

Woods Meadow Country Park News-Letter August 2020

As the fertility of the soil left over from the Parks agricultural use leaches away it has been noticeable how the vegetation has changed from volunteer arable crop plants to a wider range of what would have been arable weeds. In the setting of a Country Park they are of course not weeds but wildflowers providing many flies with nectar and food plants for their larvae. The food chain that these plants are at the bottom of, end with such tertiary predators such as barn owl and kestrel sparrow hawk to name few. On the large field that borders Woods Lane a sea of musk thistle appeared this year alongside creeping thistle and spear thistle. Ragwort is on the increase, but this is one plant that we will have to limit by pulling in future years as this poisonous plant is a danger if horses eat it. Ragwort is though, the food plant of the cinnabar moth and should be left where possible. As I understand it most horses will leave the actively growing plant alone but if the plant is dried and can't be recognised by the horse it is still very poisonous. We have an obligation, not only to our horse-riding visitors but anyone on neighbouring land that keeps horses as seeds can spread.



Wildflowers not weeds!

Again, the Park has had around 6 or 7 pairs of skylarks nesting within its confines. I have seen several young Skylarks they appear scaly owing to pale fringes to most of the feathers of the wings, back and mantle. A pair of good binoculars shows up this difference very well. It is gratifying to know that these birds are breeding successfully in the Park. As the phase 2 and 3 housing developments become inhabited and inevitably increase the footfall within the Park, the challenge will be to retain and possibly enhance the breeding numbers of this seriously declining bird. I monitored breeding pairs very carefully through second half of July so that we could mow the vegetation just as soon as the last birds had fledged. The mowing needed to take place so there is enough time for regrowth to appear and be sprayed with herbicide prior to cultivating the land.



Juvenile Skylark

Kiwi Fencing contractors installed post and three strand wire fences to delineate the Parks eastern and southern borders and will be back to install access gates and more fencing. Covid 19 has caused a delay in the manufacture of some gates and has delayed the installation. Unfortunately, the Park is still illegally used by motorcyclists and quad bike riders. This mostly happens in the evenings and at weekends and is an obvious health and safety issue and secondly a huge and unnecessary wildlife disturbance. Hopefully limiting their access will put an end to this illegal activity. A picket fence was installed around the 'soakaway' so that young children can't access the deep water. It will eventually provide an undisturbed wildlife area. A few days after it was installed the gate was kicked in and several pickets removed, they were replaced only for the gate to be kicked off its hinges completely and more pickets removed. In my experience this often happens when something is newly installed, just don't ask me why!

This year there has been a noticeable increase in Dragon flies in the Park and I spotted several dried-out cases of their larvae where they had crawled out of the pond to emerge as the adult fly. These were the large larvae that produce the Emperor Dragonfly. The male sky-blue abdomen with a central dark line and female has green abdomen with a central dark line but occasionally appears with a blue abdomen. Whitethroats have done particularly well, finding good nesting habitat in the brambles and scrubby hedges. Late July several family parties still making use of the same habitat. Putting up a nest box suitable for great tits on one of the Parks oak trees caused disturbance to a roosting barn owl that was hidden in a cavity further up the tree. It is not surprising that owls are making use of the ideal hunting grounds that the Park is now providing. We intend to contact the barn owl trust to get advice on putting up a barn owl nest-box.



Emperor Dragonfly

I met an officer from the Woodland Trust at the Park whom had come to assess the site for our plan to plant a 5.6 hectare woodland. Trees and planting were discussed and hopefully we will be eligible for 100% funding if not it will be at least 75%. We have hedges to plant as well so if anyone reading this that would like to help us this Autumn/Winter please contact me on: chris.ryde@ncsgrp.co.uk so that I can register you as a volunteer and update you on work party dates. This size woodland will be a wonderful asset to the community providing shady walks and a contrasting habitat to the grassland. A host of other bird species will be attracted to it including woodpeckers both great and green, tree creepers, tawny owls and more. In short, the biological diversity of the Parks footprint will expand exponentially over time, with the inclusion of a decent sized woodland.

If everything goes to plan we will be planting the woodland in January to March 2021. I envisage holding volunteer tree planting sessions at weekends to supplement any week-day work parties we may hold. The Woodland Trust stipulates that any trees delivered to site should be planted within 7

days. The trees are known as 'whips' and are from 40 to 60cm. Their small root system requires only a small amount of digging but essentially the roots need completely covering and not in a void, so need healing in.



The type of tree guards we will be using

As soon as the hay field is cultivated and seeded Kiwi fencing can install the inner fence to this field, playing a crucial role in ensuring that nesting skylarks go undisturbed. As soon as the hay crop is harvested pedestrian visitors with their dogs off leads can access the field through the Autumn and Winter months. As visitor numbers increase this may be the one measure that conserves ground nesting birds in the Park.

We are currently trying to find suitable benches for the Park so that walkers can take a seat and rest their weary legs. The benches could either be solid and chunky timber which will stand the tests of time and a good deal of misuse, alternatively they could be made from recycled and recyclable plastic with corresponding attributes. Work is also underway on an interpretation panel, really for more of an impression of how we would like the Park to develop. It will show walking routes and horse-riding routes and areas where both user groups come across each other and in this instance the dog walker may want to put their dog on its lead. Having fixed paths will help limit these possible confrontations and the disturbance to wildlife although visitors are free to wander where they will. My experience is that in providing mown paths through wildflower meadows for example, is that most visitors make use of these routes in preference to wading through long grass, especially when it is wet.



A suitable bench

There were two mounds of earth left by Persimmon Homes that are surplus to requirements, one being by the Soakaway the other just inside the land designated for the Community Centre. The mounds that run along the length of the school fence were left intentionally to screen the school. I'm just not sure if they are to screen the school from visitors gaze or screen the Park from those within the school. The former doesn't really work as a designated footpath will run between the mounds and the school fence? The earth from the unwanted mounds will be used to fill the deep rut that was created between the edge of the cultivated field and the track that runs south into the phase 2 development besides other uneven areas.

A large dead mature tree was removed by Norse's Arboriculture Team from the thick hedgerow that runs north to south. It would have been ideal to leave as standing dead wood, which is a valuable wildlife habitat for birds, bats, invertebrates, fungi and others but had to go for safety reasons. Judging by how much structural timber was remaining to keep it upright, it was good timing. I have chainsaw qualifications to fell large trees but the felling of large dead trees is potentially much more dangerous and for safety needs to be undertaken by a team that are tackling this sort of thing on a regular basis. It's a case of recognising where your skill set begins and ends or how scared you are!

I gave a guided walk at the Park for 13 Bonds Meadow Community Group members. I was impressed by the turn out and level of interest. This group are wonderfully proactive in managing the Bonds Meadow habitats and access issues, Lowestoft is lucky to have them, along with other woodland management groups such as the Gunton and Corton woods groups. All collectively giving up thousands of hours of their free time. It was asked what we intended to do about all the agricultural straight lines in the Park and it was suggested these are now an unnecessary feature. We had only gone as far as planting trees in corners to get rid of right-angle corners to fields, which

will in time give a much more organic impression over time. At the same time though we want to preserve most of the hedges as these are very valuable habitats that have evolved of many years.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/analyze/sVwykO02J62O9mtPfaDWKgd2ib9s4Wui400NY8Thv_2FI3D

The above link will take you to the results of a survey regarding a cycle way in the Park

Let's all pray or will, that the ground conditions, the baked and then eternally wet ground conditions that prevented the Park from being cultivated last year are not repeated. All we need now is a little rain to get the regrowth going, fingers crossed! Don't forget to get in touch if you can lend a hand with tree planting this Autumn and Winter.

