



Events for your Diary



If you have any queries regarding the cattle in the meadows please contact Basildon Countryside Services direct rather than the society committee members

Please note the Mill Meadows events commence at the Scout Hall in Greens Farm Lane @ 10:30 unless stated otherwise

17th July: Mini-beast event, investigating Butterflies, Bees and bugs.

15th Aug : Nature Quest at Wick Country Park. 11.00am to 4.00pm. Family Day. pond dipping and crafts, nature detective quiz. Parental supervision required.

15th Aug: Visit to Mountnessing Mill, 2 pm – see page 6 for more details

26th August – Bats: walk and talk. Starting at the Scout Hall with the talk at 19.00 and the walk ending approx 21:30)

11th September
conservation work party

26th September
12 noon - 4pm
The annual **Norsey Wood Open Day**

9th October
conservation work party

30th October: Fungus Foray: The very popular annual hunt for waxcaps and other fungi. A local expert will be on hand to help with identification.



13th November
conservation work party

11th December
conservation work party a chance to get some fresh air and join us in a toast of mulled wine and mince pies.



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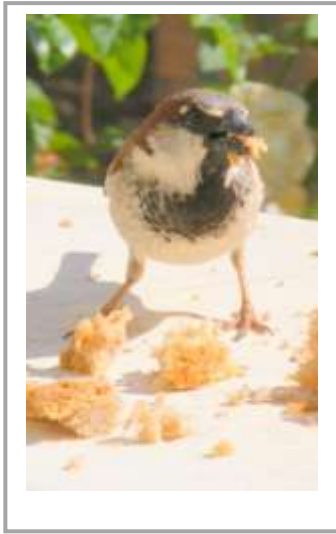
Keep Up to Date 24 hours a day!

Check the society website for regular updates, information and pictures at

www.millmeadows.org.uk



Chairman's Report



This picture of a house sparrow was part of an almost tame flock that visited our balcony and was taken on holiday in Greece in May. At one time they were so common in the UK it would hardly be worth a mention. This year, after a long absence, some are seen around the editor's garden.

£3 for the Mill Meadows annual family membership including free access to the nature reserve. Surely that is value for money in these days of economic downturn. Why not buy your friends a membership and help support the society. Then join them and spend an interesting morning or afternoon walking around the reserve and taking time to study the wildlife in detail.

Thank you to all those who attended the AGM this year, especially as many of you no doubt read my appeal to do so in the last Newsletter. It was a good turnout, although I still would have liked to have seen more of the members at the meeting. Those who came were rewarded with a very interesting and nicely illustrated talk by Brian Dawson of the Essex coastline, as viewed from the air. A lot of questions and discussion followed. So we have had two excellent indoor meetings already in the first half of the year.

The bird walk was well-attended too, as were the other bird walks at Norsey Wood and Queens Park. We now have to consider if it is possible to increase the number of these Spring walks and perhaps introduce a booking system. The wildflower walk was less well-attended but the weather was unseasonably cool on the day.

Greening Billericay

Some of us attended the Greening Billericay event on 19th June. Our photographic display featured and attracted the usual praise and helped in a small way with our membership.

There were several displays and interesting talks on the 'green theme'. The following in particular caught my attention. Firstly, Piper Terrett, winner of the Green Voice of Britain, showed a short video about growing vegetables and keeping chickens – you can see this on YouTube.

Secondly, Billericay School talked about they had practically eliminated litter from their school, by methods introduced by the students. This has benefitted Mill Meadows too: at the July 2006 litter pick several of us spent all the time working along Southend Road and it was doubtless that much of that litter was attributable to passing students, especially those experiencing "end-of-school-year euphoria". Today

the litter in this area has been reduced enormously so "well done and thank you" to Billericay School.

Thirdly, there was a talk giving advice on energy reduction in the home, especially with insulation. The presenter of this talk also compared the individual's carbon 'contribution' when visiting Disneyland in Paris by Eurostar (about 5 kg of carbon per person) with visiting Disneyland in Florida (about 1000 kg of carbon per person). I wanted to point out that you cannot see swallow-tailed kites and pileated woodpeckers in Paris.

And there is the dilemma that many of us face. After a hard year's work, or in our retirement, we want a well deserved holiday and to visit different places and to see different wildlife. But, by doing this, are we hastening the demise of that wildlife?

In my view there are three indisputable facts about this controversial topic:

1. change in the climate is happening.
2. the causes and ultimate outcome of this are not totally understood- although they are more likely to be bad than good.
3. pollution should be reduced as much as possible.

For the latter point, we place our hopes on innovations in technology, and that these will gradually make it more possible for us to maximize our lifestyle and simultaneously minimize damage to our environment. In the meantime I, amongst many and with no defence or excuse, will probably make at least one more trip to see those colourful Florida birds and probably one more trip to see the South Africa sunbirds hovering over the proteus flowers along the Garden Route. Some of us will go to India and China and see the new factories and cities generating yet more carbon into the atmosphere. And then, I hope, we will all return home and support the Greening Billericay campaign. Pollution happening somewhere else does not excuse us from reducing it here in Billericay. We can make a difference.

Cont...



Chairman's Report (cont)

Membership report

I would like to thank all those members who have already renewed their subscriptions for this year. My thanks also, to those who, very kindly, included donations with your renewals.

If you have not yet renewed, then you will find a subscription renewal for at the end of this newsletter.

Subscriptions this year continue unchanged at £3.00 per household for the under 60's and £1.50 for those over 60.

If anyone has any queries regarding membership then please do not hesitate to contact me either by e-mail, phone or surface mail.

John Hathaway

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Living Landscapes

Returning to purely local matters, the local Living Landscape Vision Document and the 'roadshows' around the local parishes have been completed. Another new project has been initiated – new hedgerows on the fields opposite Norsey Wood, to improve the wildlife corridor out towards the Ramsden area. The funding has just been secured. Additionally, we have another local landowner interested in environmental stewardship and in getting a Local Wildlife Site under his ownership into Positive Conservation Management. I'm confident that, by the end of the year, we will have met the target of initiating one project per quarter-year and that much of the work on these projects will be underway.

Management Committee

We've published the contact details of the Management Committee again as these have changed since this was last done several years ago. The new position of Events Organiser is currently vacant. At the moment, following the next AGM, other positions may also be vacant. This is a concern but not entirely unexpected, as the situation is the same in many organisations. Nowadays, people in their pre-retirement years seem less willing than ever to volunteer and get involved. At a local RSPB Group meeting this year, the Leader announced that he is stepping down, and that, with no replacement coming forward, the Group may well have to terminate. I was discussing this problem with a work colleague this year and his view was: "if you have so many groups and societies in your area

looking for new committee members, perhaps you may wonder why you have so many groups and societies?" Food for thought.

The lack of volunteers may also be a weakness in the Living Landscapes initiative. Essex County Council are funding the production of many of the Vision Documents but their contribution to make these Visions into something real is still not clear. There is funding out there but it needs people to act as 'agents' – to find the projects and then find the source of funding for them. This requires a lot of work and in many places it won't happen if it is reliant on volunteers. This is a point that needs to be re-iterated to our local government.

But in between working on local conservation projects, I hope for a better summer this year and to get out more and enjoy the flora and fauna of Mill Meadows. And I'm sure that many of you have this hope too – may it be fulfilled!

Neil Sumner 01277 630849

Chair@millmeadows.org.uk



Common Spotted v. Heath Orchid



Swift update

Since the appeal in the issue 49 newsletter John has identified 2 suitable sites where nestboxes can be sited. **There is still time to offer a location- if you know of one please contact us.**

Preferably it needs to be:

- 1] Not below 5 metres.
- 2] Nestboxes need to be placed on a north or north-west face (to minimize the affect of the sun). A minimum of three nestboxes in close proximity to each other fulfils their colonial instincts.
- 3] The approaching airspace to be free of obstructions. That is no telephone lines, power lines or tall trees.
- 4] Large windows brightly lit tend to spook the birds.
- 5] Not near the roar of traffic or loud machinery

N.B. They are not messy birds!

Contact

John H. Smart (**Save the Swift**)

T: 01277 652768

E: john_smart3@btinternet.com

Just what are those orchids?

On June 12th society members conducted a count of the orchids, organized by Paul Hudson. The final total was 5,265, almost a 70% increase on last year.

Most areas showed significant increases except for the southern part of Butchers.

We have always identified these as Common Spotted Orchids but recently several experts have suggested that they may actually be Heath Orchids. The Heath orchid is not usually found in Essex. The leaf spots are like those of the common spotted. Rod Cole, from Basildon Natural History Society examined some of them and agreed that the shape of the lip of many, if not most, of the orchids in Butchers does seem different from that of most common-spotted orchids and that they may be a different species. Some of the orchids have been picked recently which is obviously unfortunate and probably down to a lack of education rather than actual vandalism. This did give Rod the opportunity to take some away for close examination so we await further news on this topic.

The identification is also compounded by the differing colouration within the species. See examples below –



varying from light to dark to hardly any pattern at all!

Have you a digital camera? And have you taken a close up of a flower or insect, then used a computer to magnify the image? It is surprising what you might see. The editor is thinking of arranging a photographic session to share ideas and tips and those new to the hobby can get some helpful hints.

If you are interested then visit the society web page for some members photos and contact the editor via email - chair@millmeadows.org.uk



Local Bird notes

time of the walk!

"The Mill Meadows Society exists to participate with the Basildon District Council in the management and conservation of Mill Meadows"

There were two male lesser spotted woodpeckers in Norsey Wood this Spring. One gave us superb views on the bird walk. At least one territory continued to be occupied throughout the Spring but no evidence of breeding was found so it is premature to say that this indicates a recovery. In spite of the cold winter, its been a terrific season locally for song thrushes. They were everywhere at Queens Park and round the Ramsden Heath area.

Of the summer visitors, garden warblers and whitethroat numbers seem to be as good as last year, although the latter seems to be mysteriously disappearing from Mill Meadows - apart from the odd burst of song from three individuals very little of them has been seen. For turtle doves and willow warblers the decline continues with few sites recorded locally. The meadows near the railway line at Ramsden Heath had territories of each and a pair of turtle doves were seen nesting in the Dunton area.

House martins, swallows and swifts continue with their patchy local distribution but there have been more reports of cuckoo song locally than in recent years, with birds lingering around Mill Meadows, Barrenleys Meadow and around the woodlands north of 40-Acre Plantation. There was a bit of encouragement with yellow wagtails too, around the Buttsbury area. Several individuals were there in early May and a pair were breeding at Remus Horse Sanctuary in June.

The full list of species seen or heard at Queens Park follows, indicating that quite a variety of birds are present and were obliging during the

Common name	Scientific name
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Black-billed Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>
European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Hedge Accentor	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
White / Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>

The editor attended the Friends of Queens Park wildflower planting event in the spring. Approx 500 young plants that are native to the Billericay area were introduced in the field near the car park. I am looking forward to seeing their progress during the year.

At the recent society AGM the following committee members were elected, contact details are in the newsletter or below –

Secretary: Ross Holland
webmaster@millmeadows.org.uk

Treasurer: Liz Holdstock
*Friends Meeting House
Southend Road
BILLERICAY CM12 9QQ
liz12holdstock@aol.com*

Chairman: Neil Sumner

Membership: John Hathaway

Newsletter: Ken Williamson
*34 Prince Edward Rd
01277 625976*

Events Organiser: position vacant

Other committee members:
Paul Jarmy *01277 658948*
Geoff Forward *01277 654626*
Frances Adams *01277 626621*



Ranger's Report

Well, it looks like summer is here. Temperature in the 80s, little rain, hosepipe bans rumoured, grass not growing, and the cows have eaten most of the grass they were allotted for the early part of the year! The upshot is that we've allowed the grazier to release the cows over most of the site. I'm also working on getting someone to repair the broken cattle fencing we installed earlier in the year, with a view to getting them confine to the SSSI fields later in the grazing regime.

You will also have noticed one or two of the gates have taken a bit of a battering lately. I think some of them may be coming towards the end of their lives, so we've ordered a metal one for the gate behind the bus stop on Southend Road. If that seems to be ok there we'll consider trying to find some funding to do some of the others. All of them would be nice, as it would release some time to do other things. In the meantime we'll have to patch up as best we can.

I recently was lucky enough to attend a 'woodland Plants' course in Devon, which got me thinking about the fern species there might be at Mill Meadows. Luckily, ferns are one of those groups with a more manageable number of species – always an attraction! So, on my recent tour de Mill Meadows (on foot I hasten to add!), I thought I'd have a look and see what we have. My fairly cursory inspection unfortunately only revealed four species, and that included Bracken! By far the most numerous 'real' fern was Broad Buckler Fern *Dryopteris dilatata*, but there are also some other *Dryopteris* species, which until recently could be divided into Male Fern *D. filix-mas*, and Scaly Male Fern *D. affinis*. This was fairly straightforward (in Essex): no stipe (stem) scales – Male Fern, stipe scales obvious – Scaly Male. However,

recently the four subspecies of Scaly Male have been elevated to full species, so there are now five to choose from, the details of which I have yet to find the time to get sorted out. Don't let all this put you off though. Once you get the terminology sorted out I think they're a reasonably straightforward group (unlike...oh I don't know, say...orchids for example!), and if you do fancy the challenge, let me know what you find!

Thanks,

Chris Huggins

Countryside Ranger
Basildon Council
Norsey Wood Information Centre

01277 624553

Visit to Mountnessing Mill

Have you ever wondered what the wind mill at Mill Meadows was like?

Join fellow members of the Mill Meadows Society on a visit to Mountnessing Wind Mill on Sunday 15th August at 2pm. The mill is open till 5pm if you cannot get there that early.

Built in 1807 and restored to working order by Essex County Council, the mill is a post mill, the same type as the one at Mill Meadows. There are displays to be seen, including a part from the old Billericay mill, and all the internal workings can be viewed.

You may just turn up on the day, or if you cannot make that day, the mill is open on the third Sunday of each month from April to September from 2pm till 5pm. Admission is by donation, and the mill is staffed entirely by volunteers.

Please remember: All mills have steep stairways and limited access, wear sensible shoes when visiting and always follow the instructions from the guide.



Broad Buckler Fern

Photographs courtesy of Flickr

Taken at Tiptree by Peter Herring

Bracken - *Pteridium aquilinum*

