



## Newsletter, April 2021

This is our first Newsletter this year; we have a fewer things to report than we would wish, thanks to lockdown but now that life is edging back to normal things are happening again - and we would welcome a bit of help.

### Sowena Hollocks reports from Ash School

At the end of the school field at Ash school we are endeavouring to create a slightly more wild area which we hope will attract wildlife while also being of interest to the children. To this end we have planted a native hedgerow to define the area, we are leaving the grass to grow long and have sown wildflower seeds, we will mow paths through the grass for the children to use. There is a teepee style den under construction and the first ornamental grasses will be planted this week in what will eventually form an ornamental grass border. Funding permitting we hope eventually to have a new forest school building, a mud kitchen and a covered fire pit area. We have installed a number of insect hotels, some bird feeders and are collecting pallets for a bug hotel. We have also planted, Wild Cherry, Silver Birch and Rowan trees across the site.



### Trees in Martock Recreation Ground

Martock has, apparently, the biggest recreation ground in Somerset. Some of it is not used for sport or playing and we want to make it more attractive for walkers and also for wildlife. So there are now two areas that will be woodland—and soon there will be many more seats and picnic tables thanks to the Parish Council.

The fenced octagonal area near the rugby pitch will a formal woodland dedicated to those 59 men from Martock who gave their lives in the Great War. 59 Trees have been planted. There will be a plaque explaining this.

The informal shrubbery and wood at the south end has been planted with a lot of help from volunteers and consists of a variety of native shrubs and trees. We want, over time, to change the grass cover to Somerset meadow species with flowers but that will take time and effort. Thanks to all who provided—and planted—snowdrops. We have obtained meadow seed and we will put out a call, when it looks like we will be getting a bit of rain, for help





*The south end of Martock Recreation Ground. Can you help us plant some meadow flower seeds?*

with sowing. We have had a generous offer of primrose thinnings and would also like bluebells (native, not Spanish) if anyone has some to divide. We will be putting out an appeal for help with a bit of weed removal around the trees in the next month.

### **Ash Millennium Wood**

This community wood is supported by an annual maintenance grant from Ash PC and is looked after by volunteers. It is used for a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities by Ash Primary School and 1st Fosseway Scouts. Started 20 years ago, it is well worth a visit to see the kind of things we can do as a community. We were pleased to win a "Green Flag" award for the second year running: a scheme run by Keep Britain Tidy to recognise good management of green spaces. A winter programme of works is nearing completion. We have cut back the hedgerow, trimmed trees where necessary, coppiced hazel, planted understory shrubs and undertaken maintenance work at the entrance gate and to the circular bench. A tree health survey has placed a number of ash trees on a "watch list" for future felling. Bird boxes have been cleaned and new boxes installed.

COVID restrictions have had an impact on the site: there have been many more regular visitors and volunteers helping out. We are looking forward to welcoming back organised children's groups as lockdown is eased.



## The environment - a Rotary Area of Focus

Rotary International has added supporting the environment as its 7th area of focus along with Peace and conflict prevention/resolution, Health, Water and sanitation, Maternal and child health, Education, Economic and community development.

Yeo Vale Rotary has instigated this initiative by planting trees at Tintinhull, Chilthorne Domer and Coat and is looking for other projects in the area to join with local communities in protecting and enhancing the environment. Visit their website at [yeovale-rotary.org.uk](http://yeovale-rotary.org.uk)

### Do you live on or near the new housing developments?

Developers have signed up to some 'net biodiversity gain' clauses. These typically involve things they promise not to do like disturb hedgerows or remove trees, or things that specifically promise to do like put in bat tiles, nest boxes, leave corridors, etc. They often don't do these things and nobody checks. If you live on or near new developments and can keep an eye on what is happening, please get in touch. We can supply details of what was promised and help put pressure on to get it delivered.

### Cartgate Nature Area

All the nest boxes put around Cartgate seem to be occupied (they are popular with the robins) although the barn owl has not returned yet. This may be due to the big problem in the nearby fields this year, loss of habitat and prey. The adjacent area of wet set-aside, once rich with field voles in particular, has, this year, been ploughed and put down to rye grass.

Newt traps have shown the pond is very rich in smooth and palmate newts as well as stickleback. No sign yet though of Great Crested Newts. A nearby shallow sheltered ditch has proved popular with frogs and is full of tadpoles. The ditch is drying out though and we keep our fingers crossed.

We have restored more of the original meadow land around the pond and planted flower seeds. Some of the small trees near the edge have been pruned to provide a clearer landing and takeoff approach for mallards. The pair of moorhen are back; last year their eggs provided food for badgers so we hope a lesson has been learned.



*A simple bottle trap for studying pond life. It is left on the bottom overnight with a little bit of air trapped in it. It is examined the following day. This contained stickleback, two newt varieties and many pond snails.*

### Phosphate contamination of the Somerset Levels

We reported on this issue in the last newsletter. It has had a major impact on development planning throughout the catchment area (which includes all of both parishes) bringing all development to a halt. More details can be found on the [South Somerset District Phosphate Page](#).<sup>1</sup>

We have started a local survey of phosphate contamination. Phosphate is an essential nutrient present in all watercourses but becomes a pollutant when its level becomes too high. When this happens one symptom is the

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/services/planning/somerset-levels-and-phosphates/>



common bright green blanket alga that smothers everything else by depriving the water of the dissolved oxygen needed for all life. When the blanket algae eventually die even more oxygen is used up and the water can become stagnant

The survey is showing very widespread pollution. But what is particularly interesting is which watercourses are not polluted. Here are a few initial findings

- The big rivers, Yeo and Parrett are very polluted - 10x 'normal' levels or more rising to around 40x during dry periods such as this April.
- All ponds surveyed which have a good variety of plants in and around them are clear, even when they are fed by a polluted ditch.
- Streams where farmers have left the regulation 6m field margin are largely unpolluted.
- Martock sewage works (outlet just downstream from Gawbridge) is a major source of phosphate pollution. It does not have a phosphate removal treatment stage (unlike Langport and Ilchester)



*March 2021, 0.20 mg/l phosphate. Blanket algae dominates the ditch feeding Cartgate pond caused by 5x normal concentration of phosphate due to run-off from the fields upstream. Other plants cannot grow because of lack of light and depletion of oxygen caused by the alga.*



*The pond itself has always had less than 0.02 mg/l of phosphate. It is rapidly removed from the feed water by a large variety of oxygenating plants in and around the pond. The blanket algae cannot take over in these conditions. This photograph was taken last July.*

### **Keep in touch**

- By the [Ash and Martock Nature website](http://www.ashmartocknature.org.uk), ([www.ashmartocknature.org.uk](http://www.ashmartocknature.org.uk))
- By the Ash and Martock Nature Facebook group
- By email to the secretary; [secretary@ashmartocknature.org.uk](mailto:secretary@ashmartocknature.org.uk)

### **Ash and Martock Nature Recovery**

Mick Wooden	–	chair
Paul Helyer	–	secretary
Andrew Clegg	–	treasurer