



Spring Walk – 26 April 2025

Twenty-two members assembled at the Legsheath Lane car park on a glorious spring morning for the Friends' 2025 Spring Walk. For a few newer members it was their first visit to the reserve.

There was lots to see on the water at the outset, including Great Crested Grebes, Mandarin Ducks, an Egyptian Goose, a Little Egret, a pair of Tufted Ducks and a Common Tern. There was plenty of birdsong in the car park too with Blackcaps at their most vocal. Early arrivals were treated to a view of a Hobby flying over the reservoir.

The walk followed the usual route through the "study area" and out on to Pintail Bank. Just as we were about to head off, we saw two Kingfishers on the opposite bank close to a known nesting area.

We then walked through the woods past the "iron bog" and the pondlet to a glade where we are encouraging Common Orchids to spread. Members were able to see orchid plants just starting to emerge and noted that we had roped off the area and that we had a sonic device in place to deter deer munching. Also visible in this area were Adder's Tongue Ferns. This is not a particularly impressive plant to look at, but it is of interest to botanists.

There was birdsong all around us from typical woodland birds and some were able to catch the liquid bubbling call of a Garden Warbler. The various types of nest boxes were pointed out as we made our way through the woodland.

We were concerned that with the fine dry spring, the Bluebells in the Alder Carr area might be past their best. We need not have worried, in fact they were at their peak; a carpet of blue opened up in front of us and the air was perfumed with their scent. Wild Garlic was also prolific and in flower and this made a nice point of contrast with the blue haze of Bluebells. Other plants in flower included Dog's Mercury, Wood Sorrel, Lesser Celandine, Herb Robert, Cuckoo Flower (Milk Maids) and Red Campion.

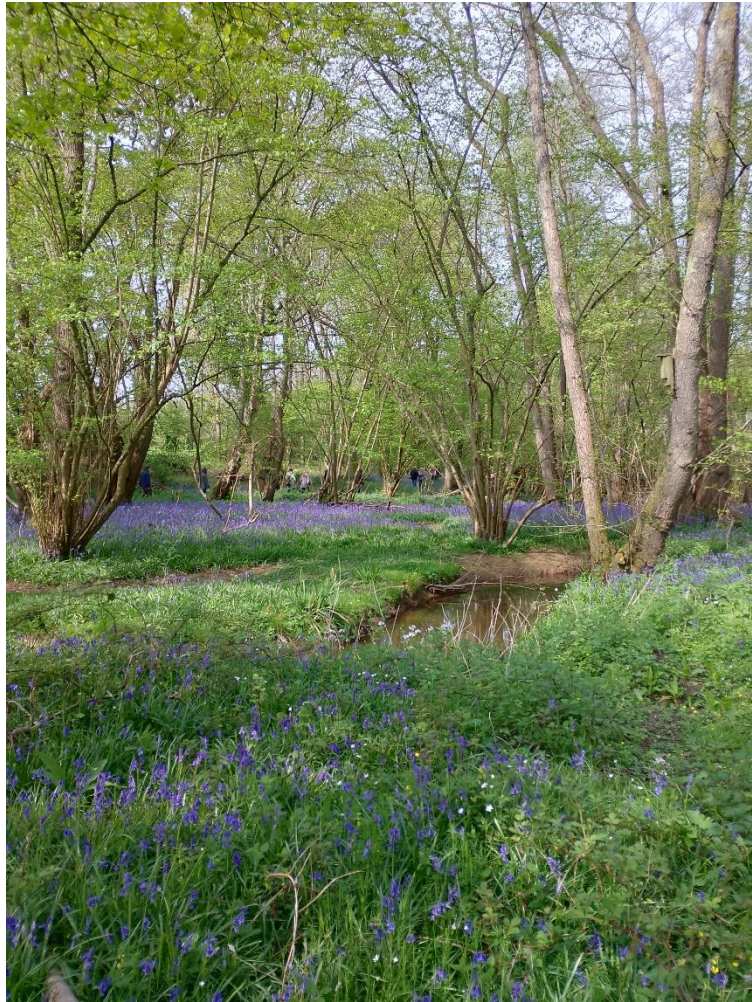


Photo: John Edwards

We moved to the boggier part of the Carr where we noted the bright yellow splash of colour from the numerous Marsh Marigolds. Members' attention was drawn to the delicate flowers of the Marsh Valerian growing nearby.



Marsh Marigolds and Bluebells



Marsh Valerian

At Pintail Bank members were able to look back across the reservoir to the hide. There was plenty of Cuckoo Flower in the meadow here, so it was no surprise to see Orange Tip butterflies flitting from plant to plant. Members noted the large Black Poplar tree growing in the meadow and we explained that as part of a wider reintroduction project, we had planted ten such trees across the reserve with varying degrees of success. Members were also shown the large nest box where two Barn Owls were currently roosting.

We made our way back to the car park for a well-earned refreshment break during which time a female Sparrowhawk was seen over the reservoir showing its typical “flap, flap, glide” flight pattern.

We then walked along Legsheath Lane to Whillets Meadows. We stopped *en route* to look at the heronry and we observed both Grey Herons and Cormorants on the nest with their respective young. Members were advised of the increase in Cormorant numbers in recent years with Cormorants occupying nests that had once been the domain of the Grey Herons.

On arrival at Whillets we made our way to the reed bed where we could hear the scratchy song of at least two Reed Warblers. Members were shown an example of the not rare but unusual Nettle Rust Fungus (*Puccinia urticata*) which had been found by the work party earlier in the week.



Nettle Rust Fungus

On into the second meadow and we stopped to look at the Cowslips and a False Oxlip which is a cross between a Cowslip and a Primrose. The birdsong was particularly noticeable here, especially Garden Warbler and Common Whitethroat with the latter putting on a display flight for us. We had noticed that the bees from the nearby hives had formed a large swarm in a tree so we decided not to hang around here any longer than necessary!



Cowslip



False Oxlip

We had a look around Meadow Pond which was fairly quiet. It was a little early in the year for dragonflies and there was no sign of the Large Red Damselfly seen earlier in the week.

We then walked through to the third meadow to look at the new wetland glade we created last year. It is still early days, but we have high hopes of this area becoming a magnet for butterflies and dragonflies and for it to support a range of moisture loving plants.

We then returned along Legsheath Lane to the car park. The walk was enjoyed by all present and people had found something of interest during the morning. There was no doubt that the overall experience had been enhanced by the lovely weather. The reserve was looking at its best in the spring sunshine. Many thanks to all who came along and shared the morning with us.



Note: Our next event will be an early summer walk on **14 June** to look at our orchid glade and other wildflowers on the reserve. Meet in the Legsheath Lane car park at 9.00am for a 9.15am start.

All photos: Bob Johnson unless indicated otherwise.

John Edwards
28.04.25