

SFPT Report for Fromus meadows, March

Winter's tail-end?

Sunshine, cold wind, rain showers, and snow flurries. It's March 8th, and the weather is interesting at Fromus meadows reserve. Primroses are in flower and cowslips are flaunting their crinkled new leaves. The Long Pond and the Circular Pond are both brimming after days of squally rain showers, and the diminutive Fromus river is in a feisty mood. Flexing its muscles, it continues to carve deeper into its bed in the Gorge with every spate, and I can't resist taking shots of an impressive torrent raging in the Gorge where branches and other debris have formed a dam and constricted the flow.

In spells of wet weather, our little river packs a surprising punch, and no doubt that swayed the Bigod family back in the 12th century when they were looking for dramatic ideas to enhance Kelsale Park. 'What if we dammed the river and made a great lake that we could stock with fish?' Today, brown-tinged river foam is jammed up against a raft of floating twigs, and just downstream the river is boiling through the low meadows on its way to the A12, to Kelsale and to the sea.

Almost every meadow is squishy, with water seeping down slope to form puddles here and there. One of them is home to thread-leaved crowfoot, a delicate white aquatic buttercup with leaves that look exactly as promised by its name, and which I have just photographed. The Long Pond is murky, but I can see through the clear water in the Circular Pond: a small pile of tiny sticks moving beneath the surface is the protective camouflage of a caddis-fly larva. The soft-bodied larva is inside, almost invisible except for the legs poking out from within. Every species of caddis fly larva constructs a different protective casing by cementing various materials together, and the shape and construction of the cases is reliable enough to enable each species to be identified. We know that great crested newts and smooth newts also live in the Circular Pond, but today there is no sign of them. Breeding activity has begun, but cold weather may've slowed things down.

Hundreds of wood pigeons throng the upper branches of the old oaks, and the birds clatter into the air as I approach: almost certainly they are birds from the continent, attracted to Suffolk by our balmy winter weather. Despite the relative mildness, the flora is slow to get going, and I have seen no flowers except dog's mercury, hazel and alder: new leaves are showing for lesser celandine, dog violet, white deadnettle, cowslip, wild arum, hedge woundwort and common hogweed.

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