

# Autumn on the Meadows

The Foots Cray Meadows boasts 240 acres of natural woodland, meadows and wetlands. North Cray Woods is listed in the Domesday book of 1086. The area is home to an abundance of wildlife, including at least 50 species of birds and over 40 types of trees, as well as bats, butterflies, newts and a variety of fish that swim in the clear waters of the chalk stream.

In autumn, the Meadows display a range of beautiful colours through their leaves, berries, nuts and seeds. A veritable bounty for wildlife as they prepare for winter.



The many varieties of fruit abundant at this time of year are edible (e.g. Sweet Chestnuts). But Horse chestnuts and wild Rowan berries can be toxic to humans & dogs.



Winter visiting birds will start to appear during the autumn. As summer visitors (House martin & swallows) start to depart we welcome shoveler, moorhen and tufted duck (the latter probably from Iceland or Scandinavia).

The Cetti's Warbler you will hear before you see, listen out for its bubbling song among willow, marsh and nettles. The male's song is unmistakable, powerful, far carrying and positively angry! It's sightings often peak in late autumn. Most warblers leave Britain in the autumn, but these little birds have been resident, since the 1970s, very likely due to how mild our winters have become, due to global warming.



This year looks like a good year for acorns. If you look closely, you may also find Oak Galls. The tiny female Oak Gall wasp lays her eggs on the oak, forms abnormal growth called a gall which protects the larva as it feeds & grows. Different species of gall wasp develop distinctive galls affecting various structures on the tree. The larvae pupate inside and emerge as adults in the spring, to continue its complex life cycle. These galls are part of the biodiversity a healthy oak tree supports.



To the west of Foots Cray Meadows – close to the car park entrance off Rectory Lane and to the right of the Friends of

Foots Cray Meadows' Information Centre – stands a beautiful tulip tree. Here it is pictured in the autumn. It has a lineage that extends back to the age of the dinosaurs and is thought to be related to magnolias.

