What we have been doing at Cremer’s Meadow 2019-21

General Maintenance

Over the last 2 years there has been a lot of ongoing work at the site. Up to the lockdown in March 2020 work continued as usual with plenty of general maintenance. This included;

* Trying to exterminate the Himalayan Balsam (we think we have achieved this!)
* Removing Spanish bluebells and Pendulous Sedge
* Cutting seeds from Dock and Alexander to control the spread of invasive species
* Keeping on top of the buddleia (we have missed a whole season of this due to Covid restrictions)
* Taking out the remaining fencing at the southern end of the watercourse
* Treating the Japanese Knotweed
* Numerous bonfires

We had the annual Cut and Clear in both 2019 and 2020 when the Friends were helped by Bure Valley Conservation and BADCOG. Fortunately, in 2020 there was a brief time between lockdowns when we were able to carry out a Covid secure process to cut 2/3 of the Meadow. This is a practice we will continue as it is best for wildlife to leave 1/3 standing each year. Several of the Friends are now accomplished scythers and this enables us to manage the smaller areas on the site appropriately.

BESL continued to visit us annually to clear out the overgrowth in the Lackford run and their last visit was especially thorough and effective. We understand that their contract has now come to an end so we hope that whoever takes over will be able to provide as good a service.

Improvements to the site

When we have been allowed over the last 2 years we have also carried out a number of improvements to the site. These include

* Planting over 80 indigenous saplings
* Thinning trees on the east side of the pond to let in more light
* Building a Hibernaculum – a natural structure for hibernating invertebrates– an insect house and a bug hotel for nesting bees
* The opening of our boat dock/platform took place in June 2019 and we were very fortunate that Mike and Margaret Cable were able to carry out the ceremony. Cremer’s has been very fortunate in having a number of donations over the years – the Cables being one of the most generous.

Keeping up our knowledge of the site

As well as ongoing work, we try to check out that the work we are doing is beneficial to the site. Over the last 2 years Friends have completed a species survey, we have continued to count the Orchids (4000+ in 2020) and we have ongoing bird surveys. We have had visitors such as Norfolk Wildlife Trust and fungi experts from UEA who have been very positive about our management of the site.

Challenges

As with many public places, Cremer’s does occasionally suffer from inappropriate behaviour from its visitors. Often there are items thrown into the watercourse which the Friends have to extract. When it is pieces of wood it is annoying but when it is lifebelts it is simply dangerous.

The Information Centre has also been subject to vandalism and again, the Friends have additional work to repair damage. It is hoped that the plan to install window shutters may alleviate this in the future

As well as human damage, there are, of course natural events which keep everyone on their toes. Over the last 12 months there seems to have been a lot of windy weather and this has brought down some trees. We have been fortunate that these have not caused further damage and a rapid response by tree surgeons has enabled the site to remain open for most of the time.

We have a system of regular inspections after high winds and this is helping to identify any concerns on a regular basis along with our annual inspection by the tree warden.

The increased use of the site has given us more challenges as the pathways have become very well used and in places have been diverted by the public to encroach on the water meadow. The Friends hope to encourage visitors to move back to the main pathways this year so that the wildlife is not disturbed so much

Natural highlights

We are always excited when we see new things happening on the site. This year we have been visited by large and small egrets, the heron, nesting moorhens and ducks. One nest has 15 eggs and we look forward to seeing the chicks when they hatch.

The bird survey highlight this year has been the return of the Cetti’s Warbler which had disappeared in 2019 following the “Beast from the East”.

A sparrow hawk was also observed taking out a pigeon over the main path. A dramatic sight but a shame for the pigeon!

What next

There has been a lot of work completed on the plan to install a manageable water sluice at the southern end of the watercourse. This will enable us to control the level of the water in different conditions. It is intended that we will shut off the flow through the middle of the site and establish a pond with more diversity. Having the ability to let in or let out water, however, will enable us to manage the levels effectively. It will also be a much easier mechanism to manage and maintain. Hopefully this work will take place this spring/summer.

Covid has curtailed a lot of our “public” work recently. We have not been able to hold our Orchid Days, nor have we been able to welcome groups of children. We hope that, as restrictions allow, we will be able to expand our information sessions again.

It is hoped that there will eventually be a bridge installed between Cremer’s Meadow and Marty’s Marsh. The two parishes are working together to agree a plan and, once funding and permissions are completed, a great circular walk could be created.

Covid and Cremer’s

The last 12 months have been challenging for us all. The Friends have had to leave a lot of usual work for many months and have missed seeing each other and holding the usual working parties. Everyone is keen to get back to work and there is a long list of jobs to tackle this year.

It has been extremely gratifying, however, to see Cremer’s Meadow used by so many people as they took their daily exercise. To have such a wonderful site, maintained so well by volunteers is a great accolade to the Friends and to the Parish Council who provided it for the use of the village.