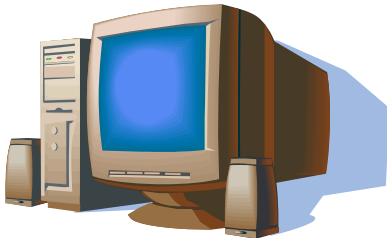


# SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



HELPING TO PROTECT MILL MEADOWS  
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Issue 43.  
October-December 2008



Check the society website for regular updates, information and pictures at <http://www.millmeadows.org.uk/>

## Events for your diary

**Oct 18/19<sup>th</sup>:** photographic display at Hanningfield Reservoir. Our display boards will be on view in the Essex Wildlife Trust Visitor Centre from 9.30am on Saturday until 4pm on Sunday.

**\*\* Volunteers are wanted for the above.** If you are interested in attending the display for an hour or two during the week-end, to tell people about Mill Meadows then please get in touch using the chairperson's contact details below.

**November 2<sup>nd</sup>:** Fungi walk\*, follows up the successful foray of 2006 and 2007 looking for the elusive waxcaps. Meet at **10.30 am** at the **Scout Hall, Greens Farm Lane**. Duration is 1-2 hours. Advance booking via Countryside Services is preferred so that we can gauge numbers.

**November 22<sup>nd</sup>** a walk with our Ranger, Chris, for an explanation of the new fencing work. Please see Chairman's and Ranger's reports below for details. Meet at **1.30 pm** at the **Scout Hut**.

## Work parties

- Oct 11** Erect tawny owl and bat nest boxes. Also we will be joining the **Billericay Town Litter Pick** by picking up litter on The Reserve.
- Nov 08** Lay and replant hedge at Southend Road.
- Dec 13** Hedgerow works in SSSI - trim/replant

## Leaflet Distribution by email

Just a reminder that you now have the option of receiving your newsletter by email. If you would like to do so, please advise our Membership Secretary, John Hathaway: [john.hathaway@hathaway.co.uk](mailto:john.hathaway@hathaway.co.uk). subscription by email is entirely voluntary.

## Membership renewal is now due:

if you haven't already done so, please send your renewal payments to John Hathaway using the form at the back of the newsletter

## Chairperson's Report

This autumn will see the start of the work to be carried out to improve the fencing around the SSSI areas. We are giving everyone the opportunity to learn about the work before it is started, please see more details under 'events'. We will explain where the fencing will be erected and where any trees have to be removed to accommodate it. The additional fencing will enable us to keep the cattle grazing where we need them to graze. This will be highly beneficial to the conservation of the meadow areas and hence to our SSSI status - and thus to ensure future funding.

The purpose of the walk on Nov 22<sup>nd</sup> is to explain the work on site because it is very hard to visualise it when described in writing, even with maps and diagrams. The few complaints we've had in the past about the management of the reserve could have probably been avoided if we had explained more in advance, as I discussed in our last newsletter. But we don't just try to deter feedback; we listened to some of the other points

as well and consequently are going to aim for tidier finishing and controlled, and not seemingly over-vigilant, scrub and tree removal in future. We will also use our Web Site and the Information Boards to give advance warning of the new fencing work.

Other work that will be less noticeable immediately will be the laying and re-planting of the hedges along Southend Road. This work is the final part of the project sponsored by the National Lottery Awards-for-All scheme. The hedging plants, however, will be funded mainly by The Society, because it was always part of the contract with the Lottery scheme that we made a contribution. We're able to do this, primarily because of the donations received from our members. The donations received each year considerably exceed our membership subscriptions and what better way to use the funds than in the purchase of things that grow on The Reserve. So many thanks to all of you who have donated so generously to The Society.

As seems to be common with many voluntary organisations nowadays, the problem is less one of money and more of people being willing and able to give their time. We still have 2 vacancies on The Committee. I'd very much like to see these positions filled to give us a bit more 'bandwidth' and push along in other areas, for example, education. Since I last made an appeal for people to join the Management Committee we have had a healthy trickle of new members – so I am justified in using the newsletter to appeal again for people to join us. It is a nice way of broadening knowledge and of course gives you an opportunity to have an influence in how The Reserve is managed. So please let me know if you would like to join the Committee.

Partly related to this appeal, I must apologise for us not holding another indoor meeting this year, as we had hoped. This now looks unlikely but we do, however, have some ideas for next year.

Finally, I hope that you can pop along to Hanningfield Reservoir Visitor Centre to see our display boards. The collection of photographs is probably our best publicity asset, drawing many admirers, as it did once again at the Norsey Wood Open Day. So we should expect a few new members following, the week-end of 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> October.

**Neil Sumner 01277 630849**  
[chair@millmeadows.org.uk](mailto:chair@millmeadows.org.uk)

## **Ranger's report**

Not a whole lot to report this time. The grazing continues and I think we're fairly pleased with the progress so far. The grass seems to me to be quite a bit shorter than this time last year. Hopefully the increased number of cattle and a slightly longer grazing period has helped. Lovely calves this year too!

To aid the grazing I'm hoping to get someone in the cut and remove a lot of the bramble and small scrubby growth from the SSSI fields shortly. At the moment there are quite a few 'islands' in these fields where the cattle don't go, and these tend to get larger and reduce the meadow area. This is only in the SSSI fields so there should be plenty of scrub elsewhere in the meadows for those species that like the habitat. You may also have noticed some orange marks on some of the trees bordering the SSSI. These are to indicate the route of a new fence that should be installed to more closely control the cattle, keeping them within the SSSI fields. We will be keeping the number of trees removed to a minimum, and field and kissing gates will be installed at the appropriate places so that your access throughout the site will remain. If you have any questions about any of this, please get in touch.

Just recently, the large Oak in Oakfield has been tidied up after shedding a branch in the summer. This was probably the result of 'summer branch drop', where trees can lose apparently healthy limbs without warning. No-one seems entirely sure why this happens, but one theory is that on humid days the amount of moisture in the tree's tissues increases the weight of a branch past a critical point. I have also asked the tree surgeon to remove some of the branches from the old Oaks in Hillmans, and I'm hoping the work will take place soon.

Many Thanks  
*Chris Huggins*  
*Countryside Ranger*  
 Norsey Wood Information Centre  
 01277 624553 [chris.huggins@basildon.gov.uk](mailto:chris.huggins@basildon.gov.uk)

### **Dog fouling on Mill Meadows**

*This subject was raised at the AGM, as it is still a problem, especially in Butchers near the Scout Hall entrance. We have written once to Basildon Council to ask if there is anything more that can be done to reduce it. So far we have received only an acknowledgement. A report, by the council, states that "the perception of the problem seemed to be far worse than the problem itself and recommended that no action be taken but that it is monitored and action taken if required." Neither us nor the Norsey Wood Society are willing to leave it at that so we will be writing to them again. We need more in the way of a deterrent to the offenders, so will press the Council for ideas.*

### **Sightings from near and far**

We have had a report from one of our members of a rare beetle, **Flat Bark Beetle** (*Uleiota Planata*). It was found, by a renowned beetle expert, under the bark of one of the fallen trees. This is only the second record in Essex. We will try and re-discover it, perhaps with one of the local conservation groups.



### **Marginal Species Survey**

At last: some response on the mammals and reptiles – we have news of weasels and adders in the grounds of Gatwick House.

Of the four wildflower species, three have been recorded this year: Harebells: one of best years for some time, Betony and a good amount of Devil's Bit Scabious.

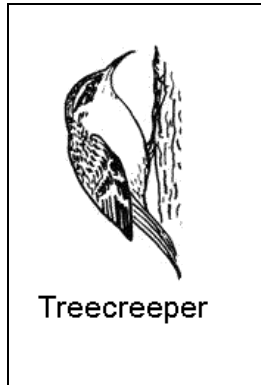


*the above picture was taken on the day of the wildflower walk – see details later in the newsletter – Ed.*

There have been no reports of any of the butterfly or moth species of which we requested records .

With respect to the birds, by the consistency of sightings, we can be confident that our Bullfinch numbers have stayed at 2 pairs but there has no reported evidence of breeding success. Which leads on to.....

### **Birds in and around the reserve**



Treecreeper

Although I could find no evidence of them holding territory during spring, Treecreepers were around The Reserve during the summer. These birds nest behind the bark of old trees so there is plenty of scope for them to breed. They are common in neighbouring woodlands, including Norsey Woods. Being so small and keeping close to the trunk or branch as they climb they are more easily detected if you know the call or song.

The 'bird-of-the-quarter' is perhaps the Nuthatch, seen amongst a party of Blue and Great Tits on August 2<sup>nd</sup>. Hours were spent in Norsey Wood and neighbouring Barrenleys Wood listening for these in Spring, even trying to encourage them with sound recordings, but to no avail. They are quite sedentary birds so where did this individual come from? Perhaps a wanderer from Thorndon Park where there are around 4 pairs. The Nuthatch is increasing nationally as it is expanding its range northwards, but in Essex it has declined.

Summer months are always the quietest for birds and the cooler and later-starting days are bring some welcome activity. On the Essex coast a number of easterly winds have brought one of the best periods of autumn migrants for some time but very little seems to have ventured this far inland. Goldcrests are common now and seem to be calling everywhere, especially from the dense conifers in the gardens. If you pass a conifer and hear a high-pitched 'zi zi' then you are probably very near one. Nowadays they seem to dwindle in the winter months. On September 27<sup>th</sup> I counted at least 15, including a group of 6 birds. A Redwing called too, on that day, and several Meadow Pipits passed overhead, as did both Pied and Grey wagtails. Flocks of tits seemed to consist mainly of Long-tailed with more than 20 in

one flock and 16 in the other. Robins were busy singing to claim their winter territories and were joined by the occasional burst from a Wren and a couple of chiff-chaffs which have the habit of singing at this time of year.

### Wildflower Walk – August 2<sup>nd</sup>

Since the last Newsletter we have had our Wildflower Walk and were once again fortunate to be accompanied by an expert – Rod Cole who many of you will remember from the AGM. Rod made the effort to record not only flowers but all species of bee, cricket and vascular<sup>1</sup> plant. The list is:

#### **Insects**

Red-tailed Bumble-bee (*Bombus lapidarius*)

White-tailed Bumble-bee (*B. lucorum*)

Cuckoo Bumble-bee (*B. vestalis*)

Speckled Bush-cricket (*Leptophyes punctatissima*)

Roesel's Bush-cricket (*Metrioptera roeselii*)

Dark Bush-cricket (*Pholidoptera griseoptera*)

Short-winged Conehead (*Conocephalus dorsalis*)

Speckled Wood

Gatekeeper

Meadow brown

Ringlet

Small Skipper

Green-veined White

Small Copper

#### **Vascular plants**

Bracken

Male Fern

Broad Buckler Fern

Lesser Spearwort

Creeping Buttercup

Common Mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*)

Lesser Stitchwort

Norway Maple

Sycamore

Holly

Yellow Meadow Vetchling

Bird's-foot Trefoil

Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*)

Red Clover

White Clover

Tufted Vetch

Common Hawthorn

Tormentil

Sloe

Field Rose

Dog Rose

Blackberry

Great Hairy Willow-herb

Mistletoe

Cow Parsnip

Common Knotgrass

Water Pepper

Common Sorrel

Sheep's Sorrel

Curled Dock

Broad-leaved Dock

Wood Dock (*Rumex sanguineus*)

Water Dock (*R. hydrolapathum*)

Nettle

English (?) Elm

Silver Birch

Hazel

Pedunculate Oak

Crack Willow

Woody Nightshade

Betony

Harebell

Honeysuckle

Elder

Devil's-bit Scabious

Yarrow

Mugwort

Lesser Knapweed

Creeping Thistle

Marsh Thistle

Common Catsear (*Hypochoeris radicata*)

Autumn Hawkbit (*Leontodon autumnalis*)

Leafy Hawkweed (*Hieracium sp.* – quite possibly *H. perpropinquum*, the species which tends to turn up in south Essex, including Laindon Common, and The Mount, Langdon Hills.)

Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*)

Toad Rush (*J. bufonius*)

Compact Rush (*J. conglomeratus*)

Soft Rush (*J. effusus*)

Common Duckweed (*Lemna minor*)

Hairy Sedge (*Carex hirta*)

Pendulous Sedge (*C. pendula*)

Distant-flowered Sedge (*C. remota*)

Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*)

Sweet Vernal Grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*)

<sup>1</sup> Had to look this up!: in summary its a plant with roots, stem and leaves

Cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomeratum*)  
 Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*)  
 Floating Sweet-grass (*Glyceria fluitans*)  
 Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*)  
 Timothy (*Phleum pratense*)

### **The months ahead**

With autumn upon us you might be tempted to put away your boots, binoculars, field guides and reference books until next year. However it is still a time to keep looking for any signs of wildlife. Winter migrating birds will soon be arriving. As the days shorten and food supplies diminish the birds will be more visible as they search for food. Please consider putting food out for the garden varieties.

The deciduous trees will be losing their leaves which can reveal the birds that are often hidden in the denser vegetation. Unlike Neil, I am not familiar with the bird calls and mainly rely on visual identification. Another sight to look out for is flocks of birds returning for the evening roosts. Recently during a holiday in Croatia this was a nightly occasion and the starlings congregated in the trees of the local town square.

The autumn fruits on the bushes and trees are another display to be admired. They are also vital food plants for mammals and insects. Though it is getting late in the season for seeing moths here is a tip courtesy of the BBC Breathing Places website for attracting them to your garden - *You can make up a sugary solution for moths which they will come and feed on instead of flowers. Simply heat cola in a pan then add brown sugar and black treacle until everything has dissolved. Let the mixture cool and then at dusk paint it onto tree trunks or posts. You'll then be able to see the moths feeding at night with a torch.*



Some of the mammals that inhabit the Reserve are active all year round. Many of them are reclusive but there is one way you might be able to identify those in the neighbourhood. The photograph opposite shows the footprint of a dog. I took the picture after a shower of rain and it was a clear imprint in the mud. Next time you are walking along the paths look out for signs of recent activity. Should we have a snowfall then the tracks are even more obvious. With experience and by referring to various books you might identify the footprint of a fox, rabbit or even a badger. I hope you enjoy wrapping up warm and taking the time to study the ever changing scenery that the Reserve provides. If you have a digital camera and take some photographs please send a copy to our chair via the website link.

### **Butterfly Survey**

We started a more formal Butterfly Survey this year, using a technique advocated by Butterfly Conservation in their UK Monitoring Scheme. It requires that we create a walk-way in 10 sections. Each section has to be traversed at a steady pace and we are only allowed to count butterflies within an imaginary 5 x 5 metre box in front of us. Weather conditions are stipulative too- not too much breeze and a reasonable temperature and/or amount of sunshine. The total counts for reserve are shown below. 2008 has been a poor year for butterflies nationally, as was last year. Our second visit was quite dismal - If we had done this in 2006, results would have been much higher.

We aim to conduct this annually to monitor trends.

	July 19	Aug 17
Small/Essex Skipper	5	
Large Skipper	1	
Large White	4	2
Small White or Green-Veined White	4	3
Holly Blue		1
Red Admiral	2	
Peacock	7	
Comma	2	
Speckled Wood	1	10
Gatekeeper	25	12
Meadow Brown	27	2
Ringlet	12	





