

Achievements

Romney Marsh Countryside Project

April 2001/March 2002

Romney Marsh Countryside Project – Our Fifth Year



The Romney Marsh Countryside Project (RMCP) was officially launched on July 26th 1996. The RMCP is being managed by the White Cliffs Countryside Project (WCCP), with funding from Shepway District Council, English Nature, Environment Agency, BNFL Magnox Generation, British Energy, Community in South Kent (CASK) partnership, Kent Rural Development Area (RDA) and the South East England Development Area (SEEDA).

The RMCP aims to help care for the special beauty and wildlife of the Romney Marsh, Walland Marsh and Dungeness, while promoting the area as a rural tourist destination. Our fifth year has been one of our busiest ever. The RMCP has grown from one member of staff in 1996 to two full time and three part time members of staff during the year 2001.

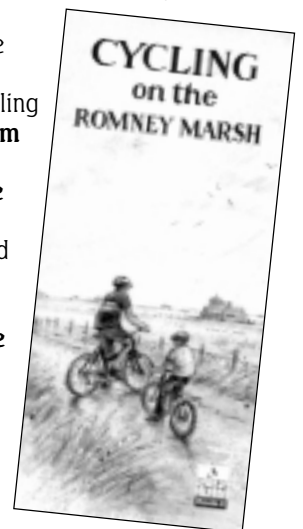
The Green Tourism and Community Wildlife Officer has been involved in a series of exciting projects across the Romney Marsh this year. The Wetlands Survey and Wildlife Enhancement Officer post has continued on a part time basis with extra funding from the Environment Agency during this season. While the RMCP has also been able to manage short term contracts for promoting wildlife grants with Marsh farmers, plus administrative support for the Project during this fifth year.

We can do more though and would like to extend the existing partnerships with other organisations, town and parish councils for the long term wildlife, landscape and economic benefit of the Romney Marsh.

In our fifth year the Romney Marsh Countryside Project has:-

- **Published two Countryside Activities leaflets, with 167 events.** The RMCP have led 69 of these, which have included 26 guided walks and children's activities with 965 people attending, 11 cycle rides with 336 people attending and 32 volunteer tasks with 445 people attending.
- **Published a cycling leaflet for the Romney Marsh,** highlighting the National Cycle Route 2 and other cycling information. This has been funded by Sustrans and Kent County Council through INTERREG II.
- **Re-printed the Romney Marsh Meanders cycle pack,** with additional cycling waymarking card, in partnership with the Environment Agency.

- **Waymarked the five cycle routes in the Romney Marsh Meanders cycle pack,** with the help of the Community Action in South Kent (CASK) partnership.
- **Published a water vole leaflet for the Romney Marsh,** highlighting the species, the law on baiting rodents and information on sympathetic management of the ditches in the area. This has been funded by Environment Agency.
- **Re-printed the updated New Romney Town Trail leaflet,** funded by the Community Action in South Kent partnership.
- **Produced an interpretation panel for Newchurch Wildlife area.**
- **Submitted a Heritage Lottery Fund Bid for Dungeness in partnership with the RSPB which was successful in spring 2002. Published a Dungeness NNR Newsletter, the "Shingle Issue", in conjunction with English Nature.**
- **Completed 584 volunteer days.** This total includes volunteer tasks on the Romney Marsh, voluntary wardens and work experience.
- **Created seven new ponds on the Romney Marsh,** with grants from English Nature, in co-operation with the landowners.
- **Planted 153 metres of hedging and 42 trees.**
- **Recorded 385 Water Vole sites** with the data used in the production of Atlas of Kent Mammals, **83 Medicinal Leech sites** and **104 Great Crested Newt sites.**
- **Completed a Greater Water Parsnip plant survey with 145 sites of 1700 plants recorded.**
- **In partnership with landowners, the RMCP has successfully completed Countryside Stewardship Schemes totalling 37km (6metre) arable margins 6.5km (2metre) arable margins and 94 hectare arable reversion for bumble bees on the Romney Marsh.**
- **The RMCP website was updated and now averages 900 visits a month on www.rmcp.co.uk**
- **Presented 14 talks to 367 people and carried out 5 school visits, attended 6 country, village fairs and spoke to 3540 people.**
- **Produced 241 press mentions, with one TV and three radio interviews.**



A partnership between



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Countryside Activities

Our aim is to encourage people to enjoy and understand the countryside through guided walks, cycle rides, countryside conservation events and children's activities.

A total of 40,000 Countryside Activities leaflets have been published and distributed for the Romney Marsh by the RMCP, with a total of 170 events organised in 2001/2002. The RMCP

Guided walks

The RMCP have led 26 guided walks and children's activities, attended by 965 people. This is an average of 37 people attending per walk, with 627 people (65%), visitors to the Romney Marsh, contributing an estimated total value of £9813 to the local economy.

Guided walks totals

99/00	859 (25)
00/01	1222 (35)
01/02	965 (26)

The number of guided walks was lower due to the foot and mouth restrictions at Easter, but there was a 20% increase in the average number of walkers attending a RMCP guided walk compared to 2000/2001.

Volunteers

We aim to encourage local people of all ages to find out more and get involved in helping to protect their local countryside.

Through our fifth year of the project we have carried out 32 conservation tasks, a 28% increase in tasks over last year. The number of volunteer days on the tasks totals 485 volunteer days, a 42% increase in volunteers compared to last year. A total of 123 (25%) of these volunteer days have been given by people who live on the Romney Marsh. The average number of volunteers per RMCP task is 15.

The RMCP has again been working at numerous sites on the Romney Marsh, including two National Nature Reserves (NNR's) and three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's).

Pond Work

Since the RMCP was launched in 1996, a total of 28 new ponds have been created and another 6 ponds restored.

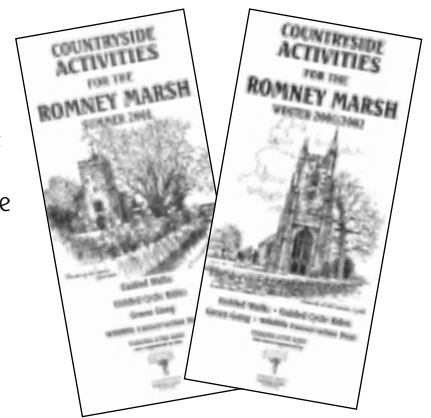
The RMCP worked on **New Romney Warren SSSI** and **Money Penny Pits SSSI** over five tasks. Willow was cut specifically around the seasonal ponds for great-crested newts, medicinal leeches and the marshmallow plant. Supervision over contracts at New Romney Warren for scrub removal and ragwort weedwiping were completed.

Working with farmers and landowners

Our aim is to conserve the wildlife and landscape of the Romney Marsh, working with farmers, local communities, landowners and business.

The RMCP employs Mrs Jane Reynolds on a part time basis to promote and help landowners and farmers interested in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS). The main thrust is to create habitat specifically for bumble bees through increasing the flower mix (especially clover) in the grass margin options.

staff led 67 of these activities. Thanks to the CASK partnership for sponsoring both of these leaflets.



Cycle rides

The guided cycle rides remain popular, with 336 people attending 11 rides. This is an average of 31 people attending per RMCP bike ride, with 207 people (62%), visitors to the Romney Marsh, contributing an estimated total value of £6313 to the local economy.

Guided cycle ride totals

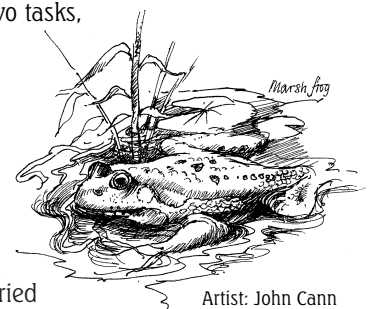
99/00	328 (17)
00/01	386 (15)
01/02	336 (11)

This is a 17.7% increase in cyclists coming on a RMCP guided ride compared to 1999/2000.

The RMCP has worked at **Dungeness National Nature Reserve (NNR)**. The tasks have involved clearing willow from the RSPB reserve on one of the Fossil Pits. The RMCP has also led two beach cleans clearing just under a half a tonne of rubbish.

Woodland ride work has continued for the third year at **Hamstreet Wood NNR**. A 100 metre stretch of woodland path has been coppiced specifically for dormice and White Admiral butterflies. The Christmas task was a success, with no rain!

At **New Romney Warren SSSI**, ragwort and nettles has continued to be controlled on two tasks, with additional help from the South Kent College team, based on site.



Artist: John Cann

Work to cut back willow and aquatic vegetation was also carried out at a pond at **Orgarwick, Dymchurch**.

A total of 7 ponds were created on the Romney Marsh during the autumn, at **East Guldeford, Brenzett and New Romney** by the RMCP, with grants from English Nature, specifically made for great-crested newts.

Jane has submitted five CSS grant applications for local farmers which if successful will create:

- 37 km of 6m arable margins
- 6.5 km of 2m arable margins
- 94 hectares of arable reversion

A further 8 farmers were visited, resulting in new CSS applications being developed at present. This post has been made possible through funding from English Nature.

Green Tourism and Community Wildlife Officer (Romney Marsh)

Andrew Nixon worked on a range of projects during the year as the Green Tourism and Community Wildlife Officer. Andrew has since left the post at Christmas and the RMCP are expecting to reappoint before the end of March 2002. A selection of some of the work completed in the year is described below.

Newchurch Panel. A wildlife panel has been produced and installed in an area in front of the church, to complement work the RMCP has carried out in conjunction with Newchurch Parish Council and the local community. **Sponsorship for this project came from Community Action in South Kent (CASK) partnership.**

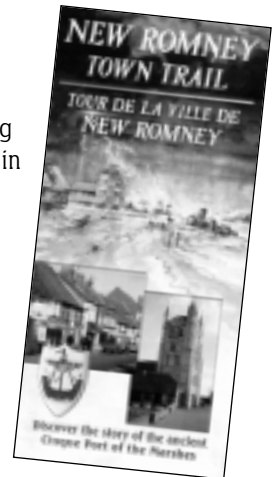
Lydd House, Lydd Housing and Lydd Football Ground. The RMCP have planted a series of tree schemes at several sites in Lydd. **Sponsorship for this project came from BNFL Magnox Generation.**

Brookland School and Village Hall. The RMCP carried out a

pond construction and wildlife area in the school grounds with the help of the pupil's wildlife group. We also planted a 58m hedge and three trees in the village hall grounds. **Both of these projects were helped by the CASK partnership.**

Toad Fencing, New Romney. The RMCP carried out a task to construct toad fencing on the Ashford Road, New Romney again in February 2002. **Sponsorship came from CASK partnership and British Energy for the materials.**

Reprinted the New Romney Town Trail leaflet. The RMCP has inserted a new map and reprinted the leaflet due to popular demand. **The leaflet has been funded by CASK partnership.**



The Magic Of the Marsh walks pack

With quiet rural villages, numerous church towers on the horizon, the Romney Marsh is an ideal place to explore on foot.

The RMCP continues to monitor, upgrade and repair lengths of the footpaths in the nine self guided walks in the walks pack, which total 45 miles in length.

Cycling

The Romney Marsh is an ideal place for family cycling. It is flat, with wide open landscapes and quiet country lanes.

The RMCP have produced a new, free leaflet on cycling on the Romney Marsh. The leaflet provides information on the National Cycle Route 2 across the Marsh. Information on accommodation, camp sites, cycle shops and waymarking of cycle routes are all included. A total of 20,000 leaflets have been printed. The information has been put on our website. www.rmcp.co.uk.

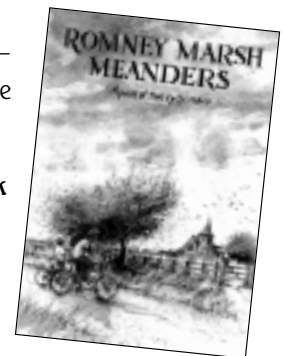
The leaflet has been sponsored by Sustrans, Kent County Council with INTERREG II funding.

The RMCP worked with Shepway District Council to make Shepway Cyclethon 2001 a great success. In June, 197 cyclists followed National Cycle Route 2 in their free sky blue T-shirts around the Marsh stopping at Lathe Barn tea rooms and back to

New Romney, before finishing off with a free barbecue snack.

The Romney Marsh Meanders cycle pack The "Romney Marsh Meanders" cycle pack has been reprinted, with financial support from the Environment Agency.

The RMCP has waymarked the five routes of the Romney Marsh Meanders cycle pack with support from Community Action in South Kent (CASK) partnership. At road junctions, brown and white arrowed discs have been attached to existing road signs, or oak posts have been installed. The waymarking would not have been achieved without the support of Shepway and Ashford Highways Departments.



Dungeness National Nature Reserve

Our aim is to care for Dungeness National Nature Reserve (NNR) through a partnership approach with other conservation organisations, private companies and the local residents.

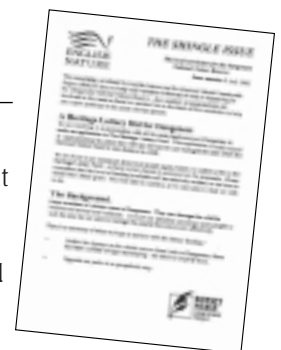
In autumn 2001, the RSPB and other interested parties including the RMCP submitted a Heritage Lottery Bid for Dungeness. The proposed work is on the RSPB reserve, Dungeness Estate and other areas at Greatstone, Lade and Lydd-on-sea. A stage 1 application to the HLF Board was successful in spring 2002.

English Nature and the RMCP have produced the second publication of a local newsletter for the residents of Dungeness to Greatstone called the "Shingle Issue". The newsletter was posted to every resident adjacent to the NNR.

The RMCP and English Nature cleared rubbish on NNR land in the autumn 2001 at Lade. This work over four days involved clearing building rubble, garden refuse flytipped on NNR land by residents. Several skips were used in the programme of work.

The Nature Conservation Order (NCO) has again been renewed for Dungeness, which prevents four wheel drive vehicles, motorbikes and quadbikes driving on the shingle. Several cases have been processed ready for possible prosecutions in partnership with English Nature and the Kent Police.

The RMCP continues to work on issues at Dungeness involving sea angling, car parking, rubbish, film and fashion crews.



Wetlands Survey - Promoting Biodiversity on the Marsh



Our aim is to improve our knowledge of wetland species on the Romney Marsh through extensive surveys, in close conjunction with the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

The Wetland Survey Post is an initiative launched in March 1998, which has continued into its fourth year with financial help from the Environment Agency. The information gathered is critical to help inform the Agency's programme of maintenance of the watercourses on the Marsh.

The RMCP have recorded Water Voles suffering a 31% decline in the 7 monitoring 1km squares on the Romney Marsh during the year. A total of 20 new 1km survey squares were completed, bringing the total number of 1km squares surveyed to 77.

The RMCP have collated 70 Mink records for the Marsh during 2001 relating to approximately 200 animals. Specific hotspots for this animal have been identified, which is a major predator of the Water Vole.

Medicinal Leeches are now found in 32 pits/ponds and 51 ditches on the Romney Marsh. This constitutes the national

stronghold for this species. The number of blood slides obtained was very low and monitoring of the leeches at sites was restricted due to the foot and mouth outbreak.

The RMCP continued with a survey of the plant Greater Water Parsnip on the Rother Valley, Wet Levels, Hexden Levels and parts of the Romney Marsh. The plant was found at 145 sites, totalling c1700 plants. 53% of plants were found on arable ditches and 94% of the plants were found on private ditches. The distribution showed a concentration along the northern fringe of the Marsh from Burmarsh to Appledore and scattered populations in the Rother Valley.

In partnership with the Romney Warren Project, at New Romney Warren, the nationally scarce Marshmallow plant was grown from seed, which were then planted out specifically for the endangered Marshmallow moth at Old Romney and at four ponds on the Marsh.

The winter wildfowl and breeding bird counts at Fairfield SSSI were conducted for English Nature in partnership with the landowner.

One training day for surveying newts (including great-crested newt) was organised. This was held at New Romney Warren SSSI in March 2002 with 40 people attending. Other training days were cancelled due to foot and mouth restrictions.

Publicity



We aim to raise awareness of the local and national importance of the Marsh and Dungeness. The wildlife and attractive landscape can assist in marketing the area to a wide

audience attracting new visitors and supporting the local economy through 'Green Tourism' which is sustainable to the local environment.

The number of press mentions in 2000/2001 totalled 241 in local papers and magazines. The publicity included three radio interviews and one TV interview.

The RMCP has given 14 talks to councils, conservation groups and societies totalling 367 people. Our stall featured 8 days at Lydd Club Day, New Romney Country Fair, Furley School Fete, Brookland Village Fete, Rye Mediaeval Festival and Dungeness RSPB Bird Fair, with the Project chatting to 3540 people.

The RMCP website has had additional pages added. In particular, on the wildlife sections, cycling and our community pages. A range of new links have also been installed. Our statistics show an average of 900 visits per month (we don't count hits). Have a look at the website and remember to keep an eye open for the laughing frog.

Be part of it

We are keen for you to become involved - contact us Nick Johannsen, Owen Leyshon, Helen McConnell or Andrea Hutchens.

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