

# FRIENDS OF FOOTS CRAY MEADOWS



ISSUE 19

NEWSLETTER

January 2019

[www.footscraymeadows.org](http://www.footscraymeadows.org)

email : [ffcm06@gmail.com](mailto:ffcm06@gmail.com)



As many of you will be aware or perhaps seen, a running event (known as parkrun) started on 21st July 2018 within Foothills Cray Meadows. After many months of consulta-

tion, including the leafleting of some 1400 local residences; notices in local shops and e-mails to community groups, 21 responses were received and were mainly favourable, but did raise a few issues.

These were: **The route.** Working closely with Bexley Parks and Open Spaces Office and the "Friends" a course was agreed that avoided conservation areas, flora and fauna and as far as is possible uses regular paths. The Bexley Office regularly monitor degradation to surfaces on a regular basis, but have not noted anything unusual; **Local Parking.** Concerns were raised about excessive parking at the Stables and on local roads. All runners are now directed to Kelsey's Farm Shop where a dedicated parking area has been set aside. Many runners cycle or run to the start; **Impact on dog users.** It was noted that there might be difficulties between local and 'professional' dog walkers and runners. So far there have been no reports of any incidents.



You may be interested to know that Parkrun itself started in 2004 when a small group of friends organised a free run in Bushy Park, Richmond. It is now a national event encompassing 560 locations including city and local parks, National Trust properties, forests, beaches, promenades, racecourses and nature reserves. As of this year, the event attracts over 120,000 runners each week

in the UK. It is also now a global phenomenon with some 1367 runs in 22 countries. It is intended to provide a local community based 5K (3.1 miles) run that is entirely free and organised by un-paid volunteers. Minimal equipment is required and the costs of our run are provided by Bexley council and Parkwood Leisure. Many of those who attend do not in fact run, indeed many walk and that is strongly encouraged because parkrun actively promotes the health benefits of regular exercise. Studies commissioned by parkrun have shown that regular even moderate exercise impacts on obesity, diabetes (both of which are significant within the Bexley Borough) heart conditions and mental health wellbeing, in fact one of the main sponsors of parkrun is the Alzheimer's Society. parkrun has also partnered with over 500 GP surgeries to actively promote parkrun and is now prescribed for many patients.

The Daily Telegraph reported that "what's clever is that it's not a race against everyone else but a timed run", and that trying to improve your personal best time is a great incentive even for slower runners. Commenting that it doesn't matter how good, or bad, a runner you are, anyone can take part, from pensioners to parents with their kids and dogs. Further explaining that the success of the events is down to them being free and weekly because it allows people to get into a routine.

Since Foothills Cray Meadows parkrun started we have seen on average 88 people attend and we do not envisage that number rising. Starting at 09:00 the event is invariably finished before 09:45. That clearly reduces impact on the local environment and is undoubtedly less

Continued on page 2

Those who attend the event comment that it is friendly and welcoming and that the location and scenery is stunning, certainly compared to many in the Greater London area and some, even from across the Borough, have mentioned that they never knew the Meadows existed.

As we approach the winter we know that certain areas of the Meadows will be unusable, both the areas by the Royal Park School lower car park, the entrance by the Stables as well as regular paths become waterlogged and very muddy. And we are conscious that the area by Five Arches is prone to occasional flooding. As such, we are actively looking at an alternative route that will avoid those areas. In extremis, we will postpone the event if conditions become too bad and we actively liaise and are guided by and adhere to the advice of the Bexley Open Spaces team and the Friends of Foots Cray. We are pleased to report that to date no complaints have been received, although one dog walker did comment that the 6 foot gap between our finishing funnel, by the playpark, and the long grass was insufficient space for them to walk their dog. Obviously, we moved it.

The support of Kelsey Farm Shop is most welcome. Not just for the parking space that has been made available, but also where we can store equipment. Notably, they have provided a small discount for the runners using the café and ensures that Kelsey's now have far more customers that early in the morning. The farm shop has also been very favourably commented on. All of which is good news for a local business.

We are very grateful to the Friends of Foots Cray Meadows for the support they have provided and we look forward to working with them to refine the event. Clearly there are opportunities to promote the Meadows, both its history, environment, wildlife and aspects of conservation and we trust their members will be able to join us on the odd occasion.

*parkrun*

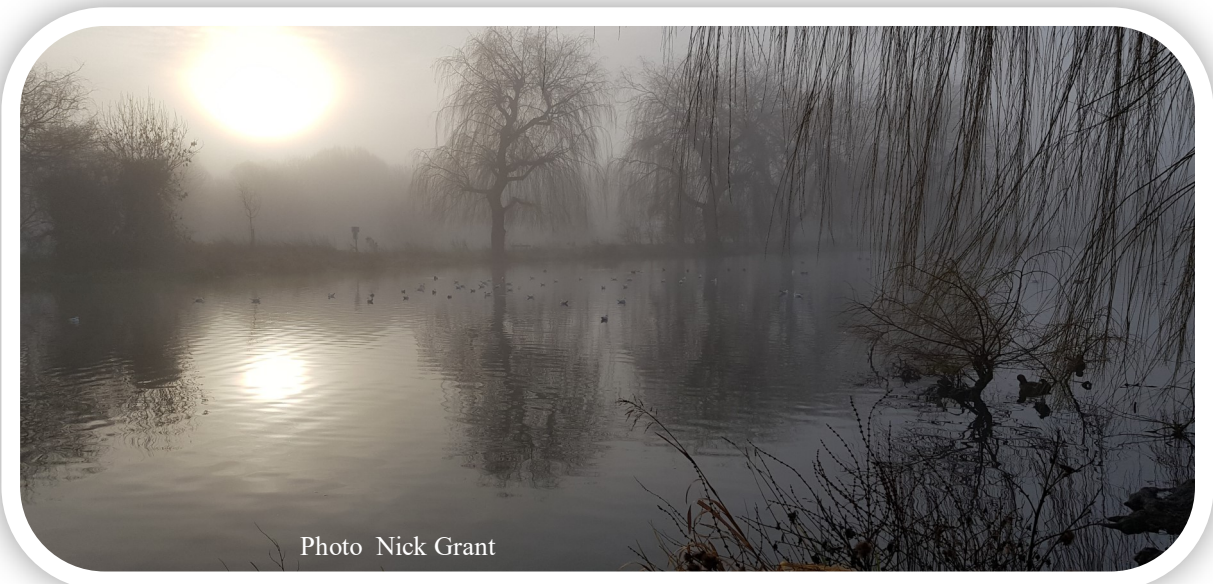


Photo Nick Grant

## FROGLIFE

The Environmental Charity FROGLIFE submitted a funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a new pond to help conserve the toad population at Foots Cray Meadows which was successful and the work commenced in early December.

The site identified for the pond is in the section alongside the river between Penny Farthing Bridge and Marsh Bridge was felt more suitable and could include clearing the ditch along the Alder Trees using volunteers. The ponds to be lined to retain water as a common toad habitat. The bid also featured the restoration of the Rectory Lane Pond.

The UK's common toad population have declined by 68% over the past 30 years and this work will help address these alarming declines.

If you would like to know more about this work please contact them on [Info@froglife.org](mailto:Info@froglife.org).





## Meadows Management Update



The Meadows is maintained by The London Borough of Bexley according to a frequency schedule of grass-cutting and cleansing operations. Because of the nature of this 240 acre site, much of the grounds maintenance intends to balance the site's significant amenity value, while retaining its historic landscape and nature conservation interest. This includes three areas of wildflower meadows, each one being cut once a year on a three year cycle. Also, woodland boundary clears and coppicing is done to retain biodiverse glades and edge habitats. The historic landscape is preserved by managing veteran specimen trees, tree avenues and extensive open grass areas giving clear vistas to features such as The Five Arch Bridge.

Over the last year developments have included the installation of new larger litter and dog waste bins at selected points. Also, continuing daily play-ground safety inspections, with an ongoing programme of play-equipment repairs. Most recently, Froglife Ecological Services have secured Heritage Lottery funding that has allowed the creation of a new pond along the River Cray towards Penny Farthing Bridge and the restoration of the Old Pond near the Rectory Lane entrance. Also, within the Local Nature Reserve, thickets of willow engulfing islands and potentially toppling them have been coppiced, encouraging better regrowth, reducing silt build up and allowing more light into the water for oxygenating aquatic vegetation to establish.

Patrick English  
Grounds Maintenance Officer

## Bat Walk

Early September of last year saw the annual FFCM Bat Walk which was attended by 50 people.

A mixture of Adults and Children gathered at the 5 Arches Bridge on 8th September and after a brief talk about bats split into 2 groups to go to the sites where these amazing creatures normally can be seen. The Group nearest St James Church were treated to quite a few sightings of the Common Pipistrelle Bat the most common bat in the UK sadly the other Group were not so lucky.

Both Groups then met up on the 5 Arches Bridge to see Daubenton Bats flying low across the lake catching gnats.

Nick Grant



## Editorial

Hopefully all have had a great Christmas and are now looking forward to the new year.

A number of newsletter articles reflect on the use of the Meadows and its use by humans but also on the wide number of other animals, trees, grasses and fauna that are supported by the Meadows as well.

Happy New Year from the Friends of Footh Cray Meadows.

Editor



### Committee Members

- **Chairman - Michael Heath**
- **Secretary -**
- **Vice Secretary - Margaret Dodd**
- **Treasurer - Margaret Dodd**
- **Membership Secretary - Margaret Dodd**
- **Events Manager - Lesley Grant**
- **Newsletter Editor - Nick Grant**
- **Publicity Manager - Sally Lands**
- **Conservation Officer - Sid Wilkinson**
- **Committee Members - Vera Heath, Jan Harmer, Raj Gajebasia, Steve Brown**

[www.footscraymeadows.org](http://www.footscraymeadows.org)

email : [ffcm06@gmail.com](mailto:ffcm06@gmail.com)

### Aims and Objectives

- Working in partnership with Bexley Council to encourage public interest in, and the conservation of Footh Cray Meadows (FCM).
- To protect the wildlife and its habitat within FCM.
- To provide a focus for involvement by the community and users in the open space, to volunteer and work with the Council, in the conservation of FCM and its development as a public open space.
- To advance the public's awareness of the open space by promoting FCM its plants, wildlife, landscape, sustainability and supporting appropriate recreational facilities for the benefit of community groups and the general public.
- To develop and deliver information, interpretive material and educational opportunities for FCM
- To raise funds for the purpose of achieving the above aims.

# Foots Cray Meadows

At this time when the pressure to build more houses is enormous it's important to retain large open spaces such as Foots Cray Meadows as they are a great benefit to our environment, they filter pollutants and dust from the air, they provide shade and lower temperatures in urban areas, and they even reduce erosion of soil into our waterways. These are just a few of the environmental benefits that green spaces provide.

Forests, meadows and wetlands protect water, provide habitat for wildlife and support human health and recreation. Communities that take the time and care to protect their open spaces as natural areas usually find their open spaces are taking care of



them in so many important ways. Soil can absorb carbon from the air, which helps reduce carbon emissions and in turn makes green spaces an important aspect in battling climate change. Urban backyards and green spaces contribute to reducing carbon emission levels in cities, which makes air cleaner and healthier for its residents.

Large urban trees are excellent filters for urban pollutants and fine particulates particularly pertinent in this area as the Meadows are located between two major routes into and out of London.

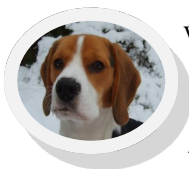
Trees can provide food, such as fruits, nuts and leaves which aids biodiversity. The definition of biodiversity refers to the amount of diversity between different plants, animals and other species in a given habitat at a particular time.

## AJ's bit

We dogs quite often get a bad press so I want to redress this by sharing with you an award given to animals not just dogs.

The **PDSA Dickin Medal** was instituted in 1943 in the United Kingdom by Maria Dickin to honour the work of animals in World War II. It is a bronze medalion, bearing the words "For Gallantry" and "We Also Serve" within a laurel wreath, carried on a ribbon of striped green, dark brown, and pale blue. It is awarded to animals that have displayed "conspicuous gallantry or devotion to duty while serving or associated with any branch of the Armed Forces or Civil Defence Units". The award is sometimes referred to as "the animals' Victoria Cross"

Maria Dickin was the founder of the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), a British veterinary charity. She established the award for any animal displaying conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty whilst serving with British Empire armed forces or civil emergency services. The medal was awarded 54 times between 1943 and 1949 – to 32 pigeons, 18 dogs, 3 horses, and a ship's cat – to acknowledge actions of gallantry or devotion during the Second World War and subsequent conflicts. The awarding of the medal



was revived in 2000 to honour Gander, a Newfoundland dog, who saved infantrymen during the Battle of Lye Mun. In early 2002, the medal was given in honour of three dogs for their role responding to the September 11 attacks; it was also awarded to two dogs serving with Commonwealth forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Iraq. In December 2007, 12 former recipients buried at the PDSA Animal Cemetery in Ilford, Essex, were afforded full military honours at the conclusion of a National Lottery-aided project to restore the cemetery.



The first recipients of the award, in December 1943, were three pigeons, serving with the Royal Air Force, who contributed to the recovery of air crew from ditched aircraft during the Second World War. Recent dogs to be cited for the honour are Kuga, a Belgian Malinois who served with the Special Air Service Regiment in Afghanistan in 2012 and Lucca a German Shepherd, a retired US Marine Corps dog honoured with the medal after she protected the lives of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, who lost a leg while on duty, she successfully completed more than 400 separate missions during six years of active service.

As of October 2018, the Dickin Medal has been awarded 70 times, plus one honorary award made in 2014 to all the animals that served in the First World War.

# Dates for your Diary: Future Events

We hope you are interested in joining in the many events we will be hosting or supporting in the coming months. At all the events listed there will be Committee Members attending. Dates (where known) and a brief description are below; look out for publicity in the weeks leading up to each date.

We are currently looking at events for 2019

Posters advertising FFCM Events are sent electronically to members as well as being in the noticeboards at the entrances to the Meadows at the following locations - Car Park, Riverside Road, Leafield Lane, Five Arches Bridge and outside Stable House and the Information Centre.

Alternatively you can visit [www.footscraymeadows.org](http://www.footscraymeadows.org)

The Information Centre which is located behind Stable House is open on the 1st Saturday of each month from March through to November between 10.00am and 12.00noon

## Join Today **Membership costs just £5 per household annually**

The Friends of Footh Cray Meadows is a voluntary group funded by its membership & fund raising activities.

### Membership will grant you

- Seasonal Newsletters that will include updates on projects.
- Reduced admission on any talks or events that we are not able to host for free.
- Additional Meadows related contacts, whether you would like help with
- Getting an event off the ground or simply would like to share some ideas or concerns regarding Footh Cray Meadows.
- Early notification of meetings, events and talks.

### Money raised will help to:

- Fund projects that will both protect and benefit The Meadows.
- Encourage interest & enthusiasm in the area.
- Organise outdoor events & talks.
- Improve facilities (initially the Wildlife and Information Centre).

*Any names and contact information gathered by The Friends of Footh Cray Meadows will only be used by themselves and not passed onto any third parties.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my/our subscription. £5

Children's Names (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is a donation to The Friends. £

*Please make cheque's payable to: **Friends of Footh Cray Meadows** and send them along with your completed form to:*

Address \_\_\_\_\_

**Margaret Dodd  
FFCM Membership Secretary  
32 Riverside Road  
Sidcup  
Kent DA14 4PU**

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

We maintain a minimal information database on a secure computer which is used to notify members of our events.

Email \_\_\_\_\_

We do not pass on this information to any third parties.