

### WEATHER

The weather this month has been very warm and sunny, the temperatures have climbed into the 20's and beaten records for the time of year. Winds, if any, have been light and there has been virtually no rainfall.

### USE & CONDITION OF THE WALK

With the fine weather and the Easter holidays people have been making use of the facility in large numbers. Lots of fishermen have been trying their luck from waist deep in water and from the Dam wall. Dog walkers, bird watchers, joggers and families have been out and about enjoying the beautiful surroundings that the Millennium Walk offers.

The path is firm and dry and in good condition. The walk has been relatively clean despite the numbers using it. Leaflets have been in great demand and the boxes have needed filling on a number of occasions.

### OBSERVATIONS

April has been a month of great change. At the beginning of the month there were still a few of the later varieties of Daffodil in flower and Primroses, Violets and Lesser Celandine were everywhere. By the end of the month the Daffodils had disappeared to be replaced by Bluebells (*right*) and Red Campion. The Bluebells have been a special delight, lining the paths and forming a shimmering blue carpet wherever you look.



Red Campion has grown up in the Daffodil fields lining the walk and have put on a splendid show of pink flowers. The Blackthorn blossom has been falling carpeting the path in white petals to be replaced by the May blossom. The fruit of Elm trees has also been falling on the path as well as the fat white, caterpillar-like catkins of the Aspen trees.

A fine Horse Chestnut in full flower was a magnificent sight. Rowan, Apple, Lime and Bird's Eye Cherry all add to the scene and attract the eye from afar making the walk very picturesque. Holly trees are also full of flower promising many berries for the winter but their insignificant flowers can easily be overlooked. Early in the month buds were unfurling on the trees but by the end the trees were almost all in full leaf and the view of the water from the path was becoming restricted.

It is very pleasing to see some plants spreading, in particular the Greater Celandine, Ground Ivy and Garlic Mustard. Greater Celandine (which is not a relative of its namesake Lesser Celandine but is a member of the Poppy family) is found in three spots along the walk and in two sites there are more plants than last year. Those in the car park have been particularly successful. Other plants in flower include Groundsel, Herb Robert, Three-cornered Leek, Alexander, Hairy Bittercress, Mouse-ear Chickweed, Ivy-leaved Speedwell, Thyme-leaved Speedwell, Wall Fumitory, Ramping Fumitory, Smith's Cress, Balm-leaved Figwort, Geranium maderense, a garden escapee, Gorse, Grape Hyacinth, Meadow Buttercup, Daisy and Dandelion.

On the water the Reed beds are beginning to green up and the Flag Iris are growing tall and promising flowers next month. The water level is falling slowly.

The warm and sunny weather has encouraged butterflies and Large White, Meadow Brown, Peacock and Red Admiral butterflies have all been in evidence. There is a profusion of solitary bees to be seen when the sun is on the earthbanks that they frequent. The hot dry conditions are not conducive to fungi but a species of Shield Mushroom has been found as well as a few Ink Caps (*below left*), *Amanita gemmata* and a particularly fine *Dryad's Saddle*.



Bird song is all around with Thrush and Blackbird in good voice. The newly arrived Chiffchaffs are making their presence felt and can be heard calling all over the reserve. As well as the usual Chaffinches, Wrens, Robins, Great Tits, Blue Tits and Long-tailed Tits, two brightly coloured Goldfinches have shown themselves a couple of times. Two Wheatears put in an appearance on another occasion and a Blackcap was reported by a couple of birdwatchers early one morning.

On the water, gangs of male Mallards hang around together until the emergence of females and young. There have been many duckling broods during the month, one female made parenting look easy with her brood of 17 while another seemed to have great difficulty to keep her brood of 2 under control. A great delight has been the Little Grebes seen feeding their young. One pair was observed with two young and on another occasion at the opposite end of the reservoir, another Little Grebe was seen with one young, although there could well have been more unseen in the reeds.

As soon as the Bistort shoots start showing above the water, the Coots' young hatch; the Bistort providing the perfect camouflage for them in their early days. One pair of Coots had five young but that has been reduced to four by the end of the month. Common Sandpipers, another recent arrival, are often to be seen flying over the water, three together on one occasion. During the first week of the month the Tufted Ducks dwindled in numbers from five to three and then finally there was only a solitary male left before it too flew off leaving the waters to the noisy gulls and other permanent residents.

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