

Wildlife Report for Turnpike Fields Working Group Meeting - Monday 5th September

Effect of Weather Conditions

The primary ecological factor of the last couple of months has been the lack of rain. This has had a huge effect on the natural environment of the fields. In particular the grassland this year has seen both a very short season with grasses seeding early and also being less vigorous than in previous years. Other later flowering plants such as Rosebay and Greater Willowherb, Burdock and Thistles have also seeded much earlier.

Another earlier seeding plant has been the Common Ragwort which has benefited from the dry conditions to out-compete other shorter rooted plants. The drier ground has extended to the Wetland areas where Creeping Buttercups, Birds-foot Trefoil and Meadowsweet have flourished later in the season but not this year. The brook as also flowed much less fully and is now down to nearly a trickle. The Pond in T1 has also much less water and whilst the Mace is still thriving other vegetation has clearly been affected. The Pond in T2, which never seems to fill, has a little less water than previous years. The bog area has also dried out considerably.

There has also been some effect on the newly planted saplings.

It is clear that there is much stress being felt in the plant world causing higher levels of fruiting.

Insect count

All this has had a knock on effect with many less insects such as beetles, butterflies, bees and Hoverflies being recorded despite this year's enhanced survey team. With a diminishing of flower food the usual summer butterflies have ceased to be sighted earlier than usual. Only a few Small White and Speckled Wood Butterflies can be seen now. Similarly the abundance of Dragonflies and Damselflies around the pond in T1 have not been seen this year. We wait to see if the pond contains the same number of larvae this year.

Despite the reduction in numbers of insects the survey team have added a number of new species to our list including a nationally rare spider.

Trees

Most of the saplings planted last Autumn seem to have survived although there are one or two losses. There has not been the annual growth that might be expected due to the dry conditions. The saplings planted in Spring 2021 on the other hand are growing well and especially the Scots Pines. The saplings planted to enhance the hedge along the canal boundary near the Whitchurch Rd gate have not fared too well and it is to be seen how many of these will survive and grow.

There are several young Oak trees now developing along the Green Lane boundary these will in time replace some of the mature trees and are naturally regenerated trees. Hopefully in time we can add to these if contractor can be persuaded not to mow too tight to the hedge.

With the abundant fruiting of Trees this year it will be interesting to see how many saplings develop which can be nurtured.

The Alder copse is developing well. Some pruning has taken place to remove saplings encroaching on the pond. In addition a path has been cleared through the copse to maintain access and add interest.

Grasslands

The Grassland have been heavily effected by lack of rain which has caused low growth and early seeding. All the Grassland has now had its Autumn cut. The use of the fields this year should help us have a clearer designation of areas that are mown areas, areas developed as Flower meadow and areas left as Grassland. It is important that sufficient areas are left to provide habit for a number of important species. (Mowing removes these insects).

Common Ragwort

This has been dealt with elsewhere. I would add that ragwort has also been dug up from around the pond.

Community Communication

This continues with conversations with users of the fields. These conversations indicate that users appreciate the open and “wild” nature of the fields. The Village Fete also offered opportunities to engage in conversations about the Fields and these again proved positive.

The holding of further “Safaris” was ironically effected by bad weather. The intention to hold Walks during the Fete did not materialise.

An update to the Wildlife Dossier was prepared for the NWIB (North West In Bloom) judging. The judge seemed very impressed with what we are seeking to achieve and made several suggestions which were very much in line with our own strategy.

The need for a Wildlife Noticeboard seems to be becoming an increasing priority. The recent sale of some more of my book “Audlem Wildlife Diaries” provides a good start to raising the £400-500 needed. I hope to raise enough to make this purchase possible.

Headline Survey Statistics

Since surveying began in 2020 the following have been recorded:

115 species of wild plant

16 varieties of grasses

80 species of insects (including 15 species of butterfly)

25 species of birds

Adrian Leighton

030922