

NEWS AND STORIES FROM ABBEY FIELDS

[Turtle Dove](#) | [Easter Quiz](#) | [Celandine](#) | [Monitoring Bird life](#) | [Reptiles](#) | [Fundraising](#) | [Guided Walks](#)

May 2022

Already at the start of May the May blossom on the hawthorn has taken over from the blackthorn which has faded. The cow parsley and buttercups are providing us with seas of white and yellow flowers on Long Meadow and some people report even hearing the first cuckoo. Swallows and house martens have also made their welcome return as well as the very rare turtle dove.

In this update

Our fundraising campaign continues and a very successful and enjoyable Easter event took place on Long Meadow. Volunteers have been busy constructing reptile refuges and we bring news of bird-life monitoring on the Croft Close Set-aside field. More information on guided walks too below!



Photo by Penny Reeves

Will the Croft Close turtle dove find a mate?

There was much excitement in Croft Close when on 12th April the distinctive purring "turr turr turr" song of a male turtle dove was heard for the first time this year. This was a very early spring record. Maybe "our" bird having failed to find a mate last year put in a spurt to arrive early ahead of any competition!

This rare, small dove winters just south of the Sahara desert; many from Britain head for western Mali. Our bird has travelled about 5,500 km in the past two months to get here.

Turtle doves are very particular about where to spend summer.

They feed on seeds from short vegetation and bare ground; they seek out areas with standing water and trees with dead branches at the top from which to call. Croft Close is just perfect.

The turtle dove has featured in English literature and song since medieval times as a symbol of love and fidelity. The giving of two turtle doves on the second day in the familiar 'Twelve Days of Christmas' shows this.

If you want to know more, look on our website [here](#) .

Why I love nature - at the Easter Quiz

Some 120 children and their families enjoyed the warm sunshine on Easter Saturday taking part in our nature-themed Quiz on Long Meadow.

The children were invited to post their thoughts on "Why I love nature?". Here is a small selection of their contributions:



Photo by Jon Pavey

"Nature makes me feel happy"

"I love seeing the dandelions – blowing seeds!"

"I love nature in spring when lots of flowers are in bloom. It looks beautiful"

"I like the colourful land, wild beauty of nature"

"I like finding things in nature"

"I love nature because I love flowers and butterflies. I also love bees".

"Enjoyed watching the stream flow by and seeing the fish and pond skaters".

“Nature is cool because it is a calm place, you can relax and be alone”.

Lesser Celandine

“There is a flower, the Lesser celandine, That shrinks like many more from cold and rain, And the first moment that the sun may shine, Bright as the sun himself, 'tis out again!” (William Wordsworth, 1888).

Anyone walking through Long Meadow at the end of March and beginning of April will have noticed numerous yellow flowers shining in the early spring sunshine along the waterline on both sides of the brook. These are the same Lesser celandine that were Wordsworth’s favourite flower; the same flower he had carved on his tomb.



Photo by Dave Dives

There are several types of Lesser Celandine. We have two: one which reproduces mostly by seeds, and one which reproduces mostly by producing small bulbils which drop off the plant to form new plants. The latter, called *Ficaria verna*, is the form we have along the brook.

This is a great strategy for spreading itself as the flow carries the bulbils downstream where they take root in mud along the water line. From mid-April onwards the plants are producing their bulbils.

The seed producing form, *Ficaria fertilis*, is similar but tends to inhabit dry patches of woodland. It can sometimes be distinguished by its petal and leaf shape.

But one can’t tire of seeing these glorious small plants signalling that spring is well on its way.

Fundraising Update

Our fundraising campaign continues to go well: we have now raised around £180,000.

Importantly, it is hoped the big boost in our campaign will come shortly when all the legal arrangements securing Long Meadow for the community are completed. We will then be able to count Sally London’s generous donation in our totals.

We are keen to encourage our supporters to raise money for the Abbey Fields campaign through a sponsored activity. This might be anything: maybe a cycle marathon, a run, a butterfly count, a coffee morning. We now have a [fundraising pack](#) available on the “Support us” pages of our website <https://abbeyfields.online/>.



At the Easter Saturday Quiz, in addition to providing a fun morning out, we sold some fantastic cakes (thanks go to the skilled cooks as well as all our other volunteers!) which together with a modest entry fee resulted in us raising nearly £500. Thank you all!

Photo by Arnold Fertig

Monitoring the bird life in the Croft Close Set-aside field

To inform our understanding of the importance of Croft Close Set-aside for our birdlife, and to see how it responds to any changes in habitat over time, we have a regular programme of bird ringing.

Using tried and tested techniques, trained scientists are licensed to fit a small metal ring to the bird's leg. This leg ring has a unique code which allows us to identify and monitor individuals.

By re-encountering individual birds that have been previously ringed, we can not only learn about the species that are using the site, but also their survival through time. This helps us understand why populations are changing.

Weather permitting, we will have a ringing demonstration on 12th June so you can learn more about this important work.

This is part of a national programme: some 900,000 birds are ringed each year contributing to focus conservation efforts.



Photo by Jon Pavey

At Croft Close we have so far ringed around 130 individual birds with 15 species ranging from goldcrest through to blackbirds. It is too early to draw conclusions, but we have a solid start to understanding this site's importance.

Reptile Refuges

Several reptile refugia have been constructed around the villages, including at Long Meadow and Croft Close.



These are low piles of logs with black corrugated sheeting fixed to the top underneath which a warm spot will develop, especially on a sunny day.

This is good news for lizards and grass snakes: they can warm themselves hidden from predators looking out for a lunch!

Photo by Dan Mace

What to look out for in May



Summer bird migrants return by mid-May and sing strongly to advertise their territories. If you missed the opportunity to listen out on National Dawn Chorus Day (1st May) there will still be plenty of chances throughout May to hear the rich birdsong. For more information see [this page on our website](#).

There are two flowers now to look out for on Long Meadow. Germander Speedwell with its racemes of pale blue flowers.

Photos by Dave Dives



In the wet area of the meadow, you could be lucky

enough to see the Cuckooflower so named as it usually flowers as the first Cuckoos arrive.

Guided Walks

Over the next few months there will be several guided walks at Abbey Fields. In May, Bruce Liggitt, who is a member of the Ely Photographic Society and whose photos from around the world have won awards and been featured on TV and Martin Minařík , a zoologist and Histon resident, will lead walks at the Croft Close set-aside. These should be good opportunities to learn more about the songbirds present as well as about other wildlife.

These will be on the mornings of the 12th, 14th and 26th May. For more information see [here](#).

We are also planning walks covering plants and trees, including one in Feast Week at Long Meadow. In June we have two walks at Croft Close set-aside with a general focus. They are on Wednesday 15th June and Saturday 18th June. Details are on our [website here](#).

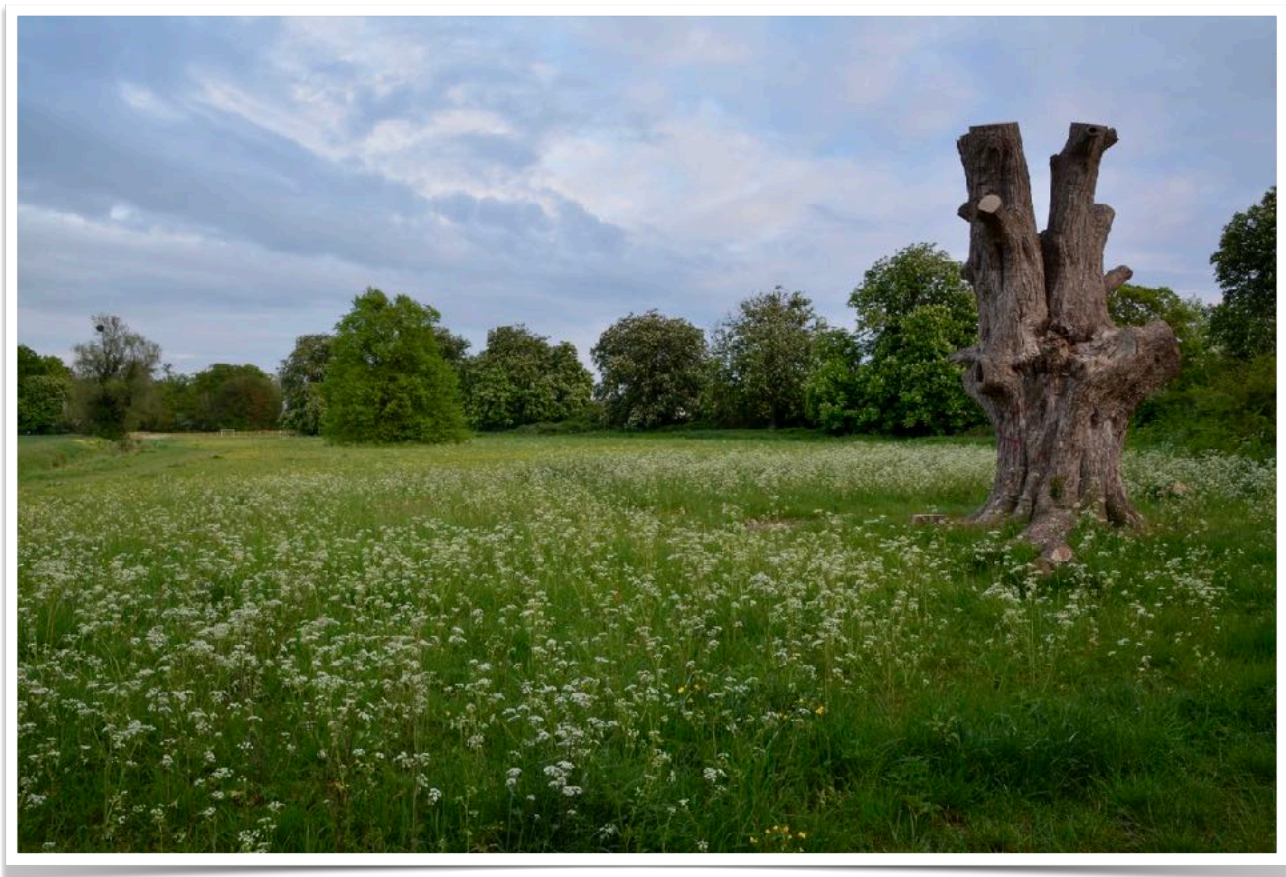


Photo of Long Meadow by Guy Richardson