Newsletter No 37

July 20th 2020

A round-up of what's been Going on in Meadow Park since Christmas

Friends of Meadow Park

January 2020

You may remember that the trees along the boundary of Bateman Road, towards the railway embankment, were cut down in error by Street Wise. There is a requirement that Meadow Park has a defined boundary, so we decided to erect a **fence.** The fence has 40 posts and 400 metres of wire. Squeeze gaps for pedestrians have been carefully sited. The cost of the fence was very modest (under £500) and has been met out of our funds and your donations. We are always very grateful to our members and others who contribute via the boxes in village shops. The fence looks really good and we attacked the Russian Vine which was growing with enthusiasm.

Russian Vine is a pernicious invasive plant which was planted by an unknown resident and has over-run the Bateman Road boundary. When the fence was erected large swathes of Russian Vine were dug up and disposed of. We had hoped to burn it, but the copious amounts of rain made this impossible. We had the stems and leaves shredded and disposed of the roots separately so that it could not re-grow. We know that this is only the first stage of tackling the problem and have seen some re-growth. It is virtually impossible to stop this shrub in the short term. Over time we will keep attacking it and hope in the not too distant future we will eradicate it.

February 2020

The working morning on Saturday 8th February was very productive. We planted **15 rowan trees** (supplied by RBC) and **one ash** tree in Gibson Field, along the northern boundary of the wooded area in Gibson Field , just west of the willow structure. They survived Storm Ciara 9th/10 February but the hot, dry weather in May has killed some of them. The hazel in Gibson Field was coppiced and the blackthorn near the outdoor gym was pruned. Eric spotted the kingfisher by the brook.

There are several areas in the park which we **coppice**. Coppicing is a traditional method of managing woodland. The idea is to cut back the hazel growth every two of three years so that trees grow outwards, rather than upwards. The natural tendency of the hazel is to grow upwards but this causes a thick canopy like area which allows no light in. If it is coppiced the base of the tree will expand and cover a greater ground area. The overall effect we want to create is a mixture of levels, with some trees coppiced and others left on a rotational basis. This is much better for wild life.

The strong **wooden structure** along from the shrubbery area has been built to accommodate the limestone mix that will be used to repair paths in the future.

You may have noticed how wet and churned up the ground was in the top south-west corner of **Gibson Field** (near the railway embankment). Over the winter the pathway had virtually disappeared.
Co-incidentally a tree in St Mary's church yard was pushing a wall down and had to be removed before it did more serious damage. The tree was felled and shredded. The chippings were used to re-create the path in the SW corner of Gibson Field. Tree Smart, a local firm, took the chippings to the Bateman Road entrance and volunteers distributed them along the unsurfaced footpaths in that area.

March 2020 (and lockdown from March 23rd)

Forest School met in early March for the last time before lockdown. The log circle, moved by the floods and further damaged as some chunks have been carved out of them, needs to be repaired when volunteers are cleared to work on the area safely.
The March work party planted alders in Gibson Field alongside the railway embankment. All came into leaf but the later hot, dry weather has killed some of them. Wild cherry was planted along Bateman Road boundary.
In the headland area of Play Field a **limestone bank** has been made with the old surface scraped off the paths and some extra chippings (several tons) bought in. The aim is to create a quarry floor type habitat. An environmentally friendly membrane was put down in front of the limestone mound to prevent rank weeds growing through. More limestone chippings were put on top of the membrane. During lockdown the bank became overgrown with hemlock and nettles. Kevin Gibbons weeded it and planted six bird's foot trefoil plants and some kidney vetch. A small amount of wildflower seed from **Naturescape** was scattered which, hopefully, will show next year. The mound is located in a sheltered, sunny spot. Limestone loving plants like kidney vetch, bird's foot trefoil, wild strawberry and marjoram will thrive and attract butterflies.

Wildflowers

Dropwort

The meadows have seen wonderful displays of flowers this year, despite the flooding in the winter period caused by three subtropical storms: **Brendan**, January 13th-14th, **Ciara** February 8th-9th and **Dennis** February 15th-16th. A hot May inhibited the growth of long grass and the lower growing plants were more prominent. These include pepper saxifrage, lesser/marsh stitchwort, red clover, great burnet, common knapweed, ladies bedstraw, common sorrel, amphibious/common bistort, meadow buttercup, hay rattle and dropwort. We also had fantastic displays of cowslips in April. It was noticeable however, that we have seen fewer purple orchids this year.

Ladies bedstraw

Birds

Little egrets have been seen in the park in the autumn and winter as they migrate from the continent. It is one of our success stories little egrets are still classified as 'uncommon' in the UK.

We always try to quantify how many birds pass through the park in the winter months of each year. This winter we have seen very few migrants. No **siskins** were spotted, and only a few **field fare** and **red wing**. This is probably because it has been relatively mild and the birds have been able to 'stay put', so to speak, and not journey far for food. We think nearly all the **bird boxes** were used by small birds like great tits both this year and last year, but cannot quantify the actual number as last year it was too wet to place ladders at the base of trees and this year no checks will be done until early autumn. We have three bird boxes to put up ready for the next nesting season. These could not be put up in February as the land was too muddy/unstable.

Butterflies

We are delighted to tell you that a **small heath butterfly** has been spotted in the park for the first time. It was found in Bateman Field near Kingston Brook. However, it is unlikely to be anything more than a visitor as the caterpillar hibernates over winter, pupates around the end of April and hatches in May. Eggs are laid in late May and the new caterpillars hatch, feed and pupate in July just when our grass is cut, sweeping up the eggs and/or pupa.

Generally the butterfly population has been good this year with numbers of orange tip, tortoiseshell, red admiral, meadow brown, ringlet and common blue in the meadows.
One interesting observation is that lots of **peacock butterfly caterpillars** have been seen feeding on nettles (and wandering across paths looking for places to pupate). Look out for these in the summer.
The **Big Butterfly Count** this year will be between **Friday 17th July and Sunday 9th August**. Go online to find out more details. Results from short observations are collated and help to give a better idea of how climate and changes in habitat are affecting out butterfly population.

Arboretum

Earlier in the year the wet soil in the arboretum was having an adverse effect upon some of the trees. The **larch** is struggling and the **sweet chestnut** has died. The trees are being monitored. Grass cutting in the arboretum is very difficult and time consuming and the committee is looking at ways of doing the in a less mechanised way – either with a small mower or even by hand. Cutting the grass in the arboretum every other year would help small invertebrates, flowers etc.

Two strimmers donated

Two petrol strimmers have been donated to FMP. These will go through the Parish Council's maintenance process and put to good use in the park. Two of our volunteers have the required approved training in their use. It may be that the arboretum area is strimmed in future rather than mown.

Hall Field

We were not able to cut back the growth in Hall Field this year due to the wet weather followed by lockdown. As a result some of the lower growing plants may have suffered but should recover if we manage to get on with cutting and clearing again over the autumn and winter. We will leave some areas uncut to provide winter habitat for small creatures.

Water Pollution

Recent flooding in the village revealed the problem of sewage disposal as the water across Gotham Road, the children's playing field and Meadow Park was tested and found to be contaminated. The Environment Agency was contacted and a report made. Glen Yeomans (RBC) visited the pumping station and we asked about putting up signage warning residents about the pollution at times of flooding. Alan Barlow asked how the pollution could be stopped and was told that separating the pipes between sewage and runoff is the only answer, but this would cost millions of pounds. However, putting in a new 10 inch pipe to the sewage farm from the pumping station would help the situation. The Environment Agency has the power to fine STW and demand that they act appropriately. Alan had a follow up meeting with the Trent Valley Drainage Board at the end of February and working in conjunction with Parish Clerk, Neil Lambert, they contacted RBC, NCC Flood team and even the Highway Agency to no immediate avail. Action was finally taken when Andy Brown (Rushcliffe Councillor) stepped in and involved Kay Cutts (Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council), who held an emergency meeting and asked those involved to provide appropriate wording for signage at times of flooding and sewage egress. The Environment Agency and STW have now been told to provide appropriate signage to warn of pollution when it floods. Discussions continue to get Severn Trent to deal with the problem in the long term.

Cowslips April 2020

The importance of meadows and grassland

Grassland stores more carbon than forests because they are impacted less by drought and wildfires. Unlike forests, grassland sequesters most of their carbon underground while forests store it mostly in woody biomass and leaves. When wildfires cause trees to go up in flames the buried carbon they formerly stored is released back into the atmosphere. When fire burns grasslands, however, the carbon fixed underground tends to stay in the roots and soil, making them more adaptive to climate change.

Professor Benjamin Houlton and Pawlok Dass at University of California: 'In a stable climate, trees store more carbon than grasslands. But in a vulnerable, warming, drought-like future, we could lose some of the most productive carbon sinks on the planet.'

With this in mind we will plant any additional trees at the edges of fields or in headland areas. This will not only keep the soil untilled but will make mowing easier.

There will be no working mornings until further notice.