

## Charity Meadow

Charity Meadow (also known as Bugbrooke Meadow) is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is under the protection of the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust. It is classified as a recovering hay meadow and is part of the Nene water meadows that flood regularly during the winter. It is an easy walk from either Bugbrooke or along the Nene Way from Nether Heyford, but it is advisable to wear sturdy shoes or boots. May and June is the best time to visit, both because many of the wild flowers for which Charity Meadow is important, are at their best, and also for the walk there, where you can see springtime at its most glorious. Charity Meadow is rare in that it is less managed than most places around the village. It has never been ploughed nor had chemical fertilizers applied to it. In summer the hay is harvested, and then it is grazed in the autumn to maintain its low fertility level. It is this low soil fertility which makes it such a favourable environment for the wildlife it supports.

The bio-diversity which it represents is remarkable and includes over 200 varieties of grass, hedgerow trees, shrubs and wild flowers. You may not be bowled over by grasses, but long grass which is left relatively unmanaged is unusual in the village (with the exception of Millennium Green and some roadside verges). It provides a rich habitat for many varieties of insect, both for feeding and breeding. Look out for Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood butterflies and the less conspicuous grass-feeding moths such as the Elephant Hawkmoth which hides in the grass during the day, and only flies after the sun has set. Other insects include grasshoppers and bumble-bees, and look out too for Mayflies, Dragonflies and Damselflies. It is not surprising that such an insect-rich area attracts predatory birds such as the summer visiting Spotted Flycatcher, Swallow and Chiffchaff. The Yellowhammer, although mainly a seed eater, will also take advantage of the abundance of insects.

However, Charity Meadow is known most for its wild flowers. Amongst more than 60 varieties of flowers, the most notable is the Southern Marsh Orchid, but there are many commoner ones which are still relatively unusual in today's world. Amongst them are Ragged Robin, White Campion, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Marsh Marigold, Sorrel, Lady's Smock, Germander Speedwell and Thyme leaved Speedwell. The ditches support many water plants such as Water Spearwort, Water Horsetail and Common Spikerush. Please remember though, that Charity Meadow is a Nature Reserve and it is forbidden to pick any of the flowers there, but whether your interest is in flowers, trees, hedgerow plants, birds, insects, or just having a walk, there is a lot to find in your local Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The results of a study of the plant species made by J.A. Best (Nene College) in 1986 is in *Bugbrooke 2000BC to 2000AD* (available from Bugbrooke History Society), and also online at [www.bugbrookelink.co.uk/naturenotes/charitymeadow](http://www.bugbrookelink.co.uk/naturenotes/charitymeadow). You will also find more pictures of the walk, and there is an illustrated guide to many of the flowering species available to download online, or by contacting me on 832125.

Bugbrooke firsts: The first Swallow was seen on 23<sup>rd</sup> March over the meadow at the end of Smiths Lane. It seems to fit into a wider pattern for this year, as despite the exceptionally long, cold winter, Swallows have been reported in the national newspapers as arriving earlier than usual. The first reported Cuckoo was heard in the field at the end of Johns Road on 27<sup>th</sup> April, and Swifts were seen first on 28<sup>th</sup> April.

Bat Survey: Do you have bats in your garden? We do and so do many other people in Bugbrooke. July and August is a good time to do a survey, whether it is just noticing bats flying around your garden just after dusk, or whether you would like to get up before dawn and see bats “swarming” back to their roosts when they return after the night. Phil Richardson, who is the Bat Recorder for the Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust, describes Bugbrooke as being “a particularly batty area”, so it would be good to know just how batty! If we make annual records we can assess the health of our bat population, and see whether it is increasing or in decline. For more information go to [www.bugbrookelink.co.uk/NatureNotes/Bat Survey.htm](http://www.bugbrookelink.co.uk/NatureNotes/Bat%20Survey.htm)