

the Yellow Flag, *Iris pseudacorus*. It has survived when the pond dried up, and the various times when it has been disturbed by dredging or removal of less desirable plants.

The genus is named after Iris, the Greek goddess of the rainbow, and is possibly a reference to the plant family's different coloured flowers, but here we are only concerned with the yellow variety. It is a perennial growing from a rhizome, with long, sword-shaped leaves which have a raised midrib. The flowers are enclosed by short leaf-like spathes, the petals are three broad oval falls speckled with green, and three erect inner tepals. The flower is the origin of the sceptre and the *fleur-de-lys*, and the three inner tepals represent faith, wisdom and valour. The seeds are enclosed in a three-part capsule.



Since ancient times, iris has been valued for its violet-scented root, orris, and was used in its dried form by Egyptians, Greeks and Romans for unguents and perfumes. It is still important in perfumery and can be used as a fixative when making potpourri.

Although all parts, particularly the rhizomes, are toxic if eaten, it has been used to treat coughs and diarrhoea, and as an emetic and purgative.

In Scotland, iris roots were an important natural dyestuff, the colour obtained varying from black to shades of grey, or green if the leaves were used. It was used in the dyeing of Harris Tweed.

### CATSHED APPLE – Elaine Mills

This winter we have planted one new apple tree, the interestingly named "Catshead".

Catshead is one of the oldest apples known in England, recorded as far back as the 1700s. Its origins are unclear, but it is considered a possible Worcestershire / Herefordshire apple.

Viewed from the side the fruit can sometimes bear resemblance to a cat's head, although you might have to use your imagination as the apple does come in a vast range of sizes and shapes!

It is a cooking apple picked in early October. It cooks down to a sharp puree making it perfect for sauces and stewed apple.

### NOTICES

The **Annual General Meeting** will take place on **TUESDAY 7th May 2019** at 2.00 p.m. in the Methodist Hall, Willaston. After a short business meeting **Alan Irving** will speak about Cleaver Heath, a nearby Cheshire Wildlife Trust reserve.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish once again to express our thanks to:

- All Friends and volunteers for their continued support and help
- CW&C Greenspace
- Wirral Countryside Volunteers.
- Staff, parents and pupils involved with the Forest School at Willaston C.E. Primary School.

*Edited, designed and printed by Hugh Morris*



## Willaston Meadow and Woodland

# Newsletter

## 2018/19



### SECRETARY'S REPORT – David Nind

Following last year's AGM when Rob Perry spoke to us about Lees Lane Ponds, ten Friends spent an enjoyable morning in June looking around the reserve. Our speaker this year is Alan Irving, the volunteer Reserve Manager at Cleaver Heath, a valuable area of residual lowland heath in Heswall. Once again it is intended to visit this area in June (date to be arranged). For those who cannot attend the AGM and would like to see the reserve **please contact a committee member for the date and time; it will be a car-share trip.**

Once again last year we had further work done by a local contractor to Jackson's Pond. The boardwalk was extended at each end, making access a little easier and safer. Later in December he carried out further dredging of another area of the pond. **This work could not be carried out without the financial support of the Friends and we are very grateful to everyone.** The contractor's work brought to light a variety of household items that had found their way beneath the water over the years, which provided FOWM volunteers with useful employment removing and disposing of them. Sadly, no items of great value or antiquity were unearthed!



In **June 2018** your committee raised the issue of the boundary of the development in Mill Lane with officers from CW&C who acted on our concerns. This eventually culminated with a site-meeting with CW&C, the developer, FOWM chairman and another committee member. Unfortunately, it appears, at this stage, that our concerns are not obviously going to be resolved. In the interim volunteers have planted several silver birch trees which may help to mitigate the impact of the new buildings on Big Meadow.

In **September** FOWM again organised an Apple Day in cooperation with Willaston Horticultural Society, when a good selection of fruit from the Big Meadow orchard was on display together with apple cake provided by our chairman.

The snowdrops that were planted some years ago under the hedge near Jackson's Pond have significantly multiplied, particularly noticeable early this year after the very mild February.



In **recent months** two members of the Friends have been recording and listing the birds that they see in Big Meadow; we appreciate their valued contribution.

FOWM is now represented on **Facebook and the Residents' Society website** thanks to the contribution of another member of the Friends' Group, to whom we extend our thanks.

### BIG MEADOW BIRD COUNT – Ann Hancox and Ben Jackson

Ben and I have much very enjoyed our monthly bird count in Big Meadow, not least because of the element of competition that is involved.

The Jackdaws know us by name now as they seem to be permanent residents.

Woodpigeon, Crow, Blue Tit and Blackbird are regularly seen, but as yet we haven't seen a Moorhen, despite being told by dog walkers that they do visit. There

seemed to be the remains of an old Moorhen nest in the reeds around Jackson's Pond when we first started.



Greenfinch counts were low, probably due to Tricomonosis disease, but Goldfinch numbers were good.

The nesting Bullfinches were a treat in the summer – I hope they return this coming year, and the beautiful Nuthatches are already showing interest in the nest site they used last time.

Song Thrush, only two and only one house sparrow, no Mistle Thrush at all.

The Willow Tit rounded off a damp, miserable October count, a big bonus, and the December treat was a pair of Lesser Redpoll.

Overall, there were fewer varieties than I expected. Perhaps my memories of Yellow Wagtail, Spotted Flycatcher and even Corn Bunting, all of which I saw regularly near the Old Windmill in the seventies and eighties, raised my hopes too high.

But that's the thing about birdwatching, you never know what will turn up!

### PLANT PROFILE: Yellow Flag (*Iris pseudacorus*) – Hilary Morris

One of the plants already present when we took over the management of the Meadow and Jackson's Pond is