

FRIENDS OF FOOTS CRAY MEADOWS

ISSUE 2

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2007

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Wildlife Notes



It's January as this piece is written and only two frosty days of note since the Autumn – hopefully those cold, crisp, sunny, frosty mornings are just around the corner although what some wildlife will make of it goodness only knows. Snowdrops and daffodils are already beginning to bloom in the garden, weeks early, so check out North Cray Wood anytime to look for wood anemones - it is just impossible to say when they will be at their best. Last spring saw the best display of bluebells for many years, thanks to the sensitive thinning of sycamore and coppicing of hazel – late April or early May should be the best time to visit to experience this typical English woodland sight.

Already some bird species are singing – Robin and Song Thrush the most obvious – again so early in the year. Blue Tits have been prospecting nest boxes – if that frost does arrive these birds will undoubtedly suffer, however with a long spring and summer ahead they should succeed with more than one brood. We should at this time be considering the winter birds and looking forward to the arrival of spring migrants. The male ducks (drakes) - Tufted Duck, Mallard and Gadwall (all grey male with smoky black rump/all brown female) - are still showing off their finest plumage and the head bobbing of the Mallard is a sure sign of courtship in the air. The tiny Little Grebe (Dabchick) will soon be moulting into its breeding plumage of rich red/brown with blackish head.

Our joint walk with the RSPB in October to celebrate “Feed the Birds Day” was a great success, nearly 40 people attending, an interesting addition to the bird list that day was a Great Crested Grebe – unlike the Little Grebe preferring deeper water – it didn't stay around for long. Another short staying unusual visitor was a Dark-bellied Brent Goose, which dropped in during the foggy conditions just before Christmas – a winter visitor from the far North it is normally associated with estuaries and was probably disorientated by the weather. Also around, Five Arches regular visitors will be delighted to have noticed, is a new pair of Mute Swans. After the disappointment last year when the female of the established pair sadly died and the male returned alone, this new pair have seemingly seen off the old male and established the territory for themselves. Let's hope they are successful in raising a family. A

Tawny Owl is now being heard regularly in the vicinity of the Stables and the Wildlife & Information Centre - it will be interesting to know if it stays around to breed. There have also been reports of a Barn Owl roosting in trees close to Loring Hall - keep your eyes peeled.

So, what to look for in the coming months? The numbers of gulls, crows and ducks will gradually reduce as they disperse to their breeding sites but we await excitedly for those summer migrants arriving from Africa and southern Europe. First amongst them will be Sand Martins and Wheatears, neither bird staying to breed in the area but both occasionally seen as they take advantage of the feeding and resting places in the Meadows – the Martins (mostly brown in colour) might be seen dipping over the water at Five Arches as they feed on insects. Whilst these two species will pass through, House Martins and Swallows will soon follow and hopefully be seen throughout the summer. Wren, Robin, Song and Mistle Thrushes will be singing to herald their territories by late March and should be joined by Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler and Whitethroat – the wooded and scrubby areas are the best places to listen for these – why not join us on our Spring Bird watching Walk to discover more (see Diary of Events - Editor).

Normally it would be later in the Spring, early summer before looking for an abundance of butterflies and dragonflies but who knows – with Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral butterflies being unusually seen into late November, if the mild weather continues they could be on the wing much earlier.

So, there is much to be enjoyed over the coming months and once again your records of observations would be very much appreciated.

Ralph Todd
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Chairman's Chat!

The Friends of Footh Cray Meadows spring into their second year with a programme of events to build on our successes. These will bring members and all interested persons together to enjoy, learn and share experiences of the Meadows; you will see that these events have themes linked to the Meadows. We will also be working with other groups to reflect the variety of wildlife, recreation activities and ecological issues the Meadows provide for the benefit of us all.

We are now firmly along the road to meet the challenge of opening the long awaited Wildlife and Information Centre (WIC). This is a formidable project for such a new group. Working with Bexley Architectural Group the Bexley Natural Environment Focus Group and the Council we are aiming to have the centre operational later in the year.

The success of the WIC and indeed the Friends of Footh Cray Meadows are totally dependent upon you the reader, we have made a stunning start with around fifty households joining as members representing over one hundred people. Your support as active members is crucial to achieving our aims to protect the meadows, for education and conservation awareness and bringing people together with a commitment to conservation. The Friends will protect the Meadows by securing funding for conservation activities, environmental projects and equipment for the WIC. Together we can make a difference for the good of the Meadows, The Wildlife and our Communities.

There are 3 committee posts to be filled events, conservation and publicity. Anyone can help in so many ways, start by sharing with the Friends 'What the Meadows means to you', what you have seen on your walks, the birds, the buds on the trees, the river life, your photos. You can do this through our website (*see page 4*) or in a letter to us. Your assistance at events will be welcome. Just give the time you can, it will be valued and a great asset to Footh Cray Meadows. The Committee and I look forward to your participation and company this spring and summer.

Michael Heath (FFCM Chairman)



Paws for thought!

My name is Tuppence and I live backing onto the Meadows. I have been visiting the fields every day since I was big enough and love them. I used to have to either do a long road walk, my owners say that it was good for my claws but I just thought that it was an excuse for them to make me learn how to walk on the lead! The other way that they used to bring me was in the car but all that jumping in and out just used up valuable play time, especially as I had to wait for them to change

their shoes, why they cannot just walk in bare feet like me I will never know. Anyway, two and a half years ago we were going home from our walk when they saw that the Old School was for sale. My mistress had liked the house for a long time and they had already put the house we lived in on the market so they thought that they would go and have a look. I'm sure that they wanted to move as I did not have enough space to play in the lounge, but the school has a large lounge so I liked it right from the start. The best thing in the world is that it now is only two minutes, if they get a move on, round the corner to the nearest entrance to the field.

I try and be responsible when in the meadows, I 'empty' right at the start so that they can use the dog bin and tell other dogs that they should be as well, no-one wants to tread that smell back home, interesting as it is. The best bit is when I get down to the water for a nice long drink, I know my owners put out water for me but who wants tap when they can drink lake? Don't they understand that lake is the vintage to the tap plonk? I usually meet up with some of my friends and we have a gossip and a game of chase or ball. Sometimes I forget myself and go hunting the source of a good smell on the wind, but I soon remember that there is carrot in the pocket if I go back when the whistle goes and I LOVE carrot. I have yet to understand why my owners do not find such smells as interesting as me, but there is none as thick as folk!

I try and be good and not chase the birds, really all I want is the bread or seed put out for them, why should they have all the best bits? I must admit though, the best time of the year as far as I am concerned is the end of the summer. The hot weather is easing [all that does is make my owners lazy about long walks] and the fruit that they call blackberries are around! I saw them picking these strange black berries and saying how nice they were and I thought I would try them. You have to pick the very ripe ones and VERY carefully, pull back your lips, grip gently with your teeth and breathe in; if they are ripe they will fall into your mouth, delicious! I have taught a few of my friends how to do it, but not all, I like them too much! At the end of my walk, always shorter than I would like, but they say that they do not have all day [why not?] I go back on the lead to go home. It really worries me when I see dogs not on the lead by the road as I know that loud bangs can startle me and I could run out into the road and get hurt, so I am happy to be safe.

I love the Meadows and everything in them, I know some people do not like dogs but most of us are friendly and all we want to do is to give you some of the joy for life that we have. The meadows are lovely, please don't spoil them.

Must go now, time for tea!



Editorial

This is our 2nd issue and hopefully error free, unlike our first effort which had a number of mistakes. My apologies to all of you who live in the area for not noticing that the council article referred to North Cray Place not Foots Cray Place!

Speaking of Foots Cray Place the last private owner of the house was Lord Waring. He was a supporter of the Scout

local Scout Groups still use Foots Cray Meadows. A number of Groups have their headquarters in close proximity to the Meadows and can often be seen during the summer months doing activities (not camping though) very much as their predecessors in the photo taken in 1924.

The owner of "The Stables" Barry Morgan continues the Scouting theme having himself been a member of the Scout Movement. So we have come full circle.

Nick Grant

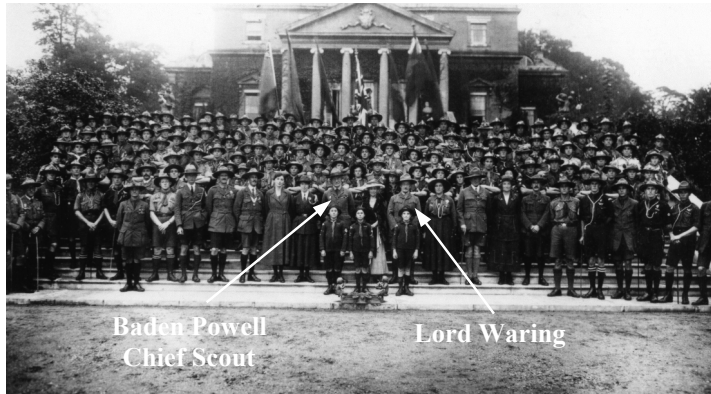


Photo: Bexley Local Studies and Archive Centre

Movement and was County Commissioner for Kent for 13 years. During the 1920s and early 1930s he hosted a number of Scout Jamborees at Foots Cray Place. Robert Baden Powell the founder of the Scout Movement was a visitor and local Scout Groups have in the intervening years continued to be a part of the meadows scene. It's fitting therefore that in this the Centenary year of Scouting

NOW ONLINE

The Friends of Foots Cray website is now online & includes among other things a calendar of events should you wish to check what walks, talks & other activities we have coming up during the year. It is also linked to our forum where all are welcome to share any views, ideas & photographs of the Meadows. For those of you who are not familiar with Internet message boards there is a guide, located on the forum, illustrating how to become a member & how to post your comments. The company that provides our forum recommends that users should be aged 13 & above but it is regularly monitored & there is a profanity filter in place just in case. Our Website Manager, Paul, is happy to offer any additional information, assistance or guidance should you require it. You can contact him via our group email address ffcm06@gmail.com.

Please visit us there, share your Meadows experiences, photos and get your voice heard.

Website: <http://www.ffcm.org.uk>

Forum: <http://bfootscraymeadows.runboard.com>



Committee Members

- Chairman - Michael Heath
- Vice Chair - Ralph Todd
- Secretary - Siobhán Trethewey
- Vice Secretary - Margaret Dodd
- Treasurer - Gill Burgess
- Membership Secretary - John Burgess
- Website Manager - Paul Trethewey
- Newsletter Editor - Nick Grant
- Committee Members - Jane Car Hyde, Lesley Grant, Vera Heath, Carol Jeffs.

We need a Publicity Manager, Events Manager and Conservation Manager. Please contact us if interested.

www.ffcm.org.uk [email : ffc06@gmail.com](mailto:ffcm06@gmail.com)

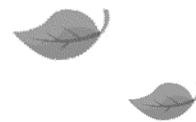


Photo: Lesley Grant

Meadows Management Update

As the owner of the Meadows Bexley Council are responsible for the management of the site. We thank them for the following update.

Editor



Tree Nursery At Footh Cray Meadows

A Tree Nursery for the Borough's Parks and Open Spaces has been established in the Stable Allotments site next to Footh Cray Meadows. The plan is for seeds to be collected and grown in the nursery and later uplifted and planted out into Bexley's Parks Open Spaces and Schools. Sid Wilkinson, Bexley's Tree & Woodland Technician, has said that he wants to concentrate on collecting seeds from old native trees. The older the tree, the more likely it is to be native local stock rather than imported from other parts of the Country or Europe. Sid has collected a lot of seed himself, but hopes that schools and community groups will also collect seeds.

If you know of a great old tree that you think should have its seeds collected and you are willing to do so, please contact Sid Wilkinson on 01322 356803 who will:

- advise, on trees worthy of seed collection;
- advise on the collecting of seeds;
- record details of the trees locations; and
- arrange for the seeds to be delivered to the nursery.

This is an exciting way to make sure that Open Spaces in Bexley, such as Footh Cray Meadows, continue to have fantastic trees, like those we have all grown up with.

Green Flag Applications

At the Rectory Lane entrance, Footh Cray Meadows flies one of Bexley's five Green Flags and the Council intends for this to continue. The Green Flag Award is the national standard for parks and green spaces, which began in 1996 as a means of rewarding the best green spaces. It considers many aspects including environmental standards, community involvement and access. The application for the 2007/08 judging round was submitted in January and judging is usually carried out in the May/June period.

Community involvement in a site is an important aspect of Green Flag awards and so the Friend's Group's support for the Meadows is therefore most welcomed. Projects supported or undertaken by the Group, such as the long-term development of the Wildlife and Information Centre and public walks programme, together with the Council's management of the site, should help the Meadows to retain this prestigious, nationally recognized award.

To find out more about the Green Flag Awards, please see the Website www.greenflagaward.org.uk

Winter Work on the Meadows

During the winter months there is less work carried out on the Meadows, however one area, which is undertaken at this time of year is tree and woodland management. There are two main areas of work to be undertaken before spring. First, is the now agreed tree and scrub clearance, around the site and immediate gardens of the old Footh Cray Place. This will help conserve the mature formal trees that were part of the planted gardens and preserve many of the features of the house and grounds, such as the terraced gardens.

The second area of tree work is the next phase of the coppicing programme in North Cray Woods. The success of last year's coppice work could be clearly seen with the huge increase in spring flowers like the bluebells and wood anemones together with the increases in butterflies and other insects. The coppiced stools of Hazel also started to grow back well and we hope to see more of the same with this year's work. We can't give an exact time on when the works will be carried out, due to wet ground conditions and other access issues. However, we hope to complete the work before spring gets too close!

Parks Team, Bexley Council
parks&openspaces@bexley.gov.uk

WILDLIFE AND INFORMATION CENTRE

Friends of Footh Cray Meadows committee members recently took up painting and decorating. The Wildlife and Information Centre (WIC) is one of the key areas that the Friends, who will be running the centre, are eager to get up and running as soon as possible. With the decorating now done the next stage is to get it equipped with state of the art display systems which will enable a wide variety of groups to put on displays and talks covering Wildlife, Natural History, Local History etc.



A local school has been approached to do a mural for the centre and it is hoped to have the WIC open later this year. We are looking for volunteers to run the centre if you are interested please contact us.

Lesley Grant FFCM Committee

Dates for your Diary: Future Events

We hope you are interested in joining in the many events we will be hosting 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. For further information please contact the Secretary on mrst.redhed@gmail.com or ring 020 8300 1906

● **26th March**

The Meadows and Surrounding Area

A talk by John Mercer, Bexley Civic Society, on the Meadows and surrounding areas.

William Smith Memorial Hall, Rectory Lane, Foots Cray at 7.30 pm. (£2.00 non-members £1.00 members FFCM)

● **14th April**

Spring Bird Watching Walk

Catch the end of the early morning Bird Song bring a camera and take the opportunity to take photos with helpful hints from experts in photography (*bring binoculars*).

● **7th June**

FFCM Annual General Meeting

Details will be notified to members nearer the date

● **30th June - 1st July**

Danson Festival

The Friends of Foots Cray Meadows will also be having a stand within the Council's Environmental Zone at this year's Danson Festival. We will have displays, showing past present and possible future images of the Meadows as well as the opportunities for you to find out more about the group's work and how to get involved.

● **July (Date TBA)**

Bat Walk

This **evening event** with members of the Local Bat Trust will give an insight into the different species of bats that can be found in and around the Meadows. Learn what bats eat, where they live, and how they fly and hunt. The walk, starting just before dusk, will take us to parts of the Meadows where there is a high probability of seeing bats emerging to begin their hunt for insects - not to be missed!

● **8th September**

River Walk - Foots Cray Meadows

Following our popular river themed walk of last year we will be holding another one this September. We will be accompanied by resident River Keeper Ashe Hurst, who has lived by and worked with the River Cray for many years and is happy to share his knowledge and experience on topics such as how to identify the many animals and plants that live in the water. He will also explain ways people can get involved in preserving the area through river clean-ups, walks and other Thames 21 projects. All are welcome to join us in what will be an informal but hopefully educational couple of hours. *Meet at Five Arches Bridge at 3.00 pm*

● **27th October**

RSPB Feed the Birds Day with Bexley Local Group

Feed the Birds Day marks the clocks going back and the winter nights drawing in - it's the time when birds and other wildlife needs a little extra help as the frost looms. RSPB Feed the Birds Day is a great opportunity to step up your feeding to help garden birds through the cold months ahead. The walk will last approximately 2

● **22nd November - 2nd December**

Tree Walk (Date TBA)

To coincide with the National Tree Week we will be holding a walk around Foots Cray Meadows. The walk will be a gentle 2 hour stroll accompanied by committee members and a resident Tree Expert who has worked in the area for the last 40 years and is happy to share his knowledge and experience on topics such as how to identify types of trees. Current projects and schemes that benefit the woodland areas and riverbanks will also be discussed.

Join Today **Membership costs just £4 per household annually**

The Friends of Foots 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 Fooms 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 Fooms Cray Meadows will only be used by themselves or Bexley Council on their behalf and not passed onto any third parties.

Name _____

Enclosed is my/our subscription. £4

Children's Names (if applicable) _____

Enclosed is a donation to The Friends. £ _____

Address _____

Please make cheques payable to:

Friends of Fooms Cray Meadows

and send them along with your completed form to:

John Burgess

FFCM Membership Secretary

168 North Cray Road

North Cray

Kent DA14 5EL

Phone _____

Email _____



ffcm06@gmail.com