



# FRIENDS OF ABBEY FIELDS

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Dear Member

Let me begin by first thanking so many of you who completed the *Cycling in Abbey Fields* survey. We had a 63% response which is exceptional.

As we expected we had a polarised view on cycling with 53% against and 47% in support. When we then asked if a planned and defined route was to be utilised the approval rating went up to 66%.

However, a huge 84% were in support of a 'safety code' and most importantly 77% agreed that it would be much safer if cyclists were instructed to dismount and walk as they approached the 'high footfall area' around the Pool and Duck Feeding Platform.

Interestingly, 91% wanted to see the application of cycle bells and 73% were against e-bikes and e-scooters. 62% of respondents were also concerned that Abbey Fields could become susceptible to more pervasive cycling utilising other non-designated entrances and exits.

It was an excellent response and it is clear to the Committee that our task in liaising with WDC is to ensure appropriate measures are put in place to minimise accidents and to ensure everyone continues to enjoy the green space of Abbey Fields whatever their reason for visiting.

Enjoy the rest of our Newsletter!

Bart (chairman), on behalf of

*Friends of Abbey Fields*

## News in Brief

**Lake Update:** Heavy rain has helped maintain the lake's water levels. The plan remains as outlined in our previous newsletter. Fish netting has taken place twice this year and will continue, along with improved management of the overflow.

**Cycling Consultation:** We have already presented the results of our Cycling Survey to WDC, and we have now been invited to join monthly meetings with them and Sustrans.

**Bench Replacement:** We still await the date of the planned 'Furniture Audit' in Abbey Fields.

**WDC Ten-Year Plan:** The *Abbey Fields Management Plan* together with the *Executive Summary* were approved by WDC in September. These documents are available on their website (Cabinet meeting 20<sup>th</sup> Sep, Documents, Item 08). WDC inform us they are working to the plans contained therein as they continue their weekly maintenance programme.

**Events and Litter Picks:** Thank you to all who attended our activities – we had record turnouts and it is great to see such support! Richard Gillard will continue to organise working parties to help WDC maintain Abbey Fields, and he will notify you accordingly.

**Pool Build:** We await the outcome of the November WDC Cabinet meeting when the future of the Abbey Fields Pool will be discussed with alternative sites and options also being considered.

**New Website:** Antony Corbett, our new webmaster, has been updating the FOAF website and we hope to have it ready soon. It will be easier to navigate the website, to sign up, to donate, and to enjoy photos of Abbey Fields.

**Nature Watch Trails:** We have ambitious plans to convert the pavilion into an educational hub to host children's nature trails. Plans are still preliminary, but we will keep you informed on this exciting development.

# Butterfly Monitoring in Abbey Fields

Jenny Green

During the summer of 2023, the fourth year of butterfly monitoring in Abbey Fields was completed. The effects of the previous year's drought were not as bad as feared. The survey count was 192, just one short of the 2022 total. Meadow Browns were once again the most prolific species. Two other common brown butterflies had a contrasting season. Gatekeepers (a delightful butterfly which frequents hedges) did well, but Ringlets (the easily identifiable butterfly with hula hoop markings) had a poor year. These trends are reflected in national statistics. White butterflies fared well. There were improved numbers of large, small and green-veined white but sadly, no marbled whites were seen this year.



**Meadow Brown Butterfly**  
– “the most prolific”



**Common Blue Butterfly**  
– “a welcome addition”

Red Admiral numbers increased slightly. In our own garden, we had frequent visits from Red Admirals in September and early October. An occasional one was seen in Abbey Fields too but this was after the end of the official monitoring season. A welcome addition to the species list was the Common Blue butterfly. Skipper numbers were down, and we had no sightings of the easily recognisable Peacock, Brimstone and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies.



Butterflies need wild spaces to feed, breed and shelter. Butterfly Conservation (the national organisation for saving butterflies and moths) is encouraging everyone to create spaces for butterflies. Leaving a patch of long grass in your garden, planting a selection of nectar-rich plants, leaving cover for overwintering, being kind to the environment by going pesticide and peat free... we can all make a difference!

# Jackdaws – “Abbey Fields ... Jackdaw owned”

Valerie Whiteman

One group of birds, the Corvids, is ever present in Abbey Fields and often gets a very bad press. These birds have done well recently and get blamed for falling small bird numbers, although the evidence suggests that this oversimplifies a complex situation. On Abbey Fields, we see Carrion Crows, usually a small family over Spring and Summer, Rooks from the Rookeries on Castle Farm, and the occasional Raven, which looks like a ‘Crow on steroids’ and is usually solitary – talking to itself as it flies over. We also have Jays in the trees near St Nicholas church, and Magpies, arguably the most beautiful of the Corvids with their iridescent plumage (but also the ones with the worst reputation for damaging the birds we really like). The birds I want to concentrate on, however, are the Jackdaws. They have increased significantly in the time I have been counting birds in Abbey Fields. Government data on bird populations states that Jackdaw populations have increased by 10% between 2015 and 2020, and further BTO data suggests that that increase has continued until this year (BTO Trends explorer, 1994–present).

Jackdaws are smallish, black Corvids with a silvery grey-black head. The adults have bright silver eyes, while juveniles have blue. They are very sociable birds, and can be heard making the “Tchack” noise, particularly on the path going up to Abbey End and by the end of the lake. The collective noun for Jackdaws is “a Clattering”, which sums up their noisy extended family life: they always seem to be shouting noisily at each other. They also breed in the castle, so they are very common in Kenilworth and seem to be colonising gardens more readily

It used to be thought that seeing a pair of Jackdaws on your wedding day meant marital bliss, apparently because the birds are monogamous. That’s good for couples getting married at St Nicholas Church!

now. Jackdaws are historically unafraid of humans and are willing to come for food, as you can see if you drop sandwich crumbs anywhere near them.

I can only report what seems to have happened in Abbey Fields, and there I have seen habitats taken over by Jackdaws, which like to live communally. By the stream, the Stock Doves, which used to nest in



by oldiefan via Pixabay

the old trees there, were displaced by Jackdaws, as were the Tree Creepers. These species tend to use tree holes, which Jackdaws take over, although I did see a stand-off between a Jackdaw and a Stock Dove for the nest box near the Barn, which the Stock Dove appeared to win. According to research, the Jackdaws do not principally eat young birds. Almost half of their diet is insect, another quarter vegetable matter and the final quarter animal matter, most of which is Carrion.

If the Jackdaws disappeared, I would miss their noisy chatter and seeing them fly in pairs over the lake and strut about the grass. The Abbey Fields is most certainly Jackdaw owned!

## Forthcoming Events

A busy year of events is coming to an end – seven litter picks, five nature walks, eight working parties! We're making good progress in planning the events for next year, including more sowing of wildflower seeds. We'll keep you posted on the details, and hope you can join us.

The photos show us planting Snake's Head Fritillaries at the bottom of the meadow and removing suckers from the lime trees!



## New Secretary



Judith Wildig grew up in Kenilworth and, after living in different areas of the country, returned three years ago. She says that Abbey Fields has always been special to her and she remembers happy times there when growing up – walking, playing tennis or just meeting up with friends. While living away, she would visit her parents, who always lived in Kenilworth, and this allowed her to retain a precious connection with her “home town”. She says that whilst the town underwent many changes over the years, Abbey Fields remained a constant.

When Judith moved back during the recent lockdown, she enjoyed walking through Abbey Fields and saw how valuable the open space was for local people who could take advantage of the freedom it gave. “I'm determined”, Judith says, “that everyone now, and in the future, will benefit from the relaxing environment and open green space that Abbey Fields provides. I also want to see the important diversity of plants, birds, insects and animals protected and encouraged”. Since retiring, Judith has taken on voluntary roles – she is a Trustee of a local charity, volunteers with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, became a member of the Friends of Abbey Fields Committee, and now takes on the role of Secretary.

## Secretary Retirement

Judith's welcome arrival obviously heralds a very sad occasion – Sue Martin's retirement from the committee as Secretary. Sue has been with us for over five years and has been an outstanding Secretary – prompting, organising, reminding, contributing and advising throughout her term. The Committee has lost a great asset and Sue will be missed. In appreciation of her time and dedication to the cause, the Committee has awarded Sue an Honorary Membership. We dispensed with the traditional paperweight gift and instead presented her with a voucher for use at one of Kenilworth's many restaurants. Thank you again, Sue, for all your hard work and support! Please keep in touch.

## Membership & Contact

Become a member and join our regular activities in supporting Abbey Fields!  
Contact Clare: [membership@friendsofabbeyfields.org.uk](mailto:membership@friendsofabbeyfields.org.uk) or visit our website:

[www.friendsofabbeyfields.org.uk](http://www.friendsofabbeyfields.org.uk)

For other enquiries, please contact Judith: [info@friendsofabbeyfields.org.uk](mailto:info@friendsofabbeyfields.org.uk)

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