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# FOSM

Friends of Stanpit Marsh

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Summer 2023 #126



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

# **View from the Chair** – *Alan Hopking*

We had a jolly time at the FOSM centre celebrating the King's Coronation, with bunting and home-made cakes contributed by members and friends, organized by Nina Blake.

Nina also organized the boat trip around Christchurch harbour and out through the Run. It was very well attended and the commentary by Mike Andrews brought to life the centuries of history and wildlife. A marvellous afternoon. We're now looking forward to our annual summer party at the Visitor Centre on 15<sup>th</sup> July.

Speaking of wildlife, so much can be seen during this hot summer (hottest June on record): heron, redshank, godwit, curlew, oyster catcher, and so many others that use the Marsh as their breeding ground.

FOSM has helped pay for the new seats on the Marsh, with a special replacement seat on Crouch Hill in memory of Dorothy Baker, who saved the Marsh from commercial development.

Our new website has been launched by volunteer Dave Woodhead. It has been revamped and updated, so please visit it for lots of information, photographs and the events to come. Thank you, Dave.

We are still looking for new committee members, so please don't be shy in putting your name forward. FOSM certainly won't run itself!

Enjoy the changing wildlife in the summer months to come.

Alan

# Warden's Snippets – *Robin Harley*

The new yellow buoys are in place and generally doing their job well. Local kayak/paddle board hire companies have agreed to indicate to customers where they should avoid landing, and a paddleboard Facebook group will carry the same message. There is also now a marine patrol and police presence in the harbour.

New signage has been ordered to replace the small “do not go past this point” signs that are dotted around the Marsh – the new ones will have perspex covers, as their predecessors got nibbled by the ponies. Also a new 4 knots speed limit sign to be installed along Grimmer Bank (for boats rather than pedestrians).

Ponies – there are 11 foals now (as of late June) with possibly one or two more to come, and ponies have also been re-introduced to Priory Marsh. Nigel the stallion has been back with the mares since mid-May and is doing what stallions do! It's also hoped to have some cattle in Ashtree Meadow soon.

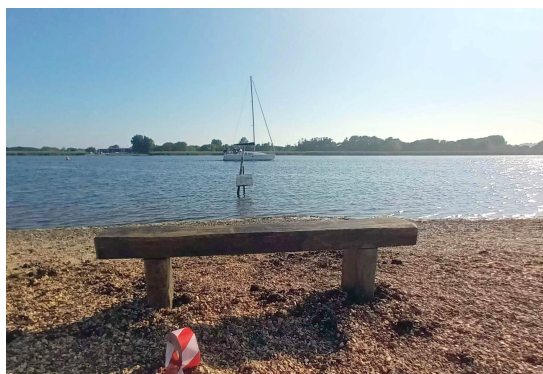
A pair of Ringed Plover are nesting on Mudeford Sandbank, for the first time since 1984. This is the area where Oystercatcher have shown interest in the past, so already has some protection to keep out dogs/foxes etc. All three chicks hatched and doing well (as of early July).

Giant Hogweed is being removed early this year – about 20 plants have been nobbled to date, with just one on Spellar's Point to still remove.

On the Recreation ground the grass mowing regime has been slightly adjusted to encourage longer grass, and various benches will be getting repaired.

On Riversmeet Meadow a new sculpture of a Devil's coach-horse beetle is coming soon.

Four new seats have been installed on the Marsh, including a replacement for the dedicated Dorothy Baker bench on Crouch Hill. The others are: in front of the Visitor Centre, another on Grimmer Bank, and one near the iron boat. As previously agreed, the purchase, installation and engraving costs of three of them is being met by from FOSM funds.



*Photos: Robin Harley*



# Events Review – *Nina Blake*

Hello everyone. Summer is here with its longer days, BBQs in the garden, picnics on the beach and wonderfully warm and sunny weather.

Since the Spring we've enjoyed a beetle drive and a bird-watching walk on the Marsh, and in May we celebrated the coronation of King Charles and the Queen Consort with a special coffee morning at the Visitor Centre with cakes and a raffle.

At the time of writing we have just enjoyed an amazing boat trip from Mudeford Quay, accompanied by popular local historian Mike Andrews who entertained us along the way, up the river, with his stories of local historical events. This trip always proved popular in the past and equally so this year with nearly fifty people enjoying a lovely afternoon on the water.

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> July is our Afternoon Tea at the Visitor Centre with cakes, a book stall and raffle. Donations of cakes, books or raffle prizes are welcomed.

**Forthcoming events:** On September 14<sup>th</sup> we'll have a combined Beetle Drive and Bingo evening. This should be a really fun evening so please come along.

At the AGM on October 12<sup>th</sup> Countryside Officer Robin Harley will give a talk updating us on the marsh's wildlife and what's been happening on the Marsh and surrounding areas over the past year. Please support the AGM where you can give your thoughts on the work of the Countryside team and of FOSM.

In November we'll have an autumn bird- watching walk around the marsh to catch up on the migrants.

**Important note:** As I have mentioned previously I am standing down from the role of Events Coordinator at the AGM. I have held the post for over eight years and I want to pursue some of my other

interests. So, the committee urgently needs someone, or perhaps two people sharing the role, to come forward to take over from me please. I've really enjoyed arranging and hosting events and meeting so many of you lovely people but I feel it's time for a change. I'm more than happy to support and guide anyone wishing to take events into the future and join our merry little band on the committee.

As ever, thank you so much for your continued support and friendship. *Photos: Nina Blake*



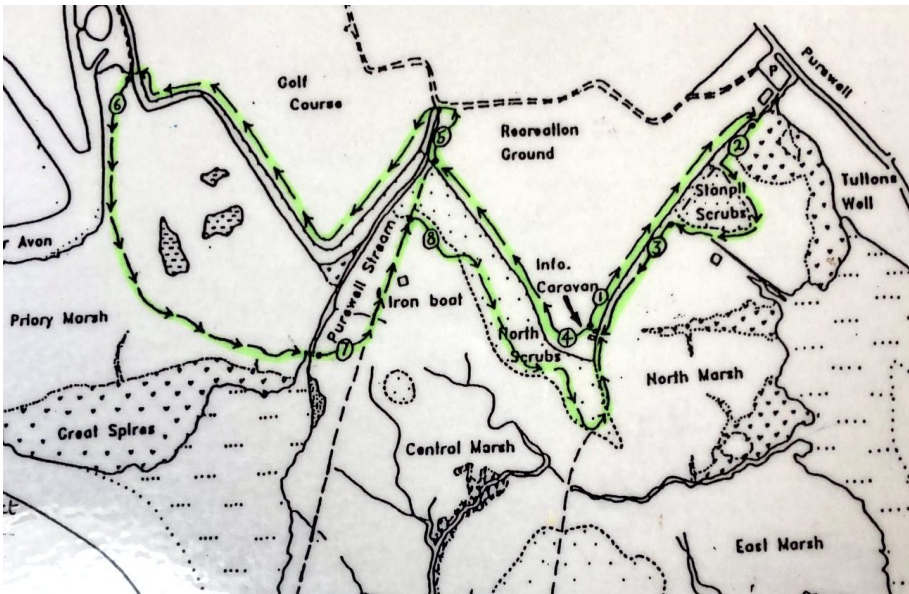
# Beautiful Butterflies in Decline

– Amanda Townshend

Butterflies are sensitive indicators of the health of our environment - sadly, they are one of the most threatened groups of wildlife in the UK and in severe decline. This appears to be related to both loss of meadow habitat and to climate change. The state of the UK's Butterflies Report 2022 published by Butterfly Conservation (available on [www.butterfly-conservation.org](http://www.butterfly-conservation.org)) has revealed an 80% decline in butterflies since the 1970s. The report relied on millions of records from various sources, including data from many people who are engaging in citizen science and regularly recording butterfly sightings.

## Stanpit Marsh Butterfly Transect

On Stanpit Marsh butterflies have been recorded since the 1980s. Nine years ago Zena Lee, Stanpit's Senior Volunteer Countryside Warden, agreed to undertake a regular butterfly survey, known as a transect. The takes place weekly every year between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> September resulting in 26 weeks of data.



During those nine years Zena's commitment has been amazing - she has devoted over ninety minutes of her time every single week over the annual twenty-six week period to counting butterflies. She walks the same transect route which encompasses a number of habitats across the reserve covering the south edge of the Recreation Ground, west edge of North Marsh, south edge of Riversmeet Marsh before cutting across the Priory Marsh boardwalk and through North Scrubs.

Unlike most, the Stanpit transect presents a particular challenge because the Priory Marsh section is passable only when the tide allows, so Zena needs to choose her timing carefully as she is not keen on getting wet feet or being stuck in the mud! All transects must also be completed within strict parameters: only sightings within 5 metres of the surveyor can be recorded and the temperature must meet a minimum criteria. The times chosen are also strictly controlled: surveys cannot start before 10.45 or after 15.45 so the count is done during the warmest part of the day. The survey cannot be done in rain, cold, cloudy conditions or strong wind. Detailed records of wind force, temperature and sunshine levels on each section of the transect must also be recorded. All the data collected by Zena is collated in a database and then passed to Robin Harley BCP Countryside Officer for further analysis.

### **Butterflies recorded on Stanpit Marsh**

Over the years Zena says she has noticed butterfly abundance on Stanpit Marsh has declined - the data for 2023 to date is particularly disappointing for those butterflies that typically fly early in the season - perhaps the cold and wet conditions in Spring this year are to blame? Research has demonstrated the complex and critical impact local weather has on the life cycle of butterflies especially at the larval and pupal stage; this varies from species to species. The most abundant species recorded at Stanpit is consistently the meadow brown. This is perhaps unsurprising since this species is actually the most abundant in many habitats and the adults fly even in dull weather when most other butterflies are inactive.



*Meadow Brown butterflies. Photo: Tony Wickham*

The table below shows all species that were recorded on the transect in 2022. Other butterflies seen on the Marsh, but not captured in the transect, included Brimstone, Green Hairstreak and Clouded Yellow.

Species	Number Seen
Meadow Brown	162
Gatekeeper	133
Speckled Wood	112
Large White	53
Small Skipper	42
Red Admiral	32
Small White	28
Peacock	24
Comma	19
Large Skipper	11
Holly Blue	11
Small Heath	7
Essex Skipper	7
Painted Lady	6
Common Blue	4
Small Tortoiseshell	3
Small Copper	3
Orange Tip	2
Marbled White	1



## **Helping Butterflies – How can you get involved?**

Increasing the recording and monitoring of the UK's butterfly populations is vital to document wider biodiversity change, understand its causes and help develop and measure effective solutions. If you would like to get involved, visit the Butterfly Conservation website. There you can pledge to create a wild space, participate in your very own garden survey or simply join the Big Butterfly Count - choose a location to spot butterflies for just 15 minutes between 14<sup>th</sup> July and 6<sup>th</sup> August 2023 and submit your sightings on the Big Butterfly Count App using their comprehensive butterfly ID guide.

In the meantime, our sincere thanks go to Zena for the all the work she is doing to enhance the understanding of Stanpit butterfly populations. Look out for her next time you visit the Marsh – she may be counting butterflies!

## **Prickly Customers – *Tony Wickham***

I think most people have an affection for hedgehogs – maybe that's from a memory of childhood stories like Mrs Tiggywinkle, observation of their slightly comical behaviour, or possibly the sense that they're good for the garden by devouring the odd slug and other pests. They're certainly an innocuous creature, and easy victims from both other animals (especially badgers) and of course humans, who are mainly responsible for their decline in numbers – in both rural and domestic environments. Of course they have also suffered badly over the years from crossing roads – the drop in sightings of casualties these days is almost certainly due to the low numbers remaining, rather than any extra care on the part of drivers.

As their name implies, they like to spend daytime at the bottom of a thick hedge or shrubbery, and those are disappearing everywhere fast. It's also likely that they suffer from chemicals used on both agricultural land and in domestic gardens, either directly or via ingesting food sources that have been killed in that way. A hedgehog at night would normally travel a couple of miles in search

of food (or a mate), and in most gardens that is impossible these days where hedges have been replaced by fencing. It's possible to help out by making a "hedgehog highway" gap at the bottom, either by cutting a gap or tunnelling under, but probably best to agree in advance with the neighbouring property, just in case the fence belongs to them!

Apart from the tell-tale signs of hedgehog visits, such as droppings, it's quite difficult to know whether you have any dropping in for a snack, as nearly all their visits will be while you're in bed. I use an infrared trail camera to gather evidence, but some people are lucky enough to "train" their hedgehogs to visit at regular evening mealtimes. I've added a couple of photos below that were taken by Barbara Higham. Barbara lives in Burton, and has several prickly visitors to her garden – given the hedgehog houses that are tucked around the garden, and the regular food supplies, it's no wonder they turn up – and although there are fences around the garden there is a hedgehog-sized gap under the gate to provide access. As you can see, they've become quite tame, even if it does leave her spaniel looking rather bemused!



# Birding Update from CHOG - Valerie Kelly

## **Peregrines**

Christchurch Harbour Ornithological Group (CHOG) is having an exciting season. Peregrines returned and successfully nested on the 900 year-old Christchurch Priory for the second year running. The adult male originally hatched on the college tower at Lansdowne, so has stayed in the area to start his own family - the pair bred two healthy males. After the success of last year, CHOG held another Peregrine Day on June 17th. Local people and holiday-makers flocked around the telescopes to get a clear up-close view of the chicks and adults. One of the chicks had left the nest and was testing his balance by running up and down on the Priory roof. He flapped about and eventually took his first tentative flight - it was incredibly exciting to witness this monumental step in preparation for fledging. Once the youngsters have fledged, the parents will still feed them, and show them where to find food while warning off any predators and guiding the chicks to safe places.



## **Ringed Plover Excitement**

Ringed Plovers are nesting on Mudeford sandbank, the first attempt at breeding in the Christchurch Harbour area since 1984. BCP Council and Natural England quickly realised the importance of this event by erecting an anti-predator cage. Unfortunately, accidentally or not, people and animals can easily disturb ground-nesting birds, even damaging the nest and destroying the eggs, so added

protection was deemed necessary.

Breeding time for Ringed Plovers is between April and July. These waders like to have space around them, and the male makes several scrapes forming a shallow hole in the sand as a nest base. The female then gets to choose which nest site she prefers. The birds often collect small pieces of wood, straw, shells, and bits of stone to build the nest together.

The female will typically lay four speckled eggs and both parents share in incubating them for about four weeks. The eggs are camouflaged to look like pebbles, so they are safe on the shore. The parents can emit a loud call and fan their tail when predators come near and will swoop to deter other birds. In an attempt to sidetrack a predator's approach, the birds also flutter and drag their wings while walking forward along the ground. By pretending to be injured, this little wader will hobble for quite a distance to distract the predator which follows them. Once far enough away from the nest, the Plover then flies off.



## Swifts

A reminder of the request to collect data about swifts that appeared in the Spring newsletter. If you see a Swift, please help save these enigmatic birds by contacting [swifts@chog.org.uk](mailto:swifts@chog.org.uk), including your name, the road you saw them on, and a postcode if possible. Alternatively, report the sightings to the Visitor's Centres on Stanpit Marsh or Hengistbury Head.

The design of new houses, and updates to existing ones causes problems as PVC guttering and fascias deprive Swifts of natural nesting sites. To help, Swift nesting boxes can be installed. Southbourne Men's Hub has kindly made nest boxes for the Red House Museum. Please visit to check out the boxes in their garden.

If more people would volunteer to have nest boxes on their properties, we could, 'give Swifts a Chance'. A nest box will need to be about 15 feet above ground on a vertical wall, with no obstructions in the incoming flight path, and not in direct sunlight. The CHOG webpage can answer questions if required: see [www.CHOG.org.uk](http://www.CHOG.org.uk).

## **A walk on the wild(ish) side** - *Nina Blake*

Since the old golf course was converted into the community parkland called Riversmeet Meadow, lots of people including myself have enjoyed this lovely open green space. With stunning views across the river, marsh and harbour, it's a place popular for a stroll or walking the dog.

I often look after my son's Golden Retriever and Riversmeet Meadow is one of my favourite places for our walkies. I usually stop and sit on the tree trunk, which is destined to become a sculptured seat at some point, and enjoy the lovely view across the marsh towards Hengistbury Head.

There are several benches on which to sit and take in the various views across the river, and picnic benches near the leisure centre where you can take your coffee and sandwiches to enjoy an alfresco lunch. Sited around the meadows are various wooden animal sculptures. Have you spotted them all? Take a look on your next stroll. My favourite is the hedgehog. Previously I loved the dog statue but this was sadly vandalised and had to be removed - happily, it has since found a new home!





Part of the grassland is left unmown as a natural wildflower meadow and during the summer, pretty cornflowers, poppies and other flowers add colour to the scene. Access for wheelchairs and buggies to the meadows was created with a circular path around the site so that anyone, including my neighbour in her mobility scooter with her little dogs, can enjoy visiting what has become a very popular local destination.

Don't tell everyone! It's our special secret place!



*Photos: Nina Blake*

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