

## Introduction – Sarah Shannon, Chair

The year April 2020 to March 2021 has been extraordinary for everyone as the Covid pandemic took hold. More than ever, the Meadow has been appreciated by the local community, with many enjoying including it on their daily lockdown walk and appreciating the seasonal changes. For many villagers, this has been a newly discovered haven during a difficult time.

Over the summer, we did a survey to get people's views about what improvements we should make. This gave a clear message that the Meadow should be kept as natural as possible and our efforts should be concentrated on planting wildflowers and installing features to encourage birds, bats and insects. We are grateful to Ben Jackson for building and installing three new bird boxes as a first step.



One of the new bird boxes

The questionnaire also raised the need to improve the entrances to the Meadow. The increase in visitors - along with bad rain during the winter months - has led to long periods when access has been difficult. Again, we got a clear message that we need to do some major work to improve this in future. Over the next few months, we will be

discussing options with the Council and contractors and developing funding bids to enable this to happen.

The pandemic also meant that we could not have as many volunteer sessions as we would have wished. However, we have recruited several new people to the group who bring new knowledge, enthusiasm and energy for which we are grateful.

This year, our Secretary David Nind stepped down after 16 years and we are grateful to Fiona Mosley for taking up the role.

## Wild Roses – Elaine Mills

As wild roses are amongst the best loved and most familiar flowers we wanted to add more of them to the meadow. In the autumn of 2020 we planted 4 native wild roses at the entrances to the meadow. The plants were sourced and provided by Rachel Anderson.

**DOG ROSE** *Rosa canina*

The most abundant and wide-spread species brightening hedgerows throughout England and Wales. It has strong arching stems and hooked thorns. The sweetly scented flat blooms vary in colour from pink to white. The hips are red and oval in shape.

**FIELD ROSE** *Rosa arvensis*

A lower scrambling or trailing shrub with curved thorns. The cup shaped flowers are always white. The hips are red and more rounded than the dog rose. Despite its name it often grows in woodland.

**BURNET ROSE** *Rosa pimpinellifolia*

A very spiny suckering plant with solitary white flowers. The hips are round and purple-black in colour. The Burnet rose is often found on coastal dunes in sandy soil so the meadow will not be the ideal habitat for it.

**DOWNY ROSE** *Rosa villosa*

A hedgerow plant with straight fairly slender thorns. The flowers are a deep pink and the leaves softly downy. The hips are red and globular.

## Willaston Meadow Cider – Fiona Mosley

The glut of apples in the orchard in Willaston Meadow meant we had a good supply. A few of us from the meadow committee, armed with bags and apple picking tools collected most of the cider apples and augmented these with a few windfalls from other trees. Sarah took the apples to a friend who has a large scale press to make apple juice. First, the apples have to 'scratted' by a machine. This chops the apples up making it easier to obtain the juice from the press. The juice was delivered in empty drinks bottles ready for the next stage.

My friend had sent me some instructions. Firstly, I had to order the equipment, yeast etc. To my surprise I found a stockist very local to us: [www.kegthat.com](http://www.kegthat.com) are based in Mill Lane and were able to supply everything I needed to my home free of any delivery charge.

The first task was to thoroughly clean the demijohns. They were then filled with apple juice, water, champagne yeast (I was told this is the best type to use) and some sugar before topping with the airlock to allow CO2 gas to escape but stop



Big Meadow Cider

germs from getting in. They were placed in a warm room to get on with the job of turning the apple juice into cider.

After a few weeks gas production had ceased and I siphoned the fresh cider into clean demijohns to leave the sediment behind. I decided to do a secondary fermentation at this stage so added some sugar water. Another month later (it can be longer) and the cider was ready to be bottled. Siphoning into the bottles was made easier using a funnel, and at this stage a few mouthfuls were tasted!

Two dozen bottles, most of which were distributed to Friends of the Meadow and to those who had helped us out along the way. I am told the cider was pleasant tasting, not too sweet or too sour. I liked it; it was very drinkable and not too alcoholic, though we didn't have a hygrometer to test this. I think we'll give it another go in 2021!

## Big Meadow Bird Count – Annie Hancox and Ben Jackson

After an extremely soggy winter of bird watching in The Big Meadow, it's time to reflect on the results of our third year. Numbers have been remarkably consistent. Although we missed March 20 due to Lockdown, looking back on March 19 and the count for March 21, it appears that along with April it is one of the best months. Surprisingly, December is the next best one.

Once nesting is in full swing, things seem to go a little quieter, probably because birds are trying not to draw attention to their nest sites and young.

After August numbers become a bit more intermittent, as birds moult and the young have departed and spread out into the surrounding area.

We had a few more sightings of the Moorhen on Jackson's Pond along with a Heron which was a fine sight.

The delightful little Goldcrests have appeared several times, always a joy.

Again, disappointing numbers of Greenfinch, and this year Chaffinch too.

They are both vulnerable to the awful Trichomonosis, a horrible way to die. GOOGLE IT!

It's really so important to keep bird feeders clean. A good scrub every week and more frequently when it's wet. Ben has built and installed some luxury boxes in the wooded areas, so hopefully residents will move in soon.

Thanks to Robyn Jackson for the colour chart, cleverly put together from my amateur one.

We are now up to 47 species, 48 if you count the Lesser Black Backed Gulls seen perched on a roof nearby.

I think I can speak for Ben and say that we so enjoy doing the count, despite some very cold fingers and toes at times.

Looking forward to reporting the next unexpected avian visitor.



Jackson's Pond walkway flooded and frozen!

Big Meadows Bird Count 2020

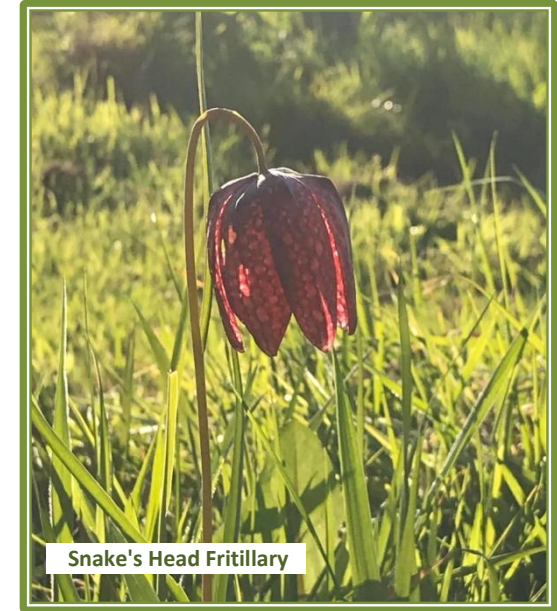
	JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
BLACKBIRD												
BLACKCAP												
BLACK HEADED GULL												
BLUE TIT												
BULLFINCH												
BUZZARD												
CHAFFINCH												
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COAL TIT												
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JACKSNOW												
JAY												
KESTREL												
LESSER REDPOLL												
LINNET												
LONG TAILED TIT												
MARGE												
MALLARD												
MOORHEN												
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REDWING												
ROBIN												
SONG THRUSH												
STARLING												
STOCK DOVE												
WASTLE THRUSH												
SWALLOW												
SWIFT												
TALONY OWL												
WELLOW TIT												
WOODPIGEON												
WREN												
CANADA GOOSE												

Chart showing bird records. See Facebook for a full size version.

### Flooding

This winter saw even more than the usual flooding in the meadow. Jackson's Pond filled up and over spilt onto the walkway and perimeter path which turned into a mud bath. The entrances to the meadow were also extremely muddy. Volunteers have laid down bark and wood chips to alleviate this problem but a long term solution to the path around the pond is being sought.

## Friends of Willaston Meadow



Snake's Head Fritillary

### Willaston Meadow and Woodland



The meadow in winter

### NOTICES

The **Annual General Meeting** will take place on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2021 - delayed due to Covid - in the Methodist Hall, Willaston. A representative from RSPB Burton Mere will give a talk.



**Proposed Events:** keep an eye on our Facebook page for dates!

- Picnic lunch - in summer after a volunteer session
- Pruning workshop - October
- Apple day - October

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- We wish once again to express our thanks to:
- All Friends and volunteers for their continued support and help
  - CWC Council Greenspace Officer
  - Staff parents and pupils involved with the Forest School at Willaston C. E. Primary School due to restart soon.
  - Hilary Ash for her advice and help

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Newsletter 2020/21