NEWSLETTER No. 22

SPRING & SUMMER 2012

HARD WORK REWARDED

The Green Flag Award Scheme was set up in 1996, as a way of recognising local authorities and also groups such as The Friends for the work they do in providing good leisure opportunities in their areas. We felt our efforts over the years had made enough difference to this collection of old farm fields to justify an application at the "Community" level, so our chairman embarked on a form-filling marathon, followed by a walk-about in the park scrutinised by a judge with a big clip-board.

She had to consider:

Is this a welcoming place?
Is it healthy, safe & secure?
Is it clean & well maintained?
Is it a sustainable environment?
Are biodiversity & heritage taken account of?
How much is the community involved?
What effort is made to market the place?
What is the management policy?
What has been achieved?

Fortunately, she liked what she saw, and we are now entitled to use this logo and fly a splendid flag for the next twelve months. Since we have nowhere to display it, the Parish Council kindly agreed to hoist the flag on the front of the parish office, which is appropriate, because it is since the council took over the routine management of the park in 2009 that it has really flourished. Steve, the groundsman, works hard to keep the place looking cared-for and he sometimes brings his tractor along to help when we're struggling with heavy work.

But as well as the volunteers who give many hours of their time in organised teams, individual park users, both signed-up Friends and others, do their bit as litter-pickers, and obviously take a pride in the park - hats off to them all. This is an annual award, applied for and assessed each year, so we need this enthusiasm to be maintained. PLEASE!

The Green Flag scheme is run by a consortium of environmental quangoes, known as the Green Flag Plus Partnership.

For more information, see www.greenflagaward.org.uk

ONE GENEROUS DONOR = A BETTER PARK FOR ALL

After replacing a couple of dead trees in the arboretum in April and attaching the proper labels, we finally exhausted the County Council grant we've been reporting on for the past couple of years. What to target next?

The public consultation days in March set up by the East Leake Community Planning Group revealed plenty of enthusiasm for the park, along with adverse comments about the state of many paths and the difficulty wheel-chair users and buggy pushers have in moving around it. While it was never meant as an urban-type park with smooth tarmac pathways, and has to serve a dual purpose, for casual leisure **and** nature conservation, it is plainly right to make it accessible to as wide a range of visitor as possible.

It therefore felt like Christmas when a local resident offered us £5,000 for an improvement project in the park. A couple of our committee spent time with a paths expert from Horizon Landscapes Ltd of Basford, identifying the most beneficial way forward.

In all it was possible to deal with almost a kilometre of pathway. In some of the most atrocious July weather imaginable, a team from Horizon Landscapes put down tons of hardcore in some of the soggiest places, then a layer of limestone grit on the chosen routes:

- From the main entrance to the Bateman Road gate.
- A spur from Kingfisher Bridge to Kestrel Bridge, plus a loop to Heron Bridge and back on both sides of the Kingston Brook.
- A link from Kingfisher Walk to the Gotham Road gate.

They also installed a new bench near Bateman Road, from which there is a really good view across the park.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH, SIR.

How to contact the
FRIENDS OF MEADOW PARK
c/o The Parish Office,
45 Main Street,
East Leake, LE12 6PF,
tel: 852217
(weekday mornings)
or email our Secretary:
meadowpark@eastleake.net
also find us on
www.east-leake.co.uk (Amenities)

BUTTERFLY BONANZA

Meadow Brown, Ringlet & Small Skipper feeding on thistle & ragwort

Kevin Gibbons writes:

Overall 2012 has been a good year for butterflies in the park.

The year started well, with reasonable springtime weather, with occasional sightings of Brimstone and good numbers of Orange Tips (there is plenty of their favoured foodplant - garlic mustard - in the park).

Despite a poor summer, the grassland populations of Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Hedge Brown have been good and could often be found feeding on the flower squares in the arboretum.

There were also surprisingly good numbers of Small and Large Skippers, particularly around the field margins, taking nectar on ragwort and thistle. If weather conditions permit, we may yet see migrations of Red Admirals and Painted Ladies into the park.

A total of 16 has been recorded, more than in 2011. Others that we could still hope to see include: Peacock, Red Admiral, and Painted Lady. Keep looking!

Species spotted so far this year:

- *Holly Blue*
- *Speckled wood*
- *Orange tip*
- *Brimstone*
- *Comma*
- *Large white*
- *Small white*
- *Green veined white*
- *Small Copper*
- *Common blue*
- *Large skipper*
- *Small skipper*
- *Small tortoise-shell*
- *Meadow brown*
- *Ringlet*
- *Hedge Brown*

OUR WILD FLOWER POPULATION

(left) Meadow Saxifrage (centre) Lesser Centaury
(top right) Common Spotted Orchid
(left) Musk Mallow (right) Hay (or Yellow) Rattle

Ann Weekley has just completed a survey of all the flowers she has identified in the park from 2006 to 2012. The total is an astonishing 123. She points out that not all of them are present this summer, and certain species come and go. For example, Lesser Centaury (in Hall Field this year) and the Common Spotted Orchid, which has done well in this wet growing season, were last seen in 2009 and 2010 respectively, while Coltsfoot, which once thrived near the Sheepwash Brook, is now a rarity.

Musk Mallow is new this year, from last April's sowing in the arboretum - a source of real satisfaction. Even better, Meadow Saxifrage has turned up of its own accord; this once common meadow plant likes dampish, "unimproved" grassland, so Oak Meadow suits it.

And then there's Hay Rattle (named for the sound its seed pods make in a breeze). It inhibits the growth of some grasses, giving other species more room to thrive, highly desirable when your aim is greater biodiversity. We sowed a large patch in Little Meadow, with startling results; the germination rate looked like close on 100%! There will certainly be more sowings in 2013.

"ACTIVITY DAYS"

JANUARY

There were 12 volunteers, and the task was to complete last December's hedgelaying, along the eastern boundary between Little Meadow and Lagoon Field.

This was laid and staked, then, with a little time to spare, we removed some young ash and cherry trees that had been ring-barked by vandals and would not have survived.

New hedge in Little Meadow

FEBRUARY

There were 12 of us again, and this time we worked at the opposite end of the park, in Gibson's Field, cutting back a considerable amount of scrub, and coppicing trees. In particular we cleared a great deal of bramble, which we were able to burn on site.

There is now a lot more light getting into the area, and we hope for better bluebells in future.

MARCH

We had an excellent turn-out of 19 volunteers, so we split into two groups, who…

- Prepared and seeded an area adjacent to the latest hedge laying in Little Meadow, leaving about 1 metre nearest the hedge for dormant seed already there to germinate. We also seeded a few extra squares in the field itself.
- Shifted sawn timber and wood waste from the edge of the brook where the Kingston Brook Internal Drainage Board contractors had left them (they would soon have ended up in the brook otherwise) Several of the logs were arranged to form the base of 'hibernacula' which when turfed or earthed-up should provide winter cover for some of our smallest residents.

APRIL

We had 14 volunteers, mostly working on the annual clean-up, including removing rubbish from the brook.

One person removed docks from the wildflower squares sown in Bateman Field last year and sowed some hedgerow seed left over from the last activity day, while two others spread woodchippings from the piles left by KBIDB on a few large muddy areas on paths in Gibson's Field and elsewhere.

MAY

Just 8 of us today, but we got a lot done, including:

- Sorting out the mulch round the stems of the new trees in the arboretum and painting the new sessile oak with a fungicide as it is badly covered in 'coral spot'.
- Cutting back dog rose in Gibson's Field shrubbery.
- Removing 'witches knickers' (= plastic bags caught up on stream branches; a term coined at the University of San Diego in 2004 - it's really educational, being a Friend!!) from Kingston Brook and hauling out a lot of garbage.
- Tidying the brook banks in places, moving brash from the KBIDB activities.
- Making a wildflower survey in preparation for the upcoming guided walk.

JUNE

10 members attended and multi-tasked, as Friends do:

- Pruning the shrubbery, frequently needed nowadays.

The mature Shrubbery

- Undoing the damage done to one of our best ash trees by two youths trying to build a tree house. Removing nails and planks had to be done with great care if the tree is to recover.
- Clearing docks from Oak Meadow

JULY

We had 6 volunteers, pretty good on a wet morning with the fields sodden underfoot.

We cleared over-hanging hawthorn and blackthorn from paths, mostly in Gibson's & Bateman Fields, also cut back a lot of nettles.

EXTRA WORK SESSIONS

Over and above the monthly sessions described, volunteers have put in nearly 100 hours so far in 2012, planting trees and sowing wild flower seed, tidying up after the KBIDB contractors, removing ragwort, flail-cutting a walkable path through Hall Field, labelling the arboretum trees, and never-ending tidying up…….

NB Kingston Brook Internal Drainage Board

We know some dredging, cutting back and bank clearance is necessary every few years, but what was carried out in February seemed excessive. This was in spite of conversations with the contractor beforehand and his assurance that damage to the habitat (and appearance) of the area would be minimal. A Friend who is an expert on river management has warned that the flow of the brook may have been adversely affected long-term, and therefore also the habitat of river and bank-dwellers. New vegetation has covered the mess on the banks, but lost trees are gone for good - including a couple of big willows and a stand of young black poplars donated by a Friend.

THE VEXED QUESTION OF "NOXIOUS WEEDS"

We all know that chemicals contained in some plants can be poisonous; anxious governments across the world pass laws against these so-called "noxious weeds".

In this country, the earliest legislation was the **Weeds Act 1959**, intended to control:

- Common Ragwort (Senecio jacobaea)
- Broadleaved Dock (Rumex obtusifolius)
- Curled leaved Dock (Rumex crispus)
- Spear Thistle (Circium vulgare)
- Creeping Thistle (Circium arvensis)

These are all native species, but were disliked by arable farmers aiming to maximise their crops in the hungry years post-WW2. Ragwort is the most notorious, being the one which can actually be fatal to livestock, and it had an act all to itself, the **Ragwort Control Act 2003**.

In Meadow Park, dock and creeping thistle are a nuisance, and we do battle with them from time to time. The thistle population in Oak Meadow, where they were most prolific, is nowadays much reduced, but docks are tougher to get rid of and all the fields still carry rather more than we like. The problem is that, although they are valuable food sources for certain bird or insect species, they can easily become dominant in any given area and choke out smaller less vigorous plants.

The farmer who mows our fields can tolerate dock and thistles, but even a moderate amount of ragwort would make the hay almost unusable. So it has become an annual task to remove as much as possible from a couple of fields, leaving other patches to the butterflies and moths which rely on it for food. In particular, the caterpillar of the cinnabar moth (left) feeds almost exclusively on ragwort.

Pulling is the preferred method of removal, but it's heavy work, and we were very grateful for the help of three volunteers from British Gypsum, who are part of a team organised by BPB Environment Manager, Kirsty Greggs. They like to find projects in the local community that they can give a bit of help to, and this was so successful that we hope we shall see them again, maybe in the Autumn.

Richard Best, Jason Gilbourne & Gary Clarke

GUIDED WALKS

The 2011 series of "Getting to Know your Park" walks was well received, and leaders Ann Weekley, Max Watson and Dennis Fox were happy to repeat them, so we picked some dates for this year. And then, as we all know, the heavens opened, for weeks on end. Thanks and congratulations to the few brave souls who ventured out on three wretched Saturdays in May.

There were good things to be seen, like the trees in the arboretum, which now look as if they belong and were just nicely coming into leaf, or the good show of wild flowers from last year's sowing, mostly in Bateman Field, or the latest hedge-laying in Little Meadow, or the hibernacula built near the brook and in quiet corners like the north-west of Little Meadow.

New for this year, Kevin Gibbons joined forces with Ann on the flower walk, pointing out some of the huge number of insects that live in the park, but which for the most part we are unaware of.

Undeterred by the vagaries of our climate, the walks' leaders have said they'll turn out for us again in 2013, for which we are truly grateful. Come next Spring, watch out for details of date and times.

AUTUMN ACTIVITY DAYS

September 8 – Cutting back Dogwood, mainly in Hall Field
October 13 – Cutting back hawthorn etc, SW Lagoon Field and Hall Field
Saturday 10 November & Saturday 8 December:
to be confirmed, probably hedge-laying

PLEASE COME IF YOU CAN

Meet at the depot behind the Parish Office at 9.50am, to collect tools and discuss the morning's work

And finally,
for those of you who kindly help our funds by buying our popular NOTELET packs, with photos taken around the park - we now have similar packs illustrated with photos of some of our wonderful wild flowers.

£2 per pack of ten (incl envelopes) from the Parish Office