Newsletter

No 38

January 2021

A round-up of what has been going on in Meadow Park since August 2020

Friends of Meadow Park

Heron in the park 5th Nov 2020

The January newsletter usually gives an overview of the AGM reports. However, our AGM was postponed so this January's newsletter is simply an overview of what has been going on in the park over the last six months. I hope you enjoy reading it and feel very pleased with what has been done.

Arboretum

Earlier in the year the wet soil in the arboretum was having an adverse effect upon some of the trees. The **larch** was struggling and the **sweet chestnut** died. 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 petrol strimmers were 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.

Wild flowers

The meadows last summer saw wonderful displays of flowers, 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 included pepper saxifrage, lesser/marsh stitchwort, red clover, great burnet, common knapweed, ladies bedstraw, common sorrel, amphibious/common bistort, meadow buttercup, hay rattle, dropwort, willow herb, mallow, centaury, wild carrot, yellow rattle, scabious, cornflower, corn marigold, clover, mallow, spotted orchid, selfheal and sorrel among many others. Year on year the number of flowers is increasing and we have created four bee worlds where a selection of wild flower seeds have been sown. However, we had fewer purple orchids in 2020. The meadows were mown in August, after the flowers had set seed.

Red Bartsia

Red bartsia

Some of us thought we had found a 'new' plant to the park. Red bartsia was spotted in Play Field, not far from the butterfly bank and caused some interest. However one longstanding member of the committee was able to clarify that it has been present for some years in the top north-west corner of Play Field and also in Hall Field. It does not grow in profusion, but is obviously well established. Red bartsia is a common plant in low-fertility soils, where it lives partially as a parasite on the roots of grasses. The red bartsia has pinkish and red flowers from June to September. It prefers dry conditions and full sun light exposure and is pollinated by bees and wasps.

Although over the last 70 years, the red bartsia has disappeared from many woodland locations in Dorset it is still a common plant of roadside verges, railway cuttings, waste ground and other disturbed ground in the UK.

Himalayan Balsam

Early in 2020 **Himalayan balsam** appeared along the Kingston Brook edges, on both sides of Kingfisher Bridge. It is a pernicious invader, despite looking very beautiful when in flower. It is an annual plant and the main method of control is to remove flowers/seed heads. We think it may be coming downstream as small amounts have been found in previous years all the way up the brook to Willoughby-on-the-Wolds. It can spread quite quickly (it's become a real problem along many streams and riversides across the UK).

Himalayan balsam's aggressive seed dispersal, coupled with high nectar production which attracts pollinators, often allow it to outcompete native plants. It also promotes river bank erosion due to the plant dying back over winter, leaving the bank unprotected from flooding. Himalayan balsam can also adversely affect indigenous species by attracting pollinators at the expense of indigenous species

Update on Himalayan balsam

When the problem was assessed in the Park it was obvious that Hb was well established. A Friend of Meadow Park who lives in Costock emailed to tell us it was growing in the brook at the back of his house. It can be found miles away along Kingston Brook. Initially Conrad Oatey (Parish Councillor) thought a small group of volunteers could get to grips with the problem, but increasingly the huge scale of the problem became clear. He has contacted Trent Valley Internal Drainage Board and it is hoped they will soon be able to tackle it. Meanwhile our intention is to deal with the Hb in the Park. We will not uproot it (as that damages the river banks) but will take off all the flowers and cut it back where possible.

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Birds

Redwing Dec 2020 near Kingston Brook

Over the winter months the park has seen an increase in the variety and number of birds.

Redwings and Fieldfares

Last autumn winter thrushes arrived from the Scandinavia. The smaller redwing with an orange-red flush radiating from beneath its wings, the larger fieldfare with its slate-blue head, rump and tail have been spotted in large flocks in the park. Hawthorn and holly berries are favourite foods and they systematically glean the fields. This year has been a particularly good year for berries so sightings of these birds have been easy and frequent. Waxwings arrived from Scandinavia and have been spotted in the park. They mostly go to the West Midlands, but good numbers have been seen in the East Midlands. They particularly like rowan and hawthorn berries.

Many birds stay with us year round. Good numbers of robin, wren, blackbird, gold finch, blue tit, and great tit are in the park. The kingfisher is a regular visitor. If you have a bird feeder in your garden make sure you keep it topped up as birds make special visits to spaces they know are likely to have food.

Butterflies

Fortunately we saw a good butterfly population in the park with numbers of orange tip, tortoiseshell, red admiral, meadow brown, ringlet and common blue in the meadows, no doubt because of the abundance of wild flowers. We had lots of **peacock butterfly caterpillars** feeding on nettles (and wandering across paths looking for places to pupate). However it is sad to report that country wide the butterfly population was down in 2020. Results of the **Big Butterfly Count 2020 saw the lowest numbers of butterflies recorded in 11 years.** Wildlife charity Butterfly Conservation has released data about the number of butterflies counted in Big Butterfly Count (17th July – 9th August 2020). Worryingly summer 2020 saw a reduction in the average number of butterflies logged per count of -34% in comparison with 2019 and the lowest average number of butterflies logged overall since the event began eleven years ago. Go online to see the 2020 results.

Work in the park

Although we have not been able to meet for the regular work parties since early March 2020, individuals have worked on their own. Working practices have adjusted over the last months to be in line with guidance and good sense. A Covid 19 Risk Assessment form provided by RBC via Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust has been applied and our Parish Council provides insurance so long as we adhere to these guidelines

The log circle for **Forest School** has neem repaired. The wire fixings had been prised apart and the logs displaced, also the posts that carry the tarpaulins in wet weather to provide a shelter for the children had been dislodged. Volunteers mended everything and re-set the posts so all will be ready for Forest School when it can re-start.

In **September** RBC, through the Notts Wildlife Trust, funded the use of a **flail machine** with its operator. The LV 500 Green Climber is a long range [300m] remote controlled, steep terrain mower which is fitted with a high performance flail as standard, for use on roadside/overgrown areas. As the operator is not on the machine it can go into steep or uncomfortable areas i.e. mixed scrub/brambles/hawthorn/ blackthorn. In Meadow Park, the areas which were causing concern were the northern boundary and Hall Field. The scrub it cut back was nearly four metres high in some places. What would have taken a group of volunteers several months to clear was turned into chippings in four hours.

Our **October** work party was split into three groups with two groups of five working on Hall Field and clearing brash and two volunteers working on the shrubbery. Lockdown in **November** meant no working groups. The move to Tier 3 in **December** allowed us to carry out some work. The work party on 12th December split into two groups. One planted hazel and crab apple in two different areas of the park, the main site being near Bateman Road. The second group coppiced dogwood and wild rose and cut back blackthorn and hawthorn along the pathway from the sculpture to the Arboretum letting more daylight in which in turn will create an area of regrowth to give different heights of trees/dogwood etc. As we do not have bonfires, the branches cut down were used create a 'dead' hedge.

Richard Jenks did the annual yearly field margin cut on **2nd December** 2020. The margins are cut to control the spread of rampant species such as bramble. However, he cuts the margins on a three yearly rotation basis, which ensures that there are areas of long grass left each year which are important for overwintering mammals and invertebrates. Individuals have continued to work on general maintenance doing such jobs as picking litter, cutting back shrubs and branches overhanging pathways. A brash hedge has been created in Stonebridge Field. It is sturdy and neat and should deter dogs from rooting around too much in that area. We plan to plant some single snowdrops and native bluebells (the dainty, bowed head variety) in Stonebridge Field.

The Thursday '***walk in the park'*** group is not meeting at the moment but hopes to re-start in the near future.

On the RBC website you will find: Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2021-2025 Draft (PDF - 844KB). You may be interested to read the proposals for conserving nature in the borough.

Comments are welcome emailed to environmentalissues@rushcliffe.gov.uk