

NEWS AND STORIES FROM ABBEY FIELDS

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June 2023

June is a time when our nesting birds are working hard raising their broods and there are a lot of young birds around busy learning how to support themselves. It's also a good time to look out for butterflies and moths – our moth-trapping events have shown that we have a wide variety of species in the CCSA.

In this update

Our fundraising efforts have been successful and we now have the funds to complete the purchase of CCSA and Long Meadow. Our focus will now change to raising money to support access and maintenance.

June is a good month for spotting insects in Long Meadow and we suggest some apps that can help with insect and bird identification.

Mosses are often overlooked but beautiful and fascinating – we take a look at some of the species that grow in the CCSA.

Croft Close Set-aside

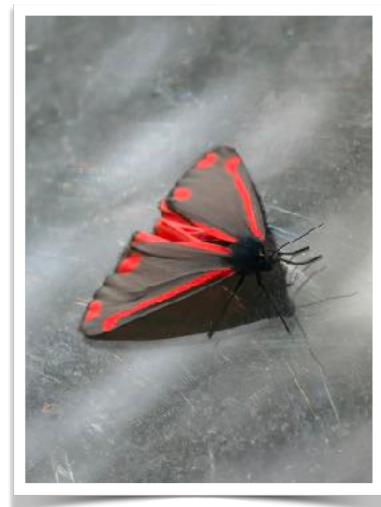


Summer evening at the CCSA, photo by Penny Reeves

It is only a little over 2 years ago that we knew for sure that Croft Close Set-aside (CCSA) and Long Meadow were firmly in line to be saved as community assets, places for wildlife and accessible countryside close to the heart of our villages. The task then was to raise £0.5 million.

This has been achieved through the generosity of many individuals within the community, with significant contributions among others from Sally London, from whom Long Meadow is leased, the Jenking family who provided bridging finance and more, and the Parish Council. Substantial grant funding also contributed.

Our many fundraising events have helped appreciably, with



Cinnabar moth at CCSA, photo by Guy Richardson



Croft Close Set-aside, photo by Jon Pavey

our two most recent events (the Easter Holiday Quiz and the evening at The Boot) together raising well over £4000.

Histon & Impington Green Spaces, the charity behind the Abbey Fields venture, has now completed the purchase of CCSA on the community's behalf. However, this longed-for moment will not result in any changes on the ground.

We will continue with our programme of site and habitat management and with our wildlife monitoring. Both are aimed at ensuring this [jewel in our midst](https://www.hihub.info/features/a-place-for-nature-the-jewel-in-our-midst/) [https://www.hihub.info/features/a-place-for-nature-the-jewel-in-our-midst/] is maintained for its biodiversity and, importantly, in such a way that our community can enjoy and learn from this.

Long Meadow insect bonanza

May and June are top months for spotting some of our smaller wildlife at Long Meadow. This traditional hay meadow supports a host of invertebrates, on a warm sunny day it is worth pausing to look what is feasting on the flowers or lies hidden among the grasses.

Better still, pull out a magnifying glass or get a close-up picture on your phone and marvel at our exotic creatures.



Snipe fly, photo by Jon Pavey

The flowerheads of the cow parsley and buttercups are a good place to start. Or you may see a butterfly flitting across the meadow to suddenly disappear among the grasses. It's extraordinary how such brilliant insects as the common blue butterfly can become almost invisible, camouflaged among grass stems. Good spotting!



Tiger crane fly, photo by Penny Reeves



Thick-legged flower beetle, photo by Penny Reeves



16-spot ladybird, photo by Jon Pavey



Common blue butterfly, photo by Penny Reeves



Photo by Jon Pavey

AI and wildlife identification

May is perhaps the best month for hearing a range of birdsong. We ran several birdsong walks introducing around 40 participants to the songsters of CCSA. Willow warbler, chiffchaff and song thrush excelled; most heard the turtle dove declaring his territory.

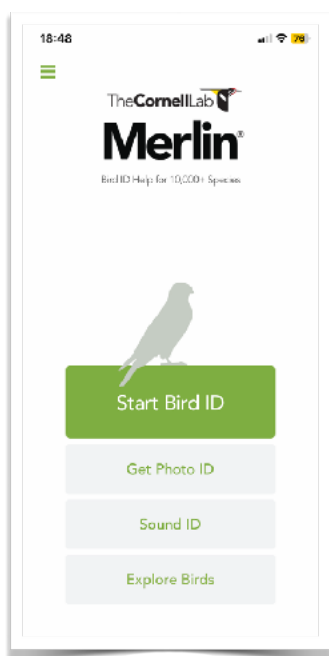
Whilst many of us are keen to know what species we see and hear, this can be daunting. Experts gain experience over many years but now for the curious, casual observer help is at hand with modern technology in the shape of the ubiquitous app.

A word of warning: always treat an app identification with caution. Some apps are very good, but even the best will regularly mis-identify. Nevertheless, they can provide an excellent starting point in narrowing down an identification.

For many of us, identifying a bird by its song is very difficult. Many songs and calls are similar, and often we don't have the time to track down what is what. And our memories play tricks when we next hear the exact same call (or was it?).



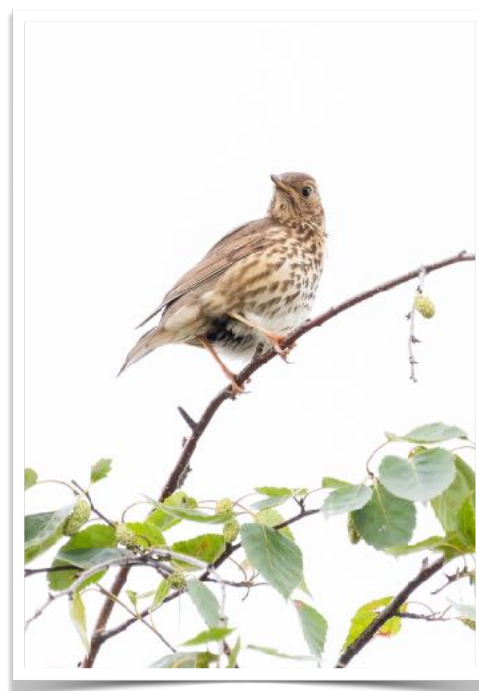
Chiffchaff, photo by Penny Reeves



There are various apps you can download to assist. One of these that some might like to try - demonstrated on the bird walks - is called '**Merlin**'. This free app was developed by The Cornell Lab in partnership with the British Trust for Ornithology. It records and lists in real-time the birds singing and has a playback facility.

Butterfly conservation provides an online tool (<https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/identify-a-butterfly>) for identifying butterflies. They have also joined with iRecord (see below) to develop an **iRecord butterfly app** which helps identify and record species.

For more general use (of both flora and fauna), if you can photograph a species, the main **iRecord app** will suggest in real time an identification. It will sometimes indicate how certain the suggestion is (as a percentage).



Song thrush, photo by Penny Reeves

(If you upload your observation with iRecord a UK expert will check your photo and add your observation to our national database - well worth doing.)

An app with similar features is **'Seek'**, which is based on the iNaturalist platform. This has the disadvantage that your records don't get added directly to the national database. But it can give a "second opinion" on your identification as well as suggesting identification from old photos .



Willow warbler, photo by Penny Reeves

Fairyland moss carpet

Moss is too small a word to encompass the variety of these delicate treasures: there are 763 species of moss (or bryophyte) across Britain and Ireland. Cambridgeshire hosts just 246 species.

Mosses are best observed in late winter when they are at their finest with least competition from the higher plants. Last winter we started investigating the moss flora. The rabbit-grazed lawns of Croft Close Set-aside - also known as Fairyland - was a good place to look. Here the compressed sandy soil and anthills host a selection of mosses, and we found more species than we had anticipated.

The photo was taken during February. The ground is surprisingly green given it was mid-winter and before most of the plants in the vicinity, mostly annuals, had started to move. A close look at the plant cover showed that something like 30% was made up of moss, and there are various mosses giving rise to the range of colours you can see in the photo - bright green, yellowish green, brown, red etc.



Fairyland, photo by Jon Pavey

The bright green moss is Hornschuch's beard-moss; the dull green is bi-coloured bryum; the yellowish green moss, most prolific at the edges of the walks, is rough-stalked feathermoss; and an occasional

island of plum red is appropriately called redshank. There are other mosses here too associated with the anthills e.g., field forklet-moss and common pottia.

In these well grazed and well-trodden areas mosses have little chance to put up spore cases to produce the next generation, but many mosses also reproduce vegetatively.

In the photo of bi-coloured bryum, most rosettes hold globular growths between the leaves that are tubers ready to roll or be carried away, ready to make new moss plants when they contact the soil allowing the moss carpet to still spread in well-trodden places. In 'belt and braces' style bi-



Bi-coloured bryum, photo by David Dives



Redshank, photo by David Dives



Bi-coloured bryum spore capsules, photo by David Dives

coloured bryum does also produce spore capsules when it gets a chance by growing in a protected corner. The photo, right, illustrates its typical spore capsules.



Rough-stalked feather moss, photo by David Dives



Hornschuch's beard-moss, photo by David Dives

This season's total was 10 species found on Croft Close. A full list, with scientific names, is on the Abbey Fields website [here](#).

Fundraising: What's next

Having raised the funds to secure the Abbey Fields sites our fundraising efforts will change gear. Both Long Meadow and Croft Close Set-aside will need regular maintenance to preserve the sites as we value them, to enhance their biodiversity and to provide safe access.

Much of this work will be done by volunteers (everyone is welcome to come and assist, you don't need to be super-strong!). However, some tasks are too specialist or too big for volunteers to manage (for example mowing Long Meadow or working at height) and must be paid for.

We also have some basic operating costs – such as insurance – which we must cover, albeit we seek to keep such costs to a minimum.

For all this we will continue with our fundraising and will continue to be appreciative of your and the wider community's support.

Photo competitions

Following on from the success of last year's photography competition, we are pleased to announce the launch of our second annual competition. This year the theme is **flora, fauna and fungi**, taken in or around Histon & Impington, and the competition is now open for entries.



Thirteen winning photographs will be chosen to appear in the Abbey Fields 2024 Calendar and one of those will be selected by the community to feature on the cover page. It will be on sale from October 2023. The competition is open to all ages and will be judged anonymously. Closing date for entries is 30th September 2023. For more details visit <https://abbeyfields.online/photo-comp-2023-intro>

We're also launching a **young person's photo competition** soon – it will have two age categories, and entries will close on 31st August 2023 – watch out for more details!