Newsletter 39
July 2021
A round-up of what Has been going on in the Park since Christmas

Friends of Meadow Park

adder's-tongue fern

January

The path from Stonebridge Drive was the focus of some work. A dead hedge has been laid so that clear pathways into the under-growth are well defined. The work is quite extensive and will be long lasting. The idea is to guide feet away from areas where wood anemone rhizomes have been planted. Another swath of these rhizomes was planted near the entrance to Hall Field at the bottom corner of Playfield. Hundreds of wood anemone rhizomes were planted and we hope for a good display next year. Native bluebells and single snowdrops were also planted in Stonebridge field.

View through the old tree tunnel (near the entrance) 24/01/21,

February

The trees in the Arboretum were checked. Some bramble/scrub was cut back. The limestone pathways were walked and found to be in need of a little attention as there was a certain amount of pooling/unevenness. The extra limestone mix we have in store near the millstone sculpture was used for repair.

March

Oak Meadow saw some serious hedge laying, dead hedging, coppicing and tree pruning. The native/English dogwood in Oak Meadow had layered too far into the meadow and was dug out on 16th March. Our aim was to improve the habitat and general appearance of the area. Volunteers also organised a litter pick two days in March and the park looked much better for their efforts. Many bags of litter were collected. Litter picked up included bottles, cans, a piece of lino, garden pots, an assortment of things wrapped around the branches from where the brook had flooded, a garden spade, a hammer and a seat cushion from a sofa/chair.

One volunteer made it her task to remove the old plastic tree supports from the wooded area to the north of Play Field. She collected eight big bags of them. Unfortunately the plastic cannot be recycled and her work continues.

April

Early in April hedge laying/coppicing and pollarding of the Stonebridge, sculpture area and Oak Meadow copses was completed for the year. Dangerous/dead branches that were overhanging paths were removed. Various bulbs and hazel were planted in the areas cleared. The very generous donation from **Arch Communications** enabled us to add another seat in Gibson's Field and plant, in various places along Kingston Brook, 500 wild daffodil bulbs. It is the second part of the donation Arch has made since their start up in the village ten years ago. We value their input and are pleased that they intend to continue their support. The butterfly bank in Play Field was weeded and two different mixtures of wild flowers sown in that area.

May

Work has continued in the park on an ad hoc basis, with a group of 16 (by invitation and split into smaller groups) working on Saturday May 15th. Dogwood was cleared, rank weeks pulled, the trees in the arboretum checked and the shrubbery weeded.

June

On 12th June 16 volunteers worked in small groups on a range of projects. They fitted Ground Grab Tiles under a further two seats as the work in May proved to be a success. They also harvested willow from the trees in the corner of Gibson's Field (for Forest School), walked the paths to cut back overhanging brambles and branches.

Sorting willow for Forest School

In mid-June a small group of committee members took a walk round the park to compile a list of jobs for the autumn and beyond. A group effort was called for so that everyone has a better idea of what is being done where and by whom and so that we follow the approved management plan as best as possible in the circumstances.

July

Our stock of limestone path gravel was diminishing so a request was made to the Parish Council to obtain a further supply. After a lot of good work by the council a contact was made with David Wilson Homes who are at present building on Rempstone Road. This resulted in a very generous supply of 20 tons of Breedon limestone path gravel which was delivered to Bateman Road entrance to the park and subsequently on two work sessions the majority was moved to the store. A big thank you goes to our Parish Council and David Wilson Homes.

The July work party was well attended with 17 volunteers present. They cut back the growth over the paths adjacent to the Arboretum copse and Bateman Road. A large pothole had developed at the entrance to Gibson's Field near the Bateman Road entrance and this was filled in and will hopefully not return. A group of volunteers worked on creating tunnels in the willow bed (ideal for youngsters to wander through).

On a sad note, a tree near the Forest School log circle has been stripped of its bark, and two others nearby partially stripped. This of course, will mean the tree dies and we will have to remove it. The youngsters attending Forest School will be upset by this senseless action which in effect damages their 'base camp'.

Wild flowers

The flowers in the park have been spectacular this year. We saw swathes of cowslips in April, buttercups in May and June and a good quantity flowers and species overall – in total **99** different types of flowers have been spotted so far this year. Year on year the wild flowers are increasing in the park. In June Meadow Park was full of wild flowers such as herb bennet, yellow rattle, white dead nettle, creeping buttercup, meadow buttercup, red clover, ox-eye daisy, ragged robin, red campion, meadow cranesbill, cornflower, foxglove and goat's beard among others. Over the years we have scattered quite a lot of yellow rattle seed and this has helped keep the taller grasses in check. Yellow rattle is a semi-parasitic plant that suppresses grass growth and allows a better display of wild flowers in meadows. It is known as 'the meadow maker' or 'nature's lawn mower'. Yellow rattle is an annual, completing its life cycle in one year. In early spring the seeds germinate and grow quickly. As their roots develop underground they seek out the roots of plants growing nearby, especially grasses. Once contact is made the yellow rattle draws water and nutrients from them, suppressing the growth of grasses by as much as 60%. In the resulting space, other flowers have room to grow. However, there is one exception to this general trend as the purple spotted orchid, which has not been so abundant this year. No doubt the weather has something to do with this and we hope to see them return in quantity next year, or even later this year.

The **Oak Meadow flower strip** appears to have badly degraded in terms of species diversity over the last few years, probably due to lack of cutting and the fertilisation effects of flood water. It still has a good range of flowers but it may be best to include it in the general hay cut.

Meadow Saxifrage

We have two rather special species in the park this year. In May **meadow saxifrage** was spotted in Play Field. This delicate plant has not been seen in the park for a few years and it is nice to see it return. At the end of May/early June another species associated with old meadows and grassland was found, namely **adder's-tongue fern** spotted in Hall Field. We are not sure how it might have got here but it is another indicator of how ecologically rich this part of the park has become.

Earlier in the year we planted hundreds of native bluebells, wood anemone rhizomes and single snowdrops in Stonebridge Field. Another swath of these rhizomes was planted near Heron Bridge near the entrance to Hall Field. We also planted **500** wild daffodils along the banks of Kingston Brook.

Arboretum

The Arboretum and our larger trees have been checked regularly and unfortunately we have lost quite a few trees over the last 18 months - the sweet plum, the sweet chestnut and downey birch have all died along with some of the large cherry trees in the copses adjacent to, and near the Bateman Road. The alder and replacement beech are both showing signs of recovery, in the case of the alder this will be pruned to a smaller size to allow growth to develop from lower in the trunk. As regards the downey birch, this is already a second replacement so this will not be replaced with a new tree, as obviously they do not like the present situation in the Arboretum. One committee member planted a downey birch in his garden at the same time the tree in the arboretum was put in. His tree is now 18 ft tall and flourishing.

The meadow flora in the arboretum has been particularly impressive this year – we are not sure that we should put any more trees in here as in the long term they will shade out the plants underneath. The Arboretum sponsorship fund will continue to be used for any on-going maintenance that is required in this area. We added a replacement horse chestnut to take the place of the sweet plum, downey birch and sweet chestnut.

We would like to maintain and develop the arboretum in a better way, but we need more resources. You may be interested in supporting our **arboretum sponsorship** scheme. If you would like to help then you could give a donation, in multiples of £10, and the money would be used specifically in the area near the Bateman Road entrance. Your gift would be written up in our book of donations and you would get a card thanking you for your sponsorship. It is a novel way of giving a present or commemorating a life or a family event.

Birds

Due to the Covid situation over the last 15 months we have been unable to visit the boxes to clean them out and check any possible residents that have used them - this is normally carried out in November of each year. We have however been able to add and replace various damaged/lost bird nest boxes and bat boxes in either their existing position or in the new areas recently cleared.

We now have 20 older nest boxes and 19 new additions along with six bat boxes, hopefully these or most of them have been used successfully over the last two breeding seasons and in November this year we can resume cleaning/checking.

Butterflies

Butterflies in Meadow Park – 2021 so far…..

Well. It has been a challenging year for the butterfly population in the park so far. The effect of a cold April, followed by a wet May and then a sunny June has created the sort of untypical and unpredictable weather that butterflies struggle to cope with. However we were still rewarded with some of the butterflies that emerge from hibernation in the cold, but sunny weather of April and early May which included sightings of brimstone, peacock and small tortoiseshells.

June: a large skipper (male) in the long grass area above Playfield

Despite the very poor weather conditions in May, the orange tip butterflies ventured out whenever they could, skirting the hedgerows in search of their food plant garlic mustard (also known as 'Jack by the hedge'). The speckled wood butterfly, was also seen in dappled shady areas (its favourite habitat), and will be seen now for the rest of the year in small numbers, possibly up to October.

June is always a quiet month for butterflies, but there were certainly plenty of small tortoiseshells and a few peacocks around laying their eggs on nettles. There were also a few brimstones flying, and laying their eggs on their food plant (alder buckthorn – which we have planted quite a bit of in the park), a number of brimstone caterpillars were seen feeding on these plants. By the end of June, there were a few of the summer butterflies in the park starting to show, including the meadow brown and ringlet.

In early July there were very good numbers of meadow browns in the grassland. In a one hour walk over 30 were counted as well as 20 ringlets, several large skippers, one red admiral and a good number of small tortoiseshells.

So as you walk the park in July through to August (as long as the weather is kind to us) you should see a few of these beautiful creatures fluttering about. Enjoy.