



Wolvercote Commoners'

NEWSLETTER February 2020

Very wet for some, a great home for others!

Although the flooding of the Commons is inconvenient for some, as well-known Wolvercote resident Steve Goddard shows, it can be a haven for others!

It won't have escaped anyone's attention that this has been a wet winter on Port Meadow. While this is a nuisance for walking the dog, it's great news for birdwatchers – a flooded meadow (as long as it's not too flooded) is a magnet for all manner of wildfowl. As part of my early-January attempt to maximise my list of birds seen in the UK this year, I spent a very happy afternoon in January watching large numbers of ducks and other birds from the south entrance to Burgess Field. On the floods were

rafts of Wigeon, an attractive duck which has a distinctive whistle as a call; several Shoveler, with outsized beaks; at least three Shelduck; and, as darkness fell, two pairs of Goosander, a strange and rather lovely diving duck, landed on the flood, as they tend to towards evening in the winter.

When I arrived, a number of shoveler were present (a species which is usually regarded as declining – the Meadow is an important resource for them), and several flocks of Golden Plover flew high overhead. A sizeable gull roost – mainly Black-headed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls – added considerable noise and activity to the scene.

Although I didn't see them that Saturday, the Meadow floods often play host to a number of Pintail – for my money, one of the most handsome UK duck species – and if the Meadow is still flooded around March and April, there's a good chance of Garganey, quite a rare duck, but one

which visits the Meadow almost annually, passing through. And as long as the floods recede a little – if they leave a good amount of glorious mud around their edges – at much the same time, it'll be worth looking out for migrating waders: Curlew, Black-tailed or Bar-tailed Godwits, perhaps Avocet or even rarer visitors might well drop in. And although I always suspect they're mainly following the course of the Thames, I only ever seem to see springtime

Ospreys when the floods are still present: I spotted one last March (as it happens, while looking for a visiting Garganey) flying very high overhead, heading north. In fact, the very same day, I saw my first Sand Martins of 2019 – they and their House Martin and Swallow cousins will happily hunt insects after their long migration over the floodwaters of the Meadow, and the first sight of them always improves my morale.

So, while having much of Port Meadow somewhat of a no-go area for the winter may seem inconvenient, it's worth it, it seems to me, as it is then that it really comes into its own as a refuge for many and, in some cases, rare birds. It's been said before – but we in Wolvercote are truly blessed to have this natural treasure literally on our doorsteps.

Steve Goddard



Recently there have been several incidents of walkers being intimidated by horses on the Commons. This can be for several reasons. However, one reason, which may not be obvious to many, is when someone thinks it would be nice to feed the horses a titbit such as an apple or carrot. Firstly the horses on the Commons should only be fed by their owners, who know what is safe for them. Some horses are very susceptible to colic (which may be life-threatening) and can be caused by extra food such as apples. However, the danger is when the horses see others being fed and then become aggressive in their efforts to get to the food. This is when they might pay little attention to any nearby people and hence the possibility of an accident.

It's that time of the year to join the Spring Wolvercote Litter Pick

Saturday 29th February
Meeting Points & Times
10am – 12noon

UPPER WOLVERCOTE
Opposite the Village Hall
LOWER WOLVERCOTE
Bathing Place Car Park

Organised by: The Wolvercote Commoners and The Wolvercote Tree Group
As part of Ox Clean 2019: www.oxclean.org.uk



If you would like this Newsletter emailed to you please email medesign@ntlworld.com

Don't forget Village Work Mornings second Saturday of every month

Meet outside the Village Hall at 10am (bring garden gloves, wellies and any gardening tools you have). Children welcome

www.wolvercotecommoners.co.uk – wolvercote.commoners@yahoo.co.uk

Chair: Mary Brown (01865 236897) Secretary: Eleanor Woods (07815 548351)