

# FRIENDS OF FOOTS CRAY MEADOWS



ISSUE 7

NEWSLETTER

December 2009

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

## FROGLife

The London Borough of Bexley was fortunate to work with Amphibian & Reptile Conservation (ARC) previously Frog Life, on their Living Water project that seeks to improve water habitats and awareness of their importance across London, to help support amphibians and other wildlife. Foots Cray Meadows was chosen as the site for the work to be done in Bexley Borough, and the Council and the Friends group have been working with Alex Drapper from ARC to develop suitable projects.

The project is funded by the Cory Ibstock Community Landfill Tax grant.

### Why is this Important?

Old maps and local people's memories show that Foots Cray Meadows and the surrounding area once contained many more ponds and an extensive network of ditches, including a large central canal. Many of these features have since disappeared and now the only significant one is the old pond near Rectory lane, however, it is over shadowed by trees with little aquatic vegetation and it dries out in summer. Some of the old ditches still exist, but no longer hold water for any period of time. All this means that frogs, toads newts and lot of aquatic insects don't have suitable homes on the Meadows and their numbers are dropping. The same is true for grass snakes and lizards, which also benefit from these habitats.

### Purpose and scope of project

The Living Water project's core objective for the Meadows is to enhance and restore any existing standing water habitat and create new habitat. The practical outputs of the project will be to:

- Enhance the existing old pond;
- Create new ponds and meadow areas,
- Restore old ditches if possible;

- Enhance land habitat for key species and the connections between sites -so animals can move between them; and increase capacity for local volunteers to help manage the new habitats.

Great crested newt (GCN), smooth newt, common frog, common toad, grass snake and slowworm have all been recorded at the Meadows,



but are now a rare sight. The prospects for continued survival of GCN on the Meadows is threatened by lack of breeding habitat. However, by restoring and creating new breeding ponds, wet scrapes and a revised grass management - to increase corridor connectivity- should all help the GCN flourish once more, as well as helping many other animals, insects and plants. This project will bring real benefits to the wildlife of the Meadows and the people that use it!

For more information on Living Water Project across London, on ARC and its other work please visit [www.arc-trust.org](http://www.arc-trust.org)

*The Friends of Foots Cray Meadows are thrilled that ARC and Bexley Council have chosen Foots Cray Meadows as the London Borough of Bexley's primary site for a Frog Life project and we welcome the opportunity to join as partners in the project. The Friends will provide volunteers to undertake some of the initial ground work and planting to the ponds at Rectory lane and any new developments within the remit of the scheme.*

*The training by ARC of local's volunteers should take place at our centre using the IT equipment purchased from our Awards for All Funding. These facilities in turn give the Friends the capacity to continue with a pond awareness scheme after this programme finishes, enabling the Friends and Bexley Council to sustain the quality of these sites as an amphibian habitat in the years ahead..Look out for details as this project unfolds, all members will receive notification of opportunities to join in and regular updates of the project.*

Michael Heath FFCM Chairman

*Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Committee or Bexley Council (unless otherwise stated).*

# Tuppence's Diary

Hi there! Wasn't the snow GREAT? I had the time of my life playing in it. I was in the Dog Hotel at the time as my owners had gone to Antarctica to find snow and penguins, they could have stayed at home and had all the snow they wanted, but would have got a bit stuck with the penguins! The people where I was staying put on a Dog Olympics for us, chase the snowflakes, find the buried toy, snow digging and snow rolling were some of the events, we all had a lovely time and afterwards we all had our supper and a treat then settled down in our heated kennels with extra blankets for the night, this Kennels doesn't have five stars for nothing.

Back to what has been happening on the Meadows in the doggy world. Since I spoke to you last we have had several new 'kids on the block', they have all settled in well and are fast learning their manners, staying in sight of their owners [well at least most of the time], enjoying group ball games, keeping out of the lake especially when the water birds have young, learning that the swans are only friendly when they are being feed and making sure that their owners carry plastic bags to clear up after you, at this point could I make a plea for a dog bin at the entrance to the Meadows by the allotments? The walk down the side of the river from five arches downstream on Albany Park side has had a lot of work done on it and you can now walk all the way to the iron bridge, it makes a lovely walk especially on a hot day, if you haven't tried it I suggest you give it a try, but it still gets a bit muddy on wet days, but what is wrong with a bit of mud, it comes off when you dry. The black-berry season was very good this year, I managed to find plenty on most days, and left enough for the birds and humans. One day I was with my owners up at the Information Centre, they had met up with John the Ranger as they were doing a couple of events with the Children's Centre and he was helping them organise a nature trail, anyway, they were looking round for things to make up a quiz and John pointed out apple and pear trees and sloes in the area, did you know they were there? Apparently sloes soaked in gin with some sugar marinades into a drink made in heaven, or so I am told.

I also went on the Bat Walk again this year, it was very well attended and is fast becoming one of the highlights of the FFCM calendar, if you haven't come, please remember it next year, even the rain didn't put people off, the bats flew and were picked up on the need sensors which helped people find them, why you need sensors I don't know, I can hear them

without problems! A couple of weeks before I was on the Meadows in the evening with my owners and their grandchildren looking for shooting stars and we found the bats as well, they were so excited as they had never seen either before. Talking about the grandchildren, I really love it when they come and see me, especially if they stay for a few days, but boy, I'm so tired when they go home, they do love playing with me so much, but puppies of every species are such hard work!

Talking about being tired, time for a nap!

## NORTH CRAY CHILDREN'S CENTRE and FFCM

For the last couple of years FFCM have worked in conjunction with the Centre to provide events in the holidays for the young children and their families during the Easter and Summer holidays. John and Gill Burgess are both volunteers at the Centre and with Stella Cagneux from the Centre have managed to fit in two events each Summer and one each Easter holidays. These are fitted into the program of events at the Centre and the children, with their carers, are also encouraged in various ways to join in any FFCM events on the Meadows that may interest them.

The events especially for the Centre are usually held in the afternoon and take the form of an activity designed to encourage them to learn about the meadows, it's wild life and the diversity of flora and fauna right on their door-steps. We usually finish the afternoon with games and a picnic. We have arranged bug hunts; nature trails; egg hunts; and quizzes to name but a few. John brings his microscopes and we have a supply of pens and paper on hand for the children to record their findings.

This year we entered the council's Environmental Challenge in the education category, to date we don't know the results but we can say that when the judges came and joined in the bug hunt they seemed to have enjoyed themselves, even joining the queue to look at some of their finds down the microscope! The results are not as important as the fact that we are introducing the Meadows to another generation in a way that will, hopefully, encourage them to care for and enjoy the Meadows as the fantastic resource it is.

If any local youth groups, schools or societies are interested in working with us to provide an educational event based on the Meadows please get in touch with John or Gill Burgess

E-mail [jhgburgess@btinternet.com](mailto:jhgburgess@btinternet.com) .

# Chairman's Chat

We present an exciting new programme for you this winter. There will be opportunities to join in the management of the woodland. In association with the Parks and Open space Team, we shall continue the tree planting and coppicing in sections of the woods. This rejuvenates the trees, encourages new growth of native species and protects the natural wildlife habitat. (See the diary of events)

This is a chance for us all to: be involved, learn and enjoy managing the woodland on our local open space. With the organisation of these days the 'Friends' shall keep you informed of what, how, when and why this woodland activity takes place. We will do this with public information displays during the sessions.

Another motivating up and coming project is with the Amphibian Reptile Conservation Charity when we will be revitalising the pond near Rectory Lane to improve the Toad Habitat and introducing other amphibian and ecological friendly measures within the Meadows (see separate article).

With the display panels for the centre nearing completion our building will not only be a base for our events but become a long awaited centre for visitors to be informed about the Meadows. We will invite members and local groups to an open day next Spring which will review our progress with the winter projects and preview the centre. All This takes place through the continued dedication of the 'Friends' Committee and the supporting partnership of the Bexley Team.

More details of our recent events and projects such as: activity days with the North Cray Children's Centre, our seasonal walks, tree planting sessions and History Talk are explained in this edition. The key to our success is your support and it will soon be time to ask for your membership renewal for 2010.

Our achievements will depend on you, your families and friends coming out in your wellies and literally getting stuck into some woodland preservation activity. I and your committee look forward to meeting you at these sessions; together we can keep our Meadows the local treasure we are all rightly proud of.

Michael Heath

FFCM Chairman

# Editorial

The picture on the right is of a very clean pair of boots which in the coming year should get very dirty as we plan to get into more hands on work around the Meadows.



Keep an eye out for notices of upcoming events many of which will be direct working alongside Council staff in improving and maintaining the Meadows and we need your support for this.



## Committee Members

- **Chairman - Michael Heath**
- **Secretary - Karen Wheeler**
- **Vice Secretary - Margaret Dodd**
- **Events Manager " "**
- **Treasurer - Gill Burgess**
- **Membership Secretary - John Burgess**
- **Website Manager -**
- **Newsletter Editor - Nick Grant**
- **Committee Members - Lesley Grant, Vera Heath, Sally Lands**

**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)

## Aims and Objectives

- Working in partnership with Bexley Council to encourage public interest in, and the conservation of Fooks Gray Meadows (FCM).
- To protect the wildlife and its habitat within FCM.
- To provide a focus for involvement by the community and users in the open space, to volunteer and work with the Council, in the conservation of FCM and its development as a public open space.
- To advance the public's awareness of the open space by promoting FCM its plants, wildlife, landscape, sustainability and supporting appropriate recreational facilities for the benefit of community groups and the general public.
- To develop and deliver information, interpretive material and educational opportunities for FCM
- To raise funds for the purpose of achieving the above aims.

# Meadows Management Update

December 2009



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

*Editor*



## Planned works on the Meadows

In addition to the tree planting on the west side of North Cray Woods on the 21<sup>st</sup> November, more tree works will take place in North Cray Woods this winter, including:

- Sycamore removal along the northern woodland path,
- Another area of hazel will be coppiced; and last year's hazel coppice will have more small oaks, Ash and hazel planted.

In the late winter more trees will be planted in the newly cleared section of the Meadows near All Saints Church. Most of the old fencing here has been removed to open up this area for the public for the first time and to improve its appearance. The Alders Woodland down near Royal Park end of the River Cray will have more sycamore removed and new alder trees planted.

You may have noticed that the old yew hedge, at the top of the Lime Avenue, has received its second trim! These plants were originally kept as a 4' high hedge around the tennis court of Foots Cray Place, as you can see they were allowed to grow unchecked. The yews are now all level once more after work earlier this year to reduce their height could not be completed before the start of the birds nesting season, due to poor ground conditions.

This work will improve the condition of these old plants, as well as opening up the view across the Cray Valley from the site of Foots Cray Place.

**Parks Team,**  
[parks&openspaces@bexley.gov.uk](mailto:parks&openspaces@bexley.gov.uk)



## Congratulations

*Our congratulations to Sid Wilkins (Bexley's Tree Man) in getting the Individual Commitment and Achievement Award in the Forestry Commissions Forestry's London Tree and Woodland Awards.*



MERRY CHRISTMAS  
AND A  
HAPPY NEW YEAR

## FFCM Website

"Due to rising costs our website has had to close, but we hope to reopen it with a lower cost provider soon."

In the mean time the Friends have entered the world of Facebook! Committee member Sally Lands has set up a group for the Friends of Fots Cray Meadows and anyone can join.

**If you already have a Facebook page or one of your children do, it is very easy to find us.**

- In Facebook type in the "search box" Friends of Fots Cray Meadows.
- It will ask you if you want to join the group and then give you the option to invite other friends to join.
- Once you have joined the group it will list it with any other groups you have joined towards the bottom of the information page on your profile.

Now you will be able to see the Meadows news and see other people's comments and thoughts on the Meadows and you can add your own! You can view or upload photos of the Meadows to the page, but please try to label them, especially if they are historical.

If you haven't joined Facebook and would like to, it is very easy. Go to [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and follow the easy steps to set up your page and then follow the instructions above.

## Membership Reminder

Don't forget to renew your Membership in January to keep receiving the Newsletter and prior notice of all our upcoming events.

# 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 07874 217186

- 5th December 2009  
**Tree O'Clock**  
As part of National Tree Week, BBC Breathing Places is inviting people to join them in setting a new Guinness World Record TM for planting the most trees in one hour in multiple locations. FFCM & Bexley Council are hoping to contribute to this challenge. Meet at the Wildlife & Information Centre at 10.30 am or "come look for us in North Cray Woods".
- 15th May 2010  
**History Walk &Talk**  
A walk followed by a talk by Katherine Harding & Denise Baldwin. Meet at the W&IC at 6.00pm
- 16th January 2010  
**Tree Planting Day**  
Meet at the Wildlife & Information Centre at 10am
- 8th June 2010  
**Annual General Meeting**
- 20th March 2010  
**Work Day**
- 3rd/4th July 2010  
**Danson Show**
- 27th March 2010  
**W&IC Open Day**  
The Wildlife and Information Centre will be open to allow people to see the progress made so far.
- 24 July - 1 August 2010  
**Love Parks Week**
- August 2010  
**Bat 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 Fooths 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 Fooths 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 cheque's payable to:  
**Friends of Fooths Cray Meadows**  
and send them along with your completed form to:

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

Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_  
Home addresses of committee members are not necessarily those of the Committee or Bexley Council (unless otherwise stated).