



# TIGGINS MEADOW

## 2022

Drought | Trail Camera | Barn Building

### Grass snake

Visitors to Tiggins Meadow spotted a grass snake on one of the heaps of cut hay and showed Peter where they saw it. We discovered an entrance into the heap which we think is where the grass snake has a nest as it's the sort of site they typically use.



Grass snakes lay 10-40 eggs and incubate them until late summer. They are not venomous and are very wary of humans. They defend themselves from predators by emitting a foul smell and taste, though they are also good at playing dead. Grass snakes hibernate over winter.

We have seen a grass snake once before at Tiggins Meadow, but many years ago so are pleased to have another sighting.



### What a year !

We've had a really good year and hope you have too. The growing season started off with lovely lush growth and despite the extraordinary high temperatures and long drought this summer the vegetation stayed surprisingly green. The flowers and grasses were spectacular. We were particularly pleased that the seed we sowed in 2021 of mallow and scabious grew well so we hope they continue to establish themselves readily over the next few years. The yellow rattle also did very well so we have been able to share seed with people.



## New benches

We are keen that Tiggins Meadow should be a place people can enjoy going for a wander and for that purpose we keep paths mown to give good accessibility, especially for those who find rough ground challenging. We are also keen that it should be a place where people can sit and enjoy the peace, listen to birdsong and the wind rustling in the trees or enjoy the stillness that allows you to see things you might otherwise miss. We have a collection of old plastic chairs which people are free to move around to wherever they wish to sit, but slowly we are phasing them out and replacing them with benches. This year we've built some using gabions on the basis that they are useful in several ways - the wire 'cages' should last much longer than wooden structures, the filling of rubble has cleared some of the unsightly piles we had lurking in the field and our garden, whilst at the same time they should provide a habitat for insects to enjoy.



## Willow Harvest

Our year started, as it does every January, with harvesting willow. We have several different types of willow growing, only some of which we harvest for weaving with - the others are left to provide an early source of food for bees. It's a satisfying job to do, taking care to create a healthy 'stool' and picking out the willow 'rods' which are good for weaving with.



Lion came to help harvest and then made some beautiful 'dream catchers' which he sold at festivals. I made fences, nests and baskets.



## Galls

Unusually there were hardly any marble galls on the oaks this year - usually there are lots. We also see Knopper galls and oak spangle galls - all of which are caused by tiny wasps. Robin's pincushions are another common sight. Instead, this year, the field maples were covered with maple bladder galls which are caused by mites.



## Miner Bees

The bare earth banks around the barn pond seemed particularly attractive to miner bees this year so we saw lots of activity there. They excavate individual holes in the ground but are social creatures. This website has some fascinating information about them: <https://www.heath-hands.org.uk/blog/miningbees>



## Barn Building Progress



Steve has been a fantastic help again this year and so far we haven't found anything he won't tackle! We've also had really valuable help from other friends and family including Elvira from Switzerland who worked hard getting internal clay render on while Vinnie did some 'caving' underneath the barn strengthening the floor joists. Gary's engineering skills were put to good use creating the front entrance steps. Our son and architect Kit put in many, many hours getting dirty hands and sore muscles, sometimes with a little help...



During the year we were made aware that some local people do not understand what the purpose of the barn is. This made us realise that in fact it's the building project itself that is as important to us as the finished building. It's allowed us to experiment with UK sourced 'eco' materials, demonstrating simple hand building techniques while letting a wide range of people 'have a go'. The skill sharing and team building opportunities have been very enjoyable and, we feel, important,

especially for people who rarely get opportunities to be involved in building work. This is partly why we're not rushing to complete the project.

Although unfinished, we are already able to use it for storing tools and sheltering from the weather. Next we will focus on getting the earth floor laid and have been sampling different mixes using clay dug from the field and hay we have cut, with a bit of horse muck thrown in!



## Treasure

Who knows what lies buried in the soil in a place which has certainly been used for at least a couple of hundred years?

With tales of Saxon hordes and Viking raiders through to the era of horse drawn ploughs, it's no wonder metal detectorists are keen to explore. We were amused by what Mick found - some long lost toy cars, though of what



vintage it's hard to say. Possibly they only date back twenty or so years. Whatever, they contain stories and human meaning and our grandson was delighted by them!

## Quinces

Although we planted all the fruit trees at the same time, in early 2009, they have grown at very different rates. By far the fastest is the Quince, Vranja, which, this year had a fine crop of fruit. Some of these we harvested to cook with, others we left as windfalls which clearly small creatures enjoyed.



## Barn Owls

We specifically asked Kit to design the barn with space for an owl loft and with crevices, eaves and shelves for small birds roosting or nesting. The dry area underneath the barn should also be attractive to small mammals. We fully expected for it to take some time before any creatures started to make use of the barn, especially with the disruptions of people working on the building periodically. However we soon spotted signs of owls roosting, finding splash marks and pellets on the ground around the barn. So we set up our trail camera and were delighted with what it showed us!



## Drought

Every summer we see large cracks appearing in the clay soil as it dries out, but this year were the biggest and deepest we've ever seen. Steve measured some of them using a stick - wow !



## Hazels

We planted four varieties of hazels in 2012 knowing that they much prefer light sandy soil, but still we thought it worth a go as the nuts and coppiced poles are valuable. They have been slow to get established but all are now growing well and this year produced lots of nuts. Not that we got to eat many of them but we're happy for them to be a



food source for wildlife. Plenty of nuts obviously get buried as we've found lots of young seedling hazels growing.

This winter we will also try propagating by layering. We will also start to do some coppicing.



## Time & space for youngsters.



We very firmly believe that young people should have opportunities for spending time out of doors in fresh air, with space to run and explore. This year we've had several families visiting from London,

Cambridge and Ipswich, some camping for the first time ever. The freedom to 'go off alone' was voiced firmly by one six year old girl who also delighted in being able to take her two year old brother off to 'find things'. It's clear that these sorts of experiences are extremely important for building self-confidence, responsible attitudes and freedom of expression. This is just as important for teens and young adults so we were delighted to have Ameer & friends camp and share a fine meal cooked on the campfire.



## Happy New Year!

*Wishing you a healthy & enjoyable year ahead. We look forward to seeing you at Tiggins Meadow in 2023. Juliet & Peter*

[wildabouttiggins.org](http://wildabouttiggins.org)

