Newsletter 43
July 31st 2023
A round-up of what's Been going on in the Park since Christmas

Scarlet elf cap fungus

January/February/March

Small working groups prepared the ground for hedge laying and dug large holes for the new trees in the Arboretum. The work was weather dependant and had to be organised around the freezing conditions which persisted in the early months of this year. Newly moved trees and spliced branches would have struggled in the very cold weather. The working morning scheduled for 14th January was moved to 21st January because of the cold snap. A good number of volunteers turned up and cleared Russia Vine from the Bateman Road boundary. It is an on-going job as this pernicious weed is hard to eradicate. When the vine was cleared spring bulbs were uncovered and gave a good display of snowdrops and daffodils.

By the end of February the new trees (alder, sweet chestnut, downy birch) had been planted in the Arboretum. Hedge laying between Gibson and Bateman Fields was a huge undertaking and looks very impressive. These hedges are making a big difference to the quantity and variety of wild life we see in the park. Our aim is to continue with hedge laying where appropriate and to manage the variety of hedges in the park sensitively. Some will be higher and wider than others.

April

The brash from the hedge making was taken away and either woven into existing dead hedges or used in the wooded areas around the park. The regular working party in April had a busy time planting native bluebells and single snowdrops in Sculpture Alley, putting a grit layer under a number of seats and adding wood chipping to the entrance path on Hall Field. Some work was also carried out on the limestone bank, along with the usual litter pick with special attention given to the brook and the railway tunnel. Many glass and plastic bottles were retrieved.

Volunteers replaced the log circle used by Forest School children in readiness for the summer term. The old circle had lasted a long time but was gradually rotting away. The new design will enable the children to sit more comfortably to eat their lunch and plan their activities.

Two committee members (Diana and Mary) have worked on a leaflet about the butterflies you may see in the park. Copies are in Mel's shop, the library, the Parish Office and will be downloadable from the village website (see the page minutes, meeting and reports and it is under the documents section).

May

In May some of the most damaged paths were repaired, grass under seats was cut, ground grab tiles under seats were fitted and wood chip and the remaining Russian Vine was removed from the Bateman Road bank. Some weeding was done in the shrubbery and stalwart volunteers continued with the litter pick. Leaflets about the park have been distributed by the three primary schools in the village.

June

Work in the park in June was mainly about tidying up with branches overhanging pathways being cut back, some light pruning and a trim to the willow structure by the Bateman Road entrance. Some work was carried out on the top path in the Arboretum. We have a limestone mound on the edge of Playfield and have planted bird's foot trefoil, rock rose and kidney vetch to attract some different species of butterfly. Volunteers worked hard on this patch in June. We had a stall at the Carnival.

July

Tasks undertaken in the park in July included work on the Forest School area, weeding the shrubbery, trimming back brambles and branches and the usual litter pick. The committee is currently considering where to plant some trees given to us by RBC and the most likely area seems to be on the Stonebridge Field boundary. Along with the trees given to us we intend to buy some different species to give a better balance to the tree line. It was thought Play Field should remain clear for ball games so the donated trees should not be planted there.

Wild flowers: Gwen Mountain

cranesbill

In total just under a hundred different types of wild flowers have been recorded in Meadow Park from December 2022 to July 2023. Meadow saxifrage appeared again in Hall Field during May and yellow rattle continues to spread in most areas of Meadow Park. Yellow rattle is particularly beneficial for maintaining flower rich grassland. Meadow cranesbill also continues to spread well into various areas. Southern marsh orchids were recorded again in Hall field during June and July but in smaller numbers than last year. There were no sightings of common spotted orchids this year. In both cases this may be due to the quantity of meadow sweet in the field which make access into parts of the field quite difficult. The meadow sweet continues to grow well in Hall field.

southern marsh orchid

Despite the optimism expressed in last year's report, the number of flowers from the sowing of wild seed in 2022 was very low and substantially less than anticipated. The flowers from the planting of bulbs in 2021 on the other hand offered a good display especially of bluebells and snowdrops. It is pleasing to report that pepper saxifrage was recorded for the first time since 2018 and dropwort was recorded

native bluebell

Arboretum: Andy Denker

Fortunately since the turn of the new year, even though we have had some dry and hot spells, the rain over this period has been beneficial for the trees in the Arboretum. All the surviving mature trees which were planted in 2011 are doing well within the limits of drought and flood over the years with the elm still suffering from Dutch Elm disease after a period of good growth. There have been some losses over the period up to 2023. Some of these we have replaced two or three times over the years with no success - the alder and downy birch come to mind. The recent loss in 2021/22 of the sweet chestnut, wild plum and downy birch (again) came as a bit of a surprise because they were all doing well. The three replacements which were planted this year were placed in different areas to their original positions, the downy birch, sweet chestnut and wild pear (wild plum not available) were planted early in the year and fortunately the weather changed and we had regular rainfall. These new trees are doing well.

Birds

We have replaced many of the bird boxes in the park and added new ones this year all of which seem to have been occupied. Our plan is to continue to increase the number of bird boxes as these are clearly in demand. The bird population is increasing steadily with good numbers of resident birds such as wrens, sparrows and blackbirds as well as occasional visitors like fieldfares. Kingfisher and little egret continue to fish in the brook and a red kite has been spotted flying over the park.

Butterflies and moths: Kevin Gibbons

Brown argus resting in Little Meadow

The butterfly year started slowly in the spring due to variable weather conditions, but eventually we were treated into seeing the beautiful yellow brimstones in the park and also orange tips (but in low numbers). Since then numbers of most species have started to increase and it is good to see that the brown argus butterfly now appears to be well established in our fields. This year has also seen very good numbers of skippers, with the small skipper appearing in June, followed closely by the large skippers.

Ringlet in Stonebridge Field

By the end of June meadow browns and ringlets were on the wing. Some of these are still flying now along with the hedge browns (gatekeepers), taking advantage of our policy of leaving good size margins of long grass and wildflowers around the edges of the fields. This year has also been a good year for the red admiral and comma butterflies and right now is a good time to see them.

Activity Days remaining in 20223:

Saturday mornings 10 a.m. till noon (or earlier). Meet at the depot (behind the Parish Office) at 9.45 a.m.

September 9th October 14th November 11th December 9th