

# FRIENDS OF FOOTS CRAY MEADOWS

ISSUE 5

NEWSLETTER

November 2008

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

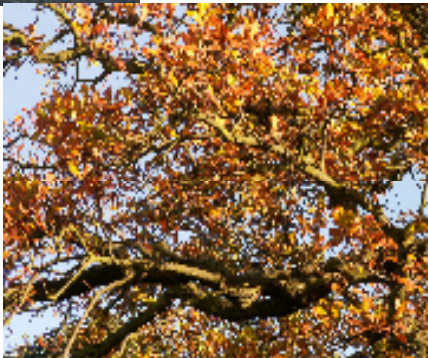
## Rockies vs Meadows!

My husband and I have just returned from a holiday in the USA which took in the fantastic scenery of the “Rockies” with snow capped peaks, panoramic views and mixture of Pine Forests and sheer expanse of desolate country but it wasn’t until taking a walk on the meadows a day after our return that we realised we had missed something on our trip;



birds, yes we had seen Bald Eagles, Buzzards and Ravens and some local variations of our sparrows but we hadn’t seen the variety we see on the Meadows or heard the consequent bird song that goes with them.

Parts of the USA are renowned for the colours of the leaves on the trees as they approach the autumn this is true of the Rockies but we to also have some magnificent colours in our leaves on the trees on the meadows and in our gardens.



We often try and compare the landscapes of different countries but the reality is that each are unique in their own way and our meadows is just as unique and as fascinating in its own way as the Rockies. It was nice to have seen the Rockies and even nicer to be home alongside our Meadows.

Lesley Grant

FFCM Committee Member

## Tuppences Diary

Hello! and a big ‘woof’ to you! What a funny summer this has been, the weather was, I understand, not to your liking, but us dogs don’t care as long as we can get out. Though I must say, I much prefer to chose when I get wet, in a river or the sea, rather than when it falls down on me from the sky. I particularly dislike having to get wet last thing at night, you are lucky, you don’t get thrown out to make yourself ‘comfortable’ for the night, we do. You must understand, we end up making our bed wet as we dry off, would you like to go to bed wet?

My friends the water birds have done quite well this year, they have managed to raise several youngsters, despite the attentions of the pike and those bully swans. The swans raised six young, although one was attacked and the kind ranger found it and sent it to a swan sanctuary to have its wounds treated, the last I heard was that it was doing well, but they thought that it would possibly not be coming back here as its parents may not recognise it, they grow up so quickly, you know. The young are testing their wings and will be flying off soon, I hope that they find somewhere nice to live and manage to raise lots of young, but I wish that they were not so unfriendly! Talking of the birds, do you know that it isn’t very kind to feed them lots of white bread? It isn’t very good as it fills them up so that they do not eat what they require to grow strong and healthy. You wouldn’t be very healthy if you just had a diet of burgers, would you? Grain or special water bird pellets which you can get in the pet shops is much better, by the way, we dogs love the bread, but it is not very good for us either, but we are not very fond of the pellets!

The blackberry season is now over, shame as I love picking them, I made my mistress laugh one day as I came back from my walk with juice all round my face, she said that it reminded her of when their children were little. I thought that blackberries were a special treat for us dogs and foxes, but I now learn that humans like them too.

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# Chairman's Chat!

**B**uilding on a successful summer - It may not have been a glorious summer on Foots Cray Meadows but the Friends have sizzled along nicely, building on success. Following our second AGM in June with two strands of development; these surely are the future for the group and the Meadows. First, was our inaugural 'Work Day' (see article), when members were able to set about some positive physical work with the Bexley's Parks and Open Space team.

This type of activity is integral to the original aims of the Friends and I am determined to build on this and continue to work with the council on similar projects early in 2009. Secondly and whilst not yet fully operational the Wildlife & Information Centre is proving to be an effective Base for the Friends and our events. Of particular note was the use of the building when the Friends entertained young families as part of the North Cray Centre's Summer Activities.

I am also pleased to report that even without fitting external notices; how, just opening the doors to the W&IC attracts casual visitors. Surely a good omen for when the information panels are complete.

However, it will only be with the support of members

and volunteers that we can commit to a timetable when the centre is open.

For the future we need to identify projects and seek independent funding. The above mentioned Wet Meadow is a prime candidate; The Friends can invest time and money into retrieving this Wet Meadow, through a programme to reintroduce here an inlet of the River Cray. This will with some replanting allow for a revival of the previous freshwater marsh area encouraging the return of marginal plant growth and wet habitat that would attract many birds, invertebrates and amphibians.

This then is an achievable project for the Friends which is compatible to our aims and those of the Council's overall Management Plan for the Meadows. To do this we need support from members with volunteers to take the lead for fund raising and liaison with relevant strategic authorities.

That said; such projects are realistic, their success will be good for the Meadows, for the Friends and a huge source of personal satisfaction for all those involved.

Michael Heath (FFCM Chairman)

## FFCM Work Day

on Saturday June 28<sup>th</sup> saw the Friends of Foots Cray Meadows with Bexley staff getting down to some physical work on the Meadows. Working on site has always been a key aspect of achieving our aims, On this day together with the council team we set about two practical tasks as part of the Management of the Meadows. These were to place some protection around the willows on the East side of the lake near to the Five Arches. These trees have natural hollows in the lower sections of their trunks, which are at risk of vandalism. This should be reduced by the application of the wire protection. The maturity of these trees is such that they are now at risk of losing limbs and also splitting at the main trunk is possible, which would lead to losing the tree. To reduce these risks I understand some of the large willows may be subject to pollarding this winter in order to prolong their lives, this will allow for the growth of a younger lighter canopy which is less of a stress on the tree and yet will retain their contribution to the landscape.

On the West side of the lake approximately half way between 'penny farthing footbridge' and the Fire Arches is a distinctive site recorded as a small wetland within the large Wet Meadow area. This site can best be identified by the wooden footbridge that spans the damp ditch. The work day enabled the bridge to be cleared of overgrowing shrubs and grasses and a new non slip surface fitted. A few hours work returned this part to an easily identified route and safe access to the bridge. However, over the years this site has become dryer, it is now a heavily vegetated depression which has lost much of the interest for wildlife that a wetland area would have. Our work in June was a success and everyone enjoyed themselves.

It is of importance for the Meadows and the Friends as a effective group that this is the first of many such days. I am determined that we will continue with these and already plans are being made for similar sessions this winter. Future success will be dependant upon the number of members and supporters joining us.

Michael Heath



# Editorial

The article on the trip to Rockies also threw up an interesting thought on what some consider as being pests and others see as a fascinating visitors.

The ring necked parakeets who inhabit the meadows are considered to be a bit of a pest by some but I wonder how we would react to an Elk Stag and his harem descending on parts of our Meadows and causing the type of damage to our grass that they do to a Golf Course in Estes Park in the Rockies. Incidentally the Golfers kept a very close eye on the stag!!



Photo Lesley Grant

Nick Grant



Photo Michael Heath

## **Breakfast in the Bothy**

On Christmas Eve St James church on the Meadows serve a full english breakfast from 8.00am to 10am in the Bothy which is in the Church grounds for the very reasonable cost of £5 per head. Why not come and have a breakfast, then walk off some of the calories in the Meadows? What a lovely way to start the preparations and celebrations of Christmas?

The Bothy is found in the grounds of St James Church which has a car park on North Cray Road but can also be accessed from Five Arches bridge by following the footpath over the bridge, then go straight towards North Cray Road, go though the churchyard and the Bothy is just the other side of the church. It can also be accessed from The Grove via a marked footpath.

We look forward to welcoming you, for further details please ring Gill Burgess on 020-8309-0367



### **Committee Members**

- **Chairman - Michael Heath**
- **Secretary - Karen Wheeler**
- **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, Shirley McKeon**

[www.ffcm.org.uk](http://www.ffcm.org.uk)

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

Tuppence's Diary Cont.....

I went on a special walk one evening, called a bat walk, though it took some time for me to understand why we had to go on a walk to find bats, surely you can find all sorts of bats in the shops, cricket bats; table tennis bats; base ball bats..... but they were talking about flying bats! My mistress had one settle on her when we were on holiday in Ludlow this year, so she was very interested to see if we could see some. You have to use a special listening devise as they are very high pitched, the kind lady who did the walk and Margaret managed to find some so you humans could listen for them. The Meadows have lots of bats, you can see them flying around at dusk, I thought that they were a kind of bird, but now I know better. Unfortunately the weather was bad for them, but just as we were leaving to go home at the five arches we saw them coming out of under the bridge, so mistress ran back to tell bat lady so everyone was able to see them.

Must go, time to tell my owners that it is supper time and I am hungry. Take care of yourselves, hope to see you on some walks through the winter, it really is lovely in the Meadows at any time of the year.



# Meadows Management Update

***As the owner of the Meadows Bexley Council are responsible for the management of the site.***

**F**or those who have been keeping an eye on the works that took place on the site of Footh Cray Place over the last year, I hope you will agree that the works have delivered a vast improvement to the look of this part of the Meadows. Not only has the site of the House largely been cleared, but also the views that would have been enjoyed by those living and visiting the house have been partially restored.

For the time being we are not planning any further significant works in this area, although some small works are included in the programme below. Effort is to be focused on maintaining the current improvements.

Yet again the Horse Chestnuts of the Meadows have suffered the same condition as most of the Chestnuts in South East England. The larval form of the leaf minor moth having caused significant damage to our trees yet again, destroying their leaves well before the natural end of the growing season. As we have said before, most healthy trees can cope with this attack but with the loss of their leaves the trees lose the ability to create sugars, the first casualty is their crop of conkers but over time reduced sugar production will lead to weakening of the tree and make them more susceptible to other pests and diseases. At this time there seems to be no effective control.

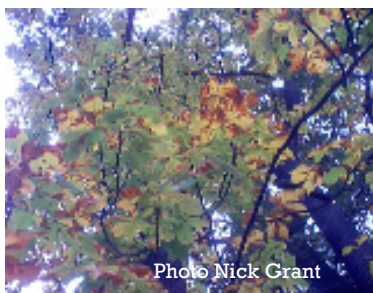


Photo Nick Grant

## **2008/09 Woodland Management**

Over the coming months a range of work is planned across the Meadows, below are the major works which mostly relate to woodland management.

**The Alders** – Last winter's coppicing trial on a small area of Alder, re-growth and regeneration has shown good results. Therefore this work will be undertaken to extend this small area of old ancient Alder woodland by removing any invasive Sycamore and replanting with native trees.

**North Cray Woods** – Hazel coppicing – we are looking at continuing with our third coupe this coming winter. Both sections from previous years are doing well and this work will compliment what has already been done.

**North Cray Woods** – The Creation and opening up the second glade through the woodland will take place. This will be from the entrance at the bottom of Ladbrooke Crescent through to the Meadows. A new bark-chipped pathway will be put down for a more pleasing and easier access.

**Footh Cray Place** – Work will be undertaken to remove Sycamore trees that are in a very poor condition, most of these are small non mature trees growing on the western side of the main track past the old footings of Footh Cray Place.

**Tree Planting** - in addition to the ten standard trees that will be planted in different places across the Meadows this winter a larger tree planted project will also be undertaken. This is to plant a screen of trees that will grow to visually block out the Cray Industrial Estate- which since its extension several years ago is now clearly visible on many southern views in the Meadows. This work is being done in partnership with the Friends Group so please look out for this event and come along and support this important project!

**Parks Team, Bexley Council**  
[parks&openspaces@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:parks&openspaces@bexley.gov.uk)



## **FFCM 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

# Dates for your Diary: Future Events

November 2008

We hope you are interested in joining in the many events we will be hosting in the coming months. At 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 Events Manager on [maggie.dodd@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:maggie.dodd@hotmail.co.uk) or ring 07874217186

● **Saturday 15th November 2008**

**Tree Nursery Work Day**

Bexley Council have a Tree Nursery located in the stable allotments in Leafield Lane (off North Cray Road). Join members of FFCM as we help to maintain the area. We will be meeting at 10.30 at the bottom set of gates.

● **Saturday 27th December 2008**

**Annual Foots Cray Meadows Cycle Race**

The Wildlife and Information Centre will be open from 10.00 am. Why not pop in and see us!

● **Saturday 24th January 2009**

**Tree Planting Work Day**

The Council's Tree and Woodland programme for the Meadows includes the replanting of trees on a regular basis. Join FFCM members to plant 1000 whip's along a section of the Meadows from Penny Farthing bridge back towards Harenc School. All you will need is a spade or trowel. Several sessions lasting about an hour each are planned throughout the day commencing at 10.00 am. Meet at the entrance to the Meadows alongside All Saints Church.

● **Saturday 21st February 2009**

**Winter Walk**

Join members of FFCM as we have a leisurely walk around the Meadows. More details nearer the date.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Subscriptions are due in the New Year  
please use the application form below  
to renew your membership

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

### 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

### 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).

Name

Enclosed is my/our subscription. £4

Children's Names (if applicable)

Enclosed is a donation to The Friends. £

Please make cheque's payable to:

**Friends of Foots Cray Meadows**

Address

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](mailto:ffcm06@gmail.com)