

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 51-52, 19 to 31 Dec 2011**

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

### **CONSERVATION REVIEW OF 2011 - by Wally Osborne**

#### ***Practical Work***

Out of 24 practical work sessions held during the year 2011, only 1 was abandoned due to bad weather, a testament to the dedication of all of the average 10 Volunteers per session, who put in a total of 480 hours of conservation effort. As always the sessions were organised to BTCV standards, with our 4 experienced Volunteer Leaders providing the task and safety briefings and latterly, joined by 2 newly qualified Leaders Lesley Harris and Maurice Lillie who will share the load in future.

General work - The cruel weather of early 2011 left the Meadow a sorry sight but, in the first quarter, we managed to complete a good amount of formative pruning and selective bramble control plus the finishing of our annual schedule of the grassland mosaic cutting. Palmers Road Copse paths were spread with wood chippings arising from some nearby tree surgery work and a lot of effort was put into blocking off unauthorised paths out of Gooseberry Cottage onto the South Meadow, plus creating dead hedges on riverbanks to protect Water Vole habitats from dog intrusions.

Path maintenance - The vigorous spring vegetation growth always creates work for us in keeping the occasional paths open to all visitors through both hand and power scythe cutting, whilst appreciating the wonderful wild flowers developing. Some new paths were cut in an attempt to relieve footfall on some of the heavily used stretches, and as ever, visitors created their own new routes which we try to discourage by brushwood barriers, particularly around the North Meadow wild flower rich area.

Annual cut - The annual cut by our Contractor (paid for by HBC), began rather late this year, following the standard practice of mosaic cutting non-adjacent sections, which had not been cut in 2010. This work included the cutting of the heavily overgrown northern most part of the South Meadow, not done for many years and now included in a 3-year rotational cut system. A further benefit from this work was the access provided to the Alder Buckthorn plantation to enable it's nurturing.

Special projects - In the last quarter, two rather special projects were begun at the instigation of the New Committee, in addition to the usual work of keeping the site tidy and free from litter. Firstly, the Hawthorn hedge planted in the North Meadow about 7 years ago was 'laid in the midland style' by a strong team led by Mike Probert and, as he said, it is 'a pukka job'. Secondly, they decided to plan and execute the extension of the Native Hedgerow along the western boundary of the Seagull Lane patch, taking advantage of the Woodland Trust scheme, which celebrates the Queen's Jubilee. This project entailed the somewhat controversial removal of a large patch of brambles and it is now ongoing towards the planting date of 4<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

Tree Work - The big stock of Crack Willows across the site need regular attention and 3 in Palmers Road Copse were pollarded by HBC early in 2011 whilst volunteers started the 'cut back' of many big branches fallen across the river below the North Bridge. In late summer, a huge collapse of Crack Willow across the river 'S bend' required a big clearance effort by volunteers, supported by HBC's Andrew Skeet. HBC and BMCG shared the cost of the tree surgery work needed to complete the clear up of the area and we now look forward to the spring growth masking the 'desolation'.

Child visits - During the year we welcomed visits by the Emsworth Guides as part of their 'Service to the Community' and also 4 pupils of Glenwood School who helped with our work. We thank Pam Phillips for providing hot tea, coffee and biscuits to volunteers, whilst being a very active one herself.

See web site - for reports and photos of all Brook Meadow work and activities - address below  
Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January & Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2012

#### ***Annual Inspection of Brook Meadow Trees***

The annual inspection of the Meadow estate of trees by HBC Arborist Andrew Skeet, took place on 16<sup>th</sup> December with the Group represented by Maurice Lillie and Frances Jannaway. This inspection enables us to give Andrew our views and also aids his preparations for his Budget for year 2012 / 13.

The visit was very constructive and the following work may be done during January 2012:

In Palmers Road Copse a number of Crack Willows will be pruned and a White Willow pollarded. On the eastern riverbank in South Meadow, two large Crack Willows leaning towards the footpath will have their lower branches removed to reduce the load upon them. At the river 'S' bend east bank in the North Meadow, a previously pollarded Crack Willow will be done again.

#### ***Final word***

As your new Chairman, I would like to thank all Members for their continued support of the work of BMCG through their subscriptions and donations, both large and small. We can always use of some additional Volunteer Workers but if you are unable to help in a physical way, your moral support and financial contributions enable us to maintain the meadow as a much loved Local Nature Reserve.

## **WILDLIFE REVIEW OF 2011 - by Brian Fellows**

### **Water Voles**

A total of 86 Water Vole sightings were reported to me in 2011 which is a slight improvement on last year's total of 77, but well down on 2008 (124) and 2009 (161). Good news was that Water Voles were seen in all sections of the river, suggesting that several pairs were in residence. Not such good news was the presence Brown Rats on the river banks. Thanks to Jeff Fleming on his long vole watching vigils for alerting us to this problem. Rats can cause serious damage to a small population of voles like ours, by predated youngsters and spreading disease. David Gattrell sets traps for rats on Peter Pond and this is something we need to consider on Brook Meadow. All the Water Vole news and photos are on a special page on the Brook Meadow web site - address below.

### **Birds of Brook Meadow**

52 birds were recorded on Brook Meadow in 2011 from a total of 71 on the all-time list. All the common residents were present, ie, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Gt Spot Woodpecker, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, House Sparrow, Collared Dove and Woodpigeon.

As for warblers, all three of our regular summer visitors, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Whitethroat, arrived on time, though their breeding success was not clear. We also had a fleeting visit from a Cuckoo and the Cetti's Warbler, which was regular in 2010, showed up briefly in spring and went.

Of the corvids, Carrion Crows and Magpies were ever present and a Jay was often spotted flying towards Lumley, where it probably nests. We have also had regular sightings of Nuthatch in the north-east corner, though this is probably a visitor from Constant Springs.

Meanwhile, on the river, Little Egret, Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail were frequently seen and at least 3 pairs of Moorhens nested along the river banks, and probably Mallard, as well, though how many youngsters survived is anyone's guess.

Of the birds of prey, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk were often seen over the meadow, but we missed the 'resident' Buzzard which we had last year. Other notable absentees in 2011 were Water Rail, last seen in 2008, Turtle Dove, not seen since the summer of 2008 and Mistle Thrush, which has nested near the south bridge. The full bird list for Brook Meadow is on the web site - address below.

### **Flowers**

A total of 255 plant species were recorded on the Brook Meadow site in 2011, from a total plant list of 335. Some on the complete list were one year casuals and others have not been seen for many years and are probably gone for good. However, all 12 of our sedges were found, with Divided Sedge and Distant Sedge (a meadow indicator) doing particularly well on the Lumley area.

Of the other meadow indicators Hoary Ragwort showed well on the west side of the north meadow and Strawberry Clover likewise on the path round the Lumley area. Pepper-saxifrage came up on the Lumley area as usual, but I could not find any Marsh Arrowgrass despite a lot of searching!

Tall Fescue dominated the grassland, while the rare Festulolium Hybrids were also showing well.

As for the orchids, seven Southern Marsh Orchids came up where two were planted in 2005. We found 8 Common Spotted Orchids, but Bee Orchids (2 plants) and Pyramidals (only 1) were very hard to find.

Of the two plants that I count every year on Brook Meadow, Butterbur continues to go from strength to strength with a record 859 flower spikes in 2011. A large increase over the past three years is mainly due to the continued spread of plants onto the meadow in front of the seat, which now accounts for over 40% of all the plants on the meadow. In contrast, I was only able to find a maximum of 214 flowering plants of Ragged Robin on the Lumley area, which was well below the record set last year of 625, but that was exceptional. The full plant list is on the web site - address below.

### **Insects**

21 species of butterfly were seen on the meadow in 2011, including Brown Argus and Ringlet, which are fast becoming Brook Meadow regulars. Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper were abundant in the summer, but Small Tortoiseshell continues to be scarce. Of the migrants, Painted Lady was very scarce and Clouded Yellow was not seen at all. Again see the web site for the full list.

Of the other insects, we had plenty of Ladybirds, Soldier Beetles, Froghoppers, Hover flies, Meadow Grasshoppers and Bush-crickets. Richard Somerscocks spent hours stalking damselflies and dragonflies with his camera lens and got some great images for the web sites.

### **Brook Meadow web site . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/>**

This has details of all the wildlife in this review as well as conservation activities (and lots more)

### **Emsworth Wildlife Web site . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/>**

This community web site has a daily wildlife diary (blog) of local wildlife news and photos, plus special pages on the Spotted Redshank, Black-tailed Godwits and millpond birds.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 49-50, 5 to 18 Dec 2011**

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

### **CONSERVATION NEWS - by Wally Osborne**

#### **Work session – Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December**

The last workday of 2011 was lead by Maurice Lillie and there was a good turnout of 10 Volunteers on a cold but bright day. The main job was to continue the arduous task of clearing bramble roots from the newly exposed part of the Seagull Lane patch, part of the overall task of preparing for the planting of the extension to the Native Hedgerow along the western boundary. The 'Whips', which are scheduled to be planted on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> March, have been obtained from the Woodland Trust as part of the celebrations of the Queen's Jubilee. Brian Fellows was on hand to photograph proceedings and was asked about possible planting of the disturbed ground now exposed and he expressed the opinion that it would probably be best to do nothing, but 'wait and see' what emerged from the 'seed bank' already in the ground, in the springtime.

Following the work session, the Volunteers congregated at Ted & Penny Aylett's house to enjoy some seasonal warming refreshments. This get together has become something of a BMCG tradition, highly valued and appreciated by all of the Volunteers. Many thanks to Ted & Penny for their hospitality and to all of the workers for their efforts during 2011.

Photos of the work session are now on the Brook Meadow web site 'blog' page.

<http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-diary-2011.html>

#### **Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January & Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2012**

#### **Hedgelaying Project - 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> December 2011**

Following his suggestion a couple of years ago, it was agreed that Mike and a team of volunteers should lay the planted Hawthorn hedge on the Western side of the border between the North and Central Meadows. The hedge had been planted about seven years earlier and the individual stems had grown tall and slim possibly due to shading by nearby Willows.

A total of eight volunteers ably assisted Mike in rotation over two fine, if windy, days and all the pleachers (laid, living stems) were well cut and laid into the structure of the hedge which also used hazel stakes and binders cut by Mike courtesy of the Harbour Conservancy. The hedge was laid in the 'Midland' style, which is very similar to the 'Southern' style apart from the detail of the binding. The laid hedge forms a tight physical structure into which new Hawthorn shoots will grow rapidly in the coming years to make a dense new hedge, ready for laying again perhaps in ten to fifteen years!

Thanks go to all those involved in laying the hedge – a quality job! The work progressed pretty smoothly apart from Mike's lunchtime sandwich being grabbed and swallowed by an out-of-control Doberman on day 1 and a (presumed) sleeping bee stinging his knee later that afternoon! Photographs of the hedge 'before', during' and 'after' will be shown on the Group Website - address below.

Many thanks to Mike for his dedication and leadership of this task, a 'first' for the Meadow, very rewarding and much enjoyed by all of the Volunteers and also passing visitors who commented favourably.

*Annual Inspection of Trees* – On 16<sup>th</sup> December, Maurice Lillie and Frances Jannaway met with HBC Arborist Andrew Skeet for the annual inspection of the estate of trees on the meadow, in preparation for the their 'hoped for' inclusion in Andrew's Budget Planning for 2012 / 13. We shall report on the outcome of this site visit at the next opportunity.

*Seasons Greetings* – On behalf of the BMCG Committee, may I offer you our sincere Good Wishes for an enjoyable Christmas holiday and a safe, prosperous New Year. Additionally, as your new Chairman, I would like to thank all Members for their continued support of the work of BMCG, through their subscriptions and donations, both large and small. We can always make good use of some additional Volunteer Workers but if you are unable to help in that physical way, your moral and financial contributions enable us to maintain the Meadow as a much loved Local Nature Reserve, open to all.

#### **Emsworth Waysides News - from Brian Fellows**

The annual cutting of the waysides has now been completed and the arisings raked and removed from most of them to facilitate the growth of spring flowers. The Winter Heliotrope on the A259 embankment by the surgery has been spared! Our thanks to Andy and Rod of the Friends of Hollybank Woods for cutting the Bridge Road Wayside and to Brook Meadow volunteers for their help with clearing. Rachel Moroney from the BTCV was present to verify that the group were carrying out all the required health and safety procedures in accordance with the Public Liability Insurance.

More news on the web site. . . <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/few-NEWS.htm>

## **WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows**

### **Bird news**

I have been keeping an eye on the Crab Apple trees around the town, which are laden with juicy red fruit. But, there has been no sign of any winter thrushes as yet, but hopefully they will come. Walking through Brook Meadow this morning, I heard several birds singing in preparation for spring; Goldfinch, Robin, Great Tit and Woodpigeon, plus a snatch of Blue Tit song in Palmer's Road Copse. Two Dunlocks were calling and flicking their wings to one another in courtship display, in the hedgerow on Lumley Road, and one gave a short burst of song. Meanwhile, a Grey Heron flew leisurely onto the icy water of Peter Pond and took up station in the sunshine on the edge of the reedbeds. Perfick! Patrick Murphy and Pam Phillips have seen Goldcrests on Brook Meadow in the past week and Richard Somerscocks got a cracking photo of one in Nore Barn Woods - photo on web site. Goldcrests are tiny active little birds with a distinctive yellow crown. I have had one in my garden. Richard also got excellent views of the Bearded Tits on Thorney Little Deeps this morning. Chichester Harbour Conservancy has erected a nesting platform for Ospreys on a landing light on the east side of North Thorney. Ospreys are common in this area on passage, but have never nested.

### **Millpond news**

One of the Cormorants on Slipper Millpond is in breeding plumage, having a magnificent 'judge's wig' (ie grey head) and a white thigh patch (or 'roundel'). Gavin Millar of the Slipper Millpond Association says the rare Tube Worms that live in the mud at the bottom of the pond have had a good breeding season. Large colonies of the coral-like worm casts were prominent when the sluice gates were opened to let the water out. Ralph Hollins noticed the tiny yellow flowers of Prickly Lettuce were out on the west bank of Slipper Millpond. Ralph has seen them flowering in several places recently, but says they are easy to overlook.

### **Yellow Dung Flies**

As I was admiring the magnificent flower heads of Hogweed, which are still standing tall on Brook Meadow, I noticed a couple of gingery hairy flies on the flowers. They were Yellow Dung Flies, which are mostly predators on smaller insects. This is the case with one of the flies that I saw, which appeared to be eating another insect. Both males and females are found on dung heaps, the males only feeding on other insects that visit dung, such as blow-flies. Females will be there both to feed and oviposit on the dung surface. The BBC has a video of Chris Packham studying a group of Yellow Dung Flies on a cow pat. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Scathophaga\\_stercoraria#p007q9y7](http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Scathophaga_stercoraria#p007q9y7)

### **Cattle Egret**

News came through this morning to get birdwatchers' hearts racing, of a Cattle Egret on the large field with cattle at the end of Church Lane, Warblington. Ralph Hollins says the best view is from the field gate where you turn towards the church. Cattle Egret is best distinguished from the Little Egrets in the same field by its thick pale bill, shorter neck and generally stockier build. It should be there for a few days, at least. The last one we had in this field was in January 2006 and attracted many birdwatchers.

### **Fungi**

The Wood Blewitt growing around the young commemorative Oak tree just inside the Seagull Lane gate to Brook Meadow is still looking good. The tree could possibly account for their presence at this spot. Incidentally, the Oak shows up very well now the large area of Brambles have been cleared.

### **Mistletoe**

To end on a seasonal note, Mistletoe is plentiful and prominent on trees around Emsworth, though most is well out of our reach! I checked on the Mistletoe growing on an Ivy-covered Hawthorn bush on Brook Meadow and found it healthy, but without berries, which presumably means it is a male plant. Mistletoe is a dioecious plant, having male and female flowers on separate plants. We have just one species in Britain - *Viscum album*. The Latin name refers to the berries - which are white (album) and contain a sticky viscous fluid (Viscum). There is also some male Mistletoe on a Hawthorn on the Bridge Road Wayside. Hawthorn is the third most popular host for Mistletoe, after Apple and Lime. An article by Jonathan Briggs in the current issue of British Wildlife (October 2011) indicates that Mistletoe is on the increase and is spreading, despite the demise of orchards. Interestingly, one possible reason for the change is the increase in wintering Blackcaps, which are the most effective bird in planting Mistletoe seeds on the branches of trees and shrubs.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

**CONSERVATION NEWS - by Wally Osborne**

**Work session – Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> December**

10 Volunteers turned out on a cold, grey but dry morning and after the briefing at Lumley Gate, we decamped into the north meadow and the Seagull Lane patch. The north meadow group took advantage of the continuing low water levels in the River Ems, to rake out all of the accumulated winter tree debris, onto the riverbanks, and at the same time remove any litter. In this way, the stretch of river from the NW corner through to below the 'S' bend was cleared so that increased water flow will not cause any blockages. The larger group went to the Seagull Lane patch, where our contractor's clearance job (see Native Hedge Project Extension below) left behind a field of bramble and nettle roots. We set to with forks to dig out as many roots as possible before raking the cleared area of all arisings and taking them to the sacrificial dump area. This was a really tough job and the volunteers stuck at it 'manfully' and 'womanfully', to make an excellent start on a task, which will occupy a few more workdays ahead.

We know very well that the brambles will start to regrow in the spring but our future tactics will be to keep this area under control, since there are very ample bramble patches close by. Many thanks for the dedication and effort by Jennifer, Maurice, Patrick, Richard, Mike, Tony, Gordon Dave and Penny. Photos of the work session are now on the Brook Meadow web site 'blog' page.

<http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-diary-2011.html>

**Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December & Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2012**

Come and join us for the next workday when seasonal refreshments will be provided.

***Native Hedge Project Extension***

A couple of years ago, a native hedgerow was planted along a section of the western boundary of the Seagull Lane patch and it is now getting quite well established. We have decided to extend the hedge by about 20 metres, up to the railway embankment fence. The Woodland Trust Jubilee Woods project is giving both trees and hedgerow plants free of charge to approved organisations and BMCG have been selected as a worthy cause. Preparations for the extension are already underway and you may have noticed that the large patch of brambles has been scrapped off and the arisings pushed as far as the embankment fence. This action may appear to be drastic to some but the Committee decided that the timing was right for it and our next workdays will see the site tidied up ready for a new length of stock fencing to be erected, protecting the site. The planting strip of ground will then be prepared for planting of the 'native hedgerow whips' with their protective sleeves, in early March 2012. At that time we will be looking for extra help with the planting and would therefore encourage both old and new Volunteers to come along and help with this worthwhile project. Details will be published in the new-year. Project completion will enable us to restore the newly 'exposed ground' back into a wild flower rich meadow, joining into the rest of the Seagull Lane patch.

***Hedge Laying***

We've talked about the need to 'lay' the short Hawthorn Hedgerow planted some years ago and located near to the central line of Crack Willows and intended to provide both a habitat and a food source for birds. The job has now been organised to go ahead on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> & Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> December (weather permitting), using stakes and ties obtained free of charge by Mike Probert.

Mike has some experience & training in hedge laying and a rota of Volunteer Member helpers will support him during both mornings & afternoons. We are uncertain how long the job will take us but if you would like to watch the work in progress or even assist, just turn up on the appointed days.

***Membership***

Our 'final reminder procedure' has yielded a good number of late renewals from Members to make the total membership today up to 254. This number is 42 lower than last years figure and whilst we will now stop following up the lapsed members, we will certainly continue to accept both renewals and new members. Distribution lists for both the 'paper' Quarterly Newsletter and the fortnightly e-mail notes will now be changed to include current members only.

***Brook Meadow Diary 'blog'*** - A new page on the Brook Meadow web site has reports and photos of conservation work, events, wildlife observations, surveys, etc. on the meadow. Please send any news of interest relating to the meadow. <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-diary-2011.html>

### **Harbour news**

Black-tailed Godwits continue to delight in Emsworth Harbour, particularly on the western shore, where Richard Somerscocks and I had about 150 on Saturday afternoon (Dec 3), not quite a record, but we did have two new colour-ringed birds, one never seen before in Emsworth.

News and photos of all the Godwit colour-ringed sightings are on the Emsworth wildlife web site <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/x-black-tailed-godwit-c-ring.htm>

The western harbour is also filling up with migrant ducks, particularly Wigeon and Teal. We also have several Pintail, the male of which is a most handsome bird, irresistible to female Pintails!

And our 'resident' Spotted Redshank has a 'mate'; a second Spotted Redshank has been seen in the Nore Barn stream on two occasions over the past week. They just tolerate one another.

### **Grey Wagtail**

During litter picking at today's work session on Brook Meadow, Penny Aylett saw a Grey Wagtail in the river in the north-east corner of the meadow. This was our first sighting of this common winter visitor to Brook Meadow, where they just love the shallow clear running water of the River Ems. During the breeding season, Grey Wagtails prefer fast running streams of the hill country, but in winter they disperse towards the coast and are often seen in town centres.

### **Short-eared Owl**

I had the pleasure of watching a Short-eared Owl leisurely quartering over the rough pasture on the west side of Thorney Island between Little Deeps and Great Deeps, in the large field immediately west of the guard house on the main Thorney Road. It perched briefly on a post where I got it in the scope, but it flew before I could get a photo. Short-eared Owl is a day flying owl and very easy to see and recognise from its low and leisurely flight. Over the years, I have had lots of Short-eared Owl sightings on North Thorney and Thornham Point. One experience stands out, during a WeBS count on Hayling in the early 1990s, when seven were hunting below me as I stood on the seawall at Tournurbury Farm.

### **Other bird news**

Southsea Castle is the best place to see the rare Purple Sandpipers. Tony Wootton was there on Dec 2 when he got good views of 8 on the rocks in front of the castle. See the web site for his photo.

Caroline and Ray French had a good day out at Pulborough Brooks on Dec 2, where they saw a large flock of Fieldfares (c60), with a few Redwings among them. I have not heard of any Fieldfares locally, but Pulborough is not that far, and the local trees are loaded with juicy red crab apples.

Official figures reveal that Turtle Doves are the UK's most threatened farmland bird, with populations falling dramatically since the 1970s. They badly need ecological farming methods (e.g. set aside and wild strips around fields) and French and Spanish hunters to stop shooting them on migration.

### **Plant news**

Winter Heliotrope flowers are now showing well on the main river path through Brook Meadow. Do not confuse Winter Heliotrope with Butterbur, which has much larger leaves and flowers in the spring.

Hogweed plants are very prominent on Brook Meadow, many showing a full bloom of white and pink umbellifer flower heads, attracting the occasional late fly.

Meadow Buttercup at the southern end of the Bramble path is still in flower (with 7 flowers), though the plant itself has been blown over. This plant has been flowering here for several weeks.

Sweet Violets are now flowering on the grass verge on Warblington Road (opposite number 26)

### **Seaweed**

Emsworth east beach is presently covered with a carpet of bright green seaweed called Sea Lettuce (*Ulva lactuca*). The name is appropriate as it has lettuce-like 'leaves' or fronds, which are exceedingly thin (40 microns). It is worth prising open a frond to reveal the beautiful green membranous thin sheet, rather like delicate silk. Also, present is an olive brown seaweed called Egg Wrack (*Ascophyllum nodosum*), named after the egg-shaped bladders at intervals along the middle of the frond.

### **Honey Fungus**

There seems to be a lot of this about. There is a clump on a tree stump on the Havant Road and more on a Crack Willow on Brook Meadow. It varies in colour from yellow to red-brown, but the give-away feature is the yellowish ring on the stem. Honey Fungus is a destructive species which can kill trees by choking the vessels which carry the tree's nutrients. See web site for photos.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 45-46, 7 to 20 November**

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

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

#### **Work session**

Thursday 17 November - Splendid warm and sunny weather greeted the 12 volunteers including a new volunteer, Jane, for the last work session in November. The main task was to cut, rake and remove the arisings from the Lumley wet area which was successfully completed with Maurice on power scythe by the tea break provided as always by Pam. Another task was to carry out a thorough litter pick of the whole meadow including Palmers Road copse. This yielded 3 bags of rubbish including a bird feeder and a pair of shoes. In addition, all the sign cases were given an expert clean by Lesley. Finally, several paths in the central and north meadows were widened with Patrick and Phil on power scythe and the arisings raked and removed. The same treatment was given to the area around the Hawthorn hedge just north of the central line of willows in preparation for it being laid by Mike and his band of merry volunteers in a few weeks time.

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 4 Dec and \*\*Thursday 15 December\*\*

Please note: The first work session of 2012 will be on Sunday 8 January.

#### **Christmas cheer**

After the last work session of 2011 on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> December, Volunteers will be treated to a seasonal glass of something that 'warms' plus mince pies kindly provided by Penny & Ted Aylett, at 13 The Rookery, Lumley Road, Emsworth. Come and join us if you can.

#### **Work Party with Hampshire Wildlife Trust Watch Group**

Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November – report by Lesley Harris. Six young people with their leader, Sally Rumpfelt and assistant Judy, plus two accompanying adults, turned up in the warm sunshine to help rake and bag the arisings from the mown wildflower area in the North Meadow. Great fun was had dragging, spreading and trampling in the sacrificial area. Curtis, wearing camouflage jacket and hood, disappeared into the soft heap for several rests. Oliver, the oldest boy, was inspired by the power scythe and helped Richard to move and clean the machine. It was great to see Richard Jannaway working in Brook Meadow after so long *hors de combat*. Laura was delighted to find a Field Vole nest and Isla, Erin and Sarah were the indefatigable workers, dragging heavy branches to protect the wildflower area from excessive footfall. Several boys and girls had a go at using a bow saw. Frances led the work session assisted by Jennifer, Lesley and Pam, who also provided welcome refreshments. One lesson we learnt was to request that girls (and boys) with long hair tie it up to prevent it getting tangled up between branch and bow saw! Photos to come on website.

#### **Fly tipping at Seagull Lane entrance yet again!**

When walking to Brook Meadow for the Watch Group visit on Saturday morning, I noticed a pile of rubble and soil dumped in front of the fence next to the entrance to Brook Meadow. This has happened so many times before, admittedly with varying types of material being tipped, I ask myself if this is the same culprit each time? Are they just lazy or have they got something against Brook Meadow? I will report the incident to HBC on Monday and get it removed – what a waste of HBC's time and resources!

#### **Membership renewals for year 2011/2012 – Wally Osborne**

Total Group Membership on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2011 has risen to 239 and is growing daily. This is in response to the final reminders which have been sent out to all 'lapsed households', by variously mail, e-mail or by hand. If yours is one of the 54 households not yet renewed, there is still time and if you need to check on your membership status just call me on 01243 375433 or 07787 966162 and otherwise by e-mail at [wjn545@homecall.co.uk](mailto:wjn545@homecall.co.uk)

#### **Emsworth Waysides News - from Brian Fellows**

The Havant Biodiversity Action Plan has been published and is available to download from the HBC website at <http://www.havant.gov.uk/havant-12025> The good work of the Emsworth waysides group in promoting biodiversity is strongly acknowledged, with recommendations that the scheme should be expanded and that HBIC should continue to support Emsworth waysides group with road verge surveys and SINC designations. That's brilliant! Meanwhile, we are pressing on with the clearance of arisings from the cut waysides. See web site: <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/>

**Brook Meadow Diary 'blog'** - A new page on the Brook Meadow web site has reports and photos of conservation work, events, wildlife observations, surveys, etc. on the meadow. Please send any news of interest relating to the meadow. <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-diary-2011.html>

## **WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows**

### **Harbour news**

Wintering birds are now settling down in the local harbours. Brent Geese still dominate the scene, with good numbers of Wigeon and Teal also prominent at Nore Barn. Black-tailed Godwits can usually be seen feeding in small flocks, to the west of Emsworth, while Dunlin and Ringed Plovers have been showing well on the mudflats to the east of the Emsworth Sailing Club building. A colour-ringed Ringed Plover sent me searching internationally for its origins, until I discovered it was ringed on Hayling Island this September by Pete Potts and his merry men. On the same occasion Pete also ringed lots of Sanderling, so keep a look out for them on the beaches. The Spotted Redshank is still turning up in the Nore Barn stream, though not with the regularity of previous years.

### **Millpond news**

I am surprised at how little there is on the millponds. Only a few wintering Tufted Duck have so far appeared on the town millpond and there has been no sign of Great Crested Grebe or Red-breasted Merganser as far as I am aware, but please let me know if you spot any. Wintering Coot numbers on Slipper Millpond are up to 60 and Cormorants are settling in on the main raft. The unusual and quite rare tube worm casts, rather like corals, can be seen now the water is out of the pond.

### **Other bird news**

Nutbourne Bay is always a good place for birdwatchers with masses of geese, ducks and waders, but the stars are the Avocets. There were 9 when I was there on Nov 16, and numbers were up to 15 two days later when Janet Hider saw them. We never ever get Avocets in Emsworth Harbour. Why is that? House Sparrows are increasingly scarce birds, but we have several flocks in Emsworth, which can be heard chirruping away in dense hedges, usually towards dusk. I have had a couple of House Sparrows coming onto the feeders in my garden, but numbers have plummeted over the last 10 years. Peter Milinets-Raby counted 132 Little Egrets going into the Wade Court roost site on Nov 9. The BTO reported the first of the five satellite-tagged Cuckoos crossed the Equator on 25th October. See their progress at . . . <http://ctt-news.org/NXN-LBN8-3GJW16-88H3V-0/c.aspx>

### **Plant news**

I counted 23 plants in flower on Brook Meadow this week, plus 6 grasses with spikelets. Winter Heliotrope is the only plant that is supposed to flower in winter; it is well out on the roadside embankment near Emsworth surgery and has just started on the river path on Brook Meadow. It has a wonderful aroma brighten a winter's walk. A fine Meadow Buttercup has been in flower on the Bramble path on Brook Meadow for the past 2 weeks and a new Cow Parsley is out on the river path. Further afield, an unusual rayed form of Groundsel can be seen on the edge of the large field with round straw bales on the church path to Warblington.

### **Black Walnut**

My friend Jack Garvey presented me with a round nut, asking if I knew what it was. It looked like a walnut, but it had a tougher, rounded and less wrinkly shell. I gave up, so Jack told me it was a Black Walnut. Having never heard of it, I did a bit of research. Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) is a large deciduous tree native to eastern North America and introduced into Europe in 1629, but only occasionally planted in this country. The nut is very hard and special nutcrackers are sold in America to open them. Does anyone know where I could see one locally?

### **Godwits spurting water?**

The experts remain baffled over the photos of Black-tailed Godwits spurting water from their bills. I cannot believe the behaviour is that unusual. Sid Davies sent me a photo he took 2 years ago of a Godwit doing exactly the same as the ones I saw recently at Nore Barn. Ralph Hollins suggests the birds could be unusually hungry and are forcing the water out through a minimal gap between the mandibles to catch the tiniest of food items, rather like a Shoveler duck sieves its food out of water. Another thought by Ralph is that the birds were washing out their bills to get rid of a nasty taste. Nice one! Any other ideas? The photos and discussion can be seen on the Emsworth web site - Nov 17.

### **Other news**

Red Admirals have been everywhere over the past week, but no other butterflies. A splendid Shaggy Parasol mushroom was showing well on the Church path from Nore Barn to Warblington. Jill Stanley found a cluster of Sulphur Tufts on the grass verge outside her house in Helston Drive.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 43-44, 23 October to 6 November**

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

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

#### **Work session**

Sunday 6 November, report by Wally Osborne.

Contrary to the forecast, the morning was bright but with a chill wind which encouraged the 11 Volunteers to get going promptly on the many tasks listed and awaiting action. Firstly, Maureen and Tony Wilkinson set off to cover the badly needed litter pick of the Palmers Road Copse and everywhere else, this task taking the best part of an hour. The remainder of us, Pam, Richard, Lesley, Tony B, Debi, Penny & Patrick, set about clearing the dense bramble and nettle growths, crowding out the Alder Buckthorn plantation on the southern slope of the central bund. The recent annual cut of the northern section of the South Meadow has exposed the site and made this arduous task a little easier to get at although the cutting with shears, raking, bagging and removal of the arisings was a mammoth task. The team stuck at it both before and after the coffee break served up by Pam. Meanwhile, Maurice used the Power Scythe to cut a small nearby area of scrub/low bramble and cut the exposed bramble stems to ground level where possible. Later, Patrick took over, to widen the South Meadow occasional paths. These tasks took the whole of the session so that the other ones on our list remain there 'waiting for another day'. We were pleased to have Brian Fellows on hand to photograph some of our activities in progress and intend to ask him to take a picture of the completed job, giving a 'before and after' record. As we stood admiring the results of our labours, Pam spotted a Weasel coming out of nearby undergrowth and then turning to dash back in. To our great surprise, all of us then saw the creature dash 20 metres or so across the open ground and disappear into a remaining patch of brambles. Unfortunately, Brian had moved on before this happening.

Thanks to all Volunteers for the sterling efforts which warmed us through thoroughly and, hopefully, we'll meet again Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> November, for an action replay.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 17 November, Sunday 4 & Thursday 15 December

#### **Tree Work**

As reported in previous conservation news, a number of large Crack Willow trees have fallen over the River Ems south of the s-bend. Volunteers cut and removed most of the brushwood at the last two work sessions to enable tree surgeons to cut down the large trunks with chain saws and move them out of sight into the undergrowth, work which BMCG volunteers are unable to do. This work was partly carried out on Thursday 27 October. However, there are still two piles of large logs on the western riverbank close to the river which need to be moved into the undergrowth about which Andrew Skeet has been contacted. The costs of this work are being shared jointly by HBC and BMCG.

#### **Pollution in River Ems**

Last weekend, Lesley Harris reported seeing some white effluent in the outfall pipe into the River Ems near the north bridge. There have been previous pollution incidents in the past, namely in March this year and before that in 2009 and 2007. The culprit in all three incidents was the anodising unit on Seagull Lane. Over the last few weeks, I have noticed work being carried out at the front of the industrial unit presumably to the process water plant? The incident has been reported to the Environment Agency. Please keep a look out for any further pollution and let Mike or Wally know.

#### **Membership News**

Our membership for year 2011 / 2012 now stands at 205 which is quite disappointing compared to the 296 at the same time last year. Renewals have now almost stopped but we do not give up that easily and the 75 households with 105 members, will shortly be receiving 'personalised' final reminders, either e-mail, post or hand delivery. At the end of November, we shall change our various circulation lists to exclude those 'lapsed members' who have not renewed. Please contact me on 01243 375433, 07787 966162 or [wjn545@homecall.co.uk](mailto:wjn545@homecall.co.uk) for further help or information. BMCG values very highly the support of the Membership and it is not necessary to do active physical work.

#### **Waysides News - by Brian Fellows**

The annual cutting of the Emsworth waysides is now underway. Thanks to Richard Denman and his merry men of HBC for their good work. Many of the sites have already been cut and we now need to organise work parties to rake up and clear the arisings ready for next spring. We shall need some extra help with the large Westbourne Open Space wayside, so if you can lend a hand please get in touch. Also, if you have any suggestions for other areas as wildlife conservation waysides please let me know. E-mail [brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk) Web site: <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/>

## **WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows**

### **Emsworth Harbour news**

Brent Geese numbers are building up in Emsworth Harbour with over 300 regularly there. They include many juveniles; my juvenile to adult percentage so far is 13%.

Black-tailed Godwit numbers in Emsworth Harbour have soared over the past couple of weeks from 80 to 140; the same thing happened at this time last year. With them have arrived several colour-ringed birds new to Emsworth, though the regulars also keep turning up. See web site for daily updates.

Spotted Redshank is not as regular in the Nore Barn stream as it has been in previous years, so you are not always guaranteed a sighting. But be patient and keep watching.

Tufted Duck were back on the town millpond this week. Numbers will build up as winter approaches.

### **Firecrest in Nore Barn Woods**

Richard Somerscocks had a good time in Nore Barn Woods on Saturday afternoon (Nov 4), seeing Treecreeper, several Goldcrests and, best of all, a Firecrest, which is probably a first for Nore Barn. Richard also got a splendid photo of this bird - see the web site. Firecrest differs from the more familiar Goldcrest in having white 'eyebrows' as well as a gold crest. The Nore Barn bird was probably on passage from its breeding grounds in Central Europe to wintering quarters in Southern Europe, though a few do spend the winter here.

### **Godwits spurting water?**

On examining some photos I took at Nore Barn on Oct 25, I noticed two Black-tailed Godwits that appeared to be spurting water from their bills - see photo on web site. Pete Potts said he had never seen anything like it before and suggested I submit a note to the Wader Study Group Bulletin. The editor of this bulletin said he was intrigued by my photo. He thought the birds were expelling water taken into their bills with food prey, but said he would consult other international authorities.

### **Thorney news**

Caroline French walked down the west side of Thorney on Nov 1 and was rewarded with a sighting of a juvenile Goosander on the Great Deeps and a Short-eared Owl flying over the gorse to the south of Little Deeps.

Richard Somerscocks had two sightings of a juvenile Marsh Harrier over Little Deeps. Barry says it was the same bird that he saw flying north over Pilsey Sands on Oct 20. Barry also said the long-staying Cattle Egret had roosted with 78 Little Egrets on Oct 29 at the Little Deeps.

Just over the water, Dave Oliver saw a Short-eared Owl over the foreshore on the east side of Chidham on Oct 29. In the past, Dave has seen more than one so would be interested if anyone else sees any.

### **Other bird news**

Penny Aylett had two Jays together in her garden in The Rookery, a most unusual occurrence, no doubt attracted by the acorns from their large Oak tree.

I was pleased to hear my first Mistle Thrush song of the autumn in Stansted Forest on Nov 1. They will be singing through the winter from now.

Ralph Hollins says the Long-tailed Duck is still showing well at the Budds Farm pools.

### **Plants in flower**

There are still plenty of flowering umbellifers of Hogweed showing well on Brook Meadow, some white some pinkish. They still attract flies and bees. About 20 flower spikes of Winter Heliotrope are already out on the A259 embankment wayside near the Emsworth Surgery. I have placed a notice on the verge, hoping to prevent their cutting. Ralph Hollins's flowering plant list for November is already up to 113. Recent additions in the Havant area were Pale Flax beside the Hayling Coastal path just south of the Oysterbeds area and fresh plants of Cow Parsley and Moth Mullein (yellow flowered) by Ferry Road on either side of the Hayling Golf Club entrance road.

### **Swarm of Harlequins**

Tony Wootton was sitting on the edge of Nore Barn Woods, patiently waiting for the Spotted Redshank to appear on Nov 1, only to be plagued by a swarm of Harlequin Ladybirds. This reminded me of the occasion last year (on Oct 8) when my wife and I were similarly plagued by Harlequins while walking along the Main Avenue in Stansted Forest. Ladybirds tend to swarm at this time of the year in preparation for hibernation. Tony Wootton also saw three Red Admirals while at Nore Barn.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 41-42, 10 to 23 October**

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

### **CONSERVATION NEWS - by Wally Osborne**

#### **Work session**

Thursday 20 October - Fourteen volunteers, including 2 new ones Catherine and Maureen, plus Andrew Skeet, Arborist at HBC, turned out on a lovely sunny but chilly morning with the first frost of the autumn soon disappearing.

The main task was to complete the removal of smaller branches from several willows, which had fallen across the River Ems. It was then possible to see the 'wood and river for the trees'. Andrew arranged for a tree surgeon to come on Thursday to cut up the large willow trunks and hide the arisings in the undergrowth on the western riverbank. This work will be paid for by HBC and BMCG jointly.

Other equally important tasks completed included cleaning all the signcases and posters, and clearing round the signcases and bins. A litter pick of Palmers Road copse yielded among other things a fluorescent light bulb. Last but by no means least, the Seagull Lane entrance was tidied up including cutting back mainly stinging nettles from around the memorial Oak tree, cutting back the Dogwood hedge, weeding round the small Hazel copse south of the entrance as well as cutting back Bramble and stinging nettles from the hedgerow planted 18 months ago along Seagull Lane footpath. Thanks to all the volunteers, especially Pam for providing much needed refreshments. Special thanks to Andrew Skeet for clambering over the fallen willows with such dexterity

Report by Frances Jannaway

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 6 & Thursday 17 November

#### **Annual cut**

The annual cut of the meadow by contractor John Blamire is now almost complete, albeit very late this year. We continue with our strategy of 'selective mosaic area cutting' so that we never cut the whole of the site at one time and alternate the areas cut each year. This year, the Seagull Lane patch and parts of the North & Central Meadows have been cut. Visitors will notice that the South Meadow (northern section) has also been cut for the first time in many years as it was being taken over by bramble growths. This was a recommendation from Bryan Pinchen (Freelance Entomologist) after his insect survey last year. Each of the 3 sections of this South Meadow will now be cut on a 3-year cycle to maintain habitat diversity.

Some clearance work remains to be done and then, through the autumn / winter months, Group Volunteers will progressively cut parts of the Central & North Meadows using the Group Power Scythe, removing the arisings by hand. This is very arduous work and we need to maintain / improve the turnout of Volunteers through these months. New Volunteers will receive a very warm welcome.

#### **Membership renewals**

We have just reached the magic 200 number of Members for the year 2011 / 2012, with a few more arriving each week. Today's figure leaves 96 Members officially lapsed so we ask those who know that they have not yet renewed to do so as soon as they can and anyone who is unsure, to contact me by phone, mobile phone / text, letter or e-mail and I will check our records immediately. (See details below) In one month we shall be sending out final reminders and, shortly afterwards, our distribution lists / e-mail address files will be changed to include only current members.

Sincere thanks to all those Members who have made donations and in many cases very generous ones. We value very highly your ongoing support of our work, which enables us to maintain our very low £3 membership fee.

Wally Osborne, Phone 01243 375433, mobile 07787 966162, e-mail [wjn545@homecall.co.uk](mailto:wjn545@homecall.co.uk)

#### **Annual General Meeting**

The 11<sup>th</sup> AGM was held on 12<sup>th</sup> October and attended by 35 Members / Non Members who heard the retiring Chair Frances Jannaway give her final Annual Report, after 11 years service, firstly as Treasurer and then Chair. In appreciation of this service, the Committee presented her with a book gift 'Flora Britannica'. After the election of the new Committee (see below) and a refreshment break, Tony Wootton, one of our members and a workday volunteer, gave an interesting illustrated talk on 'Wildlife Photography' featuring many local scenes. Our sincere thanks go to Tony.

The meeting heavily over-ran the normal 7 to 9 pm schedule and we shall seek to do better next year.

New Committee – The new committee is comprised of Wally Osborne – Chairman, Lesley Harris – Secretary, Pam Phillips – Treasurer. Committee Members - Dave Lee, Mike Probert & Maurice Lillie, with 2 positions unfilled from the floor. The new Committee may co-opt members as needed & possible.

***Spotted Redshank is back***

I have been checking the Nore Barn stream on a daily basis for the past weeks, waiting for the arrival of the Spotted Redshank. Finally, on Friday (Oct 21), there it was feeding happily in the stream with its 'friend' the Greenshank. Astonishingly, this is the 8th year running that this rare, and now quite famous, bird has come to Emsworth to spend the winter with us, and it is looking as healthy and sprightly as ever. The best time to see it will be 2-3 hours either side of high water. All the news and photos of this bird can be found on the special Spotted Redshank page on the Emsworth wildlife web site at . . .

<http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/x-spotted-redshank.htm>

***Brent Goose breeding***

This year's breeding season for Brent Geese could be a bumper one. Juveniles with distinctive white bars on their wings are everywhere. On Oct 21 in Emsworth Harbour, I counted 41 juveniles in a flock of 142, including two families with 5 youngsters in each. Looking back through past records, the good seasons have been coming every 6 years, at least since 1993. The pattern is mixed before that date. 1993 was a good year with 18% juveniles, the next good year was 1999 with 24%, then came 2005 with 28%. So far this year, my personal percentage of juveniles to adults is 15%.

***Harbour news***

The Black-tailed Godwit flock feeding in Emsworth Harbour is steady at about 80 birds, with several colour-ringed birds. There are many more in Bosham and Fishbourne. Dunlin, Grey Plover and Redshank are now increasing into the harbour. But migrant ducks are slow.

Tony Wootton came across a very handsome Ruddy Shelduck in a flock of Brent Geese on a winter wheat field at Nutbourne on Oct 21. This is a very rare bird in the wild, but this one was probably an escape from a wildfowl collection. Also, at Nutbourne one can see 400+ Wigeon and some Pintail in the bay, 150 Black-tailed Godwits feeding along the shore, as well as, our old friend the Greenshank, with green and yellow rings on each leg (GY+GY), in the small stream.

***Other bird news***

Not far away from Nutbourne is another rare bird, the Cattle Egret which is now in its 10th week in the field with the herd of cattle at the end of Thornham Lane! Equally eye-catching were the Bearded Tits which have entertained many birdwatchers in the past week in the reedbeds at Thorney Little Deep. Today, Richard Somerscocks had a good view of a Marsh Harrier traversing over the Deeps as well as a couple of Sandwich Terns fishing in the harbour. More mundane was my first Dunnock song of the autumn at Nutbourne this week. Tony Wootton spotted two Goldcrests on Brook Meadow on Oct 12,

***Garden birds***

Birds tend to be a bit slow returning to gardens after their summer breeding season, but I have been getting 'charms' of around 10 Goldfinches on the sunflower heart feeders in my garden in the past week. Things should pick up once winter gets a grip. I have also heard a Chiffchaff calling from a neighbour's Silver Birch tree. The Sparrowhawk has been back in Patrick Murphy's garden, looking for some tasty morsels. The BTO reports a national upturn in House Sparrows in their Garden Bird Survey, but Starlings continue their downward spiral. In contrast Woodpigeon is now number 3 in the charts with Goldfinch at number 10 and rising.

***Wild flower news***

The Cow Parsley on the main river path on Brook Meadow is still in flower, though not looking quite as good as it did two weeks ago. Other flowers still showing well on the meadow include Hogweed, White Dead-nettle and Bristly Ox-tongue, plus a few bright yellow buttercups in the orchid area. Bramble and Hedge Woundwort are also out on the river path and Gorse on the causeway (so, kissing is in season). There are still a few Golden Samphire flowers showing along the seawall by Nore Barn Woods. Tony Wootton found Cherry Plum flowering at Warsash on Oct 13. Has the world gone mad?

***Other news***

Gavin Millar and his grandson caught a bright green fish in the harbour, which was probably a young Ballan wrasse. Ed Rowsell says they are quite common in Chichester Harbour.

There seem to be plenty of bees feeding on the flowers of Ivy and Verbena in my garden. The only butterflies I have seen recently are Red Admirals and Speckled Wood. It has surely been a remarkable year for Acorns; one cannot walk through woods without crunching them underfoot.

***Emsworth Wildlife Web site*** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.



## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 39-40, 26 September to 9 October**

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

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

#### **Work session**

Sunday 2 October - report by Mike.

Eleven volunteers met up on a lovely, hot morning, including a welcome newcomer, Maureen. Wally had already made a head start on cutting the grass paths with the power scythe and the remainder of the group divided into teams:

The main team commenced the trimming of the large willows which had fallen by the 'S' bend, in preparation for their removal by tree surgeons at a later date. They cut back accessible branches and cleared all the brush to the east bank or the path side. This was a formidable task. Good progress was made with some more work needed on the next work day.

The other teams trimmed back overhanging vegetation from the hard paths, litter picked Palmers Road copse and raked up the path cuttings where necessary.

Pam provided refreshments at half-time, much appreciated in the hot working conditions.

**Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October & Sunday 6 November**

#### **Bat survey – report by Graham Walsgrove**

This month we carried out the survey on 30 September. The temperature (start 19C & end 17C) was very mild for the time of year especially with no cloud. There was a lot of activity from the south bridge along the river to the gasholder. We spent 10 minutes at the causeway seat recording Common and Soprano Pipistrelles with a possible Serotine at the gasholder. There was a lot of food about judging by the large number of feeding buzzes we recorded. No recordings at NE railway arch and only one Pipistrelle at Constant Spring. More Pipistrelles were recorded down Lumley Road and around Peter Pond.

#### **Membership renewals**

So far, 181 people, including 53 on Standing Order, have renewed their membership for 2011/2012. Last year, there were 296 members, so there's a way to go yet. If you have not already renewed, please send the renewal form (on website) together with your membership fee (£3 pp) to Wally Osborne. You can also renew your membership at the AGM on 12 October.

#### **AGM and Wildlife Photography talk**

The 11<sup>th</sup> Brook Meadow Conservation Group AGM is open to members and non members alike and what's more is free! The formal part of the evening includes my last annual report as Chair as well as Pam's Treasurer's report for the year 2010/11. The election of a new committee and a break for tea/coffee and biscuits will be followed by an illustrated talk on Wildlife Photography by Tony Wootton.

#### **Committee members**

We shall be electing a new chairman and also a secretary and treasurer. Wally, Pam, Mike, Dave, Lesley and Maurice have all agreed to stand for re-election so there is room for two new members to join the team. Please think about putting yourself forward to come on the committee to help continue this valuable conservation work. Copies of the Brook Meadow Through the Ages book will be on sale at half price to members as well as the always popular FSC ID guides. I look forward to seeing you there.

### **WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows**

#### **Water Voles and rats**

Graham Roberts, the Water Vole expert with Hampshire Wildlife Trust, was very concerned to hear (through the last Newsletter) that Brown Rats and Water Voles were being seen in the same vicinity in the river on Brook Meadow. Jeff Fleming had seen many during his long vigils on the river bank.

Graham says rats are known to kill voles, particularly young ones, and rats also act as vectors for diseases that Water Voles are susceptible to. More so, as their numbers build up, rats may actually drive the voles out of their burrow systems, resulting in small populations like ours becoming extinct. The only solution was trapping the rats and disposing of them humanely.

The Brook Meadow committee have discussed the problem with Rob Hill of HBC who successfully tackled a rat problem threatening the tern colony on Hayling Oysterbeds a few years ago. David Gattrell offered to help as he has had plenty of experience catching rats on Peter Pond. Let's hope the situation can be resolved before we lose our population of Water Voles for good.

All the Water Vole news and sightings is on the web site at . . .

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

### **Godwit news**

Richard Somerscocks and I have been busy logging the colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwits in Emsworth Harbour on an almost daily basis over the past two weeks. It is very exciting to see what will turn up each day. We had a special treat on Saturday afternoon (Oct 8) with the arrival of our first Kent-ringed Godwits of the season; these have three colour rings on each leg, which are very colourful. They included our old friend RYL+RLY which has been coming to Emsworth every year since 2005, usually arriving in October and staying until January. In contrast, Today, Richard had another Godwit ringed in Iceland in 2002, which to my knowledge has never been seen in Emsworth before! All the Emsworth colour-ringed Black-tailed Godwit sightings with photos are on the web site at . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/x-black-tailed-godwit.htm>

### **Other harbour news**

On Saturday, Richard and I also had a record 15 Greenshank in the low water Emsworth channel. Large numbers of Redshank have been moving into the harbour, along with a few Turnstone and Grey Plover, but the bulk of the winter waders has yet to arrive. No sign of the Spotted Redshank at Nore Barn stream. If you see him please let me know, but beware a Greenshank also likes feeding there. Brent Geese have arrived in force in Langstone Harbour and should be with us in Emsworth very soon! The migrant ducks should also be on their way; I saw a pair of Teal at Nore Barn earlier in the week, but no Wigeon as yet. Ralph Hollins counted 166 Little Egrets going to roost at Langstone Pond.

### **Millpond news**

This morning David Gattrell was hard at work on Peter Pond thatching the reeds on either side of the north channel to prevent them falling into the water. Very interesting, you can see the results from the Lumley Path bridge. He told me he had caught two Brown Rats on the pond in the past week in the near the feeding area. David is hoping reduce light pollution on the pond by persuading the highway authorities to install directional street lamps on the A259 as it passes the pond. What a good idea. The first Little Grebe of the autumn was on Slipper Millpond this week.

### **Giant House Spider**

Also on Oct 6, Tony Wootton had a huge spider in his bedroom with monstrous fangs! While Hilary his wife was hiding in the wardrobe, Tony (good wildlife man) got his camera out and took a picture. The spider was almost certainly a Giant House Spider *Tegenaria duellica* (formerly known as *T gigantea*). The spider can use those fangs, though the bite (according to Wikipedia) does not pose a threat to humans, although it is the only species of the whole Agelenid family to be able to pierce human skin.

### **Plant news**

Ralph Hollins already has over 100 species on his October flowering plants list. Following his example, I did a tour of Brook Meadow and logged 45 plants in flower, plus 8 grasses. The dominant flowers were Hogweed, White Dead-nettle, Bristly Ox-tongue and the Bindweeds. Also, well represented Red Clover and Creeping Thistle. The Cow Parsley on the main river path just north of the S-bend is still standing, though a little battered by the wind. Wild Angelica has mostly gone to seed as have the Pepper-saxifrage, but a few flowers of each were still showing.

There is a marvellous display of Michaelmas Daisies on the eastern edge of the Lumley area, which look particularly fine in the late afternoon sun and attracts bees and Red Admirals. The large yellow daisies of Perennial Sow-thistle show well in the south eastern corner of the south meadow, where I also found a good flowering of Wild Radish, which is a new plant for the Brook Meadow list, which is now up to 253 for this year and overall to 334. Full list is on the Brook Meadow web site at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-list-plants.html>

### **Sparrowhawk kill**

Patrick Murphy and his wife had a good view of a male Sparrowhawk making a kill of a Goldfinch in their Emsworth garden. Patrick had his camera handy (good fellow) and was able to take a couple of photos before it flew off with it's kill. Patrick's photo is on the web site for Oct 6.

### **Fungi**

Patrick Murphy took an interesting photo near Thornham Marina of a couple of Shaggy Ink Caps in different stages of development. See Patrick's photo on the web site for Oct 5. The back one is a young fungus with a typical finger-shaped smooth white cap; the front one is older with its cap base having dissolved into an inky fluid resulting in a flat cap with a long stem.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 37-38, 12 to 25 September**

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

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

#### **Work session – Thursday 15 September**

What with Richard having a new knee and visiting my daughter and granddaughter in Cambridge, it has been several months since I have been to a work session never mind lead it. Fortunately, it was a gloriously sunny morning for the select band of 7 volunteers. Before starting the morning's tasks, Brian pointed out several important wildflowers which should not be cut down as they are still flowering and setting seed. These included Pepper Saxifrage, one of the 9 meadow indicator plants which is growing well on the eastern edge of the Lumley wet area. Brian also pointed out that the litterbin near the north bridge was overflowing and had not been emptied for quite some time. This was added to our tasks. The first task was to cut with the power scythe (Lesley & Phil), the SE corner of the South Meadow which had not been cut last year. The arisings were raked and removed to a nearby sacrificial area. After cutting and raking, the vegetation (mainly Sea Couch) became alive with small frogs and toads jumping every which way. Several were carefully put in the uncut vegetation to avoid damaging them. Meanwhile, Maurice did a litter pick of Palmers Road copse as well as cut back the Hawthorn hedge along the Water Vole fence to aid visibility from this vantage point. Although not much litter was found, Maurice did remove two green containers full of petrol. This has been reported to HBC. Incidentally, if you see or find anything on Brook Meadow which shouldn't be there, please phone HBC Customer Services – 02392 446010.

After a well-earned break provided as usual by Pam, volunteers dug and cut excess vegetation from both sets of steps near the central seat, making them safer. The team went on to clear vegetation from around the young Wild Cherries and Rowans in the North Meadow and cut down suckers of Purple-leaved Plum on the southern side of the raised path near the Lumley gate. And finally, Maurice emptied the litterbin near the north bridge but struggled to move it to the bin near the central seat because it was so heavy, mainly due to the enormous amount of dog mess deposited in bags. The incident was reported to HBC who removed the very full bag on Friday. Apparently Dave Lee had already reported the overflowing bin to HBC last Monday! I am waiting to be assured by HBC that this omission and health and safety hazard will not happen again in future. Many thanks to the small group of volunteers who worked so hard – a good morning's work!

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> & Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October

#### **Trees fallen over River Ems**

Over the last few months, several willows have fallen over the riverbank, especially south of S bend and a number of others have fallen in previous years, especially south of the north bridge. Volunteers have removed some of the smaller branches but are unable to tackle the much larger willow trunks. The committee is concerned about the deterioration of the river habitat especially for Water Voles as they don't like too much shade. To discuss this and other tree matters on Brook Meadow, Maurice Lillie and I met Andrew Skeet (HBC tree officer) about a week ago. The outcome of a very productive meeting was that:

- 1) 3 groups of fallen Willows, south of the S-bend, were identified as having the highest priority.
- 2) BMCG volunteers to remove most of brushwood at Thursday work session on 20 October with help from Andrew Skeet. Arisings to be used as dead hedges round wildflower areas as in previous years.
- 3) Andrew to contact HBC approved tree surgeon to do work estimated to take 1 day with BMCG volunteers helping, and arisings removed into undergrowth on western riverbank.
- 4) Get tree work on high priority willows done as soon as possible while river levels remain low.
- 5) Agreed to split the costs of the work to be carried out by tree surgeons between HBC and BMCG.
- 6) Lower priority trees south of the north bridge - volunteers to remove smaller branches and brushwood with work by tree surgeons depending on how much more BMCG is willing to pay.
- 7) Other trees, especially a small Willow at S-bend and a larger Willow north of south bridge will be dealt with during the course of the winter in accordance with the annual pollarding programme.

#### **Annual General Meeting**

This will take place on Wednesday 12 October at 7pm in Emsworth Centre, South Street. This year's talk will be by Tony Wootton on *Wildlife Photography*.

#### **Membership renewals**

So far, 129 people, including 53 on Standing Order, have renewed their membership for 2011/2012. Last year, there were 296 members, so there's a way to go yet. If you have not already renewed, please send the renewal form (on website) together with your membership fee (£3 pp) to Wally Osborne. You can also renew your membership at the AGM on 12 October.

## **WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows**

### **Water Voles**

Jeff Fleming never gives up. Today he spent another 10 hours patiently watching for Water Voles from his 'quiet spot' on the river bank in Palmer's Road Copse. I joined him in mid-afternoon and he had only two sightings of Water Voles by then, but lots of Brown Rats. Together we watched a large rat race along the opposite bank and swim across the river just like a vole. This made me wonder how many Water Vole sightings we have had which were, in fact, Brown Rats. Jeff says there is no interaction between Rats and Water Voles, but he was concerned about two black and white dogs that raced down the river, disturbing a Water Vole which was feeding at the time.

Please see web site for all the Water Vole news and sightings at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

### **Harbour news**

There is not much bird activity in gardens at this time of the year, and Robins are the only bird singing in the town and countryside. However, things are hotting up in the harbour as the wintering migrants start to arrive from their breeding grounds in the far north. A flock of 50 or so Black-tailed Godwits regularly feed in Emsworth Harbour; they are best seen from the marina seawall.

Richard Somerscocks and I have been logging the colour-ringed Godwits of which we have seen 12 different ones so far this season, all but one ringed locally. The other was ringed as a chick in Iceland in 1999 and has been seen frequently in Emsworth Harbour over the years.

Other waders now in the harbour include Oystercatcher, Redshank, Greenshank, Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Turnstone, Dunlin, Knot and Curlew. The Oystercatchers are particularly noisy at present.

Meanwhile, up to 30 Shelduck can be seen on the western mudflats, about half of which are juveniles. There is no sign of any Brent Geese as yet, but they should be around in the next week or so.

### **Other bird news**

While waiting for Water Voles to appear on the river, Jeff Fleming enjoys many other wildlife. Today he had three sightings of Kingfisher, and a Goldcrest came close. He watched a Buzzard being harassed by a pair of Carrion Crows and frequently sees a Treecreeper, not a common bird on the meadow.

Tony and Hilary Wootton watched a Marsh Harrier flying over the Thorney Deeps; it dived into the reeds where it stayed for 3/4 of an hour, by which time they gave up. But Tony got his photo, just!

Steven and Emma Turner posted a message on the Sussex Ornithological Society web site on Sep 19 with a photo of a Jack Snipe taken in their back garden in Emsworth. The SOS Editor confirmed 'beyond all doubt' the bird was indeed a Jack Snipe. So, well done Steven and Emma.

Interestingly, Juliette Leach sent me a photo of a common Snipe that she had in her Rowlands Castle garden in December 2010. That was unusual, but a Jack Snipe was very very unusual.

### **Insect news**

Red Admirals seem to be everywhere at present; we have had two virtually parked on the Verbena flowers in our garden for the past week. Speckled Woods are still chasing each other in Palmer's Road Copse. Clouded Yellows have been scarce this summer, but Ros Norton and Tony Wootton have seen them along the western track of Thorney Island.

During our regular waysides surveys, Jane Brook spotted a large black beetle lying on its back in the middle of the underpass at the end of Washington Road. We later identified it as a Dor Beetle (*Geotrupes stercorarius*), a new one for us. It is also called Lousy Watchman as it is often heavily infested with mites, as was the case with our beetle.

My wife and I saw a very colourful Yellow-tail moth caterpillar during a walk along the Chichester Canal on Sep 22. I thought at first it was a Brown-tail caterpillar, but was corrected by Ralph Hollins.

Richard Somerscocks has been seeing lots of Migrant Hawkers around North Thorney.

### **Other wildlife news**

On Saturday Richard Somerscocks walked round Thorney Island and saw the resident colony of 14 Harbour Seals on a sandbank between Thorney and Hayling Island. His photo is on the web site.

Earlier in the week Richard got a nice photo of a Brown Hare in long grass on Thorney. So, they are still there.

While delivering the Brook Meadow Newsletters last Tuesday, I came across a huge fungus (25cm across) growing on the grass verge of Seafields. I had a few stabs at identification, before coming up with Boletus erythropus - thanks in no small part to Ralph Hollins. There were quite a few other smaller fungi of the same and other species on the verges, which should be still present.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

**CONSERVATION NEWS - by Frances Jannaway**

**Work session report**

Sunday 4 September – report by Jennifer Rye.

Twelve determined volunteers turned up to work, despite a forecast of rain, so we set to work promptly on the south meadow. Wally strimmed the sides and ground of the whole length of the bramble path, and others cut and tidied all the occasional paths with shears, and rakes.

A small party felled a willow which had fallen yesterday and was held up across the main path, and also took out some other leaning willows which were threatening to do the same thing in the next high wind. They then moved on to the River Ems, which is so low that it is hardly flowing at all, removed some large litter and did a general litter pick around the south bridge and Palmers Road copse. The threatened rain arrived just before 11, so after a damp but convivial coffee break (thanks Pam) we decided to let rain stop play. Many thanks to all. Wildlife seen: a small brown frog and 2 tiny field mice in a nest, which was disturbed in the cutting but was returned to the right spot in the hope that they might survive.

**Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> September & Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> October**

**Emsworth Show** – Monday 29<sup>th</sup> August 2011 – report by Wally Osborne

Thankfully, the weather was dry, warm and not too windy for setting up our stand which was put together rapidly by Lesley, Dave, Maurice and myself, supported by my press-ganged son-in-law Paul. The four of us covered the day in 2-hour shifts and whilst we had nothing special on offer, we concentrated on making contact and chatting to existing and prospective new members. A total of 3 new members were recruited, 20 members renewed their subscriptions for year 2011–2012, and quite a lot of people took away free Meadow Guide and Membership Information leaflets.

Our 'Brook Meadow Through the Ages' book was on sale at a special price of £2.50 for existing / renewing members and £5 to the general public. The sales numbers were disappointing. As usual, the 'Field Study Guides' proved to be popular, with one customer buying a total of seven.

As an overall impression, the Show seemed to be less busy this year with fewer stands in place, although attendance numbers were said to be good. Thanks to all of the Volunteers for their time and efforts.

**Annual cut started at last!**

After several real threats to take our business elsewhere, Wally eventually got John Blamire on site with his small cut and collect machine on Saturday 3 September. The northern part of the North Meadow as well as the western side of the Central Meadow have been cut, collected and dumped on the sacrificial area on the eastern side of the North Meadow. The arisings were piled up rather high and were steaming within a few hours. We will be keeping an eye on them and may have to spread them out a bit more at a forthcoming work session. John will hopefully return later in the year to trim several other areas.

Membership renewals

Membership of BMCG is now due for renewal. Please fill in the form, which was attached with the last email notes and is also on our website, and send it together with your membership fee (£3 pp) to Wally Osborne. You can also renew your membership at the AGM in October. So far, 96 people, including 53 on Standing Order, have renewed their membership for 2011/2012.

**Annual General Meeting**

The AGM is on Wednesday 12 October, at 7pm, Emsworth Centre, South Street. This year's talk will be by Tony Wootton on Wildlife Photography. Our AGM is always a well-attended event. This year the audience will be swelled by wildlife photography enthusiasts eager to get inspiration from Tony Wootton, whose presentation follows the formal, but always interesting, part of the evening.

Committee members

As many of you will know, I am stepping down from the BMCG committee after 11 years, 6 as Treasurer and 5 as Chair. So we shall be electing a new Chairman, and I am delighted to announce that Wally Osborne, our Secretary for 10 years and stalwart volunteer at work parties, has agreed to stand. The strong and dedicated Committee of Pam Phillips (Treasurer), Mike Probert, Dave Lee, Maurice Lillie and Lesley Harris wish to stand for re-election and there is room for two additions to the team. Please think about putting yourself forward to join the Committee to help carry forward this worthwhile conservation work.

**Water Voles**

Jeff Fleming spent 10 hours watching for Water Voles at 'his quiet spot' on the river bank in Palmer's Road Copse on Sep 9. He had logged 8 Water Vole sightings by the time I joined him for half an hour at 4pm. These take this year's total to 83. Jeff also saw some Brown Rats and a Kingfisher. I saw nothing while I was there, but for a female Mallard with a white ring on its right leg, probably a domestic escape. See web site for all the Water Vole news and sightings at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

**Millpond news**

Up to nine Cormorants have been on the main raft on Slipper Millpond which now has a luxurious growth of vegetation on it, together with a couple of Little Egrets and a Grey Heron. I got a good shot of a juvenile Common Tern on the small southern raft (which is now in a new position). We are not sure of the origin of the single Canada Goose on Peter Pond, but David Gattrell told Maurice Lillie that there are quite a lot of lone Canadas currently around Chichester Harbour awaiting their short migration - as far north as Petersfield.

**Bad news from Langstone Harbour**

It has been a dreadful year for breeding sea birds in Langstone Harbour. Warden, Chris Cockburn reported almost zero productivity on the RSPB Islands, despite the presence of a record number of nesting Mediterranean Gulls. Of the 57 Little Terns nesting only one fledged successfully. Repeated disturbance from foraging fox was the main cause plus poor weather conditions. Unless the fox problem is solved, Chris fears for the future of the site as a breeding colony for seabirds. The situation was not a great deal better on the Hayling Oysterbeds site, where Common Terns had a poor year, but good news was that Sandwich Terns nested there for the first time.

**Brook Meadow plants**

The Brook Meadow plant list continues to grow. This week I found Field Madder, which took the total recorded on the site since 1998 to a staggering 332, though not all of these are found in every year. So far this year I have logged 223, so there is some way to go, though many plants on the list have not been seen for years and have vanished without trace. The full plant list is on the web site at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-list-plants.html>

Two plants that have done very well on Brook Meadow this year are Water Mint and Hoary Ragwort. Pepper-saxifrage is also doing well with about 20 plants standing tall and flowering on the east side of the Lumley area. Michaelmas Daisies are just starting to open their flowers and will be the main source of colour on the meadow in the coming weeks.

**Rare plants**

A new site for the rare Marsh Mallow plant was discovered by the Havant Wildlife Group at Copperas Point near Chichester Marina on Sep 3. Details are on the web site for that date. While walking over the 'Broadmarsh mound' on Sep 7, admiring the profusion of colours of late summer plants, I stumbled across another rare plant without realising it. What I thought was Grass Vetchling, Ralph Hollins told me, was in fact Hairy Vetchling, of which this is the only known site in Hampshire!

**Other wildlife news**

A Harvest Mouse nest was discovered during the last workday on Brook Meadow with two mice still present. It was carefully replaced, hoping for not too much disturbance. Ros Norton saw a Clouded Yellow butterfly on the western track on North Thorney on Sep 2, the only sighting of this butterfly I have heard about locally. Richard Somerscocks managed to capture a Pipistrelle Bat in flight over the pond on the Deckhouses Estate near Thorney Island on Sep 9, 'a great achievement' says bat expert Nik Knight! Despite their name, Common Lizards are not all that common, but I spotted one resting on a patch of dried grass at the end of Seagull Lane with the end of its tail missing. Apparently, Lizards have evolved a strategy, called 'tail autonomy', of breaking off their tails when they are threatened by a predator. The tail regrows in time, but the tail loss is costly and the Lizard is weakened. Today, I found my first Wasp Spider (*Argiope bruennichi*) of the season on a web adorned with several stabilimentum. I did not recognise it at first as it was showing its underside, which has two yellow lines down each side of its abdomen, in contrast to its wasp-like upper surface.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 33-34, 15 to 28 August 2011**

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

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

#### **Work session report**

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> August – report by Wally Osborne. The widely forecast rain did not arrive until after midday so that the 8 volunteers were able to finish off the planned tasks of the 2 hour session, in good time. The tasks set by the Committee at their meeting the previous evening, concentrated on the Ems riverbed, where the Environment Agency (EA) annual cut programme had left an untidy aftermath with various arisings either in the river or on the eastern bank. Fortunately for us the river flow is almost nil at the moment with just the deeper pools a bit hazardous.

Firstly, Pam, Lesley and Jennifer topped the willow barrier on the eastern bank opposite the Water Vole signcase while Maurice, Dave, Phil and Mike set about the clearance of litter and arisings whilst walking in the riverbed. At the 'S' bend, log piles were created for wildlife habitats and much brushwood was hauled out of the deeper water pools to assist free flow later in the year. One pallet was hauled out and hidden in the western bank undergrowth. The whole team (except for Pam) then moved up to the north bridge to gain easier access to the riverbed and proceeded to haul out the EA arisings and then began the task of raking clear all of the seasons debris from the riverbed and depositing it in a Seagull Lane patch sacrificial area. The final result of this effort was very pleasing to the 'labourers' but also illustrated just how much more there is to do to return the River and its banks to a more ideal Water Vole habitat.

Meanwhile, Pam with trusty shears had attacked the northern gravel path sides where nettle, blackberry and other vegetation had taken over so that walking through this route was not a pleasant experience. Thankfully, all is now well.

At the end of the session, Mike spotted a large adult Water Vole just south of the gasometer. It was sitting on a patch of weed on the eastern bank having a 'munch' and then swam casually across the river pool and out of sight. Thanks to all volunteers for a great mornings effort and also to Pam for providing the much needed mid morning refreshments.

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> & Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> September

#### **Path Maintenance in Brook Meadow**

The main paths through Brook Meadow were eventually strimmed by HBC last Monday. The reason for the delay was that Les who I usually contact to do the strimming work has been off sick with a shoulder injury for the last few weeks. It was his mate Lee who did the strimming work this time. I would like to thank Lee for doing a good job all on his own and wish Les a speedy recovery.

#### **Bat survey** – from a report by Graham Walsgrove

During the bat survey on 24 August, no bats were recorded at several of the usual places including south bridge, causeway seat, NE railway tunnel and Constant Spring although some large moths were seen flying around. Only a few Pipistrelles were recorded and possibly a Serotine near the south entrance. The activity had moved from the western side of the Meadow to the eastern side. However, the lack of water in the Ems (some places were dry) could have been a factor affecting bat activity. Maybe the bats are not feeding young now and therefore have less need to hunt for food??

#### Water levels in River Ems

Maurice noticed a dramatic change in water levels last week. *"It is amazing that yesterday (24 August), the section of the river along the railway was effectively dry with nothing flowing at all. Today less than 24hrs later, the river is flowing well at least 8cm deep."*

**Membership renewals & AGM notice** - see attached membership renewal and AGM notices.

#### **'Brook Meadow Through the Ages'** - fantastic offer to members only

The 'Brook Meadow Through the Ages' book is on sale to members only at the reduced price of £2.50 (retail price £5). So renew your membership and buy a copy of the book for half the price! Contact Wally Osborne or Frances Jannaway if you would like a copy at this reduced price.

#### **Emsworth Show** - Tomorrow! Monday 29<sup>th</sup> August,

BMCG have a stall at this year's Emsworth Show on August bank holiday Monday. As usual there will be plenty of wildlife photos to admire, the Brook Meadow Through the Ages book (at the reduced price of £2.50 members only) and FSC wildlife identification guides will be on sale as well as the opportunity to renew your membership. We look forward to seeing you there.

## **WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows**

### **Harbour news**

Early migrant waders are starting to turn up in Emsworth Harbour to join the 50 or so Black-tailed Godwits that have been there for some weeks. A few Turnstone and Grey Plover have arrived looking rather fine in their summer tunics. Redshank and Greenshank numbers are building up. Richard Somerscocks also spotted a small flock of Knot which are unusually early for Emsworth Harbour. However, the bulk of the waders will not be here for a few weeks yet. Meanwhile, Shelduck families are wandering aimlessly around on the mudflats, while Swallows skim purposely for insects over the surface of the water. It is still possible to see Common and Sandwich Terns fishing in the harbour and Richard Somerscocks got a fine image of a Sandwich Tern diving off shore at West Wittering.

### **Thorney birds**

There has been lots of activity around North Thorney in the past week. A Cattle Egret caused a 'twitch' of excitement when it turned up (appropriately) in a field of cattle along Thornham Lane. It provided good photo opportunities around the legs of the cattle. Caroline French got one perched in a tree. Richard Somerscocks also spotted some Yellow Wagtails among the cattle. Less unexpected was the Osprey (or two) that dropped into Thorney Deeps on passage back to its wintering grounds in Africa, as it regularly does at this time of the year, though this bird provided less favourable opportunities for photographers. Tony Wootton took my personal prize for what he called 'a hopeless' photo of one of two Marsh Harriers that he saw flying over the Thorney Deeps on August 25. Tony's picture captured the atmosphere of this magical bird perfectly in its leisurely flight over the Deep. Richard Somerscocks spotted a covey of around 15 Grey Partridges in a field to the south of Thornham Lane on Aug 27. This is good news as Grey Partridge is red listed bird of high conservation concern, though these may well have been released birds.

### **Little Egrets**

This is the time of year when Little Egrets return to our area in their hundreds and local roosts are already building up; 105 were in the copse near Thorney Little Deep on Aug 14, and 153 were in the trees behind Langstone Mill Pond on Aug 16. Ralph Hollins noted that the Langstone roost included some 20 juveniles that were hatched there. He thinks there may well be more birds roosting around Chichester Harbour, e.g. at Thorney Great Deep, Thorney churchyard, Tournerbury Wood and Oldpark Wood on the Bosham peninsula. Little Egrets are also increasing in local harbours; four were feeding in the low water channel below Emsworth Quay when I passed by yesterday.

### **Bird deaths**

There has been a lot in the press recently about avian pox killing garden birds. A couple of local examples came my way recently. Mike Wells sent me some photos of a Great Tit in his daughter's garden at Liss with large tumours and in considerable distress. Hilary Gilson who lives in Prinsted told me about Greenfinches dying in her garden. Hilary actually bagged one and popped it in her freezer, wondering if the RSPB would be interested in it. I suggested she should contact them to find out. They should also be able to give her some advice as avian pox is currently highlighted on their web site. <http://www.rspb.org.uk/advice/helpingbirds/health/sickbirds/avianpox.aspx>

### **Butterflies**

Butterflies have been fairly scarce over the past 2 weeks. However, both Richard Somerscocks and I have seen fresh Painted Ladies, on Thorney and Slipper Millpond. From their freshness, Ralph Hollins suspects that these insects have not flown across the channel, but rather come from eggs laid here by earlier migrants, ie a third stage of 'generational migrants'. I had a super Red Admiral in the back garden feeding on the Michaelmas Daisies along with the regular Large Whites and a Holly Blue.

### **Portsdown Hill**

My wife and I had a walk along the path below Fort Widley on Portsdown Hill where the late summer flowers provided a glorious spectacle of colour with lots of Hemp Agrimony, Common and Hoary Ragwort, Yarrow, Wild Carrot, Marjoram, Greater and Common Knapweed, Bristly Ox-tongue, Field and Small Scabious, Traveller's Joy, Hedge Bedstraw, Burnet-saxifrage and Rosebay Willowherb. Highly recommended! We were puzzled by tall plants with clusters of partially opened yellow flower buds, enclosed by a ring of reddish bracts, that reminded me of giant Groundsel. I had no idea what they were until I found Ploughman's Spikenard in my flower guide at home. Apparently, it was used as an expensive medieval perfume and ploughmen were said to hang it in their hovels 'to sweeten the air'.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 31-32, 1 to 14 August 2011**

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

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

**Work session report** Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> August – report by Wally Osborne

Warm and dry weather greeted the 9 volunteers with a just few black clouds threatening but never wetting them. The single job for the morning was to clear all of the occasional paths around the south, central and northern meadow sections, using the power scythe and hand tools to control the many high growths of vegetation, which had fallen across the numerous routes.

As usual, we limited Power Scythe operation to 20 minute spells with experienced operator Pam Phillips starting off, followed by new operators Maurice Lillie, Phil Wilde and Tony Browne who were all given training and were closely monitored. Finally, experienced operator Dave Lee finished off and carried out the 'machine clean jobs'. In areas of heavy growth, the volunteers raked, bagged and removed the arisings whilst many of the lower growth paths the arisings were not removed. Ute Wilde, Penny Aylett and Richard Somerscocks shared this work with the power scythe operators and we were all content with the results of a hard mornings graft. Many thanks to the 'stalwart volunteers', particularly Penny who carried on despite suffering from hay fever.

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 18 August and Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> September

#### **Trees fallen over river**

Over the past few months, several large Willows have fallen across the river adding to those that have fallen in earlier years. Most recently two have fallen by the 'S' bend. Several of the branches overhanging the footpath have been cleared by HBC and BMCG volunteers. The BMCG committee is concerned that this amount of shading is detrimental to the fragile population of Water Voles. Last week, Wally and I met Rob Hill (HBC) to show him the problem and have worked out a few options. On hearing that the EA would soon be doing the annual river maintenance, we sent an email to Matt Wilde (East Hampshire Operations Delivery, Environment Agency) with the request for the team to at least clear some of the fallen Willows in order to maintain the open nature of some stretches of the river. This was the reply: *If the fallen willows pose a flood risk the team will clear the channel. At the meeting we had on site a year or so ago, our Biodiversity Officer recommended we leave the overhanging willows through this section as they provide cover for water voles. !!*

#### **River Maintenance by Environment Agency – a non event**

I was rather sceptical when I heard that the Environment Agency planned to carry out the annual River Ems maintenance last week. So I was pleasantly surprised on Wednesday 10 August, to get Maurice's report: *"The AE are in the river, in force. They are strimming and pruning from the northwest corner downwards and making a pretty good job of it. They are only working on the west bank though."* However, Brian reported that *"the Environment Agency chaps were giving the River Ems what they call a 'tickle', i.e. not much."* And later in the afternoon Wally told me: *"The EA have done 'so much' that you have a job to see what they have done. The only signs of any work are the very small amount of arisings dumped on the east bank in a few places (all almost invisible), being a few small willow branches and some blackberry debris. Nothing seems to have been done at all at the S bend and the only real signs of work are that a small branch partly overhanging the river, south of the S bend has been stripped of its growth so that it is again a bare perch! The arisings being on the east bank just opposite."* So my scepticism seems justified.

#### **Annual cut**

We had hoped to have had part of the annual cut done by early July this year. Unfortunately John Blamire, the environmental contractor we used the previous two years to cut several areas of the Meadow, is having administrative difficulties at the moment. Other options and contractors are being looked into. In any event we hope to have these areas cut by early September.

#### **Path Maintenance in Brook Meadow**

The main paths through Brook Meadow are getting very overgrown. More than a week ago, I sent in a request to HBC for the path edges to be strimmed as quickly as possible. Unfortunately this has not been done yet so we will just have to wait our turn.

#### **Litter in river**

Brian reported that there was quite a lot of litter in the river in the north-east corner by the tunnel under the railway. Sign of school holidays. He picked up what was on the bank and the rest in the river has been cleared by others. Many thanks. It is important for all users to keep the area clean and tidy.

**Bird news**

Birds are very quiet at this time of the year. However, a Song Thrush was singing on the Seagull Lane patch on Saturday, the first I have heard for a while.

I met Richard Somerscocks on Brook Meadow this morning who told me he had seen a wader-type bird on the river in the north-east corner. This could have been a Green Sandpiper which I used to see regularly further up river near Westbourne until the area was opened up by dog walkers. This would be a first for Brook Meadow and worth keeping a look out for.

A Mallard family with 4 fairly mature ducklings was on Peter Pond on Saturday, three of which were pale and one had a 'black eye'.

**Flowers of Brook Meadow**

Brook Meadow is full of colour at present, with masses of white-flowered Hogweed and Wild Angelica interspersed with delicate pink flowers of Great Willowherb, towering above a ground cover of yellow Common Fleabane and purple Creeping Thistle. The view from the causeway is simply stunning.

The Bulrushes which stand majestically on the west bank of the river are covered with fluffy heads.

The minimal work by the Environment Agency north of the north bridge was enough to expose a patch of flowering Gipsywort, only the second site on Brook Meadow for this plant.

The highly aromatic Water Mint with purple flower spikes is common on the Lumley area, along with Strawberry Clover on the edge of the path with both flowers and strawberry-like fruits. Look out also for the narrow pointed leaflets of Pepper-saxifrage in this area. Both these plants are meadow indicators.

Hoary Ragwort is another meadow indicator, which is flourishing in the central wild flower area on the north meadow like never before. Also showing well in this area are the white umbels of Wild Carrot usually with a single red flower in the centre, looking just like an insect. Less obvious, are the yellow flowered Square-stalked St John's-wort with reddish seedheads forming.

As you enter the Seagull Lane gate look to the left where you will find a mass of Stone Parsley with its tiny white flowers, contrasting sharply with the bold white trumpets of Large Bindweed.

Meanwhile, the Rowans in the Gwynne Johnson plantation on the east side of the north meadow are adorned with bunches of bright red berries, all ready for the invasion of Waxwings!

**Wild Angelica and Hogweed**

I have been looking more closely at these two plants, which are best seen on the Bramble path through the south meadow. The flower heads (umbels) of Wild Angelica tend to be more rounded than those of Hogweed, though I noted several Wild Angelicas with fairly flat umbels. The leaves of Wild Angelica are smaller and more delicate than those of Hogweed. Even more striking on Wild Angelica are the large inflated sheaths, which gradually get smaller towards the top of the plant. Underneath the umbels Wild Angelica has bristle-like bracteoles, but no lower bracts, whereas Hogweed has both with the lower ones rather limply hanging down. The stems of the two plants also differ with Wild Angelica having smooth hairless reddish stems and Hogweed having rough, hairy and ridged stems. In contrast, the Hemlock plant on the east side of Slipper Millpond has 'evil-looking' purple-spotted stems.

**Other flowers**

The Common Reed on the east side of Slipper Millpond has red flowers which wave in the wind.

Ralph Hollins came across an interesting game crop near the New Barn buildings on Apuldram Manor Farm with a variety of unusual plants, including Tansy-leaved Phacelia (*Phacelia tanacetifolia*) and Buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*) both new plants for me. See web site for details.

**Other observations**

Water Vole sightings are pretty rare on Brook Meadow at the moment, but Pam Phillips spotted one swimming in the river about 20yds north of the north bridge on Aug 7, number 72 for 2011. This is about the same as last year.

Pam also found a young hedgehog in The Rookery. She put it in a bucket and returned it to undergrowth by the Lumley pool, but later saw it trying to cross Lumley Road. Tut, tut.

There are lots of hover flies on Brook Meadow, mostly small and mimicking bees with their striped abdomens. But I spotted a large one feeding on Water Mint on the Lumley area with a glossy black and brown body and a distinctive pale band across the top of its abdomen. Bryan Pinchen confirmed its identity as Volucella pellucens Bryan says this fly is fairly widespread and quite often feeds on deep flowers like Water Mint. So, it is worth looking out for on the meadow.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 27-28, 4 to 17 July 2011**

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

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

#### **Emsworth Guides** - report by Jennifer Rye

We were delighted to welcome around two dozen guides and their 4 adult leaders to Brook Meadow on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July for an evening work session as part of their Service to the Community. Ignoring the light rain that was trying to fall, they got stuck into a variety of jobs: weeding and watering all the newly planted trees and hedgerows in the North Meadow; creating 3 new meter squares of bare earth on the south east bund in the South Meadow to encourage solitary bees to nest and a very thorough litter pick in Palmers Road copse. When the work was done, several of them enjoyed a Nature Hunt around the whole meadow. They all seemed to have a thoroughly good time, and we were delighted to have such helpful and focussed workers alongside the three BMCG volunteers (Jennifer, Pam and Lesley). In fact they want to come again, and even make it a twice-yearly fixture, which would suit us fine.

#### **Falling willow** – report by Maurice Lilley

Last week, I was walking my dog in Brook Meadow at about 7.30am when I heard an ear splitting noise which was the sound of a large Crack Willow on the west side of the River Ems falling eastwards across the river about six metres south of the S-bend, effectively blocking the footpath. I immediately reported the dangerous situation to HBC and very soon afterwards the branches overhanging the footpath had been cleared presumably by HBC.

#### **Drinking party**

A few weeks ago, Pam mentioned a drinking party in Brook Meadow around the central seat. One of Pam's neighbours collected 3 bags of bottles and local dog walkers collected a lot of broken glass. It is uncertain whether the drinkers were underage but it is believed that a fight took place. Incidents like this should always be reported to the police so that PCSOs can include Brook Meadow on their patrols. Please report any incidents of this nature to 08450454545.

#### **Bat survey in June** – report by Pat and Graham Walsgrove

A lot of activity on the south bridge with good sightings of Pipistrelles and to a lesser extent near the gasholder. Disappointing again at Constant Spring and the causeway seat although the eastern side was better. There were numerous moths about. Very exciting at the railway arch in the NE corner of Brook Meadow with larger size bats (Daubenton's?) flying in and out of the tunnel almost into our faces!

#### **Hedgerow Harvesting, Bats & Trees**

Havant Borough Tree Wardens (HBTW) organised two talks and walks about Hedgerow Harvesting and Bats & Trees in Emsworth last week, attracting 16 people. Jon Stokes of The Tree Council explained why the management of most hedgerows on farmland has remained virtually unchanged until relatively recently. During a short walk to a nearby hedgerow, Jon pointed out several common plants which can be harvested for food. Nik Knight, local bat expert, went on to explain how important trees and hedgerows are to bats for roosting, rearing young and navigating. At about 9.30pm, we went out armed with bat detectors and walked to Nore Barn Woods, seeing and hearing at least 5 different species of bats including Brown Long-eared and Serotines. Many thanks to the Brookfield Hotel for providing the venue. Money collected was donated to HBTW and to Hampshire Bat Group who provided bat detector boxes.

#### **Ems Valley Walks 17 July – report by Jennifer Rye**

Unfortunately, the morning walk had to be cancelled due to extenuating circumstances. In spite of very changeable weather, the afternoon walk happened (led by Jennifer Rye), with 7 customers. We managed to shelter under trees during the squalls. Four were members, but 3 weren't, and I distributed BM leaflets. It felt good, and they all said they'd enjoyed it and learnt a lot! It was well worth doing.

#### **Forthcoming events**

**Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> July, 7- 8.30pm, Healing Meadow Herbs** - A second Herb Walk in Brook Meadow, led by Steve Taylor, herbalist at the Medicine Garden. Meet next to Brook Meadow interpretation board in Palmers Road car park. Free to members, non members £3 which gives membership of BMCG.

**Monday 29<sup>th</sup> August, Emsworth Show** - BMCG have a stall at this year's Emsworth Show on August bank holiday Monday. As usual there will be plenty of wildlife photos to admire, the Brook Meadow Through the Ages book and FSC wildlife identification guides will be on sale as well as the opportunity to renew your membership. We look forward to seeing you there.

**Forthcoming work sessions:** Thursday 21 July & Sunday 7 August

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows

### Bird news

Between 15 and 20 Swifts were flying around the houses in Bridge Road this week, the most I have seen in this area this year, probably family groups preparing for their long journey.

Kingfishers don't breed locally, but we have had several sightings of them, which suggests they may be moving down from their breeding areas earlier than usual.

Cuckoos are already on their way back to Africa! BTO fitted 5 Cuckoos with GPS tracking devices and one has made it to a northern slope of the Atlas mountains - one of the last vegetated locations before the Sahara. You can follow all the action on <http://bto-eneews.org/IG4-GY60-3RN36S-6OVN6-0/c.aspx>

### Brook Meadow Plants

Marsh Woundwort flower spikes are out at the north end of the Bramble path. Super flowers.

Purple Loosestrife is showing well on the river bank, escaped from the garden of Gooseberry Cottage?

Hogweed is everywhere with virtually every flower head occupied by red Soldier Beetles.

Harebells are still out by the Southern Marsh Orchids on the north meadow.

Stone Parsley is flowering as usual on the Seagull Lane patch and along Lumley Road.

Gipsywort and Giant Fescue are together on the west bank of the river below the south bridge.

There are no cherries on the tree on the causeway this year, though I am sure there was blossom.

### Other plant news

Musk Mallow is flowering on the edge of the reedbeds on the west side of Peter Pond, right opposite Gooseberry Cottage. Is this the only site for this attractive plant in Emsworth?

Maidenhair Spleenwort fern is looking good on the wall of the Waterside Church in Bath Road.

Perennial Sow-thistle daisies are showing up very well in various areas of the town.

The plant that I found on Sinah Common, which I thought at first was Rock Sea-spurrey, was confirmed by Martin Rand as Sand Spurrey a nice plant, but not as rare as Rock Sea-spurrey.

### Nore Barn news

On July 12 I attended an outdoor meeting of the Havant Conservation Forum in Nore Barn Woods with tour of the woods from Roy Ewing. My first juvenile Black-headed Gull of the year was in the stream. A Bullfinch was calling in the woods. Roy said there had been no reports of Sparrowhawk nesting in the woods this year. There is a fine display of flowering Selfheal in the woods. I had my first Sea Aster flowers of the year on the saltmarshes. I found yet more Phleum grasses with small inflorescences, which might be Smaller Cat's-tail. I am finding this grass everywhere at present.

### Plant survey

On Sunday July 10, I accompanied botanist John Norton and his colleague Debbie in a survey of plants in the Northney area as part of the BSBI Plant Atlas of tetrad SU70. I say 'accompanied', for as a non-botanist I was not able to contribute much to the survey, but I did learn a good deal and was shown some new plants for me. Among the more interesting plants were Babbington's Orache on the beach, Wild Celery in a roadside ditch and Hound's-tongue, a first for this tetrad. Details on the web site.

### Other wildlife news

I was surprised to come across an adult Hedgehog near the Lumley Stream on Brook Meadow this week, the first one I have seen on Brook Meadow since 2005. It shuffled off as I passed by.

John Bogle saw several Adders on a walk around Queen Elisabeth Country Park on Sunday (July 10).

### Ragwort myth

Anyone who is in any doubt that horses do not eat Ragwort should have a look at the animals feeding in a field full of the stuff to the west of Emsworth Recreation Ground. They nibble away at the sparse grass on the ground, while completely ignoring the lush leaves of the ragwort plants all around them.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site . . .** <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

### Emsworth Waysides News

Entomologist, Bryan Pinchen did an insect survey of four Emsworth waysides this week and was impressed by the species recorded, giving a good snapshot of how important the waysides are. Every time Bryan swept his net through the vegetation he came up with hordes of tiny little creatures that one would never normally see, but which are all a vital part of the life and ecology of the sites. My personal report with a selection of photos is on the Emsworth waysides web site at . . .

<http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/few-NEWS.htm> Bryan's full report will follow.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 25-26, 20 June to 3 July 2011**

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

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

#### **Work Session Sunday 3 July – report by Jennifer Rye**

7 volunteers turned up on a sunny morning with Brook Meadow looking at its best, with tall grasses waving, masses of butterflies and other insects and lots of people walking through to enjoy it. We took the power scythe to the north meadow and cut most of the occasional paths with a new one to reach the newly planted cherries. Girl Guides are expected on Wednesday working towards their conservation badges. We plan to set them to work nurturing the new trees. The sides of the paths were trimmed and the arisings taken to the dumping site. Some paths on the south meadow were given similar treatment to make them easier to walk along on wet and dewy days.

After welcome refreshments taken in the shade (thanks to Pam) we cut a straight path into the Seagull Lane patch to enable our wildlife recorders access. The new hedgerows were also given some care and attention. We knocked off early in deference to the heat. An organised party of cyclists going along the causeway were reminded that it was a permissive path only and asked to wheel their bikes.

Photos on web site. . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2011.html>

Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 21 July & Sunday 7 August

#### **Herb Walk in Brook Meadow Thursday 23 June – report by Lesley Harris**

During a heavy shower between 6.45 and 7pm we huddled under umbrellas, eyeing the blue sky in the distance. At 7pm, the sun shone and Steve Taylor led a group of nine, including 5 BMCG members and Amy. Amy is a pupil at St James' Primary School who is doing a project on herbal medicine. Steve was very encouraging and answered all her questions. During the walk, we were also joined by two Mallard drakes and a duck which caused much amusement because they walked between our legs and nibbled the vegetation round our ankles. Steve will be leading another Herbal Walk on 28th July, to study different plants.

#### **Emsworth Guides keen to help out in Brook Meadow**

Members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Emsworth Guides are going to help with conservation work on Brook Meadow next Wednesday, 6 July. This additional work session will be led by Jennifer Rye assisted by Pam and Lesley. Brian Fellows will also be on hand to give information on wildlife to be seen and heard on Brook Meadow and take photographs. A number of suitable tasks will be carried out including creating new bee nesting places and removing vegetation from around recently planted young trees as well as a nature hunt. The conservation work will contribute towards the guides' community badge. Let's hope the weather stays fine for them.

#### *Forthcoming events*

Monday 11 July, 7-11pm, Brookfield Hotel, Emsworth, *Hedgerow Harvesting, Bats & Trees*

Jon Stokes (Tree Council) is giving a guided walk on 'Hedgerow Harvesting' starting at 7.15pm (taking about an hour). Followed by a talk at 8.30pm by local bat expert Nik Knight on 'Bats and Trees' with a walk at dusk to detect bats in the Warblington Church area. Please bring a torch & bat box (if you have one) for the bat walk.

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July, 10am & 2pm: *Two Ems Valley Walks*

Brian Fellows (morning walk) and Jennifer Rye (afternoon walk) will lead the walks. Learn about the wildlife & history of the southern section of the Ems Valley, including Brook Meadow. Meet next to the Brook Meadow interpretation board in Palmers Road car park. Walks are free and take about 2hrs.

Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> July, 7- 8.30pm, *Healing Meadow Herbs – part II*

A second Herb Walk in Brook Meadow, led by Steve Taylor, herbalist at the Medicine Garden. Meet next to interpretation board, Palmers Road car park. Free to members, non members £3

### **EMSWORTH WAYSIDES NEWS - by Brian Fellows**

Famous author and broadcaster, Germaine Greer, has joined the growing ranks of waysides with a typical punchy article the Weekend Telegraph (June 25) extolling the virtues of leaving roadside verges to grow naturally. We agree. Maybe, would we invite her to be our leader!

Jane and Andy Brook did a good job in clearing the rampant Ivy on our new wayside at the north entrance to Emsworth Railway Station. Despite its small size it is a promising site with 44 species of plants already logged, including Agrimony, Hoary Willowherb Spiked Sedge and Rosebay Willowherb. Travellers once again invaded our Emsworth Recreation Ground wayside as they did last year, but this time they were evicted within hours, thanks to prompt action from Andy and Jane Brook, David Gillett and Gary from HBC. The Police acted swiftly as it was wildlife conservation area.

More details are on web site . . . <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/few-NEWS.htm>

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

### **Birds**

Birds are getting quiet again during their annual post-breeding moult. But Blackcaps in particular, Chiffchaff, Whitethroat, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Wren, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove and Greenfinch were still going strong on Brook Meadow this past week.

Swifts have been very scarce in Emsworth this summer with several days going past without seeing any at all and, even then, only 4 or 5. We had a flock of about 20 screaming over the town after the thunderstorms in late June, but they disappeared as quickly as they came.

House Martins have been completely absent from Emsworth for at least 15 years. So it heartening to hear from Caroline French that she and Ray discovered what appears to be a healthy population of them in Westbourne around the Mill Road, Lark way area.

Bad news comes from the RSPB islands in Langstone, where a Fox has destroyed much of the nesting colony of Gulls, Terns and others.

### **Water Voles**

Water Vole sightings have almost dried up, but local wildlife photographer, Jeff Fleming set up his hide again on the river bank near the gasholder. This time he had better luck than he did on the last occasion. He saw some Water Voles as well as Eels and a 2 foot long Pike in the river plus an early Kingfisher. We look forward to his photos.

### **Butterflies**

Meadow Browns are still all over Brook Meadow and elsewhere, but Gatekeepers are also on the wing, smaller than Meadow Brown with more orange on them. Caroline French had the first in her garden on July 1 and soon they will be all over the place. Ringlets are having a good year on Brook Meadow as are Large and Small Skippers.

I was very chuffed to get a good sighting and photo of my first Essex Skipper on Nore Down near West Marden. Its antennae look as if they have been dipped in black paint! Incidentally, Nore Down is a beautiful place for wild flowers and butterflies and has stunning views over the West Marden valley.

### **Plant news**

Prominent flowering plants on Brook Meadow at present include Meadowsweet (with heady aroma), Perennial Sow-thistle (large yellow daisies), Creeping Thistle (west side of north meadow) and the ever reliable Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea which each year struggles to push its way through the Brambles on the Seagull Lane patch.

I was pleased to clinch the identification of the buttercups on the path round the east side of the Lumley area on Brook Meadow. They are Hairy Buttercups, low growing with turned back sepals, but the key feature is the ring of warts on the achenes (fruits) - you need a microscope for this.

I was concerned about the absence of Jointed Rush on Brook Meadow, but it has been popping up here and there, though not in the quantity of previous years.

The Alder Buckthorn trees below the causeway are loaded with red berries as are the Rowans on the north meadow.

### **Orchids galore**

Nigel Johnson and the Havant Wildlife Group carried out the annual count of Southern Marsh Orchids on the South Moor Langstone on 25 June. They counted an astonishing 8805 flower spikes. Last year the count was even higher at 9234, but this year the orchids flowered exceptionally early and many were in seed and difficult to see. Ed Rowsell said the Southern Marsh Orchid count on Fishbourne Meadows was also a bumper one at 650. We had just 7 on Brook Meadow. Must try harder!

### **Hayling Island**

My wife and I were puzzled by strange clicking sounds as we walked through Sinah Common last week. I think they were caused by the seed cases of the Gorse breaking open. Viper's Bugloss is in full in the open areas of the common and it was here that my wife sampled her first ripe Blackberries of the year. I also found what I thought was Rock Sea-spurrey, though Ralph Hollins says this is rare and could be Lesser Sea-spurrey. The west beach in front of the golf course is ablaze with wild flowers, including Restharrow, Common Centaury, Sheep's-bit, Sea Bindweed, White Stonecrop, Sea Holly and lots of Hare's-tail Grass. Best of all was the aroma of honey from the Ladies Bedstraw!

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site . . .** <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 23-24, 6 to 19 June 2011**

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

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

#### **Work Session**

Thursday 16 June. Torrential rain between 9 and 10.20am soaked the meadow and created many puddles of standing water and soaking wet vegetation. Despite these conditions, 4 volunteers turned up but we decided to abandon the session even after the rain had stopped because the intended jobs involved cutting and handling soaking growths. Many thanks to the 'stalwarts' and sorry for the wasted journeys. Report by Wally Osborne

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 3 and Thursday 21 July

#### **Annual cut**

Over the next few weeks, I will be contacting John Blamire, local environmental contractor, to fix a date to start the annual cut. As in previous years, John will use his small cut and collect machine to cut selected areas of the North and Central meadows. He will also use a strimmer to cut certain other areas such as part of the South Meadow and the Seagull Lane patch. All arisings will be removed to sacrificial dumps to reduce the fertility of the soil which encourages a wider variety of wildflowers.

#### **Various repairs**

**HBC has at long last repaired the hole in the surface of the south bridge which was forming a trip hazard. Unfortunately, another hole has appeared further to the west. HBC have been informed.**

Thanks to Maurice Lillie, the damaged Water Vole notice near the central seat has been replaced with a very sturdy new one. Many thanks Maurice. It looks great.

#### **Elusive Water Voles**

A few weeks ago Jeff Fleming, local wildlife photographer, put up a hide along the riverbank in Palmers Road copse to observe Water Voles and take photos of this endangered mammal. Although Jeff was in position for at least 8 hours, he didn't see a single Vole. He wants to have another go a bit later but we hope in a more suitable location. Many thanks to Jeff for his generous donation to the group.

#### **Dog bags**

Rob Hill has informed us that HBC are no longer going to provide the bags for the two dog bag dispensers on Brook Meadow. The BMCG committee are considering what the options are as to whether BMCG provides the bags instead of HBC or comes up with an alternative solution or asks HBC to remove the dispensers. Pam Phillips who fills up the dispensers will put up a notice on the dispensers as soon as she has used up the current supply. If you have any positive suggestions and/or creative ideas to solve this problem, please contact Pam on [p.phillips367@btinternet.com](mailto:p.phillips367@btinternet.com)

#### **Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 7- 8.30pm, Healing Meadow Herbs – Country Lore & Wisdom**

Herb Walk in Brook Meadow, led by Steve Taylor, herbalist at the Medicine Garden. Meet next to Brook Meadow interpretation board, Palmers Road car park. Free to members, non members £3 which gives membership of BMCG.

#### **Monday 11 July, 7-11pm, Brookfield Hotel, Emsworth, Hedgerow Harvesting, Bats & Trees**

Jon Stokes (Tree Council) is giving a guided walk on 'Hedgerow Harvesting' starting at 7.15pm (taking about an hour). Followed by a talk at 8.30pm by local bat expert Nik Knight on 'Bats and Trees' with a walk at dusk to detect bats in the Warblington Church area. Please bring a torch & bat box (if you have one) for the bat walk.

#### **Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July, 10am & 2pm: Two Ems Valley Walks**

Brian Fellows (morning walk) and Jennifer Rye (afternoon walk) will lead the walks. Learn about the wildlife & history of the southern section of the Ems Valley, including Brook Meadow. Meet next to the Brook Meadow interpretation board in Palmers Road car park. Walks are free and take about 2hrs.

#### ***HAMPSHIRE FARM - report by Brian Fellows***

Frances, Jane and I did a quick survey of the site of the proposed new housing development to the north of Emsworth, part of which is to be 'public open space'. The best bit was where the houses are to go. We logged 50 species of plant, including large amounts of Corky-fruited Water-dropwort and Grass Vetchling. The open space was planted up with Barley and barren of wildlife, but for Swallows.

The full report is on the waysides web site . . .

<http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/wayside-19-hampshire-farm.htm>

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows

### **Bird news**

Three Whitethroats have been singing this week on Brook Meadow, along with a couple of Blackcaps and a Chiffchaff. Song Thrush, Wren and Blackbird have also been in good voice, but Robin and the tits have gone quiet. Richard Somerscocks saw the elusive Nuthatch in the north-east corner of the meadow. Pam Phillips had a sighting of an early returning Kingfisher on the Lumley Stream last week; they will be more frequent in the autumn.

Ray Cobbett sent me a photo of a white House Sparrow which he had in his Havant garden. Ray's sparrow did not have the pink eyes of an albino bird, so it should be called leucistic. Sometimes leucism affects just parts of a bird's body, so you get Blackbirds with white heads or wing patches, like the one frequently seen around Lumley Road area.

The Coots are back in Emsworth; 28 were in the basin to the south of Slipper Millpond earlier this week. Last year we had a vast number beneath the quay all winter. The swans and the ducks are moulting on the town millpond, which accounts for all the feathers and the ducks losing their colour.

### **Flowers**

The four species of orchids from previous years have all come up on Brook Meadow again. However, Bee Orchids have been surprisingly scarce, with just two having been found. The solitary Pyramidal Orchid is still amazingly sprightly despite being covered by tall grasses on the north meadow.

It is good to see the Broad-leaved Everlasting-pea flowering again on the Seagull Lane patch. This morning I spotted the first Great Willowherb in flower on the north meadow. There is a good display of Lesser Stitchwort on the cross path through the south meadow, where you can also see a 6 foot tall Teasel, not quite in flower.

### **Grasses**

Brook Meadow comes into its own at this time of time year with a magnificent display of grasses. The tall cylindrical spikes of Timothy and the delicate panicles of Meadow Barley are now starting to show as are the rare Festulolium Hybrids particularly along the eastern path by the log seat. My special favourites are the Bromes with their delicate hanging spikelets; there is a good selection of them along the eastern side of the north meadow and on the path around the Lumley area. They also make very nice displays in the small vases on my desk. The sedges and rushes are doing fine on Brook Meadow, except for Jointed Rush, which I cannot find anywhere. What has happened to it?

### **Insects**

Butterflies have been rather scarce in the bad weather. Meadow Browns and Large Skippers are out, and I had the good fortune to find the first Ringlet of the year on the Lumley area on Saturday. Jane Brook had a Small Tortoiseshell in her north Emsworth garden last Monday, a rare sight these days. The Brook Meadow grassland is currently teeming with grasshoppers. Most are the flightless Meadow Grasshoppers but look out also for the long antennae of a Dark Bush-cricket. Also prominent are the green beetles with swollen thighs (*Oedemera nobilis*) and many types of spider. I was treated to the spectacular sight of hundreds of Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet moths on the Langstone South Moor, feeding on thousands of Southern Marsh Orchids. Wow!

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

## EMSWORTH WAYSIDES NEWS

### **Insect survey**

Thanks to a generous donation from Jackie Scadden, we shall be employing entomologist Bryan Pinchen to do a day's survey of some of the Emsworth waysides, starting with the Bridge Road site. Bryan did a survey on Brook Meadow last summer - his report is on the group web site. We see the insect survey is an important step to determine the scale of ecological benefits of the non-verge-cutting scheme, apart from plants.

### **Railway wayside**

We have a new wayside on Emsworth Railway Station. Southern Railway have agreed that the Friends of Emsworth Waysides can take over the management of the small area of land at the northern entrance to the station (in front of the billboards). This is part of a community refurbishment of the station. A quick survey produced 34 different plant species, including four types of Willowherb and a Spotted Crane-fly which posed for a photo on a Hawthorn bush.

For all the waysides news go to the web site at . . .

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

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 21-22, 23 May to 5 June 2011**

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

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

#### **Work Session**

Sunday 5 June: A rather overcast and windy morning greeted the 8 volunteers who turned up for the first work session in June. Despite the relatively low number of volunteers, we managed to carry out a large number of tasks. The first task was to cut back stinging nettles and brambles overhanging the riverside path in Palmers Road copse as well as do a litter pick in this area. Another task which badly needed doing was to clean the window of the Water vole signcase which had become virtually unreadable because of all the sticky 'droppings' from the nearby Sycamore tree. All the other signcases were given a clean as well.

Brambles and nettles were also cut back from the paths in the South Meadow and all the paths were cut with the power scythe. The windy, dry weather had caused the large Butterbur leaves to wilt and droop over the raised path at the Lumley entrance and also near the central seat. These large leaves were cut back to make access along these paths easier.

After welcome refreshment provided as usual by Pam, the team proceeded to tackle the recently created western path in the North Meadow. First of all, the power scythe was used to widen the path which goes behind the wishing tree and then a wider arc was cut to reach the recently planted Wild Cherry trees on the western edge of the meadow. The trees were released from the undergrowth of mainly stinging nettles and watered. The remaining Wild Cherries planted in the northern part of the Meadow were also given a bit of tlc. Unfortunately, this was a bit late for one, which was dead. All arisings were raked and removed to nearby dumps. Finally, Brambles and Stinging Nettles overhanging the main riverbank paths as well as the extreme NE corner of the Meadow were cut back. Many thanks to all the volunteers who worked so hard today.

**Photos on the web site at . . .** <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2011.html>

**Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 16 June and Sunday 3 July**

#### **Strimming work by HBC**

The following strimming work was completed by Les Foster and his mate (HBC operatives) last week: entrances, bins, steps, signcases, central seat, edges of riverbank path through Palmers Road copse, main riverbank path, path from the central seat to Lumley entrance, path from north bridge to Seagull Lane entrance, access to the Oak in memory of Malcolm Smith and along the path next to the railway embankment in the north.

#### **Bat survey**

Pat and Graham Walsgrove carried out their first bat survey of 2011 on 27 May. They saw and detected a lot of bat activity, especially at the south bridge and near the central seat. The bats detected were mainly Pipistrelles and possibly Serotines. Bats were also detected near the gas holder, NW railway bridge, and near Lumley cottages. No bats were detected at Constant Spring with very few on the eastern side of the Meadow. It was noted that there were lots of insects on the western side of the Meadow but noticeably fewer on the eastern side. Nik Knight said he often finds a lot of activity at dusk but it gets quieter later on. He asked whether there was much water at Constant Spring as he was surprised that no bats were detected there.

#### **Havant Goes Greener Fair – Saturday 28 May in Havant Park**

Despite a bit of a difficult start and a cold SW wind, it was a very good day. There was a lot of interest in the displays and information. Rachel (BTCV) provided a badge making activity, second hand nature books for sale and feely boxes. BMCG provided the wishing tree and making bird boxes (materials and tools kindly provided by Pete Hodges) as well as FSC ID guides for sale (selling 12 including all my stock of Bee ID guides to local bee keepers). Many thanks to Rachel, John Bond, Colin, Jim and Richard for helping to set up under very difficult windy conditions and to doing a stint on the combined stall.

There was not room for the full report here, but it can be read on the web site . . .

<http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2011.html>

#### **Forthcoming events**

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 7- 8.30pm, Country Lore & Healing Meadow Herbs**

Herb Walk in Brook Meadow, led by Steve Taylor, herbalist at the Medicine Garden. Meet next to Brook Meadow interpretation board, Palmers Road car park. Free to members, non members £3 which gives membership of BMCG.

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

### **Millpond news**

The Mute Swan pair on Slipper Millpond have had several goes at nest building over the past few months with absolutely no success. Their last nest lost 3 eggs, but we are not sure where to. Better news comes from John Mant who told me the Swan pair nesting on the north bank of Emsworth Marina have produced 4 cygnets, the only ones in Emsworth this year.

Brendan had a female Mallard with 11 chicks on his patio overlooking Slipper Millpond, which he "kept" for a couple of days before encouraging them to enter the water. The next day they were down to nine and recently he has seen seven. But that's not bad for Mallard productivity.

### **Cuckoo on Brook Meadow**

A Cuckoo has been heard and seen on Brook Meadow by several people over the past two weeks. This is the first definite Cuckoo sighting on the meadow itself, since we started wildlife recording in Year 2000, though they have been heard from time to time, usually around the Lumley area. I gather there has been a relative abundance of Cuckoos along the south coast this spring.

### **Other bird news**

My best bird of the week was a Garden Warbler which I heard while walking through Stansted Forest on June 2, the first I have heard for some years.

I was also pleased to find a small flock of House Martins feeding over the River Ems at Racton, a bird I see so rarely these days. They were probably from the colony that nests on Lordington House.

A small group of Swifts are back flying around the houses in Bridge Road, after disappearing for a while. I suspect they are not nesting locally this year.

Ralph Hollins saw at least 5 juvenile Little Egrets in the nests in the colony at Langstone Mill Pond and watched a couple of them being fed on May 30.

Both Common Terns and Sandwich Terns (for the first time) are nesting at Hayling Oysterbeds, but the Little Terns prefer the RSPB islands in the main harbour as they have done for the last two years.

### **Insects**

I saw my first Meadow Browns of the year in Stansted Forest on June 1 and a day later Richard Somerscocks saw some on Brook Meadow. Large Skipper should be the next butterfly to appear, followed by Gatekeeper and Ringlet.

Our 'resident' Banded Demoiselles are back on Brook Meadow, but only the male has the band across its wings. On June 2, I watched a large Emperor dragonfly patrolling over the orchid area on Brook Meadow, making occasional sorties after smaller insects.

### **Orchid news**

The 'orchid area' on Brook Meadow, which has been roped off for a while, now has a wonderful display of Meadow Buttercups, Yellow Flag and Red Clover with tall grasses waving in the breeze. As for the orchids, our 7 Southern Marsh Orchids are wilting in the heat, but the 8 Common Spotted Orchids are reasonably fresh. We have searched for Bee Orchids in vain, until this morning! I recalled Graham Walsgrove finding one in the Lumley area last year, so I had a look and, hey presto! there it was.

Richard Somerscocks found the solitary Pyramidal Orchid, but it has no flower spike as yet.

Meanwhile, there are literally thousands of Southern Marsh Orchids on the South Moor at Langstone just waiting to be counted, but hurry, since they will not last much longer!

### **Other plant news**

I do not recall ever having seen such a great display of blossom on the Brambles on Brook Meadow as this year. Means a bumper crop of Blackberries? The large Beech trees lining the Main Avenue in Stansted Forest are laden with masts. Good for the local wildlife.

The saltmarshes at Nore Barn have their usual crop of interesting plants including Common and Lax-flowered Sea-lavender and Greater and Lesser Sea-spurrey. The rare Sea Clover is showing well again on the large wet field to the west of Nore Barn Woods. See web site for details.

Spiked Star-of-Bethlehem and Hairy Bindweed, two quite rare plants, are both currently in flower on the roadside at Appledram Lane (south) at Fishbourne.

Jane Brook and I came across what we thought was a rare plant called Bloody Cranesbill (*Geranium sanguineum*) on the Southleigh Road (west) wayside during our regular Monday surveys. Martin Rand confirmed it is rare in the wild, but common in gardens, which is certainly where that one came from. My wife informed me that we had a clump in our garden. Oh, well, you win some and . . .

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site . . .** <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 19-20, 9 to 22 May 2011**

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

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

#### **Work Session**

Thursday 19 May – report by Wally Osborne

A perfect spring morning brought out 12 volunteers and on this occasion, we were joined by Rachel Moroney of BTCV, to make the annual inspection of our risk assessment and health & safety procedures and briefing' processes. Rachel was satisfied and our public liability insurance will now be paid by HBC.

The primary task was to remove the brushwood barriers & hazard tape erected around the North Meadow 'wildflower area' before the spring growth began. This tactic has been successful in discouraging random paths being made by visitors across this most important area. It was decided that the time was right to remove the various branches & logs so that later grass cutting would not be compromised. A few small new barriers were made at the main path edges and all four information notices were renewed and/or replaced (a few days later). The brushwood barriers will no doubt need replenishing and rebuilding over the course of the summer.

We then split into smaller teams who proceeded to carry out the following tasks: 'Weeded' the new hedgerow plants along the western boundary of the Seagull Lane patch. It was noted that very few of the saplings had died which is very good out of a total of the more than 200 planted. Removed the flower heads from many Hemlock Water-dropwort plants in the Central Meadow in the Lumley wet area and from the edge of the path to the west. Finally, litter picked Palmers Road copse and the River Ems. All of these important tasks were successfully completed and at the halfway stage, Pam Phillips provided us all with tea, coffee and biscuits. Thanks to all for your dedication and energy.

Photos on web site at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2011.html>

Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 5 & Thursday 16 June.

#### **Herbicide spraying of riverbank**

A few weeks ago, Maurice and Pam noticed that vegetation on a section of the western riverbank next to the AD Williams industrial unit was looking very yellow. They wondered whether it had been sprayed with a herbicide as the vegetation there is now completely dead. This is the area where there is an invasion of Japanese Knotweed which was still there a few weeks ago and in the past had been treated with an approved herbicide by the Environment Agency under licence. A licence is always required whenever a herbicide is used near a watercourse to prevent damage to wildlife. I do not know whether the herbicide was used by the Environment Agency but I am going to check and send them a photo. If anybody notices anything like this going on along the riverbank, please let a member of the BMCG committee know or contact the Environment Agency.

#### **Friends of Hollybank Woods Open Day & Arts Trail**

**On Saturday afternoon, more than 300 people enjoyed the splendid sunshine in glorious surroundings with artwork created by local children of all ages displayed around the woods. Other activities included a guided woodland walk & storytelling by Jonathon Huet, face painting, Morris dancing, folk singing, Brownie campfire songs and cake and tea provided by Emsworth Country Market.**

#### **Forthcoming events**

##### **Saturday 28 May, 10.30am-4.30pm, Havant Park, Havant Goes Greener Family Fair**

Brook Meadow Conservation Group (BMCG) is joining forces with other conservation groups in the Borough, including Friends of Hollybank Woods, Emsworth Waysides & Havant Borough Tree Wardens. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) is coordinating the conservation effort. In addition to our displays of wildlife & conservation photographs, and for sale items such as the Brook Meadow history booklet & wildlife ID guides, BMCG will be providing activities such as Making Bird & Bat Boxes and the ever-popular Wishing Tree. We hope to see you there.

##### **Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 7- 8.30pm, Country Lore & Healing Meadow Herbs**

Herb Walk in Brook Meadow, led by Steve Taylor, herbalist at the Medicine Garden. Meet next to Brook Meadow interpretation board, Palmers Road car park. Free to members, non members £3 which gives membership of BMCG.

##### **Monday 11 July, 7pm Brookfield Hotel, Emsworth, Hedgerow Harvesting and Bats & Trees**

Jon Stokes of the Tree Council is giving a guided walk on 'Hedgerow Harvesting' starting at 7.15pm (taking about an hour). Followed by a talk by local bat expert Nik Knight on 'Bats and Trees' with a walk at dusk to detect bats in the Warblington church area. Please bring a torch and a bat box if you come on the bat walk. More details to follow shortly.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows

### **Water Voles**

I have had only five Water Voles sightings reported over the past two weeks, though that is not entirely surprising considering the height of the bankside vegetation. Maurice Lillie got a good view of a youngster in the section north of the north bridge on May 20. Jeff Fleming spent 7 hours in his photography hide on the river bank in Palmer's Road Copse on May 11 without seeing a single Water Vole! That's life for a photographer, I suppose. For all the Water Vole news and sightings go to . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

### **Millpond news**

Reed Warblers are chuntering away (ie singing) in the reedbeds on Peter Pond. A Coot has built its nest in the centre of the pond, but it is unlikely to survive the spring tides. The Coot family with four youngsters from the north raft nest box on Slipper Millpond is still intact and looking good. Prospects are less promising for the Mute Swan on a nest in close to the western path. There is another Swan nest on the marina embankment. This morning, an early Cormorant was bathing on Slipper Millpond

### **Other bird news**

A family of 3 Moorhen chicks is on the river just north of the south bridge. The first Swifts of the year were flying around the houses in Bridge Road Emsworth on May 13, but they seem to have gone away. Lorraine Clode had a Bar-tailed Godwit on the small beach on the edge of the millpond outside her house on May 10. A first for the millpond! Patrick Murphy and his wife had the pleasure of seeing four Red Kites in the sky while they were having lunch at the Black Rabbit in Arundel. Steve Grange was in luck on his daily cycle commute along the Broadmarsh coastal path on May 16, when he spotted a male Golden Oriole. A very very rare sight in our area.

### **Ragged Robin count**

I did what I think will have to be my final Ragged Robin count of the year on Brook Meadow, as many of the flowers are starting to wither: Lumley area = 163, north of causeway = 51, Total = 214. This is well below the record count of 625 last year, but better than any year since 2006. Numbers vary greatly from one year to the next. See the web site for May 21 for details of previous counts.

### **Orchids are coming**

Southern Marsh and Common Spotted Orchids are coming along well on the protected area of Brook Meadow. Please take care if you look for them. Bee Orchids and Pyramidal Orchid are also expected. Much easier to see are the Bee Orchids at the bottom of the slope below the Deckhouses on North Thorney. The best place to see orchids is around the forts on Portsdown Hill, try the path in front of Fort Purbrook. Thousands of Southern Marsh Orchids will soon be out on the Langstone South Moor.

### **Other plant news**

Eastney Beach has a glorious display of flowering Sea Kale and Red Valerian, plus a good quantity of the less conspicuous Subterranean Clover. I am seeing and smelling Lesser Swine-cress everywhere at present. Smooth Meadow-grass (with short ligules) is fairly common on some of the waysides, but is surprisingly hard to find on Brook Meadow. Rough Meadow-grass is common. Marsh Foxtail is out in the Lumley puddle area, 2 weeks earlier than last year. Spiked Sedge is out on the north meadow (orchid area), which means all 12 sedges of the Brook Meadow list have been recorded this year.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site . . .** <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

### **Emsworth Waysides News**

Jane Brook and I have been doing our weekly monitoring of the Emsworth waysides, where the variety of wild flowers and grasses continues to amaze us. The waysides are also working in attracting bees, butterflies and damselflies. The small verge at the junction of Christopher Way and New Brighton Road is a particular gem with its rare Wild Clary coming into flower and worth seeing. The large area at the northern end of Westbourne Avenue is a beautiful wayside, with Meadow Foxtail grasses swaying in the breeze and the rare Knotted Hedge-parsley flourishing on the edge of the footpath. The Bridge Road car park verge remains the flagship wayside packed with a glorious mixture of flowers, grasses and sedges - 156 species at the latest count! Following its SINC status it has now designated as a 'Road Verge of Ecological Importance' (RVEI) by Hampshire County Council. To cap it all, the nationally rare Clustered Clover is in flower on the Warblington Underpass wayside. We could be in line for another three wayside SINC's at this rate! Please see the waysides web site for all the latest news on this exciting project . . . <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/few-NEWS.htm>

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 17-18, 25 April to 8 May 2011**

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

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

#### **Work Session Sunday 1 May**

Despite a much lower turnout on a cloudy but warm and dry morning, a dedicated team of 7 volunteers carried out the following tasks. Using the power scythe, most of the occasional paths in the south, central and north meadows were cut. The arisings from paths in the South Meadow were raked, removed and piled up to reinforce a dead hedge.

Brambles and Stinging Nettles overhanging the main gravel paths were cut back with shears to allow better passage for pedestrians. In addition, vegetation around steps, seats, bins and signcases was trimmed.

Finally, the newly planted Rowans and Wild Cherry whips in the North Meadow were cleared of excess vegetation and watered. Some of the cane stakes had been removed from the Rowans and the plastic guards were not really up to the job. These were all replaced with larger and stronger guards and stakes the next day.

Thanks to Pam for providing much needed refreshments and to all the volunteers for such sterling work.

**Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 19 May and Sunday 5 June.**

#### **Interpretation board window replaced**

The window in the interpretation board at the Seagull Lane entrance has been replaced by Richard as the old one was getting rather cloudy and had a large scratch across the middle. The pictorial map displayed in the signcase is now looking much better.

#### **Progress with MapMate, wildlife recording software**

We are continuing to learn about how MapMate works by recording the locations of Cuckooflower on Brook Meadow. David Search has put these into the program on what are called atlases. We intend to continue with the mapping by recording selected plants such as Ragged Robin and the 8 meadow indicators. The aim is to record differences in the distribution of these plants from year to year.

#### **YOUR HELP IS NEEDED at Havant Goes Greener event: Saturday 28 May, 10am to 5pm, Havant Park**

Friends of the Earth, Havant Transition Network and HBC are organising a 'Family Fair' event in Havant Park on **Saturday 28 May** as part of the **Havant Goes Greener** week. Brook Meadow Conservation Group (BMCG) will be there along with other conservation groups in the borough, including Emsworth Waysides & Havant Borough Tree Wardens. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) is coordinating the conservation effort. In addition to our displays of wildlife & conservation photographs, and for sale items such as the Brook Meadow history booklet & wildlife ID guides, BMCG would like to provide conservation activities such as the ever popular making bird & bat boxes and the wishing tree. We need your help to man the stall, especially the activities making bird & bat boxes and the wishing tree. If you can help out, even if this is only for an hour or two, please contact Frances on 01243 430314. Many thanks.

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

#### **Isle of Wight**

I have been away on holiday on the Isle of Wight for the past week and I am grateful to Richard Somerscocks who has been keeping an eye (and his worthy camera) on the local wildlife. All the details and his photos are on the web site. As for the Isle of Wight, seeing a fine heathland restoration project in process and having a Red Squirrel for breakfast (!) were my highlights. If you wish to know more please go to . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/isle-wight-may-2011.htm>

#### **Water Voles**

I received nine Water Vole sightings on Brook Meadow over the past two weeks, mainly from Maurice Lillie and Pam Phillips, our two main early morning spotters, bringing the total for the year to 58. They have been seen on all areas of the river, but particularly from the north bridge down to the sluice gate. While this is encouraging, an article in the current Hampshire Wildlife Trust magazine sounds a word of caution, that small and isolated populations of Water Voles, like the Brook Meadow one, are particularly vulnerable to extinction.

For all the Water Vole news and sightings go to . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

#### **Birds**

Two Whitethroats seem to have settled in on Brook Meadow, along with three each of Blackcap and Chiffchaff. But it looks as if the Cetti's Warbler has gone; there has been no report since April 8. I have not heard the Reed Warbler on Peter Pond for some weeks, though I did hear one singing from the reedbeds in the south eastern corner of Slipper Millpond this afternoon. The Mute Swan pair have clearly abandoned any idea of nest building this year. However, the Coot family with four youngsters on Slipper Millpond are doing well. We could be having more Coot chicks, as there are nests by the reeds on the east side of the pond and in the box on the southern raft. Richard Somerscocks has been checking Thorney Little Deep where both Reed Warbler and Sedge Warbler can be heard and sometimes seen, though that does not apply to the Cetti's Warblers. Richard has also seen (and heard) a Cuckoo on North Thorney, along with Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat. South of Little Deep there are quite a lot of Skylarks in the fields. Richard also spotted a Whinchat on the wire fence by the channel. And there are three Whimbrel in the Emsworth Channel.

### ***Butterflies***

Butterflies were plentiful on Brook Meadow during the warm weather, including Large, Small and Green Veined White, Orange Tip, Peacock, Comma, Red Admiral, Brimstone and Holly Blue. Maurice Lillie spotted the first Small Copper of the year on April 26, a bit earlier than usual, but not much. On May 6, Richard Somerscocks was most surprised to see a Brown Argus, almost exactly 3 months earlier than last year! However, Ralph Hollins reminded us that Brown Argus is one of the butterflies which has two generations each summer, one in May and June, the other starting in late July, so the sight of one now is not so surprising. I went out this afternoon and found the first Common Blue of the year on the 'orchid area' of Brook Meadow.

### ***Other insects***

Richard Somerscocks has been busy logging and photographing several species of damselflies on Brook Meadow and has carefully researched their sexes. He says, females can be confusing because there are often quite marked colour variations, but males seem to be more consistent. Richard has images of male and female Azure Damselflies, Common Blue Damselflies and Blue Tailed Damselflies. Large Red Damselfly and Broad-bodied Chaser have also been about. Jill Stanley sent me an amazing photo of a Crab Spider on a rose in her small, north Emsworth garden, having caught a bee! She says the spider's poison is powerful enough to kill its prey instantaneously. Dozens of Speckled Yellow Moths were on the heathland area at the top of Longcose Hill in Hollybank Woods on Saturday morning. They look like butterflies, but are in fact day-flying moths, that are constantly on the move.

### ***Hollybank Woods***

I did my annual Early Purple Orchid count in Hollybank Woods on April 29 and found a total of 662, up on last year's count of 617, but generally in line with the level of counts over the last three years. Since they came up about two weeks early they are now well past their best, but still worth seeing. See the web site for details. The Bluebells are also still hanging on, but for not much longer. Orchids seem to avoid growing with the Bluebells.

There are lots of other flowering plants to enjoy in the woodland including, Wood Speedwell, Germander Speedwell, Bugle, Primroses, Pignut, Wood Melick, Wood Millet and lots of Remote Sedge and Wood Sedge. Wood-sorrel leaves were showing, but I could not see any flowers. Yellow Pimpernel (5 pointed petals) and Tormentil (4 notched petals) were in flower at the top of Longcose Hill near the Birch scrub.

### ***Brook Meadow plants***

Ragged Robin is coming along well on Brook Meadow. I counted a good 100 flowering plants this afternoon, though there is a long way to go to beat last year's record of 625. Other newly flowering plants I noted on Brook Meadow were Yellow Flag, Cut-leaved Crane's-bill, Beaked Hawk's-beard, Hoary Cress and Yarrow. And one of the Southern Marsh Orchids is already showing its petals. The sedges are also doing very well on Brook Meadow, with Divided Sedge and Distant Sedge abundant on the Lumley area, with good amounts of False Fox Sedge and Hairy Sedge also showing. Sea Club-rush is also in flower around the Hermitage Millponds.

***Emsworth Wildlife Web site . . .*** <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 15-16, April 11 to 24, 2011**

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

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

#### **Work Session - by Mike**

On Thursday 21 April, 10 volunteers gathered on a lovely, warm, spring day with a pleasant breeze. The first task was to use the power scythe to cut the eastern edge of the 'bramble path' in the South Meadow, avoiding plants of interest such as the Cuckoo Flowers which had recently come into bloom, and then rake it clear. A team of three cleared rubbish and low branches from the River Ems, starting just south of the south bridge and eventually reaching the sluice upstream. Their 'prize find' was an enamelled chamber pot *sans derriere*! Some of the Willow branches were used to block the adventitious paths over the bramble bank. The 'cut and rake' team moved on to remove early luxuriant growth of Goosegrass and Stinging Nettle from a lower section of the South Meadow. Having enjoyed Pam's refreshments by the central seat, the teams resumed their earlier tasks. The 'cut and rake' team finally cut and cleared an extra path on the west side of the North Meadow, to encourage an alternative route as in 2010, before stumps were drawn in time for the Easter weekend.

**Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 1 & Thursday 19 May.**

#### **Bat habitat surveys**

Unfortunately Pat and Graham Walsgrove had to cancel the bat habitat survey planned for last Thursday evening due to ill health. Apologies for any inconvenience caused. The survey will now take place in May. If you are interested in helping out, please contact myself (01243 430314) or Pat for details (02392 232824).

#### **Progress with MapMate, wildlife recording software**

Four members of the BMCG committee met with David Search at the beginning of April to learn about MapMate software which we hope will enable us to map and eventually monitor certain plants on Brook Meadow. Maurice and myself made a start by mapping most of the trees in the North and Central Meadows onto maps created by David Search. The subgroup is meeting again on Tuesday to get more details about recording specific plants and how the data is put into the program. Many thanks to David Search who has spent a lot of time and energy helping us.

#### **Your help is needed . . . for the 'Havant Goes Greener' event**

Friends of the Earth, Havant Transition Network and HBC are organising the 'Havant Goes Greener' event in Havant Park on Saturday 28 May 10am to 5pm. Brook Meadow Conservation Group will be there along with other conservation groups in the borough, including Emsworth Waysides & Havant Borough Tree Wardens. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) is coordinating the conservation effort. In addition to our displays of wildlife & conservation photographs, and for sale items such as the Brook Meadow history booklet & wildlife ID guides, BMCG would like to provide conservation activities such as the ever popular making bird & bat boxes and the wishing tree. We need your help to man the stall, especially the activities making bird & bat boxes and the wishing tree. If you can help out, even if this is only for an hour or two, contact Frances on 01243 430314. Many thanks.

#### **Forthcoming guided walks in Brook Meadow**

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 7- 8.30pm, Country Lore & Healing Meadow Herbs

Herb Walk led by Steve Taylor, herbalist at the Medicine Garden. Meet next to Brook Meadow interpretation board in Palmers Road car park. Free to members, non members £3 pp which gives membership of BMCG.

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July 10am & 2pm Two Ems Valley Walks led by Brian Fellows & Jennifer Rye.

Learn about the wildlife & history of the southern section of the Ems Valley, including Brook Meadow. Meet next to Brook Meadow interpretation board in Palmers Road car park. Both walks are free and take about 2hrs.

#### **Friends of Emsworth Waysides news - by Brian Fellows**

All continues to go well in this second year of the Emsworth waysides project in which 17 verges and other small areas have been set aside by the local Council for no-cutting during the growing season. Weekly plant surveys are being carried out with all plants logged. We are finding lots of new plants that were missed last year. A summary of the results of each survey can be seen on the web site news page. The full results will be published at the end of the season. We also keep the waysides clear of litter and note other wildlife, eg, last week we had Common Lizard and dozens of Shield Bugs.

Web site . . . <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/few-NEWS.htm>

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows

### Water Voles

This looks like a very good year for Water Voles! They are very active right now and there is a good chance of seeing one on the river banks if you are patient and wait for a few minutes. The best places are near the observation fence and in front of the metal fence by the AD Williams building. We have had over 20 sightings over the past two weeks, taking the total for 2011 so far to 49. I had a great view of one swimming to and fro from one side of the river to the other, collecting nesting material on Apr 23. See the sequence of photos on the Emsworth web site. We have also had sightings of young voles, so please keep watching. But beware, Brown Rats are also about!

### Nesting news

The Mute Swan nesting on the Peter Pond island has had a traumatic time. It started nest building very late and then built its nest too low down, resulting in it being swamped by the first spring tide. However, she has persevered and today was sitting on a reasonably high nest. However, after such a late start I am not optimistic that any cygnets will be produced, but one never knows!

The Coot on Slipper Millpond have no such problems, nesting as they do on a floating raft. They have produced a brood of four youngsters which all looked fine when I saw them today.

Mallard ducklings have been popping up in the past week; there was a small family of four on the Westbrook Stream in Bridge Road car park and only this morning, Pam Phillips reported 10 tiny ducklings with mum in the River Ems on Brook Meadow.

Ralph Hollins reported at least 12 Little Egrets are now on nests at Langstone Mill Pond.

Robin Pottinger has had a pair of Bullfinches in his Southbourne garden, but lost the male when it flew into his patio window. The female continued to visit Robin's garden feeders alone until, appropriately on Easter Day, a new male Bullfinch turned up. We look forward to little ones.

### Migrant bird news

Our summer migrants have all arrived. Blackcaps are absolutely everywhere this year, but fewer Chiffchaffs. Two Whitethroats seem to have established themselves on Brook Meadow and we should have at least another one. A Reed Warbler has been singing in the Peter Pond reedbeds, but seems to have gone. Also, there have been no reports of the Cetti's Warbler for about 3 weeks. Swallows are nesting as usual in the stables on North Thorney and some can be seen feeding over Peter Pond. But there is still no sign of any House Martins anywhere in Emsworth.

You should hear at least one, and possibly two, Nightingales singing their glorious song from the plantation 100 yards north of the amenity tip in Marlpit Lane, Woodmancote. While there, listen for the soft purring song of the Turtle Dove. I have yet to hear a Cuckoo. Has anyone heard one locally?

I was pleased to find the regular Corn Bunting singing from a tall Oak tree at Hare's Lane Funtington during my BBS survey of that area, a very rare bird in our area these days.

### Plant news

What a spring this has been! Everywhere you look there are flowers and blossom. My grandchildren have been revelling in the abundance of Dandelion clocks. On Brook Meadow, Cow Parsley is lining the main river path and Cuckooflowers have been popping up all over the place. Common Comfrey (white and purple) is flowering, as are all three Buttercups, out-competing the declining Celandines. There is a galaxy of other wild flowers, including Nipplewort, Wood Avens, Dove's-foot Cranesbill, Cut-leaved Crane's-bill, Germander Speedwell, Beaked Hawk's-beard, Common Sorrel, Red Clover and Common Vetch, to name just a few! And English Scurvygrass is also looking very good at Nore Barn. After a slow start, grasses and sedges are also coming on. Distant Sedge and Divided Sedge are abundant on Brook Meadow with False Fox Sedge starting two weeks early. As for Sharp-flowered Rush, which only arrived on Brook Meadow in 2008, well, it seems to be taking over the Lumley area! There are some fine displays of Bluebells in local woodlands, e.g., Racton Park Wood. And I am told the Early Purple Orchids are in full flower in Hollybank Woods. What a wonderful world!

### Insects

Butterflies have benefited from the warm weather with Orange Tip, Holly Blue and Whites very prominent. Today, Richard Somerscocks also saw the first dragonfly of the year on Brook Meadow, a Broad-bodied Chaser. See web site for Richard's photo. Tony Poulett had swarms of flying insects with long antennae in his garden at the weekend - a type of longhorn moth called Adela reaumurella. The males gather round a selected bush and 'dance' in the air hoping to attract females! And there have been swarms of St Mark's Flies around the area in the past week.

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

**BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 13-14, 28 March to 10 April, 2011**

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

**CONSERVATION NEWS - by Frances Jannaway**

**Work Session**

Sunday 3 April: Twelve volunteers turned up for the first work session in April. It was cloudy at first but the sun came out later. Unfortunately, we were unable to use the power scythe as planned as the cutting blades had seized up over the winter period. Mike will give the machine a service hopefully in time for the next work session.

This was perhaps fortuitous as a more urgent task was flagged up by several of the volunteers. This was to restrict access to the central wildflower area in the North Meadow. Over the winter period, footfall had not been restricted to the paths. This area has vulnerable wildflowers, such as 4 types of Orchid as well as Yellow Rattle. A dead hedge was created around the whole area using branches and brushwood, finishing off with a length of red and white hazard tape. Later the same day, I returned with 4 notices explaining why access to this area was being restricted.

Meanwhile another group of volunteers tidied up debris in the river especially along the northern section where a raft had been made some days earlier. In addition, a 'tree house' was dismantled near the north bridge. The den included a fitted carpet nailed onto pallets and a seat taken from an old office chair. It is a shame to have to remove the den as the young people who constructed it had obviously put a lot of effort into it but Brook Meadow is first and foremost a Nature Reserve and is too small to be able to support this kind of activity. More below.

Another task was to cut back Brambles encroaching over the paths in the North Meadow and add to the dead hedge to block access to Gooseberry Cottage from Brook Meadow.

Finally, new notices were put on the 3 notice boards explaining what practical work is going on in Brook Meadow as well as renewing the dedicated Water Vole notice near the sluice.

As always thanks to Pam for providing much needed refreshments. Many thanks to all the volunteers for their enthusiasm and hard work.

**Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 21 April & Sunday 1 May.**

**Den building and Seagull Lane industrial unit**

It was obvious that most of the materials for the tree house den had come from the industrial unit adjacent to Brook Meadow. Access from Brook Meadow into the industrial unit yard was easy to achieve with no proper fence. On Monday morning, Dave Lee went to see the MD of the industrial unit concerned and explained the problem. Incidentally in the meantime, the den had been partially rebuilt using pallets and so Dave was able to point out the evidence clearly. The MD agreed to sort it and on visiting Brook Meadow on Wednesday this seems to have been done with the removal of the pallets and a fence being put up to restrict access to the industrial unit. Many thanks for the prompt action.

**Memorial name plaque on north bridge**

A week or so ago, the sorry state of the name plaque on the north bridge was brought to my attention. I mentioned this to Dave Lee and no sooner the word than the action, the plaque is as good as new and you can once more read the names of those who were killed in the plane crash during WW II. Many thanks Dave.

**Bat habitat surveys**

Pat and Graham Walsgrove need your help to carry out a bat habitat survey in April. This is to ascertain whether there are any bat roosting sites in the trees along the River Ems. The proposed dates for the survey are Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> and Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> April. The survey will start before dusk so at about 7.30pm. If you are interested in helping out, please contact myself (01243 430314) or Pat for details (02392 232824). It is hoped that local bat expert Nik Knight will be available to help with the survey.

**Forthcoming guided walks in Brook Meadow**

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 7- 8.30pm, Country Lore & Healing Meadow Herbs. Herb Walk led by Steve Taylor, herbalist at the Medicine Garden. Meet next to Brook Meadow interpretation board in Palmers Road car park. Free to members, non members £3 pp which gives membership of BMCG.

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> July, 10am & 2pm. Two Ems Valley Walks led by Brian Fellows & Jennifer Rye. Learn about the wildlife & history of the southern section of the Ems Valley, including Brook Meadow. Meet next to Brook Meadow interpretation board in Palmers Road car park. Both walks are free and take about 2hrs.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows

### **Water Voles and rats**

We have had 14 Water Vole sightings on Brook Meadow over the past two weeks, taking this year's total to 26. Most sightings are coming from the area between the sluice gate and the north bridge, though there have been a few from north of the north bridge. We have also had a couple of Brown Rat sightings, in one case, misidentified as a Water Vole. Here is a summary of the main differences.

Size: A Brown Rat is larger than the Water Vole and sleeker. A Water Vole is a rather dumpy creature.

Behaviour: A Brown Rat is a fast mover and tends to scurry along the river banks, looking for food. A Water Vole is more sedate, typically sitting on the river bank munching leaves.

Tail: A Brown Rat has a long hairless tail, but the tail of a Water Vole is short and furry.

Ears: A Brown Rat has large prominent ears, those of a Water Vole are small and often hidden in fur.

Nose: A Brown Rat has a pointed nose and a Water Vole has a blunt stubby nose.

There is an illustration of the main differences on the Water Vole web page.

### **Bird news**

Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps have arrived in force and at least three of each can be heard singing around Brook Meadow. Whitethroat will be the next arrival, so listen for its short scratchy song.

The Cetti's Warbler still blasts out its song from the Peter Pond and Lumley Stream area. I have been listening for Reed Warbler on Peter Pond, but no sound as yet.

Robin Pottinger invited Tony Wootton to photograph a pair of Bullfinches in his garden. Later, Robin conveyed the sad news that the male had met his end by flying into the kitchen window. The female is still feeding and we trust will manage to incubate any eggs and bring up the young alone.

### **Millpond news**

The Coot pair nesting in the nest box on the northern raft on Slipper Millpond had two chicks. There is nothing on other two rafts on the millpond, though Coots may be nesting in the bankside vegetation.

There seems no prospects of the local Mute Swan pair nesting this year. This morning one swan was on Slipper Millpond while the other was on Peter Pond. Is there any Mute Swan nest in Emsworth?

### **Insect news**

Good numbers of butterflies have been on the wing during the warm weather of the past week, including Brimstone, Orange Tip, Comma, Peacock, Red Admiral, Holly Blue and Small White.

There are masses of 7-spot Ladybirds on the nettles, but I have yet to see a Harlequin Ladybird.

I have been surprised by the number of 'Nursery-web spiders' (*Pisaura mirabilis*) basking on nettle leaves, often with their long front legs stuck out in front.

During a work session on Brook Meadow, Dave Lee showed us all a Bee Fly in a jam jar. This insect is common around flowers, sucking nectar through its long and rather fearsome looking proboscis. But it is quite harmless. Dave also found a nest of Brown-tail Moth caterpillars in the Brambles at the end of Seagull Lane, the first has seen locally. Not so harmless!

### **Plant news**

Garlic Mustard and White Dead-nettle are generally in flower around Brook Meadow, and Cow Parsley is not far behind. The first Cuckooflowers were out in Bridge Road car park on March 30, but they have only just started to flower on Brook Meadow. Orchid leaves are showing on Brook Meadow, which accounts for the dead hedge barrier around the area to protect the plants from exercising dogs.

Bluebells are starting to show in Hollybank Woods and should be at their best in a week or so.

Incidentally, the prickly-leaved shrub that I asked for help with in the last bulletin, turned out to be Holm Oak - thanks to Martin Rand for putting us right on this one.

There are some superb displays of Blackthorn blossom around the town this spring.

### **SINC for Emsworth wayside**

On April 5 we received the excellent news from Nicky Court (Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre) that the Bridge Road Wayside had been granted the status of a SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation). This is a big incentive for the Friends of Emsworth Waysides project, being the first official recognition that the project is working, in improving the natural environment and in increasing biodiversity. Although the Bridge Road site has always been our flagship, is it only one of 17 waysides spread across Emsworth and we hope in time that others can be put forward for SINC status, providing we can find some notable species. The waysides are on the move!

Waysides web site . . . <http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/few-NEWS.htm>

**Emsworth Wildlife Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report.

**CONSERVATION NEWS - by Frances Jannaway**

**Work Session** - Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> March

Volunteer numbers continue to be good (14 again) including one new volunteer, Rosie O'Hea. A strong volunteer base is essential to enable the group to carry out a wide variety of tasks and this work session was no exception. The weather was cloudy but dry with virtually no wind – ideal work weather!

One of the main tasks was to cut back the Bramble 'hedge' along the eastern boundary of the South Meadow which was gradually encroaching onto the path. A team of 7 volunteers tackled the Bramble with shears creating bays along the eastern side of the path. The cuttings were raked and piled up making a dead hedge to block access to Gooseberry Cottage from Brook Meadow.

Meanwhile a smaller team of volunteers (Mike, Maurice, Phil and Jennifer) set to and installed two new notice boards next to the signcases to replace the ones which were vandalised last year. Thanks to Mike and Maurice for supplying the materials.

Another task tackled by Tony and Patrick was to remove a large branch from a Crack Willow which was leaning over in the North Meadow. Although the branch was not causing a danger if it split and broke off it would damage the rest of the tree. The larger branches were removed to the edges of the meadow and the brushwood was used to reinforce the willow hurdles along the riverbank especially next to the sluice near the central seat. Thanks to Pam for providing welcome refreshments. After the coffee break, we were joined by 4 students and their teacher Chris from Glenwood School. The young people were keen to help out and did a thorough litterpick of Palmers Road copse, filling two rubbish bags with mainly bottles. Many thanks to all the volunteers for their enthusiasm and hard work.

**Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 3 & Thursday 21 April.**

**Otter and Water Vole training** – Fran Southgate

I have two confirmed dates for otter and water vole training days for this year. The first is Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May and the second is Thursday September 15<sup>th</sup>. The training days are ostensibly free, although this time we need to ask for £5 per person just to cover the cost of hiring the room. If you are interested in attending either date, please let me know, email: [fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk](mailto:fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk) and send a cheque as soon as possible to secure your place. The cheque should be made out to Sussex Wildlife Trust (with Sussex Wetland Landscapes Project written on the back) and sent c/o Fran Southgate, Sussex Wildlife Trust, Woods Mill, Henfield, West Sussex BN5 9SD.

Further details of the day are below. If anyone wishes to lift share or can provide lifts for people, please let me know so we can cut down our transport miles.

Places will be prioritised for people who can commit to carrying out surveys for otters and/or water voles in Sussex, so please pass this on to anyone you think would be interested in becoming a future otter and water vole spotter for Sussex.

The course will start at 10am at Winchester City Mill in Winchester (just across the border in Hampshire). We will spend most of the morning in the class room (until about 12.30) before lunch (please bring your own or there are plentiful shops and cafes nearby), and then a couple of hours in the afternoon looking for otter and water vole signs on Winnell Moors Nature Reserve. I will aim to finish about 3pm but it will depend on how long you all want to spend on the Nature Reserve. Tea and biscuits will be provided.

Transport wise it's about 10-15 mins walk from the train station, through the main high street.

If you are driving and need to park, please bring at least £8 in change with you. There is a multistorey car park nearby but **you can only stay for a few hours at a time**. It is much better to park in the Chesil Street car park (if you are driving into Winchester on the B3404 it is on your right just before you get to the high street/bridge street mini roundabout). For £6-8 you can stay all day. It will be approximately a 3 km walk around the Winnell Moors Nature Reserve to find otter signs. Please bring waterproofs, and waterproof/sturdy shoes, and any binoculars or cameras you need. No dogs please.

**Adder sighting in Lumley**

My neighbour was walking his dog last week along the footpath from Lumley sluice to Seagull Lane when he saw an Adder sunning itself in the grass at the back of Constant Spring where the garden and woodland are on both sides of the footpath. The Adder hissed at the dog who was fortunately on the lead and then disappeared into the grass only to reappear (rather surprisingly) further along the footpath much to the consternation of both the dog and his owner.

Is this the first sighting of an Adder in this area?

Brian's note: On 5 Sep 2010 an Adder was reported to have bitten a dog near the A27 underpass. This was the first Adder sighting in Emsworth that I was aware of until now.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows

### **Water Voles**

We have had several Water Vole sightings from the River Ems in the past 2 weeks including one today from Caroline and Ray French, who were our top watchers in 2008. This takes the year's total to 12. All sightings so far have been from the north bend south to the sluice gate. Nothing as yet from the Palmer's Road Copse section. All Water Vole news and sightings are on the web site at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

### **. . . and rats**

Robin Pottinger spotted a Brown Rat scurrying along the river bank and wondered if they were a threat to the voles. Expert Rob Strachan says that rats have been known to predate on nestling and juvenile Water Voles, but generally voles are quite capable of standing up for themselves when faced with a rat. The big predator of Water Voles is, of course, American Mink. Fortunately, we do not have Mink on the River Ems; if we did there would be no Water Voles.

### **Spotted Redshank**

The famous Emsworth Spotted Redshank, that has spent the last seven winters feeding in the small stream at Nore Barn left the area, very much on schedule, on March 19. It is probably now wending its way back to its breeding grounds in Northern Scandinavia. If it remains true to form we should expect to see it back in Emsworth somewhere between Oct 18 and Nov 9 for what will be its 8th winter here. What an amazing bird. It must be most well known, most looked at and most photographed Spotted Redshank in the whole country. Please come back!

### **Cetti's Warbler**

Another local star is the Cetti's Warbler that is back on Brook Meadow for the second year running. It was first heard on March 14, a good 2 weeks earlier than last year. It has been heard (and sometimes seen) most days since then, usually in the Lumley Stream area, or around the reedbeds to the north of Peter Pond. Its voice is loud and unmistakable; 'chetti, chetti, chetti'. But you have to be very patient and lucky to catch sight of it. It has a chestnut brown back and cocks its tail a bit like a Wren.

### **Millpond news**

Little Egrets are gathering again at Langstone Mill Pond, where they have nested in recent years. Mute Swans are nesting on Langstone Mill Pond, but there is still not sign of nest building from the local pair on the Hermitage Millponds. The Swan pair in the Nore Barn stream are probably young birds, as there is no suitable nesting in that area. A Coot is snug behind the usual barricade of twigs in the nest box on the northern raft on Slipper Millpond, but I could not see any other Coot nesting. A male female pair of Tufted Duck were on Slipper Millpond this morning, though they have never nested there to my knowledge.

### **Other bird news**

A few Brent Geese are still hanging around in the local harbour and Black-tailed Godwits will be here for another few weeks. But pretty well all our other wintering visitors have gone. But summer visitors are coming in. Chiffchaffs have been here for some time, 'chiff-chaffing' away in small woodlands. Caroline French heard what was probably the first migrant Blackcap on Brook Meadow today. April should see Swallow, Whitethroat, Reed and Sedge Warbler and hopefully Cuckoo and Turtle Dove. Tony Wootton spotted a pair of Blue Tits entering a hole in a Crack Willow tree on Brook Meadow. Tony also saw a female Blackbird with two conspicuous white patches on its wings. This could be the same bird seen recently by Dave Lee. Keep a look out for it and let me know if you see it. Two Buzzards were soaring over Brook Meadow, possibly from the Lumley Mill Farm nest? Caroline French has seen four Grey Partridges in the Prinsted area, clearly a good place to see them. There are some good birds to see at Farlington Marshes. Colin Vanner has got some great images of Short-eared Owl and Spoonbill in the past week. See the web site for his photos. I saw and heard a superb Yellowhammer on the top of Portsdown Hill on Mar 24.

### **Butterflies emerge**

The recent warm weather resulted in an emergence of butterflies, including many Commas, Peacocks and Brimstones. Tony Wootton and I also saw several Small Whites on Brook Meadow on Mar 23. Any strong flying small white butterfly at this time of the year most likely to be a Small White, as Large Whites are later and Green-veined Whites have weak flight behaviour. Tony and I also got a distant, but unmistakable view of a Holly Blue. This turned out to be only the second Hampshire Holly Blue for 2011, the first one being from the Isle of Wight 2 days earlier. Interestingly, Holly Blue lays its eggs on Holly in spring and switches to Ivy in summer.

Richard Somerscocks saw the first Small Tortoiseshell of the year on Brook Meadow on Mar 25. Let's hope this once common butterfly is recovering after several years of scarcity.

### **Summer Snowflake**

I was asked in the week what the attractive flower was with clusters of white bell-shaped flowers, tipped green. It is Summer Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*), misnamed, in fact, as it flowers in the spring. The much rarer Spring Snowflake is larger than Summer Snowflake with single or paired flowers. There is a particularly good example on the main path through Palmer's Road Copse. But do not confuse Summer Snowflake with the similar looking Three-cornered Leek which is also in flower at present. The latter has a garlic smell, has a 3-cornered stem and has no green tips to the petals.

### **Butterbur continues its march**

I did the annual Butterbur count on Brook Meadow this week, which broke all records with an astonishing 859 flower spikes, easily beating last year's record of 597. The big increase has been largely due to the spread of plants onto the embankment and meadow in front of the seat, which now accounts for over 40% of the plants on the meadow. This is still only a small area of the meadow, so it is not an urgent conservation issue. The flowers certainly add to the spring flora of the meadow and are attractive when looked at closely. They were described as a 'forest of flowers' by one visitor. The subsequent large Butterbur leaves also attract great interest, particularly from children. Interestingly, a new colony of Butterbur is now developing on railway embankment on the north river.

### **Periwinkles - problem solved?**

Ralph Hollins and I are still puzzling over Periwinkles, but after several dead-ends, I think we have finally cracked them! Those on Daw Lane and outside No 45 Warblington Road, with dark blue propeller-like petals, that Ralph has been calling Intermediate Periwinkle, are in fact Greater Periwinkle, 'var oxyloba' (Stace). Both forms of Greater Periwinkle differ from Lesser Periwinkle in having hairy edges to the leaves (often not all that easy to see). Lesser Periwinkles are still in flower on the embankment at the junction of Southleigh Road and Eastleigh Road and on the path from Beacon Square to the shore. We have yet to find any Intermediate Periwinkle. Can anyone help?

### **Prickly-leaved shrub - help please**

Another plant that I need some help with is the prickly-leaved shrub, first discovered by Tony Wootton on the north path of Brook Meadow. I have subsequently found examples on the footpath behind Lillywhite's Garage in Emsworth and on the path leading to Bosham Church.

It is certainly not Holly or Mahonia. Martin Hampton suggested *Olearia macrodonta* ('New Zealand Holly') which has daisy flowers. But Anne de Potier has *Olearia* in her garden, and thinks the leaves are much more glaucous than the mystery shrub. Another suggestion is *Desfontainia spinosa*, but none one knows anything about this shrub. Please have a look at the photos on the Emsworth Wildlife web site for March 24.

### **Other spring flowers**

Marsh-marigold - in full flower on the river bank in Palmer's Road Copse. Pity we only have one plant.

Sweet Violets (purple and white) - still showing well on the footpath behind the Old Flour Mill.

Slender Speedwell - with kidney-shaped leaves is abundant on the Bridge Road Nature Reserve.

Garlic Mustard - with large heart-shaped toothed leaves, is close to flowering.

Cowslips - are starting to open in from of Fort Purbrook on Portsdown Hill.

English Scurvygrass - in flower on the Nore Barn saltmarshes, beyond the rusty metal post.

Basford Willows - shedding their long yellow catkins already in Palmer's Road Car Park. This is a good month earlier than in previous years.

### **Lizards and ticks**

Lizards are not easy to find, but John Bogle certainly knows how. He found plenty of Common Lizards in Hollybank Woods on Mar 20, making the most of the late sunshine as the cloud broke in the afternoon. John provided some excellent photos, including one showing a tick crawling across a Lizard's battle scarred face. John said "It just carried on walking past the Lizard. I didn't see it try to attach itself to the lizard. Touch wood I didn't come home with any either! "

**Web site . . .** <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos and further details with photos of all the news mentioned in this report

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 9-10, Feb 28 to 13 March 2011**

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

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

**Work Session** - Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March. Report by Jennifer Rye

A chilly wind did nothing to put off our volunteers, and 14 of us, including one new volunteer, achieved a good deal. First tasks were to tidy up the tree plantation by the Seagull Lane gate; cut down (and in some cases pull up, so soft was the soil) another clump of brambles straying on to the north meadow; and prune the young self-sown Ash trees by the seat on the central causeway, using the trimmings to block up some paths leading on to the meadow and reinforce the hurdles along the riverbank.

The sun came out to warm us while we took our coffee break by the north bridge (thanks Pam). Some hardy volunteers braved the strongly flowing Ems to tidy up a blockage/dam which was obstructing the flow of water, and later disposed of the fence posts, branches and car tyre which had accumulated there.

Tree planting after coffee, saw some flowering cherries put in by the raised path on the North Meadow and by the bramble border on the north-eastern side. Ten more rowans were added to the existing rowan plantation behind the seat. Conditions were ideal for planting with nice damp soil, and we watered everything with river water, as well as staking and protecting the young whips with tree spirals. While carrying out the tree planting, it was noticed that the bark of one of the existing Rowans had been damaged, initially thought by Squirrel, but more likely by Roe Deer. See Wildlife News below for more details. Volunteers put a tree guard round the damaged area to protect the tree from further attack.

Photos of the work session, the damaged tree and the river pollution are on the web site at . . .  
<http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2011.html>

**Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 17 March & Sunday 3 April.**

### **Pollution into River Ems**

During the last work session, Brian noticed and photographed a white sediment coming from an industrial unit on Seagull Lane and going into the river from a pipe just south of the south bridge. Similar pollution incidents have occurred in the past, the first occurring in 2007. The pollution comes from RBM anodising and contains aluminium. It is the result of some of the process water not going through their treatment unit (large green tank) but going down the road into the surface water drain which flows into the River Ems. I contacted the Environment Agency last Monday and sent the patch officer Brian's photos which are also on our website.

The patch officer informs me that she visited the site on Monday and spoke to the manager who claims the drain was blocked with fallen leaves! This is not considered good enough and RBM need to do things differently. The patch officer will send RBM a warning letter and expects the situation to be resolved to prevent further incidents. Please let me know if this incident occurs again and I will contact the patch officer directly.

### **MapMate software training**

David Search has been working on a digital map of Brook Meadow using MapMate software to enable us to record the locations of populations of specific plants and possibly animals on Brook Meadow. Over the next few weeks, David will give members of the BMCG committee or anybody else interested a short training session on how we can use the MapMate software and what it can do for us. Part of this training will include a recording session. Please contact me if you are interested.

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

#### **Millpond news**

I have not yet seen any clear sign of nest building by the Mute Swan pair on Peter Pond, though I expect them to start any day now. Fortunately, they have no competition, unlike last year when a second pair attempted to nest on Slipper Millpond. Please let me know if you see any nest building. The non-breeding Mute Swan flock is building up on the town millpond with 91 at the last count.

David Gattrell has restored the two duck nesting platforms with thatched roofs on Peter Pond. David has also created a new island and a network of channels for the benefit of nesting birds.

Coots have constructed their usual flimsy nest in the centre of Peter Pond, but this always gets washed away by the first spring tide. The same applies to the Coot that persists in building a nest of twigs at the northern end of the town millpond. No hope. However, those Coots nesting on the rafts on Slipper Millpond always produce some youngsters. Sensible birds.

I have been listening out for the Cetti's Warbler in the Peter Pond/Lumley Stream area, but heard nothing. You will recall we had a 'resident' Cetti's from April to June last year. Hope it returns.

**Deer damage to Rowan** - see Work Session Report

Ralph Hollins is fairly sure that the damage to the bark of the Rowan tree in Brook Meadow discovered on Mar 6, was in fact the work of a Roe buck deer 'fraying' the tree to clean the 'velvet' off its antlers and not caused by a Grey Squirrel as we at first thought. The damage was too low down on the trunk for a Squirrel. Roe deer have been seen on Brook Meadow in the past, though not, as far as I am aware, for several years. However, Ralph indicates that Roe are increasing in numbers locally and spreading to new sites. He has seen at least ten on Southleigh Farm fields on the northern border of Emsworth over recent years. Has anyone seen one in Emsworth recently?

### ***Bird news***

A Little Owl has been showing particularly well outside its nesting hole in an Oak tree to the north of the extension of Pook Lane at Warblington, just before you get to the Old Rectory.

A regular on the meadow at this time last year was a juvenile Buzzard (Feb-Mar), but we have seen nothing of it this year. This bird probably came from a brood on Lumley Mill Farm.

Chichester Gravel Pits are always worth a visit at this time of the year to see the courtship displays of the Great Crested Grebes. Tony Wootton and Richard Somerscocks have both been there and got good photos. Richard also photographed a Little Gull, 3 Goldeneyes and (best of all) a Bittern. Ralph Hollins says the Bittern may be an Ivy Lake 'resident', as there have been regular sightings over the past two winters. All photos can be seen on the Emsworth web site for Mar 11 and 12.

The mewling-like calls of Mediterranean Gulls have been a feature of the Emsworth skies over the past week. These handsome birds are on their way to the large gull breeding colony in Langstone Harbour.

### ***Spring flowers***

The yellow flowers of Lesser Celandine are showing well in many areas across the town, particularly under the hedge at the south entrance to Bridge Road car park where I counted 400 flowers.

Sweet Violets are still showing in various places around the town; one new site was on the grass verge at the junction of Allendale Avenue and Southleigh Road, but but the verge has just been mown by the Council. We hope to delay the cutting in future years until April or May when the violets have started to go to seed. This would maintain the area as a "spring flowering meadow."

The pink flower spikes of Butterbur are now popping up in the usual places on Brook Meadow, along the river banks and on the causeway. I wonder if we will have a bumper year like last year?

The single Marsh-marigold plant on the river bank in Palmer's Road Copse is almost in flower.

The Cherry blossom this spring has been wonderful. The old tree on the Brook Meadow causeway, which I recall chopping down 10 years ago, has sprouted up and is full of highly aromatic blossom.

Many of the 'Pussy Willows' are now full of bright yellow catkins, e.g., in Bridge Road car park. On Brook Meadow the dull green female catkins are out on the Goat Willows in the north east plantation. Ralph Hollins has seen Early Forget-me-not, Blue Anemone, Danish Scurvygrass, Early Dog Violets Common Whitlowgrass all flowering in Havant.

### ***Water Vole***

We have had just two more Water Vole sightings in the past two weeks (making four for the year). One was by Dave Jupp who saw 'a big one' swimming across the river near the sluice gate on Mar 5, and the other was by Pam Phillips who saw one sitting on some floating vegetation about 20yds south of the north bridge. They should be getting active in the next few weeks, so please keep a look out and let me know the date, time and location of any sightings . . . [brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:brianfellows@tiscali.co.uk) All Water Vole sightings are logged on the web site: <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

### ***Spotted Redshank***

As it is close to its predicted departure date I am doing daily checks on the Spotted Redshank in the Nore Barn stream. It was there this afternoon, looking sprightly as always, and feeding in company with a Greenshank. On the basis of previous years, I expect it to be here for at least another week. The last sighting dates for the last 6 years are: 2005: Mar 11, 2006: Mar 20, 2007: Mar 22, 2008: Mar 17, 2009: Mar 18, 2010: Mar 24. Apart from a few Black-headed Gulls the only other birds in the western harbour were a flock of 44 Brent Geese, no doubt gearing themselves up for the big journey.

### ***Other news***

Patrick Murphy and I had the pleasure of seeing our first butterfly of the year on Brook Meadow on Mar 11, a beautiful fresh Peacock with its four shining 'eyes' looking up at us. This is one our 'resident' butterflies that hibernate over the winter and emerge in the spring. Patrick also had a pair of Siskins feeding on the Nijer seed in his Christopher Way garden on and off most of this morning.

**Web site** . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos for all the local wildlife news and photos

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 7-8, 14 to 27 February 2011**

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

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

**Work Session** Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> February – report by Wally Osborne

A rather murky morning brought out 10 volunteers, plus Brian Fellows with his trusty camera also on hand. The primary task for the day was to litterpick Palmers Road Copse, which was in a dreadful state, together with the footpaths leading towards Peter Pond and the A259 underpass. Additionally, some dumped timber debris was shifted from the Seagull Lane patch and the remainder of the meadow was litter picked. An amazing stack of Litter was collected, including a pair of good heavy boots which Jennifer will dry off and pass on to a worthy cause. This task occupied all of us for about an hour.

After a well deserved coffee / tea break provided by Pam, we set about the second task which was to 'block off' the unauthorised track out of Gooseberry Cottage grounds onto the South Meadow. This was accomplished by creating a 'prickly' dead hedge up on top of the bramble bank, using prunings from some nearby Crack Willow trees and also Brambles collected near the south gate and by clearing around the Alder Buckthorn plantation on the central bund. The overall effect looked quite formidable but we remain unsure whether it will stand for very long, given the persistence of the teenage boy thought to be responsible.

Many thanks to all of the volunteers who did such a great job and also generated some personal warmth. On the next workday which is scheduled for Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March, we will probably continue our work clearing the various ravages of winter and possibly also plant a few tree saplings round the edges of the grassland.

A selection of photos from the workday are on the web site at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2011.html>

**Forthcoming work sessions: Sunday 6 & Thursday 17 March.**

### **Fly tipping or Camping on the Meadow?**

On 20 February, Pam Phillips was alerted by a doggy colleague about some "rubbish" in the brambles near the group's main arisings dump. On investigation she found 3 yellow refuse bags and assorted debris including clothing, bottles and packaging. Pam put them all in the bin but it looked to her as though someone could have been "camping" there as there is a clearing in the brambles. If anybody knows anything about this, can they please let me (Frances) know.

### **FRIENDS OF EMSWORTH WAYSIDES NEWS - report by Brian Fellows**

Everything is now in place for the continuation of Friends of Emsworth Waysides project that ran so successfully last year. The 14 waysides from last year will remain uncut by the council during the coming growing season, plus another three new ones. All the waysides will be monitored throughout the growing season and regular plant surveys will take place. We hope to beat last year's total of 230 plants on the 14 waysides. All this will help promote biodiversity in Emsworth. Unfortunately, we were not successful in our bid for lottery funds towards an insect survey, but that may come later.

We are particularly pleased that Glenwood School has got involved in the project. Two groups of their students have already helped with the raking of the large wayside at the north end of Westbourne Avenue and they hope to 'adopt' the wayside that runs from outside the school in Washington Road to the Emsworth Recreation Ground.

All the news and details of the waysides can be seen on the web site . . .

<http://www.emsworthwaysides.hampshire.org.uk/>

I gave a short talk on the Emsworth waysides project to the Hampshire Wildlife Trust Flora Group meeting at Testwood Lakes Education Centre on Saturday 12 Feb. The meeting was organised by Hampshire BSBI Botanical Recorders Martin Rand and Tony Mundell. I took along a couple of display boards with photos of the work and details of the progress of the waysides in the first year. I also took leaflets with details of the Friends of Emsworth Waysides. The talk was very well received. I had some interesting questions. Generally, people wished they had similar schemes in their own towns.

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

#### **Water Vole**

Pam Phillips saw her first Water Vole of 2011 on Brook Meadow at 7.30am on Feb 15. It swam across the river by the sluice gate from east to west. This is only the second reported sighting this year, the first being further north along the river on Jan 6 by Maurice Lillie. However, early sightings are not necessarily predictive of a good year overall. All Water Vole sightings are logged on the web site:

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

### **Harbour news**

With most wintering birds now on the move back towards their breeding grounds in the far north, the harbour is starting to look rather empty. There will be plenty of Brent Geese passing through for the next couple of weeks, but most of the ducks and waders have already left. Black-tailed Godwits will be around for a while and the famous Emsworth Spotted Redshank should be in the Nore Barn stream for another two weeks, if he remains true to form of previous years.

The large flock of 150+ Coot that have been in the channel by the quay all winter has largely dispersed, with only about 20 there this morning. It was good to see the return of two Mediterranean Gulls to the harbour, the first I have seen this winter. But Hayling Oysterbeds is the place to go to see Med Gulls.

### **Other bird news**

Judging from the racket they are making, all our resident birds are very busy establishing their breeding territories and advertising for mates. Blackbird is the latest to add its mellow relaxed song to the local chorus. Now we await the arrival of our regular summer visitors; Chiffchaff and Blackcap will be first, followed a few weeks later by Whitethroat. I actually had a Blackcap singing in my garden on Sunday, but I am sure this will be one of the wintering birds that have been visiting our bird tables.

I watched a Sparrowhawk soaring over the Hermitage area of Emsworth last week. Ralph Hollins says these are now more visible as they start to patrol and display over their breeding territories.

Eight Purple Sandpipers were on the concrete foreshore in front of Southsea Castle on Feb 25; sixteen were reported the following day! They should be there for another couple of weeks, but you need to look carefully for them as they are well camouflaged against the seaweed.

Up to five Short-eared Owls have been seen at the east end of the Thorney Great Deeps. Caroline French saw three of them last week.

### **Spring flowers**

Lesser Celandines have been a bit slow opening up this spring, but Sweet Violets are popping up everywhere. There is a magnificent display in St Faith's Churchyard in Havant and they are also showing well in Nore Barn Woods and along some of the roadside verges. Cow Parsley, Early Dog Violet, Danish Scurvygrass, Common Whitlowgrass and Green Field Speedwell have been seen by Ralph Hollins in the Havant area.

On Brook Meadow, I was very surprised to find three or four fully grown Butterbur flower spikes on the edge of the river, just below the sluice gate. These are the earliest Butterbur spikes I have ever seen on the meadow. Ralph Hollins says they have been 'forced' to develop early by being submerged under the waters of the River Ems. He has seen this in previous years at the Racton site where some plants grow immersed in water filled ditches.

### **Tree news**

Ralph Hollins discovered a very interesting tree in Havant Park this week, called Dawn Redwood. You can't miss it, it is very tall, right behind the tennis courts in the NE corner of the park. Like Larch it is deciduous, so has no leaves at present, but what distinguishes it are the hundreds of long 'catkins' hanging from its branches. These are the male flowers, which are said to be unusual on Dawn Redwood. It would be interesting to know just when the tree was planted.

Walking across Southsea Common last week, I was interested to see the few Wych Elms that survived the 1987 storm were in full flower, with tufts of red stamens making a fine splash of colour. I remember well walking across the common after the storm and seeing vast numbers of Elms on the ground.

### **Butterfly news**

One exceptionally warm day last week (Feb 24) was enough to prompt a mass emergence of Brimstone butterflies from hibernation. I had a bright yellow male flying in the garden, while Roger Mills saw two on that day at West Dean. They must have regretted to move as temperatures fell rapidly overnight. Others reported this week included Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and Peacock.

### **Stansted news**

Ros Norton led the Havant Wildlife Group on its regular Saturday morning walk in Stansted Forest during which they heard and saw a good selection of birds; Great Spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper, Yellowhammer, Buzzard, Goldcrest, Marsh Tit and Stock Dove. Flowers seen included Snowdrops, Primroses and Butchers Broom and some frogspawn in a small pond.

Head Forester, Michael Prior reported finding three specimens of an unusual Long horned Beetle on the estate called Black-Spotted Pliers Support Beetle (*Rhagium mordax*). *It may have got* its amazing name from the resemblance of its antennae to the special supports on which Blacksmiths rested their red hot pliers. Michael also reported that Ravens continue to be seen and heard regularly in Stansted.

**Web site . . .** <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 5-6, 31 Jan. to 13 February 2011**

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

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

**Work Session** Sunday 6 February – report by Mike Probert

Ten volunteers gathered under overcast skies and in windy conditions. Mike welcomed a visitor, Nina Sperinck from BTCV (SE England Community Project Officer and Health Development Manager), who had travelled all the way from Banbury to see the Group at work; to introduce the 'Wellbeing Comes Naturally' scheme which will assist people with mental health problems through their participation in outdoor community tasks; and to answer any questions members might have. Nina participated fully in the morning's tasks.

The first task was to spread the wood chips arising from recent tree work in Palmers Road copse along the main path there which had been made even muddier by the tree surgeons. This was completed to a high standard by tea break using three wheelbarrows and teams of rakers and barrow fillers. A large estate agents' sign was also removed from the sluice area to the car park bins for collection.

The group then enjoyed Pam's refreshments at the central seat before moving to the top of the North Meadow to trim the edge of the large bramble patch and use the trimmings to block adventitious paths down from the causeway. This provoked some discussion and it was noted that in general bramble provided a valuable habitat on the Meadow. A couple of fresh surveying posts were found in the ground in this area.

Pat completed a litter pick of Palmers Road copse and 'time' was called on the morning's tasks. However, Tony B had noticed a small, dead Willow leaning precariously near the south bridge and so with the help of his ropes he and Mike safely removed it in a successful finale to an enjoyable session.

**Photos of the work session** on the web site at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-work-events-2011.html>

**Forthcoming work sessions:** Thursday 17 February and Sunday 6 March.

#### **Tree work**

Three Crack Willows were pollarded and one was coppiced in Palmers Road copse on Monday 31 January and Tuesday 1 February. Other tree work remaining includes cutting back large branches of Crack Willows which have fallen over the River Ems especially around the s-bend and downstream from the north bridge. It is not certain who will be able to do this work or when it can be done, due to high water levels.

#### **Bat and Butterfly surveys**

Bat surveys are planned to start sometime in March and it is hoped to attempt a more in depth survey to identify actual bat roosting sites. This will require a number of volunteers to be effective so if you are interested in helping, please contact either Frances (430314) or Pat (02392 232824).

Butterfly transects will start at the beginning of April with a training session (weather permitting) during the Sunday workday. If you would like to get involved, please contact Wally (375433).

#### **Management Plan Review**

After quite a long break, the subgroup is continuing to update and review the Brook Meadow Management Plan. The aim is to complete the task in the next couple of months but this may be rather optimistic. Recommendations will be made to the rest of the committee about management for the next 5 years including annual cut 2011, tree planting and maintenance, river management, etc.

#### **New Committee Member**

I am delighted to announce that Lesley Harris has agreed to be co-opted onto the BMCG committee. This will take effect from February 2011 after formal approval by the current committee. There will now be 7 committee members which is a much more healthy state of affairs and leaves one vacancy!!

#### **River levels**

Several people have noted that water levels in the River Ems continue to fluctuate, sometimes it seems unrelated to the amount of rainfall. Has anybody noticed any work being carried out upstream from Brook Meadow which might account for this anomaly? If you have, please let either Frances or Mike Probert (377133) know.

## LOCAL WILDLIFE NEWS - by Brian Fellows

### **Signs of spring**

Hazel catkins seem to be having a great early spring. Everywhere you go the trees are laden with them and if you stop to look closely you can just pick out the tiny bright red female flowers. Ralph Hollins found the first Goat Willow with golden 'pussy' catkins on Southmoor Lane, but most are yet to open. Ralph has seen a 7-Spot Ladybird and a Bumblebee in flight. John Goodspeed had the first Brimstone butterfly on the wing in Leigh Park and a Peacock was seen at Blackgang Chine on the Isle of Wight. The first report of Frog Spawn comes from a Fareham garden on Feb 8. Many birds are singing well, including a Chaffinch in Palmer's Road Copse, probably a little later than usual.

### **Spring flowers**

The Lesser Celandine outside Glenwood School is still the only one I have seen in Emsworth. Ralph has seen Cow Parsley in flower in Havant and says the Giant Butterbur plants by the Langbrook Stream are thriving, despite the attentions of Rabbits, but the flowers are not open yet. Daffodils are in bud, but generally not in flower, except for those in the garden of Ralph Whitehouse at No 80A Havant Road. Ralph told me his Daffodils are a variety called "January Gold". and are often out by Christmas! The earliest ever was on 21 Nov 2007. I do not normally regard Mistletoe as a spring flower, but a tree in a garden immediately opposite Bridge Road car park in Emsworth has a mass of flowers and also berries. The flowers are tiny and green in tight clusters, with male and female flowers on different plants.

### **Garden birds**

A Brambling (and sometimes two) has been a regular visitor to my back garden over the past couple of weeks. It comes and goes with a flock of 15-20 Chaffinches and probably visits other gardens. I would be interested to hear from anyone else who sees Bramblings. They stand out from the Chaffinches as being much brighter with darker heads. Sadly, Greenfinches never recovered from the trichomonosis outbreak of a few years ago and the most I get in my garden is one or two. But welcome back to the Song Thrush, which I have seen every day for the past week, though it is often chased off by a Blackbird. I have also been getting regular visits from a Little Egret perched on the back fence looking for the fish in the stream that runs past the end of my garden.

### **Grey Partridges**

Caroline French had an interesting walk from Thornham Lane to Prinsted on Feb 7 during which she saw two Grey Partridges, possibly male and female, though the sexes are very alike. Grey Partridges are now scarce and declining and are a red listed species of high conservation concern. I have not seen one for years. However, I know efforts are being made to redress the situation through the release of farm reared birds and it would be interesting to know if there is any such release programme in the Thornham area that could account for Caroline's birds.

### **Alpaca behaviour**

On the same day Caroline also saw the Alpacas on Thornham Farm, Prinsted apparently protecting a Rabbit that was being attacked by a Stoat. Richard Hallett told a friend of his who trains Llamas and Alpacas, and she said the guarding instinct of these animals is well known amongst owners; they are used extensively by sheep owners in USA to protect lambs from foxes and coyotes. She warned about reading things into their behaviour. The Alpacas may well have been protective to the poor bunny in a confused way, but the gathering around it was typical curiosity. Caroline's full report is on the Emsworth web site (on Feb 9).

### **Other bird news**

Wintering birds, like Brent Geese, are on the move back to their breeding grounds in the far north and many of the birds we will be seeing in the harbour over the next few weeks will be birds passing through our area. This probably applies to the flock of 50 Shelduck 34 Pintail that have been prominent on the western mudflats and channels over the past week. The Pintail are worth seeing. Richard Somerscocks had a cracking view of a Short-eared Owl perched in a bush on the east side of Thorney Island near Great Deep on Feb 9 - a good site for them. Photo is on the Emsworth web page. About 50 Redwing were on the area of restored woodland immediately north of the footpath from the end of Seagull Lane to Lumley Mill on Feb 1. This area is owned by Constant Springs. Caroline French saw two Firecrests, along with two Goldcrests, in the Funtington area on Jan 31. Tony Wootton went over to Blashford Lakes on Feb 2 and got some great photos of Bittern, Great White Egret and Water Rail, as well as seeing lots of other interesting birds, All on the web site see . . .

**Web site . . .** <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 3-4, 17 to 30 January 2011**

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

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

#### **Work Session - Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011 – report by Wally Osborne**

A sunny and crisp morning brought out 15 volunteers, including Nik Knight the HWT Bat expert who was scheduled to make a Bat habitat survey of Palmers Road Copse together with Pat and Graham Walsgrove, our own group specialists on Bats. The main purpose of this work was to identify and record any sites which should be avoided in future pollarding of the Crack Willow trees, see report below.

With ground conditions remaining soggy, the tasks for the morning were centred on control of patches of Bramble, because our appreciation of their considerable value to wildlife, must be balanced against their intent to grow vigorously and spread all over the meadow. With the excellent turnout of regular and 2 new volunteers, we were able to clear 3 separate patches of Bramble and undergrowth. Before the mid morning break, the one patch surrounding a small Crack Willow in the centre of North Meadow had been cleared, many roots dug up and all of the arisings removed to reinforce the barrier below the northern boundary path. This work included some judicious pruning of the exposed Crack Willow tree.

The team comprised of Pam Phillips, Phil Wilde, Mike Probert, Gaynor Wells, Tony Wootton, Dave Lee, Jennifer Rye, June Hannan & Martin Shelley and meanwhile, Ute Wilde & Lesley Harris had carried out a thorough litter pick all around the meadow, to maintain our good housekeeping.

After the break, taken together with the Habitat surveyors, we all joined together to Bramble clear the other 2 patches, one on the approach to the North Bridge (from Seagull Lane) and the other one being the overgrown Crack Willow, alongside the northern signcase.

All in all, an excellent mornings work which warmed us up and resulted in a real difference to the northern meadow vista. On the next workday scheduled for Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> February, we may well continue the work by taking out Brambles reaching out into the meadow, just to the north of today's sites.

#### **Forthcoming work sessions: *Sunday 6 and Thursday 17 February.***

#### **Bat habitat survey – report by Graham Walsgrove**

During the workday of Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011, Nik Knight (local bat expert) kindly offered to accompany two BM volunteers (Pat and Graham Walsgrove) and give his advice on surveying bat roosts.

This took place in Palmers Road Copse, where Common and Soprano Pipistrelle bats have been recorded from the south bridge. This area, adjoining the car park, was chosen as some pollarding of the crack willows is to take place on the instructions of Havant Borough Council.

The survey involved:

- a. Measuring the height, and the depth of the tree at mid body height.
- b. Observing the presence of features used as bat roosts, such as holes, cracks, loose bark, looking behind dense, thick stemmed ivy, presence of bird and/or bat boxes, among other things.

The observation was aided by the use of binoculars and a questionnaire form provided by Nik.

Any holes, cracks, etc which looked promising and might indicate the presence of bats would have to be further investigated, together with signs of possible use by bats.

Three crack willows were looked at during the two hours, one of which had a hole in it and would need studying more closely. Our thanks go to Nik for his advice and for a very interesting and entertaining morning.

Pat and Frances returned last Tuesday to assess these findings in relation to the trees to be pollarded. It will be recommended keeping pollarding and other major tree work to a minimum so as not to disturb any potential bat roosts. It was decided that a further in depth study of the trees in this area as potential bat roosts should be carried out in the next few months. This will involve using a larger group of volunteers.

#### **Tree work**

Major tree work will be carried out in Palmers Road copse on Monday 31 January. The work is being carried out by Titchfield Tree Surgeons and will include pollarding a Crack Willow on the edge of the car park, cutting back several leaning willows in danger of falling on and damaging other trees and possibly pollarding a Crack Willow on the western bank of the river Ems. Most of the larger wood arisings will be left on site to provide a habitat for bats, invertebrates and fungi and the brushwood chipped and left to be spread by volunteers on the paths through the copse.

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

### **Harbour news**

The last two weeks have been fairly quiet in Emsworth Harbour, apart from the gentle grunting of Brent Geese and the shrill whistles of Oystercatchers. Many of the waders seem to have moved on, with very few Dunlin and no Knot. However, Richard Somerscocks found 87 Black-tailed Godwits at Nore Barn today with a new colour-ringed bird for Emsworth, probably ringed this summer in Iceland. We still have our 'tame' Spotted Redshank at Nore Barn, but the Havant Wildlife Group came across three of them in a small lagoon near Chidham. That is unusual for that site, though I think Barry Collins does sometimes record several Spotted Redshanks on Thorney Island during WeBS counts. The west side of Thorney Island has been attracting a lot of birdwatchers over the past two weeks; Marsh and Hen Harriers have been floating effortlessly over reedbeds at Little Deep and a fine redhead Smew and a Slavonian Grebe have been on the Great Deep. Rare sights in our area.

### **Little Auk?**

We had a flutter of excitement last week when Bruce Darby reported what he thought might have been a Little Auk in Emsworth Harbour. Little Auk is a very rare bird in our area, I certainly have never seen one and there are only a few sightings along the whole of the South Coast every winter. However, after going through several possibilities, we settled on Little Grebe as the most likely fit for Bruce's observation. Pity really, since I am sure Little Auk would have been a first for Emsworth. But in the process, I learned quite a lot about these tiny birds, which spend all their lives at sea, but for nesting. But, they are prone to turning up in odd places and are often tame. Ralph Hollins once picked one up dead in woodland near the A3M. The poor bird had flown through the trees and been unfortunate enough to hit the sharp point of a broken branch which speared the Auk through its throat. Pete Potts even kept a rescued one in his kitchen sink, but it eventually died!

### **Garden birds**

There have been loads of birds in gardens during the recent cold weather. I have had a Brambling, male and female Blackcaps and a pair of Song Thrushes in mine. Robins should be pairing up soon, if they have not already. Patrick Murphy attracts Blackcaps to his garden with a homemade bird cake, made from bread, sausage fat and raisins. Bill Walker had a grandstand view of a fine male Sparrowhawk as it caught and consumed a Starling in his small garden. Great photo too.

### **Other bird news**

Goldcrests are the smallest of British birds and are usually very difficult to locate in dense bushes where they search for insect larvae. But they appear to be getting bolder. Caroline French and I saw two during a Bird Atlas Survey in Fishbourne and Caroline saw another two in one day near Chichester. I have also seen two more Goldcrests, one with a flock of Blue Tits on the Bridge Road Nature Reserve and the other in the large Yew behind Lumley Mill. So it is worth keeping an eye out for them. Also, look for a white eyebrow which would mean a Firecrest! A rare bird!

Treecreepers are also difficult to see, tiny mouse-like birds scrambling up tree trunks in search of insects. Frances Jannaway and Pam Phillips had the good fortune to spot a Treecreeper while they were looking at bat habitats in Palmer's Road Copse on Jan 25. Interestingly, I see from my records that Frances (with Richard) was the last to report Treecreeper on the Brook Meadow site on 26-Sep-09.

### **Wild flowers**

The golden yellow flowers of Lesser Celandine are the first sign of spring. So, I was delighted to find one fully open on the small embankment outside Glenwood School in Washington Road on Jan 27. I informed the school and was pleased to learn that the children had been taken to see the flower (but not to pick). I have also seen Celandines flowering in Fishbourne and in Lumley Road where Greater Periwinkle is also out. The Havant Wildlife Group commented on the good display of Snowdrops in Chidham Churchyard on Jan 29. Daffodils are in bud, but I have not yet seen any in flower, apart from in the local flower shop. Have you?

Winter Heliotrope is not really a spring flower as it flowers in mid-winter, but there is a good showing (and smelling) of it in various sites around town. Ralph Hollins reports that the closely related 'Giant Butterbur' plants are visible at the Langbrook Stream site in Langstone though not in flower. The unusual female Butterbur plants will also be showing their dramatic flower spikes at this site, only the smaller male flowers grow on Brook Meadow.

PS White-tailed Eagle is still at large! It should be featured in 'Inside Out' on BBC1 at 7.30 on Monday.

See . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/> for all the local wildlife news and photos

## **BROOK MEADOW CONSERVATION GROUP – WEEKS 1-2, 3 to 16 January 2011**

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

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

**Forthcoming work sessions: Thursday 20 January and Sunday 6 February.**

#### **Water levels, wind and trees**

After several days of heavy rain last week, the river Ems is running very fast and most of the meadow is very wet and muddy. Strong winds have caused a willow on the west bank of the river to blow over just south of the south bridge. Some of the branches are in the water and will have to be removed when conditions allow to prevent detritus from collecting which might cause a blockage further downstream. A large Willow on the edge of Palmers Road car park will be pollarded by HBC approved tree surgeons later this month as it is in danger of falling into the car park. Volunteer bat recorders, Pat and Graham Walsgrove, helped by local bat expert Nik Knight, will be carrying out a survey of bat roosting places in this area in the next few days. This information will be used to help prevent any bat roosts from being disturbed by the tree surgeons.

#### **Butterfly Transect – Year 2010 - report by Wally Osborne**

Introduction – The 2010 BMCG Butterfly Transect was, as usual, conducted in accordance with Butterfly Conservation (BC) organisation standard procedures. It was our 5<sup>th</sup> transect and we had 8 recorders covering the 26-week period from early April through to late September.

Recorders and Rota – The following members volunteered to join the Transect Rota as Recorders: Heather Archer, Frances Jannaway, Jennifer Rye, Pat Walsgrove, Pam Phillips, Dave Lee, Caroline French and Wally Osborne

The Rota devised, ensured that we had at least 2 Recorders assigned to each of the possible 26 weeks and occasionally 3 Recorders.

The arrangement was that Recorders would retain all of their input sheets until the end of the Transect schedule and then send them to W. Osborne for co-ordination and input to the BC organisation.

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 word summary of the recordings:

- 21 different species of butterfly were seen over the 26 weeks compared to 18 in 2009
- The 3 new species, compared to 2009 were Large Skipper, Small Skipper and Brown Argus
- The total number of butterflies recorded over the 26 weeks was 471, more than 100 fewer than in 2009.
- The most common species was the 'Small White' with 136 seen.
- The Meadow Brown was the next most common with 65 seen.
- The most rare were Small Copper and Brown Argus with just 1 of each species seen.
- After the huge influx of the Painted Lady species in 2009, none were recorded in 2010

A series of charts on the website display all of the results, with numbers based upon the 'average' of sightings submitted by all of the recorders in a particular week. This is standard BC procedure.

For the transect results and charts go to . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-butterfly-trans-report.html>

#### **Brian's note on butterflies**

Brown Argus - 2010 was exceptional for the first ever appearance of the Brown Argus butterfly on several sites in Emsworth. The Brown Argus has always been a butterfly of chalk downland, but in July and August several insects were seen in Hollybank Woods, on Brook Meadow and even on a wayside on the east side of Horndean Road.

Essex Skipper - This was the only butterfly recorded on Brook Meadow this year which was not picked up by the transect survey. It is not common and is difficult to separate from Small Skipper, but Richard Somerscocks obtained a good photo of one which seemed conclusive. See Richard's photo on the web site for 3 July 2010 and note the black tips to the antennae.

Go to . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/0-0-0-x-wildlife-diary.07a.htm>

***The first Water Vole sighting of 2011***

Maurice Lillie had to blink to make sure he was seeing what he thought on Jan 6. Yes, there was no doubt, it was a large Water Vole chewing a dangling shoot on the river bank in Brook Meadow, about 30 metres south of the north bridge. This was not only the first sighting of 2011, but the earliest in my records. The recent mild weather had no doubt encouraged this vole out of its wintering burrow for a bit of foraging. Others are sure to follow suit, so please keep a look out and let me know. I logged 77 Water Vole sightings in 2010 on Brook Meadow, which was a bit down on the previous two years. However, voles were seen all along the river from the south bridge right up to the railway embankment, so they are definitely still here. All the Water Vole news and sightings can be found on the updated web site at . . . <http://www.brook-meadow.hampshire.org.uk/bm-water-voles.html>

***Diving Mallards***

Maurice had another interesting observation: "On Peter Pond four male Mallards were having their morning groom when for no obvious reason, one dived below the surface and reappeared a couple of metres away. This performance was repeated by all four ducks in what seemed to be a superiority display as it became a game of chase. If so, it was pretty half hearted as they seemed to get bored very quickly and returned to grooming and the usual ducking their heads in the water and throwing it over their backs." 'Birds of the Western Palearctic' (the birder's Bible) confirms that young Mallard dive freely and adults do occasionally. I have certainly seen Mallard diving in a fashion, though not smoothly or deeply, or for very long, as a Tufted Duck might, for example, or even a Coot.

***Two Spotted Redshanks***

Emsworth is famous for its so-called 'tame' Spotted Redshank, which feeds in the small stream at Nore Barn to the west of the town. In fact, this is the 7th winter running that the same bird has wintered here. Occasionally, two or even three Spotted Redshanks have been seen in the area, though never really feeding together. However, over the past two weeks two birds have been seen in the stream. Ralph Hollins saw them first on Jan 4 and I watched them closely on Jan 6. I would not go so far as to call them friends as the 'resident' bird began by chasing off the stranger. On one occasion, I had the unusual sighting of two Spotted Redshanks swimming together in shallow water, one pursuing the other. However, after the initial skirmishes the 'resident' bird seemed to tolerate the presence of the stranger and the two birds spent some time feeding and preening close together in the stream. Photos of the 'encounter' are on the Emsworth wildlife web site for Jan 6.

***Other harbour news***

Have you noticed all the Tufted Duck on the millpond and the Coot in the harbour near the quay? They are both regular winter visitors, but I have never seen them here in such numbers. On Jan 8, I counted 74 Tufted Duck on the town millpond and an astonishing 186 Coot in the harbour. They all arrived during the severe freezing weather and have stayed. They must like the place. Gadwall is another bird that has turned up in Emsworth Harbour in record numbers this winter. You can usually see them swimming around with the Coot near the marina entrance. I counted a record 72 yesterday - Jan 15. There has been plenty of juvenile Brent Geese in the harbour this winter, indicating a good breeding season, unlike the last two years. I have just completed my survey of 1871 adult Brent Geese which included 137 juveniles giving an overall proportion of 7.32%. Not bad, but not brilliant. Black-tailed Godwits have been a bit scarce in Emsworth this past week; they have probably gone to the flooded fields at Pagham Harbour where several hundred have been seen.

***Other local bird news***

Richard Hallett saw a Raven fly over Nore Barn Woods on Jan 15, which in my experience is a first for Emsworth. Mike Collins also had a Raven fly over his house in West Leigh, Havant on the same day, possibly the same bird. Following the two Ravens at Prinsted and regular sightings over Thorney Island, it seems they are becoming more common in our area. So keep looking up! Over on Thorney Island, Barry Collins reported three Marsh Harriers (two males and one female) at the Little Deep on Jan 10. There is also a Hen Harrier on the east side of the deeps and a female Smew in the creek on the west side of the Great Deep. The flock of 28 White-fronted Geese can often be seen on the large field south of the Little Deep. Colin Venner got a photo of a Corn Bunting taken near the viewing shed at the southern tip of the island on Jan 9. See the Emsworth web site. Finally, to brighten a shopping trip to Southsea, 7 Waxwings were feeding in trees outside Knight and Lee in Palmerston Rd yesterday (Jan 15) and 16 Purple Sandpipers were in front of the castle.

**WILDLIFE NEWS CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE . . .**

***Spring is coming!***

The weather is warming up and birds are starting to sing. Song Thrushes have been singing their hearts out for the past week or so; there is one on the south meadow of Brook Meadow and another near the south entrance to Hollybank Woods.

I also heard my first Blackbird song of the year in Hollybank Woods, a little earlier than in previous years. What a beautiful relaxed song it has. Robin, Blue Tit and Great Tit are going strong with occasional bursts from Wren.

On the plant front Hazel catkins are now open in several areas. Ralph Hollins also found an Alder catkin open in Havant and new flowers on the garden escape Honeysuckle on the Hayling Billy trail. Cherry blossom is out at the bottom of Seagull Lane, Emsworth. Lesser Celandines will not be long. And we even had a butterfly! Richard Somerscocks saw the first one of 2011 at Nore Barn on Jan 9 - a Red Admiral. This is now an all-the-year round butterfly.

### ***Snow Buntings at Prinsted***

A brief mention of these birds at the end of my last wildlife newsletter developed into quite a big attraction as the news spread and birdwatchers from far and wide trekked along the Prinsted seawall for what must be the best view they will ever get in this country of a male female pair of Snow Buntings. The birds were first reported on the SOS Sightings web site on Dec 31 and have been in the same place ever since, just behind the seat at the point to the east of Prinsted overlooking the bay. They were still there on Jan 14 when Richard Somerscocks saw them. They are very confiding birds, giving great photographic opportunities, not unlike the Nore Barn Spotted Redshank in this respect. Snow Buntings are mainly passage and winterbirds in Britain, mainly on the coasts and come chiefly from Scandinavia and Greenland, though small numbers do breed in Scotland.

If you go to Prinsted, then it is worth walking east along the seawall to Nutbourne where you should find a flock Avocets, along with Brent Geese, Pintail, Wigeon, Teal and masses of waders on the shore. As you walk, keep a look out for Fieldfare and Redwing in the fields behind the seawall.

### ***White-tailed Eagle***

White-tailed Eagle is our largest raptor and its appearance in the South caused a flurry of excitement, not only among birdwatchers, but also in the general public. It has featured on local Radio Solent and on South Today TV. The bird is a juvenile and was first spotted at Amberley Wild Brooks on Dec 11 and seen flying over Sandy Point on Hayling on Dec 12 before disappearing west of Titchfield Haven. It turned up in the village of Downton west of Lymington on Jan 6 and has been seen daily in that area, giving excellent views and photo opportunities. Steve Copsey got a photo showing the huge size of the eagle in comparison with a Buzzard and a Jackdaw. See photo on his web site at . . .

<http://www.surfbirds.com/blog/amigo/18179/White-tailed+Eagle+in+Hampshire.html>

White-tailed Eagles bred widely in Scotland in the 19th Century but was exterminated following a prolonged campaign of persecution by man. Reintroduction started in 1975 when 82 White-tailed Eagles from Norway were released. The first successful breeding took place in 1985 and since then the birds have been protected and monitored by the RSPB. Breeding pairs remain largely faithful to their nesting territories in winter, though immature eagles do tend to wander in their first 2 or 3 years of life. Occasional sightings in Southern Britain are thought to come from the Continent, which is where the present bird probably originates.

***Emsworth Wildlife web site . . . <http://www.emsworthwildlife.hampshire.org.uk/>***