

# SFPT January 2017 report for Fromus Meadows reserve

## Black noses, cowpats and puddles

January 10<sup>th</sup> 2017, and this is my first visit of the year to our Fromus Meadows reserve. After the heavy rain last night, the River Fromus is in fine form, and is swirling through the lower meadow past the herd of native British White cattle.

The little river here has scooped out a hole in its bed, and formed a deep, circular pool where last year I saw a water vole, and also a male banded demoiselle damselfly, which are notable and interesting sightings. The soil here is a rich brown, fertile, and dotted with molehills – and also many cow pancakes: it pays to watch your step.



Higher up its course, the Fromus pours through the dramatic Gorge, and at one point debris and a fallen tree have combined to dam its flow – but not quite: the river has overtopped the obstacle and is boiling into a cauldron of foam and bubbles. The sight sets me pondering about the day in the far distant past when the mediaeval earthen dam just upstream failed, and hurtling floodwaters carved this gorge when the great lake behind the dam catastrophically emptied. It must have been a bad day for the Bigods, but probably worse downstream for the people on the riverbanks in Kelsale and Saxmundham.

SFPT has plans to study and report on the aquatic life in the deep pool, and also in the Circular Pond and Long Pond. The main course of the Fromus river itself is prone to drying up at regular intervals every year, so it will be challenging but very worthwhile to find out what aquatic life can survive in it: I was dumbfounded last year to walk up the dry riverbed and see tiny fish expiring in a small puddle.



There is a lot to be said for puddles. In wildlife terms, they are tiny intermittent wetlands, and many species use them. Today I photographed my favourite puddle in the Fromus Meadows. Regularly churned by cart-wheels and livestock in the past, the muddy edges support many species of plant and invertebrate. Ideally, the process that originally created them must continue to maintain the squishy habitat, so our herd of gleaming white, black-nosed cattle are just what the doctor ordered.

Lovely as they are, my advice to you as a visitor is to give the cattle a wide berth. They are not hostile – just curious and occasionally boisterous. I was forced to walk within a few yards of them when I arrived – no choice. Two were head-butting each other, and these two then trotted straight at me, fast. I back-pedalled towards the river, and they kept coming! I stood on the lip of the bank, back to the river, facing them 18 inches away. It wasn't exactly Horatius at The Bridge, but one more step from them and I would have been happy to jump into the river. Then they got bored, and wandered off. I took their photo later, side-by-side and looking very pleased with themselves.



***Laurie Forsyth***