

FRIENDS OF FOOTS CRAY MEADOWS

ISSUE 4

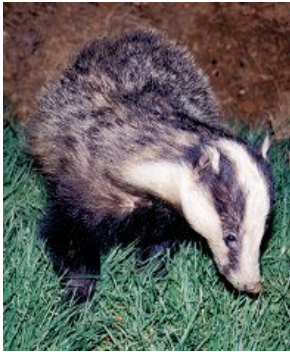
NEWSLETTER

April 2008

www.ffcm.org.uk email : ffcm06@gmail.com

Badger Alert

The Eurasian badger (*the ones we have in this country*) looks a little bit like a small bear, and indeed when it was first described scientifically it was thought to be a bear. However, the badger is not a small bear - it is in fact a big weasel! The badger's closest relatives - apart from other species of badger - are weasels, stoats, martens, polecats, otters and other members of the weasel family (the mustelidae). They are mostly nocturnal, but are occasionally active during the day mainly in isolated areas.



They live in groups of up to 14 adults. The badgers dig out and live in a maze of underground tunnels and chambers called a sett. The main sett is occupied all year round and is a permanent home. Around each main sett, there are others that are used sporadically throughout the year, often between January and March when the cubs are born. Badgers like to build their setts into sloping ground in woodlands, especially where the drainage is good and the soil is not too heavy to dig.

You might ask why this interest! Over the past few weeks I have been very lucky to see a number of Badgers wandering down some of the roads which surround the meadows. The last sighting I had was whilst I was in my car at the traffic lights in Foots Cray when a Badger followed closely by a Fox decided to cross in front of me.

Could it be that we have setts on the meadows. Have any of you seen Badgers in and around where you live? Or indeed on the meadows! If so why not tell us about it.

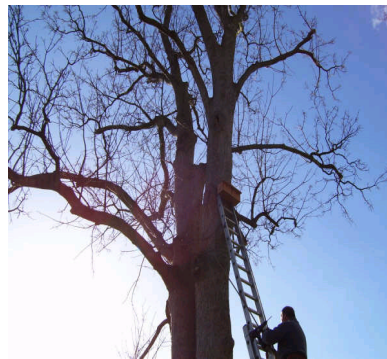
Nick Grant
FFCM



Events so far in 2008 Events so far in 2008

Since the beginning of 2008 the Friend of Foots Cray Meadows have run two events. The first on 25th January, attended by about 30 people, was the enlightening and interesting talk on Joydens Wood by Ian Hammerton, undertaking for us (after much persuasion) his very last talk.

Then on 17th February with the excellent weather that brought a constant stream of people to the W&IC for National Bird Nest Box Week. Siobhan, Sid and I had displayed various examples of Bird Nest Boxes that we got from Ruxley Manor Garden Centre and are pleased to say that we raised over £120. Several people were happy to either pay for the full amount for a nesting box or to sponsor one with other people. We have already fixed in place 9 boxes with several still to be purchased and placed when all the money has come in.



Photograph Margaret Dodd

Anybody still wishing to donate money for this project should send their name, address and telephone numbers with details of any particular box and location preferred, along with a cheque payable to "Friends of Foots Cray Meadows" to Margaret Dodd, 32 Riverside Road, Albany Park, Sidcup, DA14 4PU. Although it might be a little too late for the nesting season this year they will be up for next year, and we will be informing participants where the locations are at a future date. Binoculars at the ready!



Margaret Dodd, Events Manager

Chairman's Chat!

With the Meadows waking up after the winter, so the Friends of Footh Cray Meadows prepare for the outdoor season. Amazingly we approach our second AGM with the Friends seeking opportunities to introduce projects and bring people together for the benefit of Footh Cray Meadows

Now seems to me to be a good time to reflect upon our Aims and Objectives (*see page 4—editor*). Identifying and setting these was one of our first actions and with the hustle and bustle of establishing and running the group, a reminder of what we are about is always worthwhile. The committee have continued with their commitment to the Meadows by creating an active and viable group, they give their time to progress the friends, identifying projects and organise events.

The Meadows as always remain a popular open space during the damp and dormant winter months; inevitably this brings some damage especially within the more popular walking routes. This is a useful reminder that whilst spring enables nature to self heal it could do with a helping hand. Here FFCM should play a part, ensuring effective and timely management of the Meadows and increasing the awareness visitors have of the biodiversity needs each season brings and facilitating; natural recovery and care for the wildlife environment during the season of nesting and new growth.

We have in place an effective liaison with Bexley Council's Parks and Open Space Team; a recent example of this the nest box project (*see page three-editor*) We are working to identify and finance 'hands on' environmental projects to compliment the existing structure of the Meadows, success will be, making a positive difference in protecting Footh Cray Meadows. These Meadows need the Friends to prosper through; a greater cooperation with other groups and encourage the involvement of you the reader, if you want to help then please, turn up and join in or contact us with your comments.

Michael Heath
(FFCM Chairman)



Paws for thought!

Woof again! Hope that you are all well and looking after your masters well, they do need reminding sometimes about the more important things of life like walks, playing throw toy or ball and most importantly meal-times! They are saying that the clocks will be moving soon and we will have to wait another hour for our food, I don't understand, why should putting the clock in a different position in the room mean we have to wait another hour?

News on the 'Bark Line' in the meadows. Shane the guide trainee has moved onto further training. We understand that a new puppy, this time a black lab, is expected soon I wonder what his name will be (*his name is Prince-editor*). Congratulations to my friend Oliver (the Beagle) who was 15 on Christmas Day, that's 105 in human years.

At the start of the autumn a different water bird was seen on the lake, I'm told that it was a gadwall and both male and female were seen, I just saw a different kind of duck, but humans seemed rather pleased that they were there, none so strange as folks. The dabchicks are still around, so are the gulls sheltering from the storms on the coast and the resident heron is still here, along with the swans and all the others. I'm looking out for my friends the terrapins; I hope they found a warm dry place for the winter. The swans will be nesting very soon now, don't forget to give them a wide berth along with all the other birds while they have young, they get very cross if you disturb them they, quite rightly think you are after the eggs or babies.

The FFCM have been busy and the Wild Life and Information Centre is starting to open, it really is very nice in there, just the place to warm up or dry your feet! They had an open day recently and managed to get quite a few people visiting it to sponsor bird boxes, which Sid (Parks Department) and some of the Rangers have now put up, so some of our bird friends will have new homes to nest in. Sid and his team have also been hard at work after the winds of the winter working on the trees and more work has been done up by the site of the old house, brambles [shame about the blackberries] and the rest of the undergrowth have been 'tamed' and a new path through has been cut, I can't wait for permission to explore it! I have also noticed that the allotments have a new fence; I hope the foxes can work round to get their supper, and talking about food, the grass has started to be cut, saves me, and other, having to hunt so hard for our balls and any titbits left by picnics!!!!

Must go, my owners are due back soon so I must close the computer down and pretend that I have been working hard on guard duty while they have been out.

Tuppence .

Editorial

Those who walk regularly on the Meadows may have noticed a group of gentlemen (*see photo below*) that occupy a seat on most mornings, just below the 5 Arches. Come rain or shine they have over a number of years congregated at this spot for a natter with each other and with those of us who regularly walk our dogs.

It struck me one evening of the similarity to those other gentlemen in "Last of the Summer Wine"

Nick Grant



"Winter Sunset"
Photograph Michael Heath



Committee Members

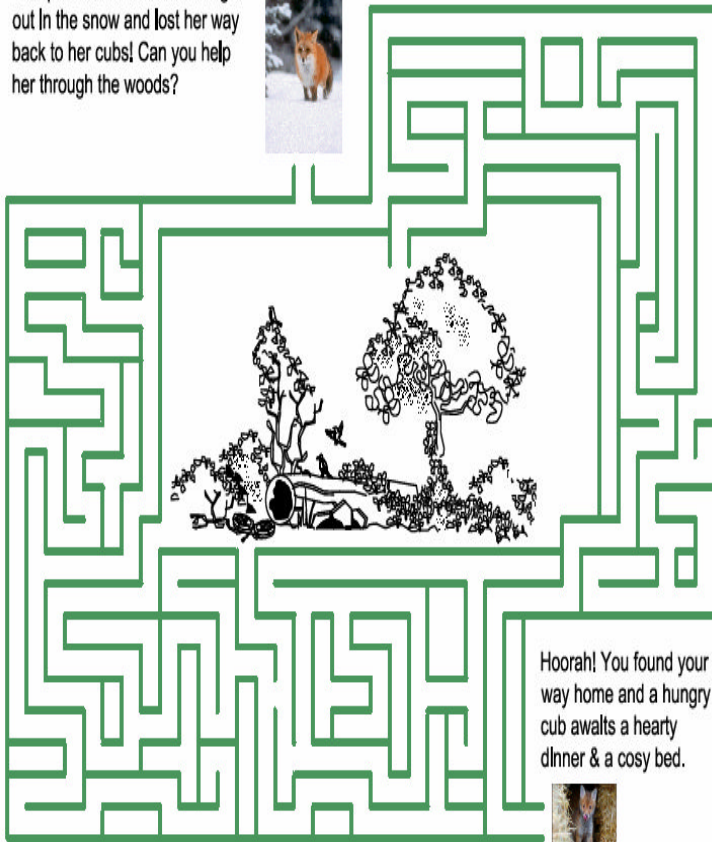
- **Chairman - Michael Heath**
- **Secretary - Siobhán Trethewey**
- **Vice Secretary - Margaret Dodd**
- **Events Manager " "**
- **Treasurer - Gill Burgess**
- **Membership Secretary - John Burgess**
- **Website Manager - Paul Trethewey**
- **Newsletter Editor - Nick Grant**
- **Committee Members - Lesley Grant, Vera Heath, Karen Wheeler**

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

www.ffcm.org.uk

email : ffcm06@gmail.com

This poor vixen has been caught out in the snow and lost her way back to her cubs! Can you help her through the woods?



Hoorah! You found your way home and a hungry cub awaits a hearty dinner & a cosy bed.



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.



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 and Woodland Programme 2008



In addition to all regular maintenance on site the following works have or will be undertaken in coming months.

Work completed by March 08

- Coppice and sycamore removal in the alder wet woods next to the river near Royal Park School
- New coppice section in North Cray Woods
- Path near Royal Park school in North Cray Wood was re-laid with deep Wood chip

Part of the Yew hedge around old tennis courts of Foots Cray Place was lowered this has been deemed a success and the trees have responded well, therefore the remained will be brought down to the same level this autumn and then next year we will look to lower the whole hedge by another few feet.

Work to commence up to the summer

A number of mature trees were lost during the early storms of 2008 most of these have yet to be cleared as ground conditions are wet and thus the heavy lorries will cause significant damage. These will be removed when conditions are better.

- The following Standard trees will be planted this spring:
 - Six Black Poplars, All Saints Church
 - Four English Oaks, North Cray Woods
 - Two Weeping Willows, Five Arches
 - Two English Limes, Lime Avenue
- Bridle path - spread wood chip sourced from works on site onto bridle path.
- Continue to carry out revetment works to the banks of the lake as per last year i.e. use tree trunks from felled trees on site and back fill with flint and dressed with soil and seeded. This work was carried out by Council staff last year with materials supplied through Kier Street Services.

Lark in the Park Volunteers - as per previous years during two weeks in August we have a number of volunteers from this organisation who carry out various works on this site i.e. litter clearing, seat/bench painting and scrub clearance. Any other ideas greatly appreciated.

(Stable Meadows allotment - works will continue

- to propagate trees from seeds collected from FCM and other sites within Bexley. The intention is once these are at an acceptable height they will be replanted back onto the sites they were collected from in future years.
- Maintain regular frequency grass cutting of the area within the foot print of Foots Cray Place.
- The Wild Flower Meadows will be cut during August/September as per previous years. Help the 'Friends' group to put up the remaining bird boxes donated in the Spring.

Lake Survey

Over recent years there have been a number of notable changes to the condition of the lake in the Meadows. Although (when tested) the water quality is of a high standard it has been the physical condition of the lake and the habitats it supports that have been of concern. In addition to the huge investment made to restore Five Arches its self in 2005 the Council has undertaken works to repair some sections of the banks and manage the trees on the islands. However it is felt that as a man made feature the lake needs greater maintenance over time. The main notable problem is the silting up of the lake. This is caused when the fast flowing waters of the River Cray are slowed down as they enter the lake. The sediment carried in the river is then deposited in the slow moving waters of the lake. Over time the depth of the lake is reduced and the range of habitats available to wildlife is reduced. The other main concern is the condition of the islands, these are important to breeding birds but are slowly breaking up. Therefore a survey and study has been commissioned by the Council to establish the current condition of the lake, identify the issues and causes and then present a range of costed options. This will then enable the Council to consider what action needs to be taken and a realistic idea of the costs involved.

The survey is taking place in April and the report should be with the Council in the summer. We will report to you the findings in the next newsletter.

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

Dates for your Diary: Future Events

April 2008

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

- **17th May 2008**
Quiz Night
Make up a team (max 8) at £4 a team.
7.15-7.30 pm at 1st North Cray Scout Headquarters Leafield Lane, North Cray. Soft drinks and nibbles provided. Bring your own 'booze' and glasses.
- **18th May 2008**
Gymkana (Joydens Riding Club)
Whilst this event is on the Wildlife and Information Centre (located behind the Stable House) will be open. Come and meet Members of the Committee and find out more about the Friends of Foots Cray Meadows
- **10th June 2008**
AGM
Details of the venue and time will be notified to members nearer the date
- **14th - 22nd June 2008**
Love Parks Week
Love Parks Week 2008 celebrates parks as free places for children to exercise with events in parks around the country. Love Parks Week is all about promoting parks and encouraging people to get out and enjoy our valuable green space and you can play your part! Why not organise an event yourself? Contact info@loveparksweek.org.uk for more information.
- **June/July 2008**
Danson Park Festival
Friends of Footh Cray Meadows will be having a stand in the Environment Zone Marquee.
- **September 2008** (date to be advised)
River Walk
Following our popular river themed walk of previous years we will be holding another one this September. All are welcome to join us for what will be an educational couple of hours.
Meet at Five Arches Bridge
- **October 2008**
RSPB Feed the Birds Day
Feed the Birds Day marks the clocks going back and the winter nights drawing in.
- **November 2008** (date to be advised)
Fungus Foray
This walk is being organised by the Sidcup and District Natural History Society and has in previous years revealed a fascinating variety of fungi in the woods and grassland of the Meadows.

Join Today Membership costs just £4 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 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 Footh 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 _____