# NEWSLETTER No. 16

# Friends of Meadow Park

# SPRING & SUMMER 2009

After a good two years' delay since the first serious proposals for a transfer of routine park management from Rushcliffe Borough Council to East Leake Parish Council were put forward, the new regime finally started in May 2009. Several of the Friends had doubted this would ever actually happen, and we're delighted to eat our words!

With local decision making, based on what is going on just a few yards from the Parish Clerk's office, we look forward to much more efficient day to day management. The field-edge paths and the Play Field are already showing the benefit of the frequent mowing they should have been getting all along, and a firm contract is in place for a local farmer to give the largest meadows the twice-a-year cut which is in the management plan but which has often been missed in the past. Unfortunately, the wet weather during July meant the first cut had to be put back by three weeks or more, but by the second week in August, after a close cut and with the hay removed, the place looked cared-for once more.

Gibsons Field after mowing

As landowner, Rushcliffe Borough Council remains responsible for the integrity of the park's boundaries, and has promised that work at the Bateman Road entrance will be done, with luck, within this budgetary year. The fences on either side of the padlocked main gate and the kissing gate have more or less disintegrated over the years, and now offer no protection against unauthorised vehicles, "travellers" included, so urgent measures are called for.

The borough council also continues to supply and service the dog-waste-bins in the park, for which we are truly grateful (if only everyone would use them….)

When the Kirk family donated the land which became Meadow Park, they added a large capital sum for its development and longer-term maintenance. Although the borough council devoted the greater part of this to building the swimming pool at the Leisure Centre (justifying it on the grounds that it was for the recreational benefit of the village and therefore within the spirit of the gift), the balance is now retained specifically to finance any future major work in the park, such as the repair to the bridges which was carried out some years ago.

There continue to be representatives from both the borough and the parish councils on the Friends of Meadow Park committee, but now that our relationship with the parish council is official, it should be easier to plan ahead co-operatively, and make progress on some of the long-term schemes in the management plan.

**FRIENDS OF MEADOW PARK**

## CALENDAR 2010

**12 different views of the park - photos taken by members of FMP**

**Now available at the PARISH OFFICE**

**ONLY £4.50**

Contact the Secretary: tel. 853345 or e-mail meadowpark@eastleake.net

# THIS YEAR'S ACTIVITIES & SOME IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

**February.**
When we layed the hedge in the Play Field last year, the stems available were rather weedy, so today's job was to help the hedge to thicken up over the coming season. We moved a large number of young hawthorn saplings from the northern area of the field and interplanted them in the new hedge.

**March**

Completion of the western Play Field hedge. More work on thickening it, also coppicing some growth behind the hedge to provide dead-hedging. We used more than 90 stakes in all, and finally bound the top of the hedge with 90 hazel binders.

There were signs of rabbit activity – we just hope they don't eat too much of our handiwork!

Hedgers contemplating their task

**April "Spring Clean Day"**

About a dozen Friends filled almost 20 black bags of rubbish—where does it all come from? Along with the usual umpteen curry platters and beer cans, the haul from the brook included quite an assortment of bicycle parts. Who's cycling on one wheel and half a saddle?

**May**

We lost a bench on Kingfisher Walk to vandals some months ago, and today a sturdy new, metal one was installed. Cllr Marie Males funded this from her Rushcliffe Borough Council "Local Members Initiative" allowance, and we are most grateful to her.

Darcey makes a good foreman

Close by we also installed a lockable, polycarbonate-glazed notice board which Kevin Shaw had made for our Secretary's activity day reminders and "What to look for…" posters. (Sadly, within a few days this was badly damaged)

Kevin & his woodwork project

**June**

A "LOP & CHOP" day. During the summer, some of the paths become very overgrown and almost impassable in places. So, a few volunteers dispersed through the park wielding shears, loppers and secateurs. It doesn't make for a dramatic morning's work, but it's more comfortable if you don't have to push your way through brambles when you go for a stroll, so it's well worth doing.

**July.**

For the past couple of summers, we have had a "thistle pull" in Oak Meadow, where other plants have been in danger of being choked out because the creeping thistles are so vigorous. The thistle population has certainly diminished, so this month we had another go, and piled up several large stacks of thistle, also dock, ragwort and the occasional rampant willow herb.

**OUR PLANNED AUTUMN ACTIVITIES ARE LISTED ON PAGE 4**

**Future Projects**

For the long term, our really big idea is to create an arboretum along the southern edge of Bateman Field (mentioned previously, but stymied so far because of problems establishing the allowable scope of species to include). We hope this will become a living reference work, representative of our native British trees.

Some years ago, as an acknowledgement of East Leake's old basket-weaving industry, we planted an osier bed in a corner of Gibson's Field. These saplings have now grown large enough to use. Basket-weaving is probably beyond us, but we hope to enlist some expert help and create a willow sculpture, which would be a novelty in itself, and would maybe amuse our youngest visitors.

It has been suggested that we could attract the increasingly rare water vole to live here if we built some small stone ledges at intervals along the brook. We're looking into that as a possible project.

# NOW YOU SEE THEM, NOW YOU DON'T

Kingfishers are quite an icon in the park, but this year people have reported fewer sightings than previously. As they are in decline nationally, we were worried that we might be losing them here, too.

Extracts from the RSPB website:

*Kingfishers inhabit slow -moving, shallow rivers or streams which are clean enough to support abundant small fish. Branches overhanging shallows make essential fishing perches. An ideal fishing spot is a firm perch overlooking a clear, shallow pool of water.*

*Kingfishers eat mainly fish, chiefly minnows and sticklebacks, but they also take aquatic insects, freshwater shrimps and tadpoles etc to top up their diet. Each bird must eat at least its own bodyweight of fish each day.*

*Kingfishers are high up in the food chain, and therefore extremely vulnerable to build-up of chemicals. Industrial pollution and contamination by agricultural run-off kills the fish birds rely on, effectively excluding the birds from many stretches of river that would otherwise be suitable habitats. The long-term population declines since 1970 are generally attributed to river pollution.*

*Human disturbance of nesting birds is a serious problem, since the broods fail if something upsets the feeding routine. If human presence close to a nest prevents these shy birds from entering the nest for too long, the chicks may weaken enough (either from cold or hunger) to stop calling. This makes the parents wrongly assume that they are well fed and [they] will not feed them. As a result, the chicks will perish.*

Our kingfishers are known to nest just outside the park, beyond the railway bridge, but they fish the length of the Kingston Brook, and there are one or two points where the dense vegetation might be encroaching on their "fly-ways". Also, there don't seem to be so many fish in the stream this year. People have speculated that there may have been more run-off of chemicals from farms upstream, or maybe more water has been extracted, but there is no hard evidence of this.

Having taken advice from an expert at the British Trust for Ornithology, we concluded that the only practical action FMP could take was to tackle the overhanging trees both east and west of Kingfisher Bridge, and the big willow just west of Heron Bridge. A small working party was organised for a Saturday in August (additional to our normal series), ready to don waders and do some pruning from the water. But after two days of torrential rain, the brook was in spate - the first time for ages - making that rather too risky, so we had to manage as well as we could from the bank (or up a tree in one case of recaptured youth). We cleared

Above – fishing with a very long pole

Below— who says climbing trees isn't fun?

away some of the obstruction, but without stripping away too much of the foliage that the birds use for cover.

It was important to carry this out before the end of summer, because by September the birds will already be selecting their territories ready for next year, when we can only hope there will be more sightings.

**Do you read the East Leake Times every month?**

**If so, you will have noticed that the Friends of Meadow Park now have a regular column.**

**We are indebted to Dennis Fox, Max Watson, Ann Weekley and John Adcock, who provide the "what to look for" advice and other insights.**

**As ever, we value your views, so let us know if you find it helpful, and what other information you'd like to see.**

# NATIVE SPECIES ONLY?

Whether or not Friends of Meadow Park should have a "native species only" policy is a controversial issue. It has been debated at length in committee without reaching any agreement. This lack of agreement is, I suspect, a reflection of diverse views amongst members. On this issue we have to agree to differ and to respect alternative viewpoints.

In the last issue of the newsletter the "native species only" view was put very persuasively. This is an attempt to balance the argument with a view from the other side.

Most of us would wish to **encourage** native species but we can do this without going to the extreme of banning all others. It is argued that native trees support lots of other wildlife; for instance oak trees support 423 species of insects and mites. But there are literally hundreds of native oaks in Meadow Park so these 423 species are very well provided for. They won't face problems by the planting of a few non-native species amongst the hundreds of native oaks. There are just two native species of oak. Planting specimens of just some of the other species would provide a wonderful opportunity to see the attractive variation in the different species of oak. Another attractive non-native species is Buddleia. The flowers are not only attractive in themselves but they are well known for attracting butterflies. It is true that the food plants of the caterpillars are perhaps more important for the conservation of the butterflies. But why can't we have both - nettles for the caterpillars and Buddleia for the adult butterflies?

It is true that some non-native species are invasive – for example the dogwood that we are trying to get rid of. But this is no reason to tar all non-native species with the same brush. Most non-native species are not invasive at all and there is no reason to ban them on that count.

The final argument is on aesthetic grounds. It is said that most people find a landscape more attractive when there are only native species present. I doubt this. Non-native species add attractive variation in colour, form and flowering season. Many people believe that non native species sensitively planted and managed make significant contributions, not only to the aesthetic appeal, but also to the educational potential and to the general public awareness of biodiversity.

*Dennis Fox.*

Contrasting management treatments.

1. Shrubbery on the edge of the park, where many different garden varieties have been donated by members and include several non-native species
2. Hall Field which has been left to develop with no interference at all.

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The Friends of Meadow Park congratulate the East Leake Carnival Committee on another very successful effort this year.

Not only did everyone have fun, but organisations like ours had the opportunity to raise much needed funds.

THANKYOU to all the people who supported our stall and helped us reach the sum of £240.

# AUTUMN ACTIVITY DAYS

Please make a note of these, and attend if you can. We really would like to see more people turning up. *Less strenuous work is always available*

Saturday 12 September

Path improvement. The annual stone-laying/rolling effort.

Saturday 10 October

Preparation for the next stretch of hedge-laying.

Saturday 14 November

Bulb planting—400 indigenous blue-bell & wood anemone are on order!