



## *The Henley Wildlife Group*



### **Report for the Annual Meeting of Electors 10 April 2014**

#### **Mill Meadows**

Despite the Meadows being flooded so extensively in recent months, the Snakeshead Fritillaries are already flowering, as is one clump of Marsh Marigolds. It was a surprise to see them flowering at their normal time after being underwater for so long. It will be interesting to see what effect the prolonged flooding has on other things. Although the area floods quite often, it isn't usually underwater for such an extended period.

Our management of the wildlife areas continues to focus on controlling non-native invasive plants, e.g. Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed, and managing habitat diversity by reducing some species that would otherwise become too dominant and crowd out more attractive ones.

Last year, the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment granted us funding for invertebrate surveys on Mill Meadows. This funding has enabled us to have both aquatic and terrestrial surveys carried out, the reports of which can be viewed on the Mill Meadows page of our web-site:

[http://www.henleywildlifegroup.co.uk/wildlifesites/HTML/wildlifesite\\_MillMeadows.htm](http://www.henleywildlifegroup.co.uk/wildlifesites/HTML/wildlifesite_MillMeadows.htm) . The aquatic survey revealed that the biodiversity has improved over the eight years since the last one, with the exception of the Mill Lane pond. Also that the Mill Meadows ponds, as a complex, offer good biodiversity (total of 51 aquatic invertebrate species) and are likely to continue to improve.

223 species of terrestrial invertebrate were identified from the samples taken on two visits. This includes 21 species of slugs & snails, 30 woodlice, millipedes & centipedes, 45 spiders & allies, 8 grasshoppers & allies, 17 true bugs, 35 true flies, 27 beetles and 26 bees, wasps & ants. Ten species are Nationally Scarce, and are considered to be of conservation significance. The harvestman, *Opilio canestrinii*, was recorded from Oxfordshire for the first time.

New signs were erected last year.

We have been considering re-introducing water voles on Mill Meadows. To our knowledge, they were last seen in the stream in 1998. The main threats to them are mink and habitat loss. Research in the Oxford area found that re-introductions were successful where mink were controlled so our first task is to assess the mink population by putting out mink rafts. These are floating platforms with a tray of clay on them. If they are in the area, mink, being curious, will investigate and leave their footprints in the clay. When mink footprints are seen, the tray is replaced with a trap so that they can be trapped and disposed of. We plan to start with three mink rafts. If we repeatedly trap mink over the trial period, we will know that it isn't feasible to reintroduce water voles. If we go a long time without trapping any, reintroduction may be feasible. Mink are voracious predators so the reduction in numbers should benefit other wildlife, even if it isn't possible to re-introduce water voles.

#### **Valley Road Chalk Bank**

The Sonning Common Green Gym repaired the steps on the chalk bank. In addition, the opportunity was taken to clear around the saplings which were planted in November the previous year. These were competing with the brambles and nettles, but once cleared were declared healthy.

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### **Gillotts Field**

A Bee Orchid was seen near the kissing gate in the north-east corner last year. This is the first sighting of this plant that we are aware of in the field. Nine Pyramidal Orchids were also seen and Hound's-tongue is spreading nicely. A year or two ago it was noticed at the far end of the field from Greys Road but now it grows in a several other places. It is a candidate for inclusion in the Rare Plants Register for Oxfordshire. Grass Vetchling was also found for the first time, as far as we are aware. This was a Rare Plants Register candidate but enough of it was found for it to come off the list. It is a pretty pink pea flower with grass like leaves. There were also some lovely patches of Fox and Cubs, an attractive orange hawkweed.

The Town Council continue to cut the field to control the Ragwort but we have agreed with them that they will leave small areas uncut for the benefit of the more attractive wild flowers. The Green Gym helped us pull the Ragwort in these areas.

### **Other Points**

The Group thanks the Town Council for all their support throughout the year.

HWG and Henley in Transition asked the Town Council to leave parts of the Greys Road embankment unmown last year. We have been rewarded with three Pyramidal Orchids and a lovely display of Mouse-ear Hawkweed as well as a beautiful patch of wildflowers by the steps up to Makins Recreation Ground which included Musk Mallow, Knapweed, Oxeye Daisy, Scabious, Lady's Bedstraw, Common Centaury and Hedgerow Crane's-bill.

The annual toad rescue on the Henley to Marlow Road outside the Henley Business School has more or less come to an end for the season. Only about a third of the numbers carried across the road last year were carried across this year. New ponds were dug for them last year, the idea being to provide somewhere for them to breed that didn't involve them crossing the road. There is a lot of toad spawn in the new ponds so, contrary to popular belief, perhaps a lot of them were happy to use the new ponds rather than cross the road to use the ponds by the river that they have always used. For more details of last year's toad rescue see the September 2013 newsletter on our web-site.

We would be pleased to welcome people to our work parties. We work on Mill Meadows on the first Wednesday of the month, meeting in the River & Rowing Museum car park, and there are occasional work parties on the Chalk Bank and Gillotts Field. All work parties run from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30, with a break for tea or coffee and cake at around 11 a.m.

For further information, please visit our web-site <http://www.henleywildlifegroup.co.uk/> , or contact Sally Rankin on 01491 578633 or [s.rankin@btinternet.com](mailto:s.rankin@btinternet.com).