

# SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



HELPING TO PROTECT MILL MEADOWS  
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Issue 45  
April- June 2009

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



## Events for your diary

### Annual General Meeting

The AGM is on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April.

Our speaker is Mr Andrew May, Conservation Manager of the Essex Wildlife Trust will talk about **Living Landscapes**.

Please note the venue: the **Scout Hall in Greens Farm Lane**.

Our usual start time of 7.45 and refreshments will be provided.

### Walks

**Sat 9<sup>th</sup> May: Bird Walk.** A walk around Mill Meadows to see and hear the breeding birds. Starts at 6.30 am

**Sat 11<sup>th</sup> July: Wildflower Walk.** A guided walk where we identify and learn about the flowers on Mill Meadows. Starts at 10.30 am

**September** (exact date to follow) **Bat & moth** evening

**November** (exact date to follow) **Fungus Foray** – the annual search for waxcaps

*For the above walks, meet 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.*

### Visits

Langdon Hills Nature Reserve

**Sun am 14<sup>th</sup> June:**

*Meet at the Visitors Centre. For precise time, directions and cars shares contact the Chairman, details below*

### Work parties

**11<sup>th</sup> April; 9<sup>th</sup> May; 13<sup>th</sup> June**

*These run from 10.30 to 12.30 – meet at the Scout Hall*

### Big Town Litter Pick

4<sup>th</sup> April. 11 am to 1 pm

The Mill Meadows Society will be partaking by litter-picking at Mill Meadows.

Meet at the Scout Hall at Greens Farm Lane at 11 am to 1 pm.



*Basildon Council do organise regular litter pick-ups on Mill Meadows. However, funding is limited and there are times when we like to do it ourselves rather than wait for the next clean-up. The same applies in Billericay town – hence this initiative to get members of the community helping to clean-up their town. .*

### A message from the Membership Secretary

I would just like to say many thanks to all those members that have kindly agreed to receive the Newsletter by E-mail. It really does make a big difference to our overheads as it saves admin time; reduces postage costs; less paper and printing; and, of course, fewer envelopes. Although this has been a great start, I would like to encourage any other members that have E-mail addresses to consider receiving the Newsletter electronically. Just send me an e-mail to this effect and I will take it from there.

*However*, I do stress that Newsletters by E-mail is optional. We will continue to deliver to those who do not have email or prefer a paper copy.

**Membership renewal** is almost upon us once again as our subscription year runs from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March. The 'new look' membership renewal form is enclosed with this newsletter to all except the 15 members who have already very kindly paid their 2009/10 subs. I hope that everybody will renew their subscriptions as your continued support really is the lifeblood of the Society.

*Many thanks,*

John Hathaway, Membership Secretary  
**14 Headley Road, Billericay, CM11 1BJ**  
 E-mail: [john.hathaway@hathaway.co.uk](mailto:john.hathaway@hathaway.co.uk)

### Chairperson's Report

The end of another Society year is here. Although it hasn't been as eventful as the previous year it is a time to be optimistic. The main events of interest were the start of the new fencing work and launch of the new Web site. Ross likes to add a new feature occasionally and the latest is the photo search facility. This will become more useful when we can put more labels on the photographs. And we are looking forward to enhancing the photograph collection too and many of **you** will be contributing. Please see below for details of a photographic competition.

I mentioned last month how we want to improve the wildlife in the non-SSSI area. We have started to do this by opening out some of the wood in Hillmans to let in more light and encourage more flowers and low-growing plants. Later in the year there will be a bit more clearance and then some planting of native fruit trees acquired with Society funds. In the area around Watts and Greens we will allow the scrub to flourish but maintain a good footpath so that we can walk through and enjoy, we hope, a bit more bird-song and a few more butterflies. We have used some of the logs from the felled trees to re-mark the 'official' path in Greens to encourage people to use this and let the scrub grow back on the other paths. (Although I expect we will have to return the logs to their intended locations many time before the vegetation anchors them down for us.)

As we have said before, we are obliged to keep the scrub down in the meadow areas but want it to flourish in other areas to get as much diversity as is possible in our small reserve.

At the AGM we are very fortunate this year to have Mr Andrew May from the Essex Wildlife Trust speaking about **Living Landscapes**. This is a national initiative to improve our natural environment. It aims to help wildlife move around the countryside by creating much larger nature reserves or by linking together existing nature reserves with "wildlife corridors". Without these corridors, many species dwindle in isolated islands and eventually disappear. This has already happened, for example, with some woodland bird species. Our countryside and its wildlife are facing ever-increasing pressure from housing development, from bigger and noisier transport links and from intensive agriculture.

Mill Meadows is part of one of the designated Living Landscape areas but is at an extreme point, which is worrying because when wildlife dwindles it starts to do so at the extremities of its range. I hope that many of you attend and look forward to learning about the initiative and how the Trust goes about implementing it. We have booked the Scout Hall this year in anticipation of a larger turn-out.

Our membership has increased slightly and our Management Committee numbers one more than

it did when I took the chair 3 years ago. A time to be optimistic, yes, but not smug. I am relieved to be able to advise that the current Committee members are once again standing for re-election but we cannot assume that they will do so every year. We still need to increase our membership to try and find those future committee members.

Finally, I should say a big 'thank you' to those Management Committee members who have done so much this year. Some have been diligently attending meetings and fulfilling the same roles for many years, whereas the newer members have taken us forward with very big steps in membership and on the Web site. Also, my thanks to the regular and occasional attendees at the Work Parties. There has been a lot done in the last year, with nest boxes made and installed and planting as well as cutting back. The work parties have been fun as well. As with any group working together on a task, there is always some good banter and a nice feeling of satisfaction.

Enjoy the Spring!

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

### **Ranger's report**

#### Wildlife

Judging by the amount of wildlife activity around the reserve this afternoon, the natural world seems to think spring is here. Several species of bird were in song and at least one Long-tailed Tit was gathering nesting material. There is frogspawn in all five ponds, although my records do show that this is slightly later than last year, possibly due to the cold winter, and the buds on the new hedging plants we put in earlier in the winter are in various stages of development. Anyway, lets' hope we're not all in for a nasty surprise and the warmer weather lasts.

#### Habitat management

The clearance of the vegetation to allow the installation of a new fence around the SSSI fields went fairly smoothly, and we're hoping to get the fencing installed some time in April. Around that time the cows should also return, possibly to the non-SSSI fields to begin with. Not a lot else has taken place since the last newsletter, although we

have managed to have a couple of work parties thinning/coppicing in Hillman's wood and coppiced the last section (on this rotation anyway!) of the hedge behind Chaffinch Crescent.

Many Thanks

*Chris Huggins*

*Countryside Ranger*

*Norsey Wood Information Centre*

01277 624553 [chris.huggins@basildon.gov.uk](mailto:chris.huggins@basildon.gov.uk)



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

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

The Tawny Owls continue to be around from dusk onwards and there are at least two calling, so signs of them returning to breed are good. This has been a good winter for sightings of treecreepers and coal tits and I'm convinced both these birds will be breeding somewhere on the Reserve. Bullfinches are hanging on, we still have at least one pair and one other male. Goldfinches, greenfinches and chaffinches have all started singing and a small group of siskins has stayed with us around the alders. But there have been no reportings of any linnets which seem to be dwindling even more in the surrounding countryside. The first chiffchaff duly returned on 18<sup>th</sup> March which seems to be the favourite date almost every year. A blackcap singing near Outwood Farm Road on 21<sup>st</sup> means that we can expect them soon at Mill Meadows.

"Just when we thought it couldn't get any worse".

This is the headline in the latest British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) magazine in an article about last year's breeding season. Apparently 2007 and 2008 were very poor years for nest productivity. The great and blue tits were some of those affected and I had noticed the reduction in these this winter. But those birds that breed earlier, such as long-tailed tits did rather well. Garden warblers are a bird we want to try and bring back to the Reserve but our chances look slim now, at least in the short term. Not only did they have a poor season but they are also impacted by conditions in Africa. The BTO's new international research team has found that the birds that winter in the

moist wooded and forest areas are in serious decline. This is also affecting nightingale and spotted flycatcher. However, it is not all bad news. The birds that winter in the dry Sahel just south of the Sahara are increasing, so we can expect our whitethroats to recover.

The BTO's research is also looking to understand the factors that are influencing these trends. As in Europe, it is agricultural practices that will make a difference. The BTO has already helped with the publication of a handbook for agricultural workers in Uganda and this advises on the importance of pollination to improved crop yields *and* wildlife. It is fascinating how work being done so far away can affect the quality of the country walks on our doorstep.

### **Mill Meadows – through your lens**

What is your favourite thing about Mill Meadows? Do you have a favourite stop, a favourite view, a favourite flower, tree or animal?

Why not share it? We are running a photographic competition for all members, and are looking for your favourite photographs of Mill Meadows from all angles and in all weathers. They don't need to be recent, and can be digital or hard copy. The competition will run until the end of September, so there is plenty of time to get snapping!

You can send your entries by email (if they are digital) to [webmaster@millmeadows.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@millmeadows.org.uk) or by post if not digital to Ross Holland, 33 Langemore Way, Billericay, Essex CM11 2BT. Please include, if possible, the date and where on the meadow the photograph was taken. The map of field names can be seen at <http://www.millmeadows.org.uk/marktrail.aspx>. Digital photo's should be no smaller than 640x480 please.

There will be 2 categories – Under 16 and Over 16. If you wish your photograph to be entered into the Under 16 category, please ensure you include your age in with the photo. Any without an age will be entered into the Over 16 category.

The competition will be judged by the Committee, and the competition is open to all members and their families, except the Committee of course!

The only other thing to note is that we would like to include these photographs in our publicity material, on our display boards at exhibitions and on our website, so by entering the competition we ask you to agree that we can do this. You can view many fine examples of the photographs we currently have at our new Photo Search page on the web site and an example at the foot of page 6.



### **Notice that the Eleventh Annual General Meeting of the**

**Mill Meadows Society will be held at the Scout Hall, Greens Farm Lane on Thursday 23rd April 2009 at 7.45 pm.** All members should attend; non-members will be very welcome but can not vote at the meeting. This is your opportunity to comment on the society activities and influence future decisions.

Nominations – if you wish to nominate a society member for the General Committee please give details of the position, the name of the nominee and your name to the General Secretary at least 24 hours prior to the meeting.

#### Agenda

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Matter arising from the minutes of the tenth AGM held on 24th April 2008. See next page.
3. Report of Chairman.
4. Report of treasurer, accounts for 2008-9
5. Report of Membership Secretary
6. Election of committee officers for the year 2009-10:-
  - Chairman
  - Treasurer
  - General Secretary
  - Other Committee Members
7. Resolutions and motions. Members are invited to submit motions for consideration and delivered to the General Secretary at 36 Beverley Rise, Billericay, prior to 14 days before the meeting.
8. Maintenance and development of the nature reserve.
9. Any other business.

Minutes of the 10th. AGM held on Thursday 24th. April 2008

Present: Neil Sumner (Chairman); Chris Huggins (Basildon District Council Ranger); Frances Adams, Geoff Forward, John Hathaway, Liz Holdstock, Paul Jarmy and Ken Williamson (Committee Members); Rod Cole (Visiting Speaker); and 21 members of the Society.

1. Apologies for absence were received from Elizabeth Forward and John James
2. The Chairman welcomed all members and visitors to the meeting.
3. The minutes of the previous meeting in 2007 (circulated with the last newsletter) were accepted.
4. There were no matters arising.
5. Chairman's Report:
  - i) The Marked Trail, financed from the Lottery Grant, had been inaugurated; the opening ceremony had been featured in the local press including a front-page photograph.
  - ii) The information display boards had been installed in various prominent locations in the reserve and had attracted much favourable comment; unfortunately the board at the Scout Hut entrance had been subject to vandalism but it was a measure of the sound construction of the display case that it had largely withstood attempts to destroy it.
  - iii) Remaining funds would be spent on various smaller enhancement projects; work on these would start in the Autumn. Boardwalks would be provided at various locations where the ground was liable to become waterlogged (some of this work has already been completed)
  - iv) Mill Meadows had qualified for the High Level Stewardship Scheme
  - v) Education remained an objective of the Committee although little progress had been made in this direction so far as priority had been given to the marked trail. It was the intention to involve local schools in the care of the reserve.
  - vi) There had been a slight increase in membership of the Society, although Neil stressed the need for more members to offer their services, both by standing for election to the committee and by volunteering to participate in work parties.
6. Treasurer's Report:
 

A summary of the year's accounts was circulated together with an additional sheet detailing expenditure on the marked trail (both summaries filed as an appendix to the minutes). Liz particularly thanked those members who made generous donations to the Society - in fact, the total amount in donations exceeded the total amount of membership subscriptions.
7. Ranger's Report:
 

Chris circulated a written report (filed as an appendix) and thanked all volunteers who had participated in work parties during the year.

In answer to a question Chris explained that the recent felling of the silver birches in the Reserve, and what some considered had been excessive scrub clearance, had been undertaken in order to maintain the structure of the SSI fields.
8. Membership: Frances was standing down as Membership Secretary having served the Society in that capacity for ten years, this including a concurrent five year term as chairman. Neil thanked Frances for her service, which was warmly endorsed by the meeting, and welcomed John Hathaway as her successor elect.

Membership currently stood at 185, a slight increase on last year.

A suggestion was made that, in order to contain costs and reduce the workload in distributing the newsletter, members with Email facilities who would be prepared to receive the newsletter electronically should be asked to give their Email addresses to the membership secretary.

9. Election of officers and committee members.

Frances was standing down as membership secretary but would be willing to remain on the committee as an ordinary member. John Hathaway had been proposed as her successor and was duly elected (proposed Neil Sumner, seconded by Frances Adams) No other nominations or volunteers for the committee had been received, and as the chairman and other committee members had indicated their willingness to serve for a further year all were proposed en bloc by Paul Hudson, seconded by Paul Jarmy, and duly re-elected, however Neil stressed the importance of a regular input of “new blood” into the committee and appealed for more members to consider standing at the 2009 AGM.

10. Any other business.

The question of dog fouling, which had regrettably increased in the reserve in recent months, was raised. Various ways of dealing with this problem, including taking legal action against offending owners, were discussed, however there were practical difficulties (including the difficulty of obtaining conclusive evidence) and the general consensus was that an appeal to the public sense of responsibility was the only action practicable.

The value of the pedestrian route signs erected by the Town Council was queried; although the committee had not been in favour of the signs, and agreed with the questioner that they were of doubtful value and could indeed be confusing when placed in juxtaposition with the marked trail signs, they were the responsibility of the Town Council and the committee would not be in favour of similar signs inside the reserve unless there was clear evidence that they were a genuine requirement.

11. There being no other business Neil closed the meeting by thanking all who had contributed to the Society and to the reserve in any way during the past year; the Formal proceedings were then followed by a most informative and entertaining talk on grasslands, in Essex and abroad, by Rod Cole.

