



Events for your Diary



Looking ahead to the summer and the return of the orchids

Keep Up to Date 24 hours a day!

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

www.millmeadows.org.uk

9th January: Working Party:

16th January: survey of the planned cable route

25th Jan : The Secret Lives of British Birds: an illustrated talk by Mike Logan Wood. At Billericay Day Centre. 7.45 pm. *Event hosted by the Norsey Wood Society*

13th February: Working Party:

25th February: Pond Life: an illustrated talk. Darren Tansley, the Water for Wildlife Officer for Essex Wildlife Trust and one of the County's leading water vole specialists, will talk to us about the fortunes of life in rivers and ponds in Essex - and what we can do to improve them. The Reading Rooms, Billericay High Street, 7.45 pm.

4th March: Living Landscape: Ramsden Heath and Woods. An initiative to improve the

rural areas around Ramsden Heath and Billericay, for the benefit of the environment, wildlife and for people who live in and use the area. A presentation and public meeting. Reading Rooms, Billericay High Street at 7.45 pm

13th March: Working Party

27th March: Bird Walk, Norsey Wood. Meet at the Visitor Centre at 7 am

29th March :Hyde Hall's Wild Wood and its Occupants" by Ian Le Gros, Curator, RHS Hyde Hall.7.45pm at the Day Centre.. *Event hosted by the Norsey Wood Society*

April 10th: Bird Walk at Mill Meadows. Our annual walk is earlier this year so that we can see woodpeckers and other resident birds before the leaves come out and make viewing more difficult. We should have the early warblers and

maybe some lingering winter visitors too. Meet at The Scout Hall at 6.30 am. Followed by an optional Working Party

22nd April: Annual General Meeting at 7.45 pm. Detail in the next Newsletter

22nd May: Bird Walk Queens Park Country Park. Meet at the car park, Rosebay Avenue at 6 am

19th June: Wildflower Walk

10th July: Minibeast event

19th August (provisional – see next newsletter) Bat talk followed by walk

30th October: Fungus Foray

We also plan this year to have a Insects/Spiders: talk and walk and a guided tour of Wat Tyler Country Park

Inside this issue:

<i>Chairperson's Report</i>	2 & 3	<i>BE's NE's</i>	2
<i>The Billericay Greening Campaign</i>	3	<i>Local wildlife sites</i>	4
<i>Fungus foray</i>	5	<i>Ranger's Report, Calendars and photographic competition</i>	6



Chairperson's Report by Neil Sumner



*The Sun through the trees—
Hilly Field, Sept 09. Taken by
Oliver Washington, aged 9*

"The landowner aims to create a conservation area on one side of the wood"

BE's NE's

In the last Newsletter we announced this initiative for a junior nature club. A meeting is being held on Friday 22nd January at 10:00 am in the Educational Room at Norsey Wood to kick-start the club's activities. If anyone wants to be involved in this please contact
SUSANNAH_HERVEY@hotmail.com

We are moving slowly but inevitably to the date when the EDF pipeline work starts, but we still do not have a start date. On January 16th, Chris will give us a tour of the route with some information about the work, the terms under which the contractors should operate and the impact on users of The Meadows. If you want to know about the work, please come along. Natural England have been closely involved in ensuring that the contractors meet with certain standards in the SSI areas, such as keeping the work within a 5 metre strip and use of trackway by the vehicles to minimise damage to the ground. Basildon Council have also asked that these same standards are applied to the non-SSSI areas. My main concern is the changes that will occur within Greens and Watts, which are the best area of Mill Meadows from a bird-watcher's perspective. Initially we will lose some important scrub areas, but in the longer term I hope that the scrub will recover as we will have a better quality path - vehicle-

standard in fact. The advantage of a better quality path is that people and their dogs will tend to use it rather than create secondary paths around it and this should reduce disturbance to wildlife and allow the scrub to flourish. The outcome should be a nicer walk with less mud and more bird-song.

This quarter saw the publication of the draft Vision Document for Living Landscapes Area 34. This is being distributed in advance of public meetings which will be held in late February / early March. As well as wildlife species, this also sets targets for people and the community. The document will be updated with more ideas for projects during March, including a view of the costs, as many of the projects could be grant-assisted.

Two projects are already underway, with the help of the Essex Wildlife Trust. One is a management plan for a local woodland, Barrenleys Wood, which is designated as a local wildlife site (see separate article in this Newsletter).

The plan suggests ideas for conserving the ancient trees, re-introducing coppicing and improving the understorey layers of the wood. We have already had one working party of volunteers and professionals to help control the sycamore, which can tend to dominate a woodland if left unchecked. Living Landscapes is about balancing wildlife with community interests and the local economy so any such plan should ensure that the landowner's business is protected as well as the wildlife areas. In this case, the business is paintball but this is confined to certain areas of the wood. Much of the wood has little or no disturbance. The landowner aims to create a conservation area on one side of the wood so the community benefit will come to users of the public footpath that adjoins the woodland.

The second project is for the restoration of the moat at Ramsden Hall School, which is a good area for reptiles and amphibians.

../cont.

As well as the new-look of the Newsletter we are also making an important change within its contents. We are publicising events outside Mill Meadows and The Society that should be of interest to members. So you will see events organised by Basildon Council and the nature reserve societies of our sister nature reserves of Norsey Wood and Queens Park. The aims of this are to publicise the events to a wider audience and to try and have complementary programmes. For example, we are planning a jointly-organised visit to the new facilities at Wat Tyler Country Park and we have set the dates of the three spring bird walks to collectively make the best use of each reserve and time of year.



Scene from a local woodland within Area 34.

"Living Landscapes is as important to Mill Meadows as the management of Mill Meadows itself"



The chairman planting a sapling in Hillmans wood during the December work party. See page 6 for the article.

Chairpersons report cont.

The E W Trust have conducted a survey and produced some recommendations. Although funding has yet to be confirmed and the landowner has to give assent, the signs are that this will progress. As well as conserving the wildlife, it will be a useful tool for education about wildlife to the school's pupils.

My aim is to initiate a new project every quarter for the foreseeable future. Mill Meadows is not one of those projects as it already has active conservation management. However, much of the wildlife on the reserve is in decline and I believe that improvement to the wildlife corridors in the surrounding area will help to reverse these declines. Living Landscapes is as important to Mill Meadows as the management of Mill Meadows itself.

The draft Vision Document for Living Landscapes Area 34 is available on our web site. I can provide a hard copy for those without Internet access and/or suitable printing facilities.

Neil Sumner

Tel :01277 630849

Email : chair@

millmeadows.org.uk

The Greening Campaign comes to Billericay

The media regularly feature climate change and its implications and the need for 'green' lifestyles. But what can the individual do? The answer is to participate in the Greening Campaign enabling a local response to these challenges. The campaign truly supports 'think global, act local'. It began in Petersfield when Terena Plowright decided to 'make a difference'. Her successful campaign led to many other villages and towns seeking ways to reduce CO2 and water wastage. Billericay Town Council is the first Essex community to facilitate the campaign - we are truly trailblazers. The campaign, which is also meant to be fun and help local people work together, is based around all the community making efforts by committing to and implementing small, inexpensive actions – which at the same time helps reduce annual household budgets. Examples of these small actions (20 in total) are:

- turning off lights when leaving a room (save £1.49 and 6kg of CO2);
- turning off standbys (save £37.30 and stop 155kg of CO2 going into the air);
- not leaving taps running when brushing teeth (save

6.9 tonnes of water).

Many community groups, including the churches, are being approached to determine interest and commitment. It is hoped each community group will take ownership for one or more of the 'small, inexpensive actions' at a public meeting that has been arranged for the evening of Tuesday, 23rd March 2010 in Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay. After this an Environment Fun Day has been arranged for Saturday, 12th June 2010 at Sun Corner where all community groups will present and demonstrate their particular 'small actions' – hopefully in fun and innovative ways – showing potential environmental benefits. Please put these dates in your diary.

David Knight – Chairman of the Greening Campaign

www.greening-campaign.co.uk

Please note that, subject to a committee agreement, the Mill Meadows Society hopes to participate in the Environmental Fun Day. Watch out for further information in the next newsletter.



Local Wildlife Sites by Neil Sumner



A pollard oak in a snowy landscape

“Local Wildlife Sites are areas of land with significant wildlife value”

The working party at **Norsey Wood** meets at the Information Centre for two hours from 10.00am every Thursday. Tools are provided but suitable footwear and outdoor clothing is needed. The work is organised by the Ranger, Chris Huggins, and includes path maintenance, clearing up newly coppiced areas, dead hedging and all sorts of odd jobs around the wood. Do as much or as little as you like in good company and giving a good opportunity to get to know the wood through the seasons.

Around Essex you may come across areas that look as if they have a certain amount of natural history or wildlife value. You may be aware of a meadow where you have seen wildflowers or viewed a private wood from a distance. You may have wondered who owns the land and whether anything is being done to promote its conservation and its wildlife. You may be looking at a Local Wildlife Site. If so, the site will be on the register of the district or borough council. Hence, if there is no positive conservation management work underway now, the intention is that will be at some point in the future.

Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS) are areas of land with significant wildlife value. Many sites will contain habitats and species that are priorities for protection under the Essex or UK Biodiversity Action Plans. Sites can be found throughout Essex and, together with the statutorily protected areas such as SSSIs, represent the best areas for wildlife in the County. They are essential pieces in the jigsaw of a wildlife-friendly Essex.

There are just over 1600 Local Wildlife Sites throughout the County and this number is growing. They are extremely varied in their

size, ranging from a plot of land under one hectare or even a village pond, to sites covering several hundred hectares. There is also incredible variation in the habitats found on these sites including ancient woodland, heathland, saltmarsh, grasslands and wetlands. The most abundant habitat associated with Essex LoWS is semi natural and ancient woodland.

Local Wildlife Sites are owned by a wide range of groups and organisations such as Essex County Council, District Councils, the Forestry Commission, the Environment Agency as well as being privately-owned or common land.

There is no obligation on the land owners to maintain their sites, unless they are protected by other legislation such as tree preservation orders, or already benefiting from management grants. No restrictions are placed on ordinary agricultural operations.

Landowners/managers control all land management decisions, hopefully in a way that is sympathetic to wildlife. No additional rights of way are created, access is by permission of the landowner/ manager only.

But they are protected within the local planning

system. They are a 'material consideration' in the determination of planning applications, and this should ensure that there is a general presumption against development upon them.

Essex County Council has a certain level of obligation to improve wildlife sites as part of its local area agreement. This means that there is encouragement to write and implement management plans for Wildlife Sites, and there are some small grants available for writing the plans and doing some active conservation work. The system in Essex is coordinated by Essex Wildlife Trust through the Essex Wildlife Sites Project (EWSP) which maintains an up-to-date register of all sites in Essex, provides planning guidance, and gives free advice to LoWS owners on obtaining grants, on managing the site with wildlife in mind and on ways to get the site surveyed.

A list of the Local Wildlife Sites in Living Landscapes Area 34 can be found in the draft Vision Document. This has most of the sites around Billericay with the exclusion of a few woodlands and meadows to the west.



Fungus Foray



Visit our web-site to view this picture in full size.

"Mill Meadows, Billericay, is a 90-acre Local Nature Reserve and one of the finest ancient meadow systems in Essex."

The recent weather including heavy rain, sharp frosts and snowfall provided opportunities for members to be out and about with their cameras. If you would like to share your images with others why not log on to the society web site and send them to the chair. This adjacent picture was scanned from my photo taken in 1993. It is a long time since the field gate was last closed and in fact it is no longer there!

This year's Fungus Foray did not find any waxcaps, but was well attended by both young and not so young members. See below for the list of species found:

Agaricus campestris Field Mushroom

Amanita muscaria Fly Agaric

Auricularia auricula-judae Jelly Ear

Bolbitius variicolor Yellow Fieldcap

Chalciporus piperatus Peppery Bolete

Chlorophyllum olivieri A Shaggy Parasol

Clavulinopsis helvola Yellow Club

Clitocybe nebularis Clouded Funnel

Collybia (=Rhodocollybia) butyracea f. asema Butter

Cap

Collybia dryophila (=Gymnopus dryophilus) Russet Toughshank

Flammulina velutipes var. velutipes Velvet Shank

Hypholoma fasciculare Sulphur Tuft

Lepista flaccida (=Clitocybe inversa) Tawny Funnel

Lepista nuda Wood Blewit

Leucoagaricus leucothites

Lycoperdon nigrescens Dusky Puffball

Lycoperdon perlatum Common Puffball

Lycoperdon pyriforme Stump Puffball

Macrolepiota procera Parasol

Marasmius oreades Fairy Ring Champignon

Mycena inclinata Clustered Bonnet

Nectria cinnabarina Coral Spot

Paneolus papilionaceus Pettycoat Mottlegill

Parasola (=Coprinus) plicatilis Pleated Inkcap

Paxillus involutus Brown Rollrim

Rhytisma acerinum Sycamore Tarspot

Rickenella fibula Orange Mosscap

Russula atropurpurea Purple Brittlegill

Stropharia pseudocyanea Peppery Roundhead

Trametes gibbosa Lumpy Bracket

Xerocomus cisalpinus

Xerocomus pruinatus Matt Bolete

Xylaria hypoxylon Candlesnuff Fungus





Calendars and photographic competition Ranger's Report



A pastoral scene on a summer day.

"During cold weather providing fresh water for the garden birds is just as important as supplying their food"

Very many thanks to all of you who have renewed your membership already. It has been a very positive early response and is much appreciated. Not only that, but another 10 have asked to receive the newsletter and all other correspondence via e-mail. Thanks to you all as this all goes toward keeping our costs down.

John Hathaway

Membership secretary

Calendars

A Mill Meadows Calendar for 2010 is now available and contains photographs taken by our members including a selection of the entries to the 2009 photographic competition. They are 5" by 11.5" with a hanging hook and the pictures vary in size at around 4-7 square inches. They are £7 each and will need to be ordered specially - they were deemed too expensive for us to buy a selection and hope to sell them. If you do want one please contact the Chairperson before Saturday 16th January and we will place an order.

Photographic Competition

We are sorry for the delay in announcing the winners of the photographic competition. Judging is postponed to the next Committee Meeting on 20th January. Winners will be notified directly and will receive a copy of the 2010 Calendar.

Ranger's report

Happy New Year to everyone. I've been down to Mill Meadows this morning (5th Jan) for my first patrol of 2010 and it doesn't look quite as picturesque as it did with the snow, but still looks pretty good. It struck me how bare everything looked and how easy it was to see the birds. There were plenty of Fieldfares, a few Redwings and Song Thrushes, and a few mixed tit flocks.

I didn't have my binoculars with me but it might be a good time to grab them and go for a walk. Neil will no doubt be able to provide more details of what can be seen and where.

I have the list of the moths identified at the bat & moth evening on August 22nd. *Apologies to Chris but because of lack of space full details will appear in the next newsletter - Ed*

I received 196 species records from Mill Meadows in 2009 (that's not all different species), which is a good number, but I would like to increase the figure so that it can form the basis for future habitat management decisions. Top scorer was Paul Hudson with 97 (Sorry Neil, the Butterfly transect records can only go under one name!)

On a more practical note the work party before Christmas planted 200 hedging plants near the Southend Road roundabout and 40 fruit trees (Crab Apple and Bird Cherry) in the Hillmans area - see picture on page 3. Hopefully we will be able to plant some more hedge plants this winter. I have some mature plants in the tree nursery at Norsey Wood, which I aim to get potted up and replanted at Mill Meadows and other places (once the ground has thawed!)

You may also have noticed some damage that need to be repaired to the fence near the Scout Hut and the gate behind the Southend Road bus stop. These are 'in the queue' and I hope will be dealt with soon.

At long last we appear to be close to finalizing the new byelaws. These are available in draft form. I don't think there is anything controversial in them, but if you would like a copy please let me know.

Thanks,

Chris Huggins

Countryside Ranger

Basildon Council

January 2010

Norsey Wood Information Centre

01277 624553