilde of the EA who confirmed it was their responsibility and he will have a look at it with the chain saw expert on Wednesday.

#### **Forthcoming events**

**Thursday 21 May – 'Get to know the Helpful Herbs of Nature'** - Guided Herb walk with Steve Taylor, local herbalist. Meet by Brook Meadow information board in Palmers Road car park at 7pm. The walk will take about 1½ to 2 hours and is free to members of BMCG, non members - £3 which gives you BMCG membership for a year.

**Saturday 13 June – Sussex Day Fete**, Southbourne recreation ground, 12 – 4pm. BMCG is having a stall at the fete with the theme of our stall will be Biodiversity and include recording and management methods.

**Sunday 26 July – Two Ems Valley walks** as part of the Hampshire Water Festival (this year at Staunton Country Park). Meet 10am and 2pm by the Brook Meadow information board in Palmers Road car park. Both walks take about 2 hours.

**LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

**Brook Meadow bird news**

I had a tingle of excitement when I heard the soft purr of a Turtle Dove from the hedge outside Gooseberry Cottage on May 13. Was this the bird that was here for about 6 weeks last summer? Sadly, I did not hear it again, so it was probably a migrant dropping in before moving on elsewhere. Another tingle moment occurred on May 15 when I heard no less than three Reed Warblers singing on Brook Meadow, quite unprecedented in my experience, and they were not from Peter Pond since I checked. Alas, they were not heard again, so were also just passing through. However, all three of our regular summer visitors, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Whitethroat, are well established on Brook Meadow, with males from each species singing strongly to establish territories and attract mates.

### **Other bird news**

Swifts are back in the skies over Emsworth and Swallows are nesting again in the stables north of Thorney Island, though not as far as I can see in Lumley Mill Farm. As for House Martins I have not seen a nest in Emsworth for years, whereas they used to be so common under the eaves in Victoria Road. Meanwhile, Mallard ducklings come and go, probably down the throats of gulls. On Peter Pond the newly established Mute Swan pair are playing at nest building on the island.

Over at Hayling Oysterbeds, Little Terns are having a tough time with 250 Black-headed Gulls occupying their 'tern island'. However, prospects are brighter for them on the RSPB islands in Langstone Harbour according to warden, Chris Cockburn. A very rare Icterine Warbler was at Sandy Point Nature Reserve last week, but I was a day too late to hear its beautiful song. Drat.

### **Insects**

Butterflies seem to be picking up at long last. I have recorded 11 species on Brook Meadow so far this year with Common Blue and Painted Lady being the latest additions to the list over the past week. But numbers are still pretty low. Sadly, there is no sign of Small Tortoiseshell. However, I hear that hundreds of Duke of Burgundy, Dingy Skipper and Grizzled Skipper have been seen on Butser Hill.

Harlequin Ladybirds seem as common as the native species, which is worrying. Patrick Murphy photographed a pair of them mating on Brook Meadow – his photo is on my web site.

### **Plants on Brook Meadow**

Brook Meadow is lush and healthy. The first Common Spotted Orchid of the year emerged on May 12 at same place as last year and today I saw three in flower, with more to follow, maybe. If last year is anything to go by, we can expect Southern Marsh, Bee and Pyramidal Orchids to follow in the next few weeks. Meanwhile, hundreds of Yellow Rattle plants are flowering on the North Meadow, mostly sown by the conservation group to control the rough grasses and they are doing their job. The Lumley area is looking great this year following the removal of the intrusive Hemlock Water-dropworts; all our prized sedges, including Divided Sedge, are flourishing like never before. Ragged Robin is also flowering well in this area and this morning I counted 98 flowering plants with more to come.

### **Wild flower spectacles**

There are some fine spectacles of wild flowers around the local area. For example, the eastern wall of the town millpond is lavishly decorated with Ivy-leaved Toadflax and the fields behind Westbourne Avenue to the north of Emsworth have cattle grazing amongst a luxurious carpet of Bulbous Buttercups; and there is a fine display of Dame's-violet behind the mound on Hayling Oysterbeds.

### **Weed spraying**

A less pleasant sight was the browning effects on plants due to weed spaying around Bridge Road car park. Frankly, I am astonished that spraying with noxious chemicals still goes on in these so-called "enlightened" times, particularly so close to a waterway. The car park and the adjacent Westbrook Stream is home to a range of wild plants, including the rare Narrow-leaved Water-plantain *Alisma lanceolata*. I am pressing the local council to take a more ecologically responsible attitude to spraying.

### **Other news**

Water Voles have been quiet over the past two weeks, with females probably busy tending to youngsters in burrows. I forgot to mention in my last report that Graham Ault, a former member of the Brook Meadow Conservation Group, saw the first ever Grass Snake to be recorded beneath the south bridge on Brook Meadow on Apr 15. Please keep a look out and let me know if you see one.

### **Local wildlife web site**

For more information and photos of the wildlife mentioned in this report plus other local wildlife news please go to my web site at - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 17-18 – Apr 20 to May 3 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work sessions**

##### Tasks for forthcoming work sessions

- . Cut Community Area and occasional paths;
- . Clear vegetation from around young trees;
- . Cut back Stinging Nettles along raised paths;
- . Remove several leaning branches of Willow for log piles and material for hurdle fences;
- . Build willow hurdles along riverbank where paths to the river are developing.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 7 & Sunday 17 May

#### **Dog bag dispensers and hand rails**

Two new dog bag dispensers have been put up by HBC at the South entrance and at the Seagull Lane entrance. Pam Phillips has kindly offered to keep all three topped up. In addition, two new handrails have been put up by HBC at the steps near the central seat and near the North bridge.

#### **Bumblebee workshop – report by Pat Walsgrove**

Three members (Pat, Graham and Jennifer) travelled to the Hampshire County Council Museums & Archives Service in Winchester. This is the Headquarters of the Museum Service and houses one and a half million exhibits of all sorts of which more than 130,000 specimens are plants and animals. After the initial housekeeping fundamentals given by Chris Palmer of the Museum Service, Bryan Pinchen (a consultant entomologist) laid out the day's activities. This was to be a very 'hands on experience' of identification with talks about life cycle and ecology.

The group split up into pairs and worked together with the aid of a microscope identifying specimens from the museum archives. By using hand-outs, we had to decide whether the item was a bumble bee, a bee or a fly. After being given some more information, we then had to work out which of the specimens were male or female bumblebees, cuckoo bees or another type of bee.

A break for lunch was taken mid way through the day and the workshop finished with advice on building nest boxes and for attracting bumblebees to wild spaces or in the garden. A thoroughly enjoyable day.

#### **Fishing on River Ems**

Mike Probert informed me that he had seen and spoken to a young boy fishing with a proper fishing rod from the eastern bank of the River Ems, just north of the south bridge. The first occasion was a couple of weeks ago and Mike spoke to the boy who was polite and promised to move on when Mike explained about Brook Meadow being a Local Nature Reserve and the home of protected Water Voles. He saw him again last Tuesday in the same spot but this time the boy was not so polite and refused to move, saying there were no signs to say he could not fish and Mike was not an official who could tell him what to do. So I contacted the Environment Agency and spoke to Cormac Meenehan who dealt with the crayfish trap found in the river last year. Cormac met myself and Mike last Friday to discuss the problem. We obtained useful information about fishing in rivers, what the rules are and what sort of signs the EA could put up. This information will be presented to the next committee meeting and then we will decide what to do if anything. All this will be in consultation with Rob Hill of HBC.

#### **Japanese Knotweed invasion**

There are clumps of Japanese Knotweed to the right of the path from the bottle bank into Palmers Road copse. This is a very invasive plant so I have alerted Rob Hill (HBC) and they will deal with it by careful spraying with a herbicide but is likely to require several treatments before it is eradicated.

#### **Forthcoming events**

**Thursday 21 May – 'Get to know the Helpful Herbs of Nature'** - Guided Herb walk with Steve Taylor, local herbalist. Meet by Brook Meadow information board in Palmers Road car park at 7pm. The walk will take about 1½ to 2 hours and is free to members of BMCG, non members - £3 which gives you BMCG membership for a year.

**Saturday 13 June – Sussex Day Fete**, Southbourne recreation ground, 12 – 4pm. BMCG is having a stall at the fete with the theme of our stall will be Biodiversity and include recording and management methods.

**Sunday 26 July – Two Ems Valley walks** as part of the Hampshire Water Festival (this year at Staunton Country Park). Meet 10am and 2pm by the Brook Meadow information board in Palmers Road car park. Both walks take about 2 hours.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### **Water Voles**

Water Voles continue to be seen on all areas of the River Ems on Brook Meadow. We have had 81 sightings for the year so far. If you see one please let me know on [brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk) I had a good view of one munching away on a mat of water weeds in the river in front of the gasholder on Apr 26. It was quite unconcerned at people passing by on the path. All the Water Vole news and sightings are on the web site at <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

### **Mute Swan abandons nest**

After a fierce fight with a pair of intruding swans the male of the local Mute Swan pair nesting on Peter Pond was badly injured and was taken away for treatment by the RSPCA. The female swan abandoned her nest which had 9 eggs in it. What a brood that would have been. So, sadly, we shall not be seeing any cygnets in Emsworth this year. The intruding pair have now taken over on Peter Pond, but that is nature. On the positive side, maybe they will nest here themselves next year.

### **Other millpond news**

Coot are having a good year on Slipper Millpond with three families of 6, 6 and 4 red-faced chicks currently on the water, all being carefully tended to by their ever vigilant parents. Families of Mallard ducklings are also appearing, though most of them are unlikely to survive with their mothers being constantly pursued by sex-mad males. Reed Warblers have arrived in force, with three singing from the reedbeds on Peter Pond and two on Slipper Millpond. What must have been a newly arrived migrant Common Sandpiper was sleeping on one of the rafts in the Slipper Mill Pond on Apr 26. This was the first I had seen on the pond since 16-Sep-06, but is probably only passing through.

### **Other bird news**

On Brook Meadow, the first Whitethroat arrived on Apr 28 and at least two more are expected. Meanwhile, Blackcaps and Chiffchaff are settling in. On Apr 27 a Mistle Thrush was feeding on the North Meadow. Ralph Hollins comments that these are now rarities in SE Hampshire so this one was a notable sighting for the area. Another notable sighting was a Cuckoo seen and heard by Pam Phillips in one of the tall trees in the garden of Gooseberry Cottage on May 2. Tony Wootton saw the first Robin fledgling on Brook Meadow on May 2 – see his photo on my web site. The old ERA track across the north of Thorney Island is a good place to see and hear summer migrants, including Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Sedge Warbler, Cetti's Warbler, Turtle Dove, Cuckoo and Swallows.

### **Insects**

Of the butterflies, Peacock, Brimstone, Comma, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood, Small, Large and Green-veined White have all been seen locally, with Orange Tips particularly numerous. I found a 24-spot Ladybird on Brook Meadow on Apr 28. Unlike most Ladybirds, which are carnivores, this species is strictly vegetarian and is a serious pest on the Continent where it is very common. St Mark's Flies were out on Brook Meadow on Apr 24, one day ahead of the official St Mark's Day.

### **Spring flowers**

Buttercups are now out on Brook Meadow and masses of Cow Parsley line the raised paths. Ragged Robin should be out fairly soon along with the early flowering Common Sorrel. Early-purple Orchids are having another good year in Hollybank Woods where I counted 644 flower spikes on Apr 25. The final total could even exceed last year's record count of 745. If you like orchids, then try Hayling beach where the Green-winged Orchids are out in their thousands!

### **Grasses and sedges**

Of the grasses, Cocksfoot, Meadow Foxtail, Tall Fescue, Red Fescue, Barren Brome, Soft Brome, Wood Melick and Sweet Vernal Grass are now out locally. Sedges are again showing well on Brook Meadow, with Divided Sedge, Distant Sedge, False Fox Sedge and Common Spike-rush already out, with Lesser and Greater Pond Sedges near the waterways and Common Club-rush on the millponds.

### **Puzzling twigs**

Regarding those puzzling Oak twigs that littered the ground in local woodlands, Michael Prior, Head Forester at Stansted confirmed that Grey Squirrels were the culprits, but he did not know why.

### **Local wildlife web site**

For more information and photos of the wildlife mentioned in this report plus other local wildlife news please go to my web site at - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 15-16 – Apr 6-19 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work session - Sunday 19 April – report by Pat Walsgrove**

A gloriously sunny day, albeit windy to start with, greeted thirteen BM volunteers. Pat, Frances, Pam, Jennifer, Jennie, Caroline, Lesley, together with her friend from Turkey, Binnaz Erkobeoglu, (a new volunteer), Michael P, Graham, David, Patrick, and another new volunteer Mike Wells. A warm welcome to Binnaz and Mike.

We were joined today by members of the First Emsworth Scout Group, Leaders Richard and Hilary with Hayley, Gemma, Emily, Elaine, Hanna, Ethan, Henry, Matt, David, Tristan and Mike. A warm welcome was extended to them also.

The work parties were split into BM volunteer and scout groups to carry out the following tasks:

- Moved the sacrificial area back off the Meadow. This was a particularly arduous job and one well done. A bumble bee nest was found on the southern side of the sacrificial area.
- Spread the remaining pile of chippings from the Seagull Lane patch on to the path from the entrance gate to the bridge.
- Continuation of the hurdle fencing construction by the river near the seat.
- Working from the bank to clear rubbish from the river.
- Bramble control and replaced brushwood on paths developing in North Meadow.
- Replaced several tree guards which were removed over the weekend and the all important
- Planted 5 Holly plants near South entrance.
- Litter picking.

A much needed break was taken mid way through the morning and a big thank you to Jennifer and Pam for providing the refreshments.

All in all, this was a particularly successful day, and made so by the many willing volunteers. Our thanks to everyone, especially the scouts, who worked so hard and enabled us to achieve such a lot.

#### Tasks for forthcoming work sessions

- . Cut Community Area and occasional paths;
- . Clear vegetation from around young trees;
- . Remove several leaning branches of Willow using them to create log piles and material for hurdle fences
- . Build willow hurdles along riverbank where paths to the river are developing

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 7 & Sunday 17 May

#### **Tree guards removed from Hazel saplings**

Pam informed me that last Friday evening several tree guards were removed from some of the recently planted Hazel saplings near the North bridge. Several guards found their way into the river and several stakes were broken but fortunately none of the trees seem to have been damaged. Two trees near the Seagull Lane entrance have had their guards removed and cannot be found. Many thanks to Pam for reporting this incident and to finding the guards.

#### **Dog bag dispensers at all three entrances**

Two new dog bag dispensers will be put up by HBC at the South entrance and at the Seagull Lane entrance, the posts have already been put in. There is already one at the Lumley Road entrance.

#### **Bumblebee workshop in Winchester led by Bryan Pinchen – Saturday 25 April, 10.30am to 4pm**

I have booked 5 places on this workshop but due to personal circumstances I cannot go. The place is paid for and includes a copy of Bryan's Pocket Guide. Car transport will be shared with the other 4 people going (Wally, Pat, Graham and Barbara). If you would like to go, please contact me, Tel. 01243 430314 by no later than Friday afternoon.

#### **Forthcoming events**

**Thursday 21 May – 'Get to know the Helpful Herbs of Nature'** - Guided Herb walk with Steve Taylor, local herbalist. Meet by Brook Meadow information board in Palmers Road car park at 7pm. The walk will take about 1½ to 2 hours and is free to members of BMCG, non members - £3 which gives you BMCG membership for a year.

**Saturday 13 June – *Sussex Day Fete***, Southbourne recreation ground, 12 – 4pm. BMCG is having a stall at the fete.

## **LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

### **Water Voles**

Water Voles continue to be seen on the River Ems on Brook Meadow. We are now up to 66 for the year so far, so please keep them coming. For all the Water Vole news and sightings go to

<http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

On April 8, Mike Wells watched a Water Vole swim up river from the sluice gate, entering about 15 different tunnels as it went. Graham Roberts of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust thought this was probably a male seeking a mate. Graham says, male Water Voles cover as many females as possible and defend their territories very aggressively. Alternatively, it could be a fussy female!

### **Conflict on the millponds**

This has not been a good week for our Mute Swan pair nesting on Peter Pond. One swan, probably the male, was injured in a fight with an intruding swan on Apr 16. The RSPCA were called and the injured swan was removed for treatment. Meanwhile, the female Swan is sitting tight on her nest full of eggs, though it will not be easy for her to raise the cygnets if her mate does not return. Two more pairs of swans are contesting on Slipper Millpond, which is not good news for our resident mum.

### **Other nesting news**

The Coot pair nesting on the raft nearest the Hermitage bridge on Slipper Millpond hatched 6 chicks on Apr 16, but there is no sign of any from the other Coot nests. On Apr 17 I saw a Mallard with a family of 8 tiny ducklings on Dolphin Lake, but I do not hold out much hope for their survival since, as I was watching, she was pursued by three male Mallards, leaving the ducklings alone and very vulnerable.

A sharp-eyed Roger Mills spotted a Moorhen on a nest on the River Ems near the Bulrushes. I suspect there will be at least two other Moorhens nesting on the river, as last year.

### **Brook Meadow bird survey**

I conducted a bird survey on Brook Meadow on Apr 16, plotting the locations of all birds I heard or saw during an hour's visit. I recorded a total of 85 birds of 20 species, mainly from the woodland areas. Top bird, by some way, was Wren with 18 songsters. I also heard 7 Blackcaps. This is certainly a Blackcap spring! Whitethroat have not yet arrived on Brook Meadow, but two were singing on Thorney Island on Apr 15, so they should be here soon. The complete bird list for Brook Meadow with status is on the group web site at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-list-birds.html>

### **Other bird news**

The first Reed Warbler was singing from the reedbeds on Peter Pond on Apr 10, one day ahead of the first on Thorney Island. The first Nightingales were back in Marlpit Lane on Apr 12, the earliest in my experience. They can be heard from the roadside 200 yards north of the amenity tip, but be patient! Ralph Hollins has heard a Cuckoo in Stansted but none has been heard locally as far as I am aware.

### **Butterflies**

Butterfly sightings are picking up after a very quiet period. Peacocks, Brimstones, Commas, Small Whites and Orange Tips have been around for a while. Today I added Speckled Wood, Large White and Green-veined White to the list. No sign of Holly Blue. Ralph Hollins says we may soon see an invasion of migrant Painted Ladies. That should be something!

### **Spring flowers**

Spring flowers are coming up everywhere. Cuckooflowers and Buttercups are out on Brook Meadow with Cow Parsley already lining the raised paths. In our local woodlands Bluebells are now at their best, with those in Ashling Wood quite breathtaking. I counted 206 Early-purple Orchids in Hollybank Woods Apr 17, but there are more to come. Last year was a bumper one with 745 spikes on 06-May-08. If you like orchids, then try Hayling beach where the Green-winged Orchids are growing fast.

### **Puzzling twigs**

There are lots of Oak twigs, complete with young leaves and flowers, lying on the ground in Hollybank Woods. Ralph Hollins is pretty sure this is not the work of squirrels, birds, or insects. His current hypothesis is that the 'rush of sap' to the tips of these twigs (which have been dormant in the winter) causes excessive pressure in the 'tubes' which carry the sap and this pressure weakens the structure of the tiny twigs making them susceptible to snapping in a light breeze, let alone a strong wind.

### **Local wildlife web site**

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## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 13-14 – Mar 23 – Apr 5 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work session - Thursday 2 April**

It was a lovely sunny spring morning for the 13 volunteers who turned up for the Thursday work session. Fortunately we had a variety of tasks to keep everybody happy or at least gainfully employed. A group of four volunteers, Wally, Mike, Jennifer and Barbara moved the brushwood which had been laid on two paths to allow the vegetation to recover from heavy footfall over the winter. Most of the brushwood was then laid across the southern and northern edges of the wildflower area in the North Meadow to restrict access to this important botanically diverse area. Other brushwood piles were laid in the north of the North Meadow to protect the recently planted Dog Roses and in the Central Meadow to restrict access from the causeway to the sedgy area, again a botanically diverse area.

Another important task was started by Steve, Patrick and Sally which was to cut and/or dig up Bramble which is invading the western side of the North Meadow just north of the Alder and Willow plantation. This task was continued with help from the brushwood team after the break. Meanwhile, David and Jil moved a pile of old wood chippings from the North Meadow and laid them around the new planting of Hazel at the Seagull Lane entrance to provide a mulch to conserve moisture. Pam and Frances completed a much more pleasant task which was to plant 15 wild Honeysuckle plants around the south entrance. We hope the Honeysuckle will improve the appearance of the south entrance as well as increasing the biodiversity of the meadow. After the break, Mike, Pam, Jil and Frances completed the formative pruning of the young Ash trees north of the Causeway and also removed several plum suckers growing close to the path. And last but by no means least, Jean and Ute carried out a thorough litterpick of Palmers Road copse. Pam provided much needed refreshments with a good selection of biscuits, especially appreciated by David Search.

#### Tasks for forthcoming work sessions

- . Move piles of vegetation in sacrificial area;
- . Remove several leaning branches of Willow using them to create log piles and material for hurdle fences
- . Build willow hurdles along riverbank where paths to the river are developing;
- . Complete service and repair of hand tools and power scythe;
- . Clear River Ems of litter.

#### Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 19 April & Thursday 7 May

#### **Visit by Emsworth Scouts**

A few weeks ago I was contacted by Michael Croucher, an Emsworth scout group leader, with the offer of a group of scouts helping out with conservation work during the school holidays at Easter. We have arranged that a group of about 10 scouts will help out at the next Sunday work session in April. The tasks we hope they will enjoy doing include, moving the piles of vegetation in the sacrificial area so that it does not encroach too much on the meadow, cutting down a couple of leaning branches of Willow and making log piles and finally using brushwood and other material from tree management work to make hurdle fences along the riverbank.

#### **Watering newly planted trees**

When Richard and I were watering the newly planted Hazels, etc. at the Seagull Lane entrance last week, we were helped by two teenage boys, John and Ryan. The two boys watched Richard as he filled a bucket from the river and asked if they could join in. The newly planted Hazels, Dog Roses and the young Oak tree all had a thorough watering, thanks to John and Ryan's help. Many thanks it was much appreciated.

#### **Forthcoming events**

**Thursday 21 May – ‘Get to know the Helpful Herbs of Nature’** - Guided Herb walk with Steve Taylor, local herbalist. Meet by Brook Meadow information board in Palmers Road car park at 7pm. The walk will take about 1½ to 2 hours and is free to members of BMCG, non members - £3 which gives you BMCG membership for a year.

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## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### **Water Voles**

Water Voles are becoming active in the River Ems as their breeding season gets underway. We have had 11 reported sightings over the past 2 weeks, taking the total for the year so far to 45. Water Voles have been seen anywhere from the north bridge to the sluice gate, but surprisingly none at all from the south bridge, which has been a favourite Vole watching spot in previous years. Mike Wells took another two good photos which can be seen on the group's web site, along with all the Water Vole news at <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

### **Winter visitors leave**

Most of our wintering birds have now left our harbours for their breeding grounds in the far north, though saying that I found 380 Black-tailed Godwits in Fishbourne Channel last week, they are probably passing through from further south. All but a few Brent Geese have gone and they will be staying. Also gone is the famous Spotted Redshank, last seen at Nore Barn on Mar 18. It will now be well on its way to arctic Scandinavia and Russia, due back in Emsworth, all being well, in early November. Today, Barry Collins told me there was a passage Osprey on the east of Thorney Deeps.

### **Summer visitors arrive**

Meanwhile, summer visitors are on their way. Chiffchaff and Blackcap are here already, so listen out for their distinctive songs in Brook Meadow and Hollybank Woods. Hopefully, we shall be hearing the short scratchy song of the Whitethroat on Brook Meadow towards the end of April. Last year I had my first Reed Warbler on Peter Pond on Apr 14, which was a Sussex record, so listen for that one too. Caroline French saw the first Swallow in Emsworth on March 30 and they should soon be exploring nesting sites in Marina Farm and Lumley Mill Farm.

### **Nesting birds**

The local Mute Swan has been sitting on her nest in the reedbeds in the SW corner of Peter Pond since March 20, which means we could expect to see cygnets by the second week of May. Fortunately, there is only one Mute Swan pair nesting on the ponds this year, thus preventing the inevitable friction that we have had in previous years. We should soon be seeing Coot chicks on Slipper Millpond from the nest on the raft nearest the bridge. They are imminent.

### **Butterflies**

At long last butterflies are emerging after the cold spring. Peacock, Brimstone and Comma are now widespread with Orange Tip and Small White also starting to show. Note, Small Whites at this time of the year look pure white. I have not seen Speckled Wood, Holly Blue or Green-veined White myself though they probably are about. As for Small Tortoiseshell, well, we can only hope and pray.

### **Spring flowers**

I had a lovely spring walk through Hollybank Woods yesterday. Bluebells are just starting to flower and, from the abundance of leaves, it should be a good year. However, I could not find many Early-purple Orchid rosettes which does not auger well. There was plenty of Wood Anemone, Common Dog-violets and a record number of Wild Primroses on Longcopse Hill.

Meanwhile, on Brook Meadow the Blackthorn in the north-east corner is a mass of blossom, the best I can recall. The Gorse on the causeway is also resplendent, as is the Weeping Willow just below it. Cow Parsley is flowering on the river bank, where there will be a riot of flowers by the beginning of May. No sign of Cuckooflowers as yet, nor any Meadow Foxtail which is usually showing by now.

### **Butterbur**

Have you noticed the size of the male Butterbur flower spikes on Brook Meadow this year? They are enormous and they are spreading. My annual Butterbur count on March 27 produced an astonishing 467 flowers, the most I have ever counted since I began in 1999, and this following three fairly lean years for them. The female Butterbur plants near the Langbrook Stream at Langstone are also doing very well this year. Something is going on!

### **Other news**

A freshly dead Mole with a lovely velvet coat was found during a recent workday on Brook Meadow. . Pam Phillips has seen two baby Rabbits on Brook Meadow, a very unusual visitor.

### **Local wildlife web site**

For more information and photos of the wildlife mentioned in this report plus other local wildlife news please go to my web site at - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 11-12 – Mar 9-22 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

**Work session** - Sunday 15 March – report by Jennifer Rye

A mercifully dry day, with plenty of sun, for the 10 volunteers who gathered bright and early to be ready to greet the visiting Sea Cubs from Printhead. Unfortunately, due to a mix up over dates, they did not appear, but we made best use of the time, and achieved a great deal.

Wally (replaced by Graham later on) started to cut with the power scythe the remaining southern part of the central meadow which had not been done earlier in the season due to wet conditions over the autumn and winter months. The cutting was carefully carried out to avoid disturbing new growth of valued plants, and an island of tall grasses was left uncut. Pam raked and gathered the arisings, while Jennie and Patrick undertook Bramble control along the North Meadow perimeter.

Meanwhile, Pat, Graham, Jill, Penny and Debbie spread the new pile of wood chippings which had been left by the tree surgeons last week (see below) on the middle path from Palmers Road car park down into the copse. They worked very hard to disperse the very warm chippings along the lower path by the river to create a better surface. Barbara did a much needed litter pick.

After the coffee break at the central seat (many thanks to Pat and Pam for a splendid spread!), a party completed the scything, and cleared all the arisings to the sacrificial dump. While another group went to the North Meadow to spread wood chippings, left over from last year's tree work, around the newly planted Hazel copse by the north bridge. We also rearranged some of the brushwood which had been used to block an unwanted occasional path by the flower-rich area, and started to block new paths which have been developing from the meadow to the northern raised riverbank path, where Dog Roses have been recently planted. These new paths seem to have developed in an attempt to avoid the very muddy conditions on the usual paths around the edge. Hopefully sunny days will cure the problem.

Many thanks to all the volunteers who worked so hard that we completed nearly all the tasks planned for an extra 20 pairs of hands without them!

#### Tasks for forthcoming work sessions

- Plant Honeysuckle at South entrance;
- Continue Bramble control in North Meadow;
- Move brushwood on paths to other areas needing protection, especially in North Meadow;
- Build willow hurdles along causeway to prevent paths from developing onto meadow and to protect recent planting of Dog Roses;
- Cut back Gorse bush and plum saplings from along causeway path;
- Complete service and repair of hand tools and power scythe;
- Complete formative pruning of young trees and other tree pruning work as necessary;
- Clear River Ems of litter.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 2 & Sunday 19 April.

#### ***New planting***

Various trees and shrubs have been recently planted around the meadow, including Purging Buckthorn, Holly, Hawthorn, Holly and Silver Birch at the Seagull Lane entrance. A Hazel copse on the western edge of the North Meadow. Dog Roses at the northern edge of the North Meadow and the southern edge of the Central Meadow. All these plants need regular watering, especially during the recent spell of warm, dry weather we have been having, to help them survive. Jennifer Rye and myself have been doing this on a regular basis. When watering the newly planted trees at the Seagull Lane entrance this afternoon, I noted that the leaves on some of the Hawthorns and Hazels are starting to emerge. I also noticed that the Osier saplings on the eastern side of the North Meadow which we planted about two years ago have lovely yellow catkins.

#### ***Tree work***

The large Crack Willow at the back of the bottle bank in Palmers Road copse has been pollarded by tree surgeons under instructions of Andrew Skeet arborist at HBC. In addition, several large branches were removed from the adjacent Willow which were overhanging the end industrial unit, and also several branches of another Willow near the central path from the car park which were overhanging the footpath. The brushwood was chipped and put in a pile to be used by the group on the paths and the large branches cut into large logs and left in the undergrowth to rot down.

Brushwood experiment

Our brushwood experiment has been very successful and several people have given us compliments about it. The brushwood was laid to block off two paths in the Central and North Meadows as these paths were attracting too much use. The grasses and other plants have now revived and the brushwood will be moved to other areas requiring protection.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### **Water Voles**

Water Vole activity is now hotting up on the River Ems on Brook Meadow. In addition to those from the north bridge area, sightings are now coming in from the area north of the sluice gate into the Bulrushes area. Mike Wells got the first Water Vole photo of the year – see the web site. We have not as yet had any sightings from the gasholder area or from the south bridge, so please keep looking!

### **Millpond news**

One of the resident Mute Swans is nest building in the reedbeds in the SW corner of Peter Pond, where they successfully nested last year. A Mute Swan is actually sitting on its nest at Langstone Mill Pond and probably laying eggs. A Coot is nesting behind a barricade of twigs on the raft nearest the Hermitage Bridge on Slipper Millpond. Two Mediterranean Gulls were on Slipper Millpond on Mar 20

### **Brent Geese**

Numbers of Brent Geese in Emsworth Harbour go up and down on an almost daily basis, indicating birds dropping in for a rest and a feed as they move back towards their breeding grounds. On Mar 20 I counted 62 to the west of Emsworth and 250 in the main harbour, the latter mostly in a tight group east of the Sailing Club. Stragglers will be here for another 2 or 3 weeks, then harbour will be empty.

### **Early migrants**

With the departure of the winter birds we now await the arrival of the summer migrants. Chiffchaffs are usually the first to turn up with their cheerful “chiff-chaff” song, though some could be birds that spent the winter here. The two I heard singing on Thorney Island and another two on Brook Meadow on Mar 20 were almost certainly migrants. Cetti's Warblers are also singing on Thorney Island but these are residents. Heather Mills saw four Swallows over at Amberley Wild Brooks on Mar 19.

### **Other bird news**

I have not seen the “tame” Spotted Redshank at Nore Barn since Mar 18, though the tides since then have not been favourable and I have been away over the weekend. If you have seen it please let me know. Ten Buzzards were over Thorney Island on Mar 14 and one was over Brook Meadow today. I have been checking the local Rookeries which are very noisy with birds nest building, egg laying and generally squabbling. The biggest one I have found is that of 64 nests at Racton Park Farm with 50 at Forestside running it close. I feel sorry for people living close to Rookeries at this time of the year.

### **Butterflies**

Butterflies are emerging with the fine weather; Brimstone, Comma and Peacock have already been seen on Brook Meadow. I also had an early sighting of a male Orange Tip flying around the Lumley area on Mar 19. Small Whites are also being seen in gardens, much to the delight of gardeners!

### **Butterbur**

The flower spikes of Butterbur appear well before the large leaves start to grow and are now showing well on Brook Meadow, particularly on the path behind the seat and near the Lumley gate. I did the annual Butterbur count last Thursday which produced a total of 298 flowering spikes which is well up on last year's total of 201 but is well down on the record counts of over 400 in the years 2000-2004.

### **Other plant news**

Jim Berry reports Wild Daffodils in Inhomes Wood near Stoughton. Sweet Violets are common on roadside verges, though not yet on Brook Meadow; I found an unusual creamy yellow form in Stansted Arboretum on Mar 19. English Scurvygrass is flowering on the saltmarshes at Nore Barn. The first Field Horsetail cones of the year are now showing in the wetter areas of Brook Meadow. Marsh-marigold is in flower on the river bank in Palmer's Road Copse. The “Pussy willow” catkins are now looking fine, the male with bright yellow and the female a dull green. The Osier saplings are also decked out with yellow catkins. Alpine Squill is again flowering in Hollybank Woods.

### **Other news**

I saw a Rabbit on Brook Meadow for the first time ever! Do they come from the garden of Gooseberry Cottage? On Mar 13 Emily Laurens found a shrivelled up Common Newt on the pavement outside my house in Bridge Road Emsworth. Just how it came to be there is a mystery.

### **Local wildlife web site**

For more information and photos of the wildlife mentioned in this report plus other local wildlife news please go to my web site at - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 9-10 – Feb 23 –Mar 8 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work sessions**

Unfortunately, I had to cancel the work session on Thursday 5 March because of heavy rain. So instead I have organised small work parties over the next few days so that at least some of the outstanding planting work can be done.

Mike, Dave and I met this morning which fortunately turned out to be lovely and sunny instead of the heavy showers forecast. Our first job was to fork over the ground around the recently planted Hawthorn, Holly, Buckthorn and Hazel near the Seagull Lane entrance and then put down a mulch of bark chippings to retain moisture. The next job was to prepare a site and plant a number of Hazel plants which I had over from the planting at the Seagull Lane entrance. I had also been given two large Hazel plants by Tim Brooks who wants to extend his vegetable garden and thought I might find a good home for them on Brook Meadow. Mike had the good idea of planting a small Hazel coppice which we could then manage to provide material for Hazel hurdles around the meadow. We decided to plant the Hazel coppice just north of the north bridge on the north-western side of the meadow. The two large Hazels were planted in the middle surrounded by 14 smaller Hazels protected with tree guards. While we were planting the Hazels, Mike noticed a seven-spot ladybird on the nettles we were clearing.

On Monday afternoon, Pam and I plan to plant two groups of Dog Rose along the northern edge of the riverbank footpath. I also have some Honeysuckle plants which I hope to plant around the South entrance later on in the week, weather permitting.

**Photo of today's work is on the group web site:**

<http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2009.html>

#### Tasks for forthcoming work sessions

- Bramble control in North Meadow;
- Move brushwood on paths to other areas needing protection;
- Cut back gorse bush and plum saplings from along causeway path;
- Complete service and repair of hand tools and power scythe;
- Complete formative pruning of young trees and other tree pruning work as necessary;
- Cut, rake and remove arisings from part of sedgey area in Central Meadow;
- Clear River Ems of litter.

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 15 March & Thursday 2 April.

#### **Visit from Southbourne Sea Cubs**

We are expecting a group of about 20 Sea Cubs plus adults from Southbourne to come to Brook Meadow for our Sunday work session in March to help us with practical conservation work.

#### **Tree pollarding**

The bad weather last Thursday also delayed the tree surgeons from pollarding a large Crack Willow near the bottle bank in Palmers Road copse. This work will now be carried out next Wednesday

#### **2008 Butterfly Transect** - report by Wally Osborne

Our 3rd year of 'proper' Butterfly Transect recording was plagued by the extremely variable summer weather and, mainly due to myself, suffered poor organisation and co-ordination. The consequence was that we missed recording altogether during a few weeks. I must strive to do better in 2009!

The complete results are shown in 3 Microsoft Excel charts (on the website). The highlights:

- The total number of Butterflies recorded over the 26 week period was only 296, compared to 433 in 2007 and 360 in 2006. There were 6 weeks when zero Butterflies were recorded, 3 of them due to weather conditions and the other 3 due either to poor organisation and/or poor weather. The months of April, May, June and early September were particularly poor for sightings whilst July was by far the best with 106 sightings.

- Butterflies of 14 different species were sighted. They were Orange Tip, Holly Blue, Common Blue, Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma, Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Dark Green Fritillary and Whites - Small, Large & Green Veined. The most common species sighted were Small White (100), Meadow Brown (55) and Large White (43). Small Copper, Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell and Marbled White all seen in previous years had zero sightings.

- Chart number 3 shows the relationship between Butterfly sightings and mean air temperature in Celsius.

Please let me know if you would like to participate in the 2009 Transect, scheduled to start on Wednesday 1st April.

## **LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

### **Millpond news**

The resident Mute Swan pair is back on Peter Pond. Let's hope they build their nest in the reedbeds where they nested last year and not on the island. Apparently, last week, there was a skirmish with an intruding Mute Swan pair, but they were driven off. They are not welcome!

David Gattrell, who manages Peter Pond, has completed the annual cutting of the reedbeds on the north part of the pond. David has also erected a duck nest box on a post on the edge of the reedbeds, which he assures me is both weather proof and predator proof. Elisabeth Kinloch who owns Peter Pond has broken her leg in a fall, but is recuperating at home.

Two Mediterranean Gulls were on Slipper Millpond on Mar 7, the first of the year. They are handsome gulls with black heads and bright red bills. Listen for their distinctive mewing calls as they fly.

The Coot have not yet started building their 'barricade of twigs, nest on the raft near the bridge.

### **Harbour news**

The harbours are starting to empty as the wintering geese, ducks and waders move back to their breeding areas in the north, though there will still be a good number of Brent Geese passing through. The "tame" Spotted Redshank still delights locals and visitors alike at Nore Barn to the west of Emsworth, often with an equally tame Greenshank for company. But they will soon be gone.

The colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwit that regularly commutes between Emsworth and Kent was seen back in Kent on Feb 28. I last saw it in Emsworth on Dec 31. It will now be on its way back to Iceland.

Six Red-breasted Mergansers were in Emsworth Harbour on Mar 5, but none came onto the millponds

### **Mute Swan on bedroom balcony**

Mike Wood and his wife had quite a shock when a Mute Swan crashed into their bedroom window and landed on the balcony outside. Mike, who lives in North Street Emsworth, rang animal rescue from the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service who turned up within about 15 minutes and soon had the situation under control. Nice to hear that the swan did not suffer from its escapade. Mike's photos can be seen on my web site under Mar 4 . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/0-0-0-wildlife-diary.htm>

### **Other bird news**

Ten Waxwings were seen feeding on the red berries of a Rowan in Valetta Park, Emsworth on Feb 28, but they had gone by the time Ralph Hollins and I heard about them the next day.

I had a good view of a Firecrest (my first for many years) near Hayling Oysterbeds on Feb 26 - with a lot of help from Barry Collins!

My wife and I had a close-up view of a Great Northern Diver fishing close to the Hayling shore just south of the Ferryboat Inn on Mar 6. It has been here for the past month. A fantastic bird!

A pair of Blue Tits have been exploring the nest box in my garden, where they nested last year.

The pair of House Sparrows are still going into the nest box on the tree in Lumley Road.

Dave Oliver (ex-HBC) was very lucky to have a Redpoll on his garden feeder in Hambrook on Mar 2.

Three Moorhens were on the River Ems, where they will probably nest as in previous years.

### **Plant news**

Primroses were originally planted on the Brook Meadow site, but are spreading; 8 plants are now in flower on the north river and at least 20 on the paths in Palmer's Road Copse.

Sweet Violets are flowering around the town, including the regular pink ones in Nore Barn Woods.

'Pussy Willow', catkins are now appearing, with some trees covered, but others still to show.

Male Common Yews in local churchyards are shedding clouds of yellow pollen, though the tiny flowers of the female Yews are not yet open. Irish Yews ('Fastigiata') can also be seen in the churchyards.

Soft Shield Fern is growing in the western end of Nore Barn Woods along with a number of male Ferns. It is not easy to tell them apart, but see my web site (Feb 28) for photos.

### **Other news**

There have been three more Water Vole sightings over the past 2 weeks, taking the total this year to 20. Two were from the north bridge and the other near the sluice gate. Keep looking!

Some of the rare Maidenhair Spleenwort fern has been lost with the removal of a section of wall of the Waterside Church in Bath Road, but there is still some left on the remaining wall.

Butterflies are late appearing this year; a Red Admiral was seen on Brook Meadow on Feb 21 and a Brimstone in Nore Barn Woods on Feb 27.

### **Local wildlife web site**

For more information and photos of the wildlife mentioned in this report plus other local wildlife news please go to my web site at - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 7-8 – Feb 9-22 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work session - Sunday 15 February**

A cloudy but fortunately mild morning greeted the 13 volunteers for the Sunday work session in February. With this number of people we were able to complete a number of tasks, which were: planting up a native hedgerow next to the Seagull Lane entrance; cutting back Bramble on the Seagull Lane patch; rebuilding part of the willow hurdle along the riverbank, continuing with the survey of Brook Meadow and the inevitable litter pick.

The entrance at Seagull Lane has been prepared for planting during the last few work sessions. In addition, HBC has put up some chestnut paling along the outside of the post and rail fence and supplied a load of topsoil. The first job for Pam, Pat, Tony and Penny was to spread out the topsoil and add some compost kindly supplied by Pam. Then the best bit - we planted Hawthorn, Purging Buckthorn and Holly along the fence with Hazel and a single Silver Birch in the remaining area. The native trees came from Burntwood Nurseries near Winchester and were either roottrainer plants or in pots all grown from seed collected over the South of England. Each plant was dipped in Rootgrow to encourage rapid root development before being planted. Four of the Hazel plants had been kindly donated by a friend of Jennifer's and were planted on the other side of the entrance to fill in gaps in the Dogwood and Field Maple hedge as well as a few extra Dog Roses. Finally, the Hazels nearest the path were protected with tree guards and all the plants were watered. There are quite a lot of plants left over which will be planted at the south entrance and at other suitable places around the meadow.

Meanwhile, Mike, Graham, Jil and Stephanie cleared two patches of Bramble to prevent it encroaching too far onto the Seagull Lane patch. They then repaired the southern section of the willow hurdle at the top of the riverbank nearest the central seat which had become broken. They used brushwood from previous tree work. The willow hurdle serves to restrict access by dogs down to the river and protects the Water Vole habitat.

Finally, Barbara and Jennifer carried out a thorough litter pick in Palmers Road copse and along the main paths while David and Caroline continued with mapping Brook Meadow to create the base map. Pam kindly provided well-earned refreshments. Many thanks to all for their hard work and enthusiasm.

**Photos of the work session are on the group web site:**

<http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2009.html>

#### Tasks for forthcoming work sessions

- Plant Honeysuckle at South entrance, Dog Rose along northern riverbank path and small Hazel coppice at a suitable spot along the boundary of the grassland;
- Bramble control in North Meadow;
- Clear River Ems of litter.
- Complete service and repair of hand tools and power scythe;
- Complete formative pruning of young trees and other tree pruning work as necessary;
- Cutting, raking and removing arisings from part of sedgey area in Central Meadow.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 5 & Sunday 15 March.

#### **Tree pollarding**

Andrew Skeet, arborist at HBC, has instructed a firm of tree surgeons to pollard a large Crack Willow near the bottle bank in Palmers Road copse. If time allows, they may also pollard several other willows along the edge of the car park. This work will probably be carried out next week.

#### **Southbourne Biodiversity Action Plan**

I have been talking a lot about Biodiversity over the last few weeks and perhaps mistakenly assumed that everybody knew what I was talking about. A simple definition of Biodiversity is: 'the variety of life including all plants, animals and their habitats'. Last week, I attended a meeting of the Southbourne Local Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group to give a summary of BMCG's experience with mapping the biodiversity of Brook Meadow and to explore ways in which we could possibly work together. As you probably know, the eastern part of Brook Meadow is in West Sussex. The Steering Group is an off-shoot of the Parish Council but also includes interested local residents. Local Authorities are obliged by Central Government to promote biodiversity and Chichester District Council is encouraging Parish Councils to develop Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAP). The Southbourne group are currently putting their Action Plan in place which includes mapping biodiversity within the Southbourne parish, encouraging wildlife projects and holding a 'Space for Nature' garden competition. I was very encouraged by the enthusiasm of the meeting and hope that BMCG volunteers will be able to get involved in some way in this important biodiversity project.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### **Bird song**

There has been a considerable increase in bird song over the past week as birds establish territories and try to attract mates. All our resident birds are now singing, with Chaffinch and Blackbird the latest to join the chorus. Blackbirds have only started up in the past few days and are best heard at dusk. Dunnock and Woodpigeon have been particularly vocal over the past week. Unusually, a Stock Dove was cooing away in Curlew Close off Warblington Road on Feb 20. I also heard a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming in Nore Barn Woods.

### **Millpond and harbour news**

An amazing six male Pochard turned up on the town millpond on Feb 14. This was a record for the millpond and only the second time I had ever seen Pochard there. Tufted Duck numbers are also building up on the millpond with a maximum of 17 last week.

Birds are getting noticeably fewer in the harbour as winter draws to a close. Brent Geese are certainly on the move, though we might expect occasional increases in numbers in local harbours from birds that wintered further south and west, stopping to stock up on their way north. Our 'tame' Spotted Redshank remains loyal to the stream at Nore Barn, often in company with a Greenshank.

### **Other bird news**

Judging from the pile of feathers in St James Churchyard, a Sparrowhawk has made a kill, possibly the same bird that caught and ate a Collared Dove in my Bridge Road garden on Feb 11.

I met Fred Portwin who pointed out a nest box fixed to a tree opposite his house in Lumley Road which was being visited by a pair of House Sparrows with nesting material. Fred also told me that a Kingfisher regularly perches on one of the posts near the 'No Fishing' sign on the north of Peter Pond. Penny Aylett told me she had seen five Redwing in the large field behind her house in The Rookery; there have not been many of these in our area this winter.

### **Spring flowers**

The recent spell of warm weather has encouraged wild flowers into bloom. There is an attractive display of Lesser Celandines under the hedge at the south entrance to Bridge Road car park, though they are later than usual this year. Fresh Arum leaves are showing well in Nore Barn Woods, but no sign of any spathes as yet. The grass-like leaves of the rare Hairy Garlic are showing well in the usual place on the footpath to the north of the woods. Snowdrops are currently showing very well around the town, their white flowers contrasting well with the bright colours of Crocuses that often grow nearby.

The first buds of Butterbur are pushing their way through the soil on the river embankment behind the seat on Brook Meadow. Ralph Hollins has found some fully open Butterbur flower spikes at Racton. I came across Butcher's Broom with both berries and flowers during a walk in Stansted Forest. Bishop's Palace Gardens in Chichester is a good place to see the attractive Winter Aconite; the patch near the south wall is now in full flower and worth a look if you are in the area.

The male Yew trees in St James Churchyard are covered in tiny sacs full of yellow pollen, but are not as yet releasing the pollen into the air - later than usual?

### **Summer Snowflake v Three-Cornered Leek**

Ralph Hollins provided useful advice on distinguishing these two very similar plants, which are currently in flower around the local area. Summer Snowflake *Leucojum aestivum* (a misnomer since it flowers in early spring, also called the Lodden Lily), has green tips to its petals which are otherwise all white, whereas Three-cornered Leek (or Garlic) *Alium triquetrum* has thin longitudinal green stripes on its white petals. The Leek also has a faint garlic smell. You can see both in Emsworth: eg Summer Snowflake on Western Parade and Three-cornered Leek outside No 55 Warblington Road.

### **Other wildlife news**

A Water Vole was spotted from the Seagull Lane bridge by Caroline French and David Search last Sunday, this being the 16th sighting this year, all but four from this area.

A Rabbit's skull was discovered on Brook Meadow during a work session, surprising in so far as Rabbits are rarely seen on the meadow. Large Brown Trout were seen in the River Ems.

The fern Maidenhair Spleenwort is flourishing on the wall of the Waterside Church in Bath Road.

A Red Admiral butterfly was seen by Tony Wootton on Thorney Island on Feb 14.

### **Local wildlife web site**

For more information and photos of the wildlife mentioned in this report plus other local wildlife news please go to my web site at - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 5-6: Jan 26 – Feb 8 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work Session – Thursday 5 February** – report by Wally Osborne

Following heavy overnight rain, the day started off grey and drizzly but we still had a good turnout of 9 volunteers ready to defy the slippery conditions and eventually, just before midday, we saw the sun. The morning's tasks were somewhat restricted by the underfoot conditions and so were restricted to top dressing at the Seagull Lane entrance paths, pruning the lower branches of some North Meadow Crack Willows and Central Meadow young Ash trees, plus the perennial litter pick. Gaynor and Ute spent more than an hour clearing away Palmers Road copse of a huge amount of litter plus a motor exhaust system, and retrieved one of our RSPB bird boxes from the undergrowth beneath one of the large Crack Willows. On examination with Brian Fellows, we found that it had been 'inhabited' in the past and so we shall arrange to have it re-erected before springtime. Pam, Jean (a new volunteer) and Phil moved and spread some of the pile of wood chippings along the path from the kissing gate to the North bridge and down into the meadow, to improve access for the public. Also, Pam dressed off the steps down onto the meadow, which had become treacherous during the recent snow conditions. Meanwhile, Graham, Frances and Wally set about pruning the 2 Crack Willows down on the meadow close to the North bridge and created a new wood pile, on top an old one, on the edge of the adjacent large bramble patch. They also cleared up the arisings from the recent tree work done by HBC. Jelly Ear fungus was noted on several of the Willow branches. The other volunteers joined in this work before and after the richly deserved refreshment break, which included delicious donuts 'all round', supplied by Pat to celebrate her birthday. Congratulations Pat and thanks for the refreshments. After the break, Frances, Phil, Pam and Gaynor set off to remove a leaning branch of a Crack Willow in the 'central line' but another larger one was left as the bigger cross-cut saw would be needed to do the job. The final task was to complete the formative pruning of the young Ash trees near the Central Meadow seat. We have looked after these 'self sown' saplings for a few years now and have now selected the best ones which are set to become fine trees so that the surrounding 'protective' smaller saplings could be removed completely. All of this work kept us warm despite the conditions and so thanks again to everyone

#### **Photos of the work session are on the group web site:**

<http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2009.html>

#### Tasks for forthcoming work sessions

- Plant native hedgerow at Seagull Lane entrance;
- Repair willow hurdles along riverbank;
- Complete service and repair of hand tools and power scythe;
- Complete formative pruning of young trees and other tree pruning work as necessary;
- Cutting, raking and removing arisings from part of sedgey area in Central Meadow.

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 15 February & Thursday 5 March.

#### **Mapping the Biodiversity of Brook Meadow**

This weekend David Search, Caroline French and myself have been using a GPS instrument to record the grid references of the main features of Brook Meadow. David will be using these to create a computerised 'base map' of the meadow upon which plants and animals can be plotted. So far we have surveyed most of the paths and some of the amenities, such as seats, steps and bridges. We still have Palmers Road copse and the Seagull Lane patch to complete. David will be coming to the next Sunday work session when he hopes to map fences, boundaries and some trees.

#### **Management Plan & 2006 botanical survey report**

A botanical survey was carried out by Hampshire Wildlife Trust in June 1998, 2 years before BMCG took on the management of Brook Meadow. This survey report is included in the 2006 Management Plan which the BMCG committee is currently reviewing. A second survey was carried out by Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre (Hbic) in September 2006. We have only recently been sent the report of this survey and are currently working out what conclusions can be drawn from it and deciding how the Management Plan needs to be modified. By comparing the two surveys, we can monitor changes in vegetation. These differences are inevitably the result of an interaction between changes in climate and management practice. It is difficult to say which has the greatest influence.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows

### **Water Voles**

Water Voles are still active on the River Ems. On Feb 7 Caroline French observed one in the river above the north bridge using its teeth to pull the bark off a branch of Willow lying in the river. This was interesting as we had a report last year (22 Aug 2008) of a Water Vole climbing a tree. Graham Roberts of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust replied that Water Voles do in fact climb trees in winter, often stripping bark of young limbs of alder and willow. He said they will also retreat into trees or dense high shrubs to avoid being washed away in floods. Caroline also saw a scuffle involving a second rodent which she thought might be a Brown Rat, though the scuffle could well have been between two Water Voles disputing territory, a common event in early spring. All the Water Vole news is on the web site at <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

### **Millpond and harbour news**

Things are still quiet on the local millponds; only 13 Tufted Duck were on the town millpond this week with 8 males (with white flanks) and 5 females and no sign of any other winter visitors. However, I did see a striking grey-headed Cormorant with a white breeding thigh patch on the main raft on Slipper Millpond, last week. It was probably a member of the tree-nesting Continental race *Sinensis*.

Brent Geese are still noisy and numerous in Emsworth Harbour though they will soon be getting the urge to move back to their breeding ground in High Arctic. Meanwhile, the ever-faithful Spotted Redshank continues to show well at Nore Barn; Ralph Hollins thinks it is beginning to acquire its breeding plumage. You might also see a Greenshank or two in the harbour, but Black-tailed Godwits appear to have largely moved away (to Pulborough Brooks and Pagham Harbour?).

### **Other bird news**

Birds are responding to the longer days with an increase in song. Most of the resident species are now singing well, but there has not been much as yet from Chaffinch, Blackbird or Greenfinch. Ralph Hollins has heard two Chaffinches singing in the Havant Eastern Road cemetery though he commented that “neither bird showed much enthusiasm for the task”. I actually heard my first Blackbird song of the winter only this morning from Seagull Lane Emsworth. Many birds are also pairing up, such as, Robins. Caroline French saw a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers on Brook Meadow.

Glaucous Gulls are very rare winter visitors to our area from the Arctic, so the arrival of two of these large white gulls off Southsea Castle in the past week created quite a stir among local birdwatchers, who also enjoyed up to 15 Purple Sandpipers in front of the castle.

### **Garden birds**

The female Blackcap is virtually a fixture on the hanging apples in my back garden, but surprisingly she is not tempted by other goodies I have on offer. Do apples provide it with sufficient nourishment? Caroline French has also found apples good for attracting Blackcaps to her garden in North Emsworth, so they are worth trying. Regarding Pied Wagtails, I had one in my back garden last week, which was only my 6th sighting in the 12 years I have been recording birds in my present garden.

### **Plant news**

The cold weather seems to have slowed the emergence of spring flowers. Lesser Celandines have been scarce in the local area, though Ralph Hollins has seen them flowering in Havant since Jan 13.

Fresh green leaves of Arum (Lords and Ladies) are springing up everywhere, but I was interested to find Italian Arum (*Arum italicum* ssp *italicum*) on the river bank in Palmer's Road Copse – a new addition to the Brook Meadow plant list. This is a common garden plant with attractive marbled leaves and broad creamy veins, but it is not common in the wild. It used to be planted as an aphrodisiac!

Ralph Hollins found a puzzling patch of tall grass, glowing golden in the winter sunshine, in an open area in the western section of Hollybank Woods. After some consideration, Ralph now thinks it is Wood Small-reed (*Calamagrostis epigejos*). See my wildlife diary for Feb 4 for full details and photos of this grass. Ralph's list of wild plants in flower so far this month/year stands at 80.

### **Other wildlife news**

Moles are now very active, judging from the number of fresh molehills springing up on Brook Meadow. This morning, I saw one growing with soil being pushed up from below, but no sign of the Mole.

A good growth of Jew's Ear fungus (now renamed Jelly Ear) was found on a Crack Willow tree during last Thursday's workday on Brook Meadow.

### **Local wildlife web site**

For more information and photos of the wildlife mentioned in this report plus other local wildlife news please go to my web site at - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 3-4: Jan 12-25 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Work Session – Sunday 18 January** – report by Pat Walsgrove

After a terrible windy, wet night, the weather turned out to be a lovely sunny morning, although with a slight cold breeze. Ten willing volunteers turned out, Pat, Pam, Jennifer, Jenny, Jennie, Debbi, Penny, Michael, Patrick and Graham and quickly set to work on the Meadow.

The Seagull Lane patch was prepared for the future planting of the new hedge. The remainder of the brushwood was transferred to the informal path across the wildflower area (to deter pedestrian traffic), with the larger pieces being hidden in the undergrowth. Mulching of young trees on the meadow was not possible due to it being waterlogged, but the 3 Horse Chestnuts were treated on the way back round the path. A litter pick was completed around the meadow and then all retired to Pam's for refreshments - a big thank you to Pam. Finally, some tool maintenance was undertaken, the bow saws checked and the blades lightly oiled and the shears checked, sharpened and oiled. A very enjoyable couple of hours and a very heartfelt thanks to all the volunteers on your good work

#### Tasks for forthcoming work sessions

- Plant native hedgerow at Seagull Lane entrance;
- Lay wood chippings on some paths as required;
- Complete service and repair of hand tools and power scythe;
- Formative pruning of young trees and other tree pruning work as necessary;
- Cutting, raking and removing arisings from part of sedgey area in Central Meadow.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 5 & Sunday 15 February.

#### **Fixed-point Photos**

Twice a year, in January and June, I take fixed-point photos of Brook Meadow, which I completed yesterday for January 2009. This entails taking photos in several directions from the same fixed-points each time. In the case of Brook Meadow, the fixed points I use include gateposts, large trees, bridges, signcases, etc. The purpose of these photos is to keep a visual record of how Brook Meadow changes from winter to summer from year to year. I have been taking these photos since June 2003 so we have built up quite a record. For the first few years, I printed out all the photos and put them in an album but now I only have an electronic record which I must remember to backup!!

#### **Mapping the Biodiversity of Brook Meadow**

The BMCG committee has made several attempts over the years to map the biodiversity of Brook Meadow, including carrying out a plant quadrat survey of the various areas of the meadow. Last October, David Search and Caroline French went on a training session given by Martin Rand (BSBI recorder) on using Map Mate software. David has been creating maps and working out how we can use the software effectively in Brook Meadow to be able to record the biodiversity of plants and animals. We hope to get this up and running by spring this year. If you are interested in helping with this project please contact me. An interesting coincidence occurred a few weeks ago, when I was contacted by Phillip MacDougall, chair of Southbourne Local Biodiversity Action Plan committee and working party (an off-shoot of the Parish Council but also involving interested local residents). They are currently putting an action plan in place and feel that it is important to make links with like-minded neighbouring groups. Their intention includes mapping biodiversity within the Southbourne parish and encouraging wildlife projects and would like to explore ways of their group working more closely with the Brook Meadow Conservation Group. I have agreed to give a short presentation to this committee on 19 February about what we are trying to do in Brook Meadow. You never know where this might lead!!

#### **Water levels in River Ems and flooding in Brook Meadow**

As I mentioned in my last email notes, water levels in the River Ems vary mainly due to the amount of rainfall but also whether the sluice gates between Lumley Mill and Constant Spring are up or down. The gates are up at present so water is being directed down the Lumley Stream. A week ago (19 January), Brian noted that heavy overnight rain produced a lot of flooding along the River Ems. The riverside path through Palmer's Road copse was totally impassable, as was the path leading to Lumley Mill from Seagull Lane. Parts of Brook Meadow were flooded with the South Meadow particularly badly affected. The southern part of the South Meadow is still under water a week later. If this heavy rainfall coincides with a high tide, more of Brook Meadow is likely to become inundated since the Lumley Stream is tidal as far north as Lumley cottages.

## **LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

### **Water Voles**

2008 was a bumper year for Water Voles on Brook Meadow with a total of 161 sightings, which was a big increase on previous years. Despite this being the middle of winter Water Voles are still being seen from the north bridge at Seagull Lane. I also had the good fortune to see 3 Water Voles in the Lumley Stream to the north of Peter Pond on Jan 12. David Gattrell, who manages Peter Pond, sometimes spots one in the reedbeds and Andy Rothwell identified the Lumley Stream as an area of Water Vole activity during his survey of the area in October 2007. So my sightings were not entirely unexpected, though they were the first I have had personally in that area. Please let me know if you see a Water Vole. All the Water Vole news is on the web site at <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

### **Millpond and harbour news**

The Emsworth millponds have been remarkably quiet this winter with few of the usual winter visitors. Only Tufted Duck have turned up on the town millpond this winter so far, with a maximum of 15 on the pond this week (8 males and 7 females). There has been no sign of Red-breasted Merganser, Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe or Goldeneye which have graced our pond in the past. The Peter Pond Slipper Millpond complex has also been fairly quiet, but for the wintering Cormorants on the raft and a couple of Little Grebes fishing. The resident Mute Swan pair patrol the ponds. In the harbour, the “resident” Spotted Redshank is still showing well to the west of Emsworth at Nore Barn along with a few Greenshank and Black-tailed Godwits.

### **Other bird news**

Despite what the RSPB are saying about the decline of Song Thrushes, there seems to be no shortage of them in Emsworth. I have heard no less than six birds singing in different locations over the past week and my neighbour John Williams saw four Song Thrushes on one of the large lawns along Western Parade on Jan 13, though these could have been continental birds wintering here. On Jan 21 I saw a pair of Robins displaying to each other on Brook Meadow, a good sign that spring is not far away. This is the second Robin pair I have seen this winter. I enjoyed a good walk with the Havant Wildlife Group in a very wet Hollybank Woods on Saturday Jan 24. We saw all five of the common Tits (Blue, Great, Coal, Marsh and Long-tailed), plus Treecreeper, Nuthatch and Goldcrest with Redpolls feeding in the high canopy. We also saw some interesting fungi, including a magnificent display of Many-zoned Polypore (renamed Turkeytail) and some Earthstar.

### **Bird Song**

Most of the common resident birds are now singing in preparation for the nesting season; Robin, Wren, Dunnock, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Goldfinch, Starling, Song Thrush, Collared Dove and Woodpigeon. Greenfinch is a late starter, though I heard one churring in Lumley today. Also, Ralph Hollins heard a Chaffinch practising its song in Stansted Forest on Jan 17. Blackbirds are usually the last, and probably the best, of the major songsters to get going, but their mellifluous song is due soon. Last week I heard a Stock Dove cooing in St James Churchyard; an hour later I saw what was probably the same bird in my Bridge Road garden (only 200 yards from the church). A first for the garden!

### **Blackcaps**

Blackcaps are unusual in that they are both summer and winter visitors to this country, and a few probably stay here all year. This is known from recoveries of ringed birds. In summer Blackcaps arrive from Africa in huge numbers to nest on Brook Meadow and elsewhere. In winter a smaller number migrate here from the continent and often turn up in gardens. They prefer fruit, though will eat almost anything on offer. I have had a pair visiting my garden in Bridge Road to feed on the half apples hanging from a tree, though only the female (with brown cap) has been seen in the past couple of weeks. I would be interested to hear from anyone else who gets Blackcaps in their garden.

### **Pied Wagtails**

Jill Stanley e-mailed me in the week to say she had four Pied Wagtails in her North Emsworth garden. Pied Wagtails are not common garden birds; the BTO Garden BirdWatch survey indicates that they are recorded in only about 10% of gardens across the country and are currently 26th in the league table for garden birds. However, Pied Wagtails gather in their hundreds around Emsworth Millpond at dusk, probably to roost somewhere warm close-by. Does anyone know where they roost?

### **Local wildlife web site**

For more information and photos of the wildlife mentioned in this report plus other local wildlife news please go to my web site at - <http://www.emsworthwildlife.com/index.html>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 1-2: Dec 29 – Jan 11 2009**

Group Website: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>

### **CONSERVATION NEWS – by Frances Jannaway**

#### **Den over Lumley Stream**

As it was still the Christmas holidays, I was not surprised to get a phone call from Brian Fellows on Saturday 3 January informing me of a den being built along and over the Lumley Stream to the east of the Lumley wet area in Brook Meadow. The den was quite an ingenious structure made of logs and branches which provided the base for several pallets and a very large sheet of thick plastic board. It had been constructed over the previous few days by a group of youths about 12 to 13 years of age, most of whom I think come from the Southbourne area. We are not sure where they got the materials from, possibly the industrial units on Seagull Lane or Palmers Road. That afternoon, I contacted several other members of the BMCG committee and it was decided to dismantle the den on Sunday morning.

Five of us soon dismantled the den and removed about 12 pallets including 2 very large ones, 2 very large plastic advertising boards, a cable drum, several sheets of wooden boarding, a Tesco trolley and a plastic bag of litter. We put all this in a trailer and roof rack. Underneath the structure was a collection of logs and branches obviously taken from the trees which HBC coppiced before Christmas which were left in piles around the meadow. We removed and hid most of the larger branches in the undergrowth but we couldn't deal with all the logs. So after Pam had bravely (it was very cold) fished them out of the water, we piled them up in a log stack and covered them over with dead vegetation. The rest of the clearing up work was left for the subsequent work session.

Richard and I spoke to three of the youths who turned up just as we were leaving. They were polite but clearly fed up that their carefully constructed den had been dismantled and said that there wasn't anywhere in Emsworth where they could do such a thing without being told they mustn't. It is a pity we couldn't involve them in more constructive activities. The BMCG committee has discussed this dilemma at length and take the view that Brook Meadow is first and foremost a Nature Reserve.

#### **Work Session – Thursday 8 January**

As leader of practical work sessions, you are never sure when you are making a list of tasks to be done, how many people will turn up. This was especially true for the first work session of 2009 and during all that very cold weather too! Well the weather was amazingly kind - almost spring like which attracted a record number of volunteers – 14! In addition, a warm welcome to three new volunteers, two of whom joined before Christmas, Phil and Ute Wilde, as well as Stephanie – who was staying with her mum - Beryl Young and thought she would give us a hand. There were three main tasks to be done.

The first was to clear away the piles of brushwood and logs left behind after the tree work carried out by HBC before Christmas. The logs were used to make wood piles in the undergrowth on the eastern side of the meadow. The brushwood was used to create a sort of dead hedge along the length of a path in the central meadow. This is to help the grass and other plants to regenerate after heavy footfall. We plan to put up 2 notices explaining the reason for this.

The second task was to clear away some of the wood chippings from the Seagull Lane entrance to make only one pile. The chippings were used as a mulch around the Oak, Dogwood hedgerow and all the Rowans as well as spread on several paths. The remaining pile of wood chippings will be used up in the same way over time. In addition, we removed a bag of litter from the area where we are planning to plant native trees.

The last job was to finish clearing up the 'Den over the Lumley Stream', including removing a large bread tray and pruning back several broken and overhanging branches. Refreshments were kindly provided by Pam.

#### **Tasks for forthcoming work sessions**

- Preparing ground at Seagull Lane entrance and replanting with native hedgerow plants;
- Servicing and repairing hand tools and power scythe;
- Formative pruning of young trees and other tree pruning work;
- Cutting, raking and removing arisings from part of sedgey area in Central Meadow.

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 18 January and Thursday 5 February.

#### **Water levels in River Ems**

Despite the lack of rain, water levels are high in the River Ems. This may be partly accounted for by the Lumley sluice gates being down which direct water down the River Ems through Brook Meadow rather than the Lumley Stream. The aquifers must also be full. The flow rate of the River Ems is being regularly monitored by the Environment Agency. Last Thursday, I spoke to an EA man who was measuring the flow near the north bridge. I believe Brian spoke to the same man about a month or so ago.

## **LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS – by Brian Fellows**

### **Water Voles**

Caroline French had the honour of having the last Water Vole sighting of 2008 (Dec 26) and the first sighting of 2009 (Jan 10). Both sightings (probably of the same animal) were made upstream of the bridge over the river near the Seagull Lane entrance to Brook Meadow. The latter sighting means that Water Voles have now been seen in every month of the year. Details of the Water Vole sightings can be found on the group web site at <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

### **The big freeze**

Our local birds will have been badly affected by the sub-zero temperatures; with ponds frozen over, fields frozen and even the mudflats covered with frost, food will have been very hard to find. All the more important for us to put food out for garden birds, including fruit, and to keep bird baths clear of ice. For the first time in over a decade, nature conservation bodies, including the RSPB put out an urgent call to birdwatchers, walkers, anglers and water sports enthusiasts to avoid disturbing to ducks, geese, swans and wading birds on lakes, rivers, wetlands, and coastal areas.

### **Millpond news**

With the local millponds largely frozen over, most of the swans and ducks moved onto the harbour, though a few continued to struggle in the ever shrinking areas of non-frozen water. There has been an influx of Coot into Emsworth Harbour from frozen inland lakes; at least 80 were milling around beneath the quay at the end of South Street at high water this morning, trying to snatch morsels of bread thrown to the mobs of frenzied gulls.

Kingfishers are usually prominent when temperatures fall and only this morning I had a great view of two flying past me as I stood on the small bridge at the northern end of Peter Pond, one passing under the bridge and the other over the top. I saw another flying up Dolphin Lake.

### **Garden birds**

Sub-zero temperatures usually mean more birds in the garden. The most interesting birds in my garden in the centre of Emsworth has been a pair of Blackcaps, the male with a black cap and the female with a brown one. They have mainly been feeding on the apples I have had hanging up, though I have also seen them hunting through the shrubs for insects. I put some mince pies, left over from Xmas, on the bird table, but the only bird to take an interest in them was a Robin. I also had a Goldcrest on a couple of occasions; they do seem to be particularly numerous at the moment. But I have not seen a Greenfinch for weeks. I was wondering if they had become extinct until I read about a roost of 300 or so at Walworth Estate in Andover.

### **Other local bird news**

Caroline French saw what she thought might be a Snipe flying south under the wooden bridge over the river near Palmer's Road Car Park. She did not get a good view, but it is difficult to imagine what else it could have been. This would be a first for Brook Meadow, though I have frequently seen Snipe on the River Ems north of the A27 to Westbourne.

I had a phone call from Barry Kingsmith with the astonishing news that he had seen a Great White Egret on Nutbourne Meadow at the end of Farm Lane on Dec 7. The Great White Egret is a much larger bird than the Little Egret and has a yellowish bill, but it is also very much rarer. So far, there has been no other report to substantiate Barry's sighting, the nearest being at Blashford Lakes on Jan 1.

### **Local harbour news**

A Bittern turned up on Farlington Marshes last week, not a twitcher's bird, but rare enough to get local birdwatchers pretty excited. It also featured in the Portsmouth News with a nice photo from Jason Crook. I had a quick look for it on Saturday, but no one had seen it that morning, so I left empty handed. It has not been reported since, so could have gone.

I did a WeBS count at Black Point wader roost on Hayling Island on Saturday morning. Dominating the roost were some 2,000 Dunlin, all huddled together in an unbroken brown mass. Also on the spit, trying to keep warm were Knot, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Turnstone and Curlew, plus a few Sanderling which were scuttling around the frosty shingle like tiny ghosts.

### **Local wildlife web site**

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