

## **SFPT September 2015 Report for Fromus Meadows**

### **Nature's larder is being filled**

The eighth of September, and it is chilly and grey. The hay crop has gone, and the shorn meadows are greening up following the recent rains. Not enough has fallen to bring the river Fromus to life, and it is reduced to pools alternating with stretches of damp sand and stones. Small birds – chaffinches, great tits and a robin – are bathing and drinking in a pool, and a swallow has just sliced the air overhead. *One for trouble, two for joy...* I can't remember the rest, but eight magpies are busy feeding together in the lower meadow.

The tall grass in the meadows is gone, but uncut grass remains at their edges – an important habitat that will remain throughout autumn and winter where invertebrates, small mammals and birds will be able to survive the tough times to come. Brushing through the grasses today, I have disturbed grasshoppers and also several speckled wood butterflies that are grounded by the low temperature, which is below what they need to be active. The tops of creeping thistle, willowherbs and bristly ox tongue are white masses of downy seedheads that will soon waft away on the breeze. Amphibious bistort and water mint are flowering beside the long pond.

Good quality hedgerows are important to wildlife at all times of the year, but in Autumn they are of life or death significance because of the abundance of food they offer. Birds, invertebrates and mammals must feed up and get into prime condition prior to migration, hibernation or just surviving one winter's day after another, like our resident thrushes, blackbirds and robins. The hedge larder is stocked with blackberries, rose hips, haws, hazelnuts, damsons and sloes: nature intends it to be eaten, to ensure that seeds are carried away and sown somewhere else.

Hooper's Law (from scientist Max Hooper) suggests that old hedgerows can be dated according to the number of trees and shrubs they support in a 30-metre stretch: one species = 100 years. Trudging beside the river, I note oak, ash, hawthorn, blackthorn, elder, dog rose, bramble, hornbeam, hazel and

**crab apple – a good tally that suggests considerable antiquity, and in keeping with the archaeological and natural features of the Bigod family’s medieval deer park. As if to clinch the point, four red deer spring from cover in The Gorge, cross the meadow and vanish into undergrowth near the earth dam: two hinds, each with a well-grown fawn. I am dumbfounded, and far too slow with my camera. Red deer are rare in my area of Suffolk, and they are a new record for the reserve.**

**Laurie Forsyth**