

The Hurst Water Meadow

Dorchester on Thames, Oxfordshire
Owned and managed on behalf of local people
Charity Number 1050272



Hurst water meadow news

November 2003

Floods



Floods - January 03

The floods this year have been the worst for many years and the water level reached to within six inches of the top of the gate.

Since then there has been severe drought. After the hay cut, there has been little growth of the grass for grazing.

Grazing

Stephen West brought six pedigree Dexter cattle onto the meadow on 12th October, but the same evening, the electric fence was taken down and the cattle escaped.



Dexter cattle on the meadow October 03

Next morning the cattle were found paddling happily in the river near the oak tree. Fortunately they did not get onto the bypass or main road, where they might have caused a fatal accident.

Three days later, the electric fence was damaged again and volunteers put it back after dark. The trustees felt that they could not take any further risks with public safety, so the cattle were removed after only five days grazing. This was disappointing, as grazing after the hay cut is an essential part of traditional meadow management. This greatly improves the fertility of the habitat for wildflowers, insects and birds.

Grazing is also part of our contract with DEFRA (the Ministry) for which we get a grant of over £900 per annum. If we lose that, we will have to appeal to the (already generous) public for a similar amount in order keep solvent. This wanton damage is the latest in a series which has included sawing off the footbridge handrails, uprooting fences, setting fire to brushwood and hay bales, and stealing the bollard padlock and bolt, as well as electric fencing posts and batteries. This involves the trustees and volunteers in a lot of work to

keep the meadow going for everyone, including those who do the damage and need somewhere to enjoy themselves.



Scrub plantation 2002



The old ash root serves as a seat and viewpoint

Sluice

The wall above the Buck Pool sluice was badly damaged in the floods. The owners of the spinney and sluice propose to obtain estimates for its repair.

Maintenance

Many trees fell into the river this year, mostly from the farmer's copse on the north bank of the Thame. Some were removed by Stephen West, and the rest by the Environment Agency, for which we are very grateful.

Changes in trustees

Two trustees have retired (Peter Duffield and Sue Dixon). Their places have been taken by Janice Balch and Michael Brookes who have already made valuable contributions to the work of the Trust.

Threat of gravel extraction

The threat of gravel extraction is very real. Hanson own the mineral rights to the Hurst and surrounding countryside. Gravel extraction could have a serious effect on lowering the water table and damaging the sensitive ecology of the area.

The trustees have objected to the proposals, both to the County Council and the South East England Regional Assembly. The trustees are grateful for all the help they have received from volunteers and the financial contributions from members of the public. Contributions from those who enjoy the meadow are always welcome.

Peter Pritchard Hon. secretary

5 November 2003

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