

## **SFPT November 2015 report for Fromus Meadows**

### **On the cusp of winter**

November 18<sup>th</sup>, and autumn colour has drained from the Fromus meadows. Heavy rain has fallen on the sticky clay farmland in the past week, and the wind that roared through here last night has stripped most of the leaves from the old ash trees. The oaks seem almost untouched. The hedgerows look bare, and the reborn River Fromus bubbles and chuckles as it works to cut the Gorge ever deeper. Dead branches in the riverbed have collected drifts of leaves torn from the trees last night, and the river is cascading over the small dams that have formed. Next year's hazel catkins are almost fully formed.

The sun is shining, and its rays are piercing the newly-open tree canopy in the Gorge and illuminating patches of the woodland floor that have been shaded since June. Beyond the Gorge, the meadows are cropped short, and have been grazed by five Red Polls. Here and there I can see the flowers of marsh thistles that escaped the hay cut.

A purple moment: I have just seen a sparrowhawk — first, just a flicker of retreating dark wings, followed seconds later by a full-on, close view as the bird returned: from its size, it looks like a large female, and she must be the scourge of the Fromus hedgerows. It is a good day, and getting better: a buzzard just lifted from the canopy of a large oak at the distant end of Mere Meadow, and then drifted at tree-top height over the meadow to where I am standing on the dam. At my feet, the clumped young leaves of primroses are piercing the steep banks.

The great dam could be 800 years old, and it holds memories of the ancient Kelsale deer park created by the troublesome and ambitious Bigod family in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Like a memorial stone, a small rock sits on its top. It is strange object in the farmed landscape. John Rainer has a theory that the spillway that carried overflow from the earth dam was lined with rock and heavy timber, to protect the earth from erosion by the torrent. The rock was found on the riverbed and placed on the dam. It is a good conversation piece. An extensive puddle formed by recent rain lies at the foot of the dam, at the lowest part of Mere Meadow. Maybe the medieval fishpond still has ambitions.

A large and almost perfectly symmetrical oak makes a good photograph. Beneath, a bed of great willowherb is covered with fluffy seed heads bedraggled by rain. Not for the first time today, I catch the musky scent of a fox. Probably, he is making a tour of his patch and spray-marking his property as he goes.

***Laurie Forsyth***