

# FRIENDS OF FOOTS CRAY MEADOWS

ISSUE 3

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2007

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## Wild Beasts at Foots Cray Meadows

Every year during the months of June and July bands of intrepid explorers descend on Foots Cray Meadows in search of Wild Beasts. The explorers are small and the wild beasts they are looking for are even smaller, sometimes no more than a few millimetres in length.

As part of Bexley Councils commitment to environmental awareness and education, Mini-beast hunts are organised by the Councils Ranger service for the benefit of local primary schools. For some of the children it forms part of their Key Stage education in "Food Chains". This year the pupils of Orchard Primary, St Peter Chanel, Harenc and Royal Park participated in these hunts.

The schoolchildren were provided with sweep nets and bug pots by the rangers and after a short demonstration they were let loose in groups of around 5 each with a helper, to start their hunt. This year was particularly successful with 5 species of Ladybird including 7, 14, 24 Spot, 16 Spot Orange and Cream Spot netted and identified. Other notable "captures" were *Oedemera Nobilis*, *Heteratoma Planicornis* and Roesel's Bush Cricket (see picture) and three species of Shield Bug (Red Legged, Bronze and Common) along with the more common species like Meadow and Common Green Plant Bug, Soldier Beetle, common grasshoppers, crickets etc.



All the mini-beasts were kept for a short while in the bug pots until all the children had seen them and then they were released back into their habitats. The children were also given a brief talk about why these mini-beasts are so important to the food chain.

As well as the mini-beast hunts "river-dipping" sessions were held with pupils from Orchard Primary and members of Danson Youth Centre. Finds included damsel and caddis fly larva, horse leeches, freshwater shrimps and bullheads.

Typically each hunt lasts for around 1.5 to 2 hours and the children, helpers and rangers enjoy them immensely.

John Codling  
Area Team South Ranger

## The Cray



The River Cray at Foots Cray Meadows provides a unique and varied habitat for a diverse range of plants and animals.

This stretch of the River Cray consists of shallow, fast flowing and clear water which runs over gravel, sand, grassland, woodland, wetland and meadow. The lake is in fact man made which was engineered by damming the river with a weir that incorporates a five arched brick bridge. Water cascades over the weir, under each of the five arches, then flows and meanders its way through the meadows, the Alders wetland wood and through Woollett Hall farm.

Some sections are shrouded by mature trees such as willow, birch and hawthorn. One thing you will notice is that the upper sections of river at Foots Cray meadows contain an abundance of aquatic plant life, whilst parts of the lake and lower sections of the Cray are devoid of these. This poses many questions on the rivers water quality, geology, and light penetration through the trees. Some areas are also more prone to disturbance by pets accessing the river.

The gravels and clear flowing water provide an ideal spawning ground for some of the 24 species of fish that are to be found along the River Cray but again, due to disturbance, eggs can be dislodged and large numbers of them washed away or damaged.



Kingfishers and Egrets, Herons are common and provide a good indicator of food species present. This also shows that the food chain is relatively healthy. However this is in a fine balance due to concerns with out-falls from surface drains that do, from time to time, discharge pollutants direct into the river. These range from domestic plumbing misconnections, thus allowing for showers, washing machines, dish washers, etc. to empty their detergents and other chemical wastes. Car washing, window washing, wheelie bin washing, DIY/building waste, litter dropped in streets and anything else that finds its way into the street drainage system all get discharged direct into the River Cray. Another issue is that when the water flow slows down, sediment carried in it sinks.

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# Chairman's Chat!

**P**rogress and establishing are the watchwords at this period for the FFCM, We as a group are established now with our first Annual General Meeting, May I on behalf of the committee pass on our sincere thanks for those members who supported this meeting last June and participated in the formal business of this meeting. It was always our intentions to first get the group started and build the Friends into a viable concern in time for our first AGM. We achieved this and from the important formalities of that evening we have a duly elected committee and an agreed constitution, which is our governing document stating who we are, our aims and how we will achieve them.

Progress with our second year of events this summer, John Mercer, Ralph Todd, John Acworth and Ashe Hurst leading us through the Meadows and their respective fields: History, Birds, Archaeological History and The River, suddenly it becomes quite fascinating almost awesome how much the natural history and environment area that is today Foots Cray Meadows play a part in our lives and those of our predecessors. Biodiversity, Wildlife Natural History and Social History are all in abundance. As the chair of the group each event brings the usual challenges: have we pitched it right is the publicity done, will people turn up and enjoy, will the weather hold.

Many of you do come along to our events and you have so much to offer the group; members it seems have lived the history, some of you witnessed the fire at Foots Cray Place in 1949 others have their own stories of the Meadows. We do want the friends to learn more from our members. It seems to me that with each walk people experience new views and insight into the Meadows, I certainly do. We as a committee should keep in touch with you and encourage you to raise ideas and participate. We have the facilities through the website for members to contact us and comment.

Without doubt the focal point for the Friends will be through the Wildlife and Information Centre. The sub group with partner members and the committee continue to work to bring this about. Legal and logistical hurdles are being overcome; work is nearing completion to fit the display panels. The subject matter is agreed and the graphic designs being prepared. It's been a long and sometimes frustrating process that pre dates the formation of the Friends. But I now believe we are there. The occupation of the Wildlife and Information Centre by the Friends is a 'rite of passage' for us all. It comes with a long term challenge and commitment to develop with Bexley Council a working centre supported by volunteers providing opportunities for regular users and visitors to learn and enhance their enjoyment of Foots Cray Meadows.

Michael Heath  
(FFCM Chairman)



## Paws for thought!

Hi again! What an eventful few months since I last barked at you!

The swans have successfully raised seven cygnets, although this event is tinged with sadness in the doggy world with the death of a much loved colleague and the attack on another who did not follow the rules and got too near to the loving parents. All birds require a wide berth when they are protecting their young, just as we bitches will go for anyone getting too near our young. Humans are the only ones who like others to coo over their newborn, why I just do not know, do they not see that they could be attacked?

At last the blackberries are ripe again, picking them makes my walk so much more enjoyable, well, you like to stop for a snack when out, don't you? I was running with some of my friends today who came over to visit me from Joydens wood, I was so pleased to see them all and we had a great time catching up with all the gossip and I met their new dog on the patch, a collie bitch, we had a great time. I sometimes see them when I take my owners up to the woods, but unfortunately one of the owners' works in a children's nursery and can only go at times that are not very convenient, I am on house guard duty when she is free. I do see owner once a week when she comes to the house to stitch, so I manage to keep in touch.

I'm so glad that the scare about the water was just that, for a week I had to go without my drink, how would you like to go into a pub and not have a beer? I keep telling my owners that river is like drinking vintage wine; the stuff they give me at home just doesn't have any character!

The terrapins are sunning themselves in the islands as we go past most days now all that rain has stopped for the time being [please could you explain why we only get shorter walks when it is raining?] they say that they came from a family who could not look after them any more so they have to fend for themselves which means that they sometimes have to take the odd duckling if there is no other food, not their fault, their owners should have had more thought than to just dump them. While on the subject of dumping, please could you humans take home and re-cycle glass and plastic bottles, the mowers chop them up and several of my friends, and myself, have hurt our paws on the resulting sharp pieces that we cannot see in the grass. Also unwanted lunches, although we find them very interesting, they often give us an upset tummy, there are plenty of bins for the rubbish if you look for them.

I have been asked to pass on thanks from all dog owners for the two new poop bins, they are very grateful. Must close now, my owners want their supper and so do I! Hope to see you down the Meadows,

Tuppence .

# Editorial

It's a sad reflection on our society that a marvelous resource such as the meadows are being abused by a minority of people who feel the rules observed by the majority of the users don't apply to them. I am of course referring to the horse riders who do not keep to the permitted ride, the motorcyclists who tear around on mostly stolen bikes before setting fire to them and to those who still insist in fishing and others who allow their dogs to go into the water at the lake. This despite the notices clearly displayed at the entrances to the meadows and along both sides of the lake. Indeed one owner of a dog sadly found out why dogs are not allowed into the water when it was killed by the male swan.

We have rules to ensure that all can enjoy the meadows.

Nick Grant

**S**ubscriptions are to remain at £4 per household for 2008 and are due January 2008. They will be due in January and should be paid to Gill Burgess Treasurer.

**The Cray**  
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This over time builds up and consequentially the lake area is at present very heavily silted. The islands have collapsed, leaving clumps of tree stumps, and the earth from these islands has added to the silting. Because of the shallowing, the river cools and freezes quicker in the Winter and in the Summer warms up much quicker and depletes oxygen levels rapidly. The sediment eventually suffocates the riverbed and prevents plants from growing. This then greatly reduces the bio-diversity of what can live below the surface. The good news is that Bexley Council will be commissioning a survey with the Environment Agency to confirm the current condition of the lake area and to use that information to then rectify the problems with future grant funding.

Thames21 currently have 5 River Keeper Volunteers that are dedicated solely to Foots Cray Meadows. They are recognized by the blue uniform with Logo, all carry ID cards. They remove debris and pick litter, carry out minor and sympathetic vegetation management, monitor the wildlife, record and report any concerns but are, above all, a point of contact.

Written by Ashe Hurst, Thames21 River Keeper Coordinator & Paul Trethewey, FFCM Website Manager & Thames 21 River Keeper Volunteer.

To contact Ashe please e-mail him at [ashe.hurst@thames21.org.uk](mailto:ashe.hurst@thames21.org.uk) or visit the Thames21 website at <http://www.thames21.org.uk>



October Sunset



## Committee Members

- **Chairman - Michael Heath**
- **Secretary - Siobhán Trethewey**
- **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.**

**We need a Publicity Manager and Conservation Manager. Please contact us if interested.**

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

[email : ffc06@gmail.com](mailto:ffcm06@gmail.com)

# Meadows Management Update

*As the owner of the Meadows Bexley Council are responsible for the management of the site. We thank them for the following update.*

*Editor*



## Tree and Woodland Programme Autumn /Winter 2007/08



To avoid problems with weather conditions that prevented work taking place early this year, the work in North Cray Woods it is proposed be completed before Christmas. Work will include; further coppicing of the Hazel near Royal Park School and a small section in the Alders wet woodland adjacent to the River Cray. One of the main paths through North Cray woods leading from the estate down to the Meadows will be opened up, for easier access, which will involve bramble clearance but no trees will be removed. Bark mulch will be placed on the path to improve ground conditions.

After the successful first phase of work on the terraces of Foots Cray Place last year the second phase will be taking place shortly. This will include removal of most of the Sycamore trees within the old western shrubbery. If you look carefully there are still a few remnants of the ornamental planting including a few Acers, which have a splendid spring an autumn colour. We will look to re-plant the gaps in the shrubbery with colourful native plants such as dogwood, spindle and dog rose. Re-treatment of the re-growth and the removal of the remaining aspens growing over the cellar of the old house will be removed. Selective removal of poor condition Sycamores along the old drive will also be undertaken to the rear of the house. The grass and brambles (to the east) around the terraces will be trimmed and maintained as grass as originally planned last year.

The final piece of notable work will be to reduce the height of the yews around the old tennis courts of the house. These were once kept at three feet in height but over the last 30 year's have been allowed to grow unchecked. About a third of their height will be removed, this will actually help re-vigour the plants, especially further down and will help to open up the views across the Meadows down to the river from the site of Foots Cray Place. The 'gateway' oak located in the middle of the hedge will be not be trimmed any further.

The other main tree issue on the Meadows is that of the condition of the Horse Chestnuts, although this is not restricted to the Meadows, due to the large number of Horse Chestnuts on this site the current state of these trees is having a dramatic effect on the appearance of the Meadows. Most Horse Chestnuts have suffered once again due to a leaf miner moths.

The larva's of the moths hatch on the leaves and then borrow inwards eating and killing the leaves. The trees should recover next year, however if the leaf minor reappears in similar numbers then the same pattern will occur. Most healthy trees can withstand this assault for several years but over time it will inevitably weaken them, make them more susceptible to other conditions. One of those other conditions and one that is already severely affecting these trees is stem bleeding caused by a fungal pathogen known as Phytophthora. This can lead to the death of the tree within a few years or to the stage where the tree is unsafe and will need to be removed. There are currently no effective treatments for either condition however a cold winter may help kill off the leaf miner moth and reduce the spread of the fungal infection but another mild and damp winter/spring will only aid the spread of these afflictions to Horse Chestnuts and it is believed that it is the milder and wetter winters that are partially to blame for the increase in these and other pathogens.

Sid Wilkins

**Parks Team, Bexley Council**  
*parks&openspaces@bexley.gov.uk*

## WILDLIFE AND INFORMATION CENTRE

Over the past few months we have been working towards getting the Wildlife and Information Centre ready for use. This has involved not only making decisions on the content and style of the main information panels and display systems but also negotiating with Bexley Council a Licence to Occupy.

We are well on the way to being able to occupy the centre and we hope to have the building open for you to see at our next event on the 27th October. The display system is in place (*see picture*) and we are working towards completion of the main panels.



Lesley Grant FFCM Committee

# Dates for your Diary: Future Events

We hope you are interested in joining in the many events we will be hosting in the coming months. At all 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 Secretary on [mrst.redhed@gmail.com](mailto:mrst.redhed@gmail.com) or ring 020 8300 1906

● **27th October 2007**

**RSPB Feed the Birds Day**

*Meet at the Wildlife & Information Centre at 10.00 am*

Feed the Birds Day is a great opportunity to step up your feeding to help garden birds through the cold months ahead. Come and see examples of bird feeders and bird feed at the Wild Life and Information Centre (located behind the new Stables House). Whilst there you will be able to see the progress so far in setting up the new centre. Refreshments will be available and Committee Members on hand for questions regarding the W&IC.

● **2nd December 2007**

**Tree Walk**

*Meet at the Wildlife & Information Centre at 10.00 am*

To coincide with the National Tree Week we will be holding a walk around Foots Cray Meadows. The walk will be a gentle 2 hour stroll accompanied by committee members and a resident Tree Expert who has worked in the area for the last 40 years and is happy to share his knowledge and experience on topics such as how to identify types of trees. Current projects and schemes that benefit the woodland areas and riverbanks will also be discussed.

● **25th January 2008**

**Talk on Joydens Wood** by Ian Hammerton

Details of the time and venue will be publicised nearer the date.

● **March 2008**

**Weather Talk**

Details of this event will be publicised nearer to the date of the talk.

● **May/June 2008**

**Dawn Chorus**

Details of this event will be publicised nearer to the date of the walk.

● **June 2008**

**AGM**

Details of the venue and time will be notified to members nearer the date

● **September 2008**

**Bat Walk**

Details of this event will be publicised nearer to the date of the walk.

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

The Friends of Foots Cray Meadows is a voluntary group funded by its membership & fund raising activities.

**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
- Getting an event off the ground or simply would like to share some ideas or concerns regarding Fooms Cray Meadows.
- Early notification of meetings, events and talks.

**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).

*Any names and contact information gathered by The Friends of Fooms Cray Meadows will only be used by themselves or Bexley Council on their behalf and not passed onto any third parties.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my/our subscription. £4

Children's Names (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is a donation to The Friends. £ \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheques payable to:  
**Friends of Fooms Cray Meadows**  
and send them along with your completed form to:

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**John Burgess**  
**FFCM Membership Secretary**  
**168 North Cray Road**  
**North Cray**  
**Kent DA14 5EL**

Email \_\_\_\_\_