

Update on Stretton Wetlands for SAWCG Annual Report 2021



The main focus of input and energies this year has gone into the purchase of part of the wetlands. In early January the Wetlands Interest Group was offered the opportunity to purchase a 3 acre field – an area now called Cudwell Meadow. SACWG is not in the business of land ownership and it seemed best to work in conjunction with a group which could pursue this. The decision to move forward with Middle Marches Community Land Trust was made at the beginning of March, with plans to launch a major community fund raising appeal. And then lockdown began..... So we had all the fun of working out how to bring together several groups and organizations (SACWG, MM, NT, SWT and interested individuals), how to share all information and fundraise

virtually. We launched a website and fund-raising campaign in mid July to raise £25,000. Thanks to many wonderful and generous local people this was raised within 10 weeks and the purchase process began. Lots of complications with fencing, land registry etc followed and the sale finally went through in early January 2021.

Water engineers, a forester and ecologists have been consulted, and a management plan drawn up. The site has many limitations – with sewage pipes, water drains and electricity wires crossing it with considerable limits on tree planting and access. In addition there is an alien weed – New Zealand Pygmy weed. The key focus of management planning is to develop the area as a wetland meadow – now a rare habitat nationally. The landowner was very flexible once agreement was reached and sheep were removed in April. This allowed the vegetation to develop.



In the early summer, flora and invertebrate surveys were carried out to establish base line data.

Invertebrate Survey

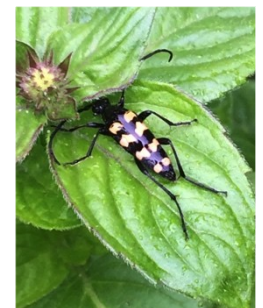


Tortoise Shield Bug larvae

Training in Invertebrate ID was provided by County Beetle Recorder Dr Caroline Uff on July 7th with additional skills and support provided by Ian Cheeseborough, County Hymenoptera Recorder.

A total of 62 invertebrate species and five Arachnida were identified. Highlights included two adult Four-banded Longhorn beetles with a nearby rotting

willow log full of large holes hopefully containing the larvae of this beetle. There were also several nymphs of Tortoise Shieldbug. This is slowly moving northwards. It was last recorded in the Wyre Forest, so this was the first record for South Shropshire.



Four Banded Longhorn Beetle

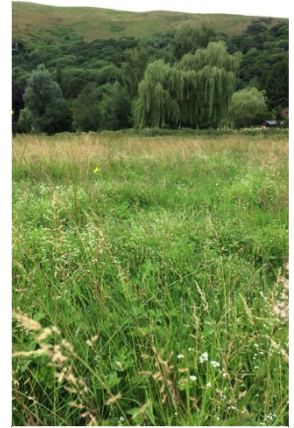
[Full survey findings](#) are available on the SACWG website.



Marsh Yellow Cress

Vegetation Survey

A flora survey carried out by Mike Carter is reported on the [SACWG Botanical group](#) webpage. The results were most encouraging – given that nothing had yet been done to improve the field. Much of the field is regularly inundated, some areas for more than 6 months a year, other parts for 3 months. Though contours vary across the field by only about 3 meters, these contours proved highly significant when it comes to inundation and plant community types. Most communities are common but others are rarer and similar to more unusual wetland flora communities in North Shropshire.



145 vascular plant species were recorded in Cudwell Meadow. Species recorded included 6 Shropshire axiophytes; these are not necessarily rare but they are useful indicators of particular environmental conditions:

- i) *Carex muricata var pairae* - Prickly sedge; rare
- ii) *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* - Bluebell; occasional
- iii) *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* - Yellow Archangel; occasional
- iv) *Myosotis discolor* - Changing Forget-me-not; rare
- v) *Myosotis secunda* - Creeping Forget-me-not; frequent
- vi) *Veronica scutellata* - Marsh Speedwell; occasional

Bird Observations

A total of 37 bird species were recorded in the meadow during 2020 to date. Of particular interest were Kestrel, Grey Wagtail and Little Egret. Several species were noted as breeding on or immediately adjacent to the site including Mallard, Moorhen, Swallow, Wren, Goldcrest and Song Thrush.

Pete Whitlock is building boxes for Tawny Owl and Kestrel which will be placed in the meadow early spring together with a large bat box which has been donated.

Mammals

Mammals (or field signs) noted during the year were otters (caught on video), moles, badger, shrew and squirrel. Watervole have been recorded in the Quinny brook in two adjacent areas (within ½ mile of Cudwell Meadow).

Based on all these findings, a formal request to SWT has been made to for this field to be added to the Local Wildlife Site designation previously given to some adjacent fields of the wetlands.

Following surveying, for the first time in decades the field was moved for hay late July.



Future Planning

Future plans are to tidy up damage from fencing on wet ground, plant trees along some edges and expand a small area of woodland and to gain access to the stream at the lowest point where a small stream joins the Quinny brook. Creating a year-round small wetland area here would provide a haven for amphibians, fish and water invertebrates. Livestock will be brought in to

graze the meadow. There are also possibilities of working in liaison with the Environment Agency to mitigate flooding in the area. More of that next year maybe.

Wider wetlands news

The boardwalk path proves wonderfully popular and in consequence has needed further work. The wooden boards became dangerously slippery after several weeks of inundation and wet weather. So wire was placed on the surface, funded by Shropshire Council Countryside Access Dept and installed by the Parish Paths Partnership in February for which we are very grateful. They also continue to cut back excess vegetation 2 or 3 times a year. Alas the wire was not sufficient and another roll was needed, provided by the town Mayor and the work completed in November 2020. At the railway end the footpath has been very overgrown and extremely muddy in recent months. Dave Hardwick Area Rights of Way Officer has, with help, cut back the vegetation and has negotiated a delivery of gravel in February to improve the footpaths, paid for by several local residents who really appreciate the boardwalk. Network Rail has also agreed to replace the two stiles by the railway with kissing gates – which will improve access considerably.

Wider interest

Alas there were strict limits on attendance for the invertebrate training and ID day in July due to Covid. But it was so successful we hope to repeat this in future years. Online fundraising for Cudwell Meadow invited people to become a 'Friend' and/or a volunteer. We now have over 80 friends and a good number of volunteers that we can call on for surveying or practical help. And of course we still haven't been able to arrange an opening event for the community ownership of Cudwell Meadow – hopefully sometime in the early summer combined with a butterfly or flower ID session.

Future plans

Stretton Wetlands Interest Group continues to look for opportunities to improve the biodiversity of the wetlands area with plans to liaise with landowners, Coppice Leasowes reserve, the smaller Ley Gardens wetland site and possibly landowners in Little Stretton. Such liaison may be around developing vision for sensitive wetland management, funding opportunities or with offers to share learning, equipment or volunteer help.