

## THE MEADOW THROUGH THE SEASONS

**The Meadow in Spring:** This is a time of blossom: the Horse Chestnut trees with their 'candles' of blossom and hawthorn trees in full bloom! Plant species are growing back after their autumn cut, Buttercups providing an early pollen boost for insects. In late spring, bat species begin to be more active (fuelled by all that insect diversity). Pipistrelles are common among the trees but larger species such as the Noctule bat have also been observed.

**The Meadow in Summer:** The Meadow in Summer is home to a rich variety of plant life: this is the time when Pyramidal Orchids are in full bloom (Bee Orchids are also becoming more widespread – look carefully!), the Bedstraw carpets large areas and Wild Thyme can be found alongside the paths. Ragwort is also present: while this plant is recognised as being hugely beneficial to pollinating insects, it is also very invasive so large quantities are removed by hand to prevent it taking over.

**The Meadow in Autumn:** This is a time when the wildflower-rich meadow areas must be cut in order to support and maintain the plant structure that brings us the diversity of Spring and Summer blooms. This is largely done naturally through the use of grazing animals such as sheep or cattle (please keep dogs on leads when grazing animals are present). The water meadow areas are 'topped' using machinery to maintain some areas of longer vegetation for cover. As the grassland height is reduced, it allows us to appreciate more the diversity of plant life in the hedgerows and small coppices – there are several Walnut trees; Blackberry, Hawthorn and Elderberry hedges, hips from the Dog Roses and many more nuts and berries which provide overwintering supplies to the birds and small mammals. Migrating birds are commonly spotted here, with Fieldfares and Redwings being particularly noticeable feeding on berries from the hedges.

**The Meadow in Winter:** Winter is a time for maintenance of the habitat: fences are maintained, or replaced to contain the grazing animals, hedgerow gaps are plugged with native species and hedgerows and scrub are cut as appropriate. The water meadows in the valley naturally flood at this time, providing flood relief to areas further down the river Glyme. This in turn provides a suitable overwintering habitat for an increasing number of migrating bird species.