

Still no positive news on the flow down the brook and through the cress beds. Although the rain in October, November and December were all above the average no month was exceptionally high. I'm sure many of you would have noticed that the cress beds were covered in ice during the very cold spell in mid-December. Although, obviously, mainly due to the temperature it probably would not have happened to the same extent if the flow had been higher. Although the cress was all knocked back the roots within the gravel will have survived and it will bounce back when temperatures recover.

The warmer water in the beds, where not frozen, attracted unusual numbers of black-headed gulls and a few snipe but as hard as I looked that was the limit of the effects on the bird populations I saw. Sightings of kingfisher this autumn and winter have been few and far between, I guess due to the very low water levels. Diving into the water as it is at the moment could result in a severe headache.

It seems an appropriate time to look back on 2022. During 85 visits I have recorded 2074 individual bird sightings of 65 species which was close to the recent annual average. It is difficult to pick out highlights but increased sightings of yellowhammer worthy of note. In all those visits I have only come across grey heron on two occasions, which seems surprising. Although I have been hearing of numerous sightings of overwintering blackcaps in gardens, they do not seem to be frequenting the nature reserve at present. I wonder if that could be due to the lack of berries? Most of the bushes were stripped very early in the winter by marauding gangs of redwings, fieldfares and visiting blackbirds.

I covered butterfly monitoring in the last Ewelme news, so I won't repeat here but, in summary, some species did well, and others didn't. There didn't seem to be any obvious pattern, so I conclude that the poor numbers of some species was not due to anything we did on the site.

The monitoring of wildflowers on the reserve is limited to counting the orchids each year but if anyone would like to do a more comprehensive survey just get in touch. Orchids had a fairly good year with 207 of 4 species counted. The total was slightly down on 2021 but when it is remembered that we started out with just 2 common spotted orchids the increase has been enormous. I should add that counting is not easy when searching amongst head high vegetation and I would not like to guarantee accuracy. The unusual adder's tongue fern continues to thrive in the small meadow on the lower site. This small, almost insignificant, plant with its green flower head is noteworthy because it has the largest number of chromosomes in the animal kingdom (1262 compared with just 46 in a human). It is possible I might have that slightly wrong as I heard a snippet on the radio that the fern had been overtaken by something else – no doubt someone will put me right.

Our monthly river fly monitoring continued throughout the year, and I'm pleased to say there was no obvious pollution effects. It was good to find a new family of flies, stoneflies. February 2022 was the first time we had seen stoneflies and we have been sampling since May 2013. Here's hoping that they return this year! The two pictures illustrate a mayfly larvae (which is what we count) and the much more attractive but very short-lived adult insect.

Volunteer work on the site continues even in the worst of winter's weather and we welcome new helpers – there really are jobs to suit everyone. We are planning, in the near future, to begin replacing some of the weirs that have begun to fail. One of the things that has been causing me headaches is the problem of compost. Material from the channels through the beds and from the annual meadow cut is piled up in heaps to decompose. Although the piles reduce with decomposition, they are growing each year. The resulting material makes extremely good compost but inevitably contains stones, plant roots and wood so needs sieving. We are currently preparing

soil so if you would like some, we have filled a builder's bag which is located just inside the gate to the centre. Please help yourself – you will need something to put it in and, unless it is a work morning, a spade or similar. Or better still why not come along during a work session on the first Saturday or third Wednesday of the month and sieve some for yourself. Although nominally free we welcome a small donation to our funds that will be used to purchase more nest boxes for the site.

At the last guided walk (first Sunday each moth) the home team outnumbered visitors by 5 to 3. Why not come along to help even up the score?