



April to June 2011

www.millmeadows.org.uk



Catkins above the gate:
Butchers/ Oakfield



Snowdrops on Old Mill Hill

Thanks to Dennis Dear for the above photographs



Events for your Diary

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

Bird Walks 5th and 9th April (6.30 am at Scout Hall) *advanced booking required for bird walks -email Chair@millmeadows.org*

Tuesday 12th April: B's NE's 'Spot The Woodpecker'. 8-10am

At the Information Centre, Norsey Wood. A short talk on woodpeckers then a chance to see woodpeckers through binoculars or telescopes. Adults should be accompanied by children. Advanced booking preferred. For information about B's NE's please contact

billericaynatureexplorers@basildon.gov.uk

Thursday 28th April – Mill Meadows Society Annual General Meeting – see page 5

Sunday 8th May – Open Day, Norsey Wood – Mill Meadows Society will be attending with our photographic display

Sat 14th May –Tree identification walk

Sat 21st May – Bird Walk at Queens Park CP (6 am at main car park)

Sun 22nd May Hanningfield Resvr, EWT **Wildlife Day** 10:00-16:00 As part of the 'Living Landscapes' initiative experts and advisors on feeding the birds, wildlife gardening and what optics would be best to buy to watch the wildlife you will be attracting to your garden. There will also be pond dipping and mini beast hunting for the children.

11th June - Wildflower walk

16th July - Mini-beast walk,

25th August - Bat & Moth walk (evening: start 7.30 pm)

1st September – Homes for Wildlife day: creating nestboxes for bats and birds and a home for reptiles



America and the Pacific North West

A photographic display set to classical music by Bill Coster

Thursday 28th April 19.45 at the **Reading Rooms**, High Street, Billericay

(following our Annual General Meeting)

Suggested donation £1

Refreshments

Bill Coster is one of the UK 's leading wildlife photographers, being represented by several photographic agencies in the UK and Europe through which his photographs appear in publications around the World. Bill has published books on creative photography and his photographic displays played to music are renowned.



April to June 2011

Editor's diary notes

The clocks have gone forward an hour, the weather sometimes feels mild enough to venture outside for longer, the hours of daylight exceed those of night-time... at last it must be spring! This winter has been cold from November onwards and I have occasionally visited the meadows to attend the work-parties or when walking up to the High Street. Therefore I was interested to see how the wildlife managed to cope with the conditions. Apart from a slow start an increase in activity in the last month has meant nature's timetable is back on track. The snowdrops have finished flowering and I was pleased to see the clumps I divided last year survived and bloomed without mishap. Hazel catkins are visible in the hedgerows. On a recent walk at Pleshey the usual spread of primroses were evident by the road verges. The bluebell foliage can be seen in the woody areas on the reserve.

In my garden the cold weather resulted in a large increase in the number of birds visiting for food. The amount of bread, porridge oats, fruit and sunflower hearts consumed meant the supplies had to be topped up on a regular basis. The birds provided a first hand link with wildlife without having to leave the comfort of a warm house (apart from putting out the food and fresh water). Now that spring has sprung the numbers of these visitors has fallen dramatically from over 20 at a time to periods when the garden is empty of birds!

(contd).

***** Situations Vacant *****

We have a vacancy on the Management Committee for the post of Treasurer or Membership Secretary. Please contact Neil on 01277 630849 or Chair@millmeadows.org.uk if you can help.

Chairman's Report

For the AGM this year we have pushed the boat out a bit and booked a photographic show by Bill Coster. I saw one of Bill's shows at the Essex Bird-watching Society AGM last year and was mesmerised. The photographs are superb and set to music with no real commentary – it is not intended to be educational or stimulating, just pure indulgence. Bill is understandably a little more pricey than our usual speakers, so we are asking for an optional donation to offset some of the cost. It will be at The Reading Rooms as usual as we couldn't really justify further spending on the extra cost of a larger room.

If you can persuade a friend or neighbour to come to a Society meeting and want to impress them enough to get them to join us, this would be the meeting to do it! And we do want new members as our numbers have dropped a little recently, several former members have left the area and several have sadly passed on.

Many of you will have been saddened to have learnt of the death of Jim Watts last year. Jim was the founder Chairman of The Society and worked hard to get us started. Jim had not been well for a while but nonetheless managed to join us at the launch of the Marked Trail in August 2007.

We are also very sorry to hear of the passing of Betty Haynes, another member and the first Chairperson of the Noak Bridge Nature Reserve Society. I'd met Betty several times at the Norsey Wood Open Days and then bumped into her again at Remus Horse Sanctuary where she will also be missed as a volunteer.

Although we have a recent drop in membership we are still going well with

175 households and a healthy financial position: perhaps too 'healthy' and I for one would like to see more of the money spent. Finding a suitable project is never easy: a few plants are a barely noticeable expense but something like extending boardwalks is beyond our means. We have found one suitable project which is to dig a fresh pond in Brickfield: hiring one contractor to do it will save us about 4 work parties and we will get bigger and more established pond. This is planned for September and we also plan to accompany it by adding a hibernaculum for reptiles.

You will see above that we have a vacancy on the Management Committee. Liz Holdstock is moving away from Billericay, possibly permanently, so has had to relinquish the position of Treasurer after many years' service. I'm sure that you will join me in thanking Liz for all her work. John Hathaway has offered to take the position but, as he is already the Membership Secretary, this is not an ideal solution. This is not just from John's point of view, with the larger workload but also it has raised concerns about whether we have sufficient 'dual control' over financial transactions as most of the monies arrive via membership. The Committee don't see this as a blocking issue but it is undesirable, therefore, we ask for nominations for both positions. If you are interested in filling either of these please let me know. If no-one comes forward then John will fulfil both positions, at least for the time being.

Those of you who are also members of the Norsey Wood Society are probably aware that they made a change to their constitution this year. This was to enable them to legitimately support the Living Landscapes activities and conservation interests around the Billericay area.

(contd)



April to June 2011

The birds that remain are the permanent residents and are becoming harder to see as they secretly prepare for nesting. Also the shrubs leaf buds are bursting and providing more cover. Today, when looking out of the window by my computer desk, the great tit was busy gathering moss for nesting material in the nest box on the wall.

A few ladybirds, bumblebees, spiders and a solitary comma butterfly were tempted out by the recent sunshine. More evidence of the advance of warmer weather was the frog chorus starting in early March and it was loud enough to hear in the house with the windows closed. In winter frogs hibernate, some, mainly males, will bury themselves in the mud at the bottom of a pond, and the rest, including most of the females will go off to find a cosy, muddy ditch. Unlike the garden birds, frogs are cold blooded. Their metabolism slows to conserve energy and they have high sugar levels which acts as a sort of "anti-freeze". They can continue to breathe through their skin when hibernating underwater. The breeding cycle restarts with all the frogs returning to the pond. They are ready to breed round about their fifth spring and produce the frog spawn which I have also seen in the pond by the Scout Hall.

Chairman's Report (contd)

The Management Committee agreed that our Society should follow suit, hence we have a resolution for the AGM to this effect – see the notification of the AGM below. It is accepted now that nature reserves cannot continue to in isolation: we have already lost many species from our reserves and, whereas wildlife corridors won't restore all of these, they can help, and they are certainly key to perpetuating many species of mammals including bats and dormice.

I look forward to seeing many of you at one or more of the events this year – we have the usual the walks through spring, summer and autumn and plan another indoor meeting later in the year. In the meantime, I hope that you all enjoy what is arguably the best period in the year for nature lovers.

Neil Sumner
chair@millmeadows.org.uk
01277 630849

..... Wintering Birds

Anyone interested in birds will be aware that there have been a phenomenal number of waxwings visiting Britain this year – probably caused by a poor berry crop in Scandanavia. In Billericay there have been reports from School Road, Gooseberry Green, Tye Common Road and possibly more sites. Its been a good year for wintering blackcaps in gardens too: almost every bird-watcher seems to have seen one and on one occasion there were two males and a female in our garden. Until recently, ringing records show that these are central European birds and that our resident birds move south to Spain or North Africa. However this year there has been at least case reported by the BTO of one of our resident birds over-wintering.

In last year's cold snap many people reported redwings in their gardens, yet this year very few have seen them.

Membership 2011/2012

Membership renewal is almost upon us once again as our subscription year runs from 1st April to 31st March each year.

A renewal form for the new year is attached to this newsletter and hopefully you will very kindly waste no time in renewing your membership. I am thrilled to report that there are no unpaid subs from the year just ending and would like to thank you all for your continuing valuable support. A particular thank you goes to all of you who also made a donation during the year.

Unfortunately there are still 8 members who last renewed in 2008/09 and 14 who last renewed in 2009/10. Clearly this may just be an oversight or perhaps some have moved away, but, hopefully these members will renew this year.

Your continued support *really is* the lifeblood of the Society.

Could you also please note that I have a **new address** –

**20 Atridge Chase, Billericay, Essex
CM12 0HR**

As this move is only temporary (we are having major alterations made to our house) until about Christmas 2011, we are relying purely on mobiles during this time. So **my only phone number will be 07802 921435.**

My e-mail address remains unchanged –

john.hathaway@hathaway.co.uk

Many thanks,

John Hathaway
Membership Secretary

Last year the cold weather was later and at a time when they normally feed on the ground – the garden pyracanthas came to their rescue. This year they seemed to arrive later: on Bird Atlas visits around Queens Park I counted 4 in December and over 100 in February. The unanswered question – where were they in December?



April to June 2011

Rangers Report



Big oak at Cumborrow. Many of the other veteran trees are within the wooded areas and need areas opening up around them to let in more light



Heathland near Danbury. The draft Vision Document for the Danbury Ridge Living Landscape has been published and sets ambitions for biodiversity, the community, the economy and for promoting and conserving the heritage of what is one of the most interesting and diverse areas in The County.

Spring is in the air! A welcome few day's spring sunshine seems to have cheered most people up, and many of the plants and animals in the countryside are beginning to rouse themselves. This being the case we have to draw our winter management tasks to a close. In the nick of time we have managed to get the hedgerows on Greens Farm Lane, Southend Road and (hopefully by the time you read this), Chaffinch Crescent cut. However, time has got the better of us with regard to the scrub clearance in the corner of Cumborrow that I e-mailed some of you about a few weeks ago. This will now be delayed until next winter when we should be able to continue our efforts to reclaim some of the valuable grassland in the SSSI fields. In the meantime the cattle will be returning shortly, but before then though we have some fencing repairs to do, as it appears to have been the subject of a certain amount of vandalism.

Also in preparation for next winter I'm hoping to comprehensively map the veteran trees at Mill Meadows with a view to considering what management we can put in place to make the best of these valuable habitats and features. This shouldn't involve any work on the veterans themselves (other than for safety reasons), but rather considering opening up the area surrounding them, so that they have more light, but not so much that they become too dry. This practice is often referred to as 'haloing', and recent reading I have done suggests that in many cases an approach has been taken that is too cautious, thus not benefitting the tree sufficiently. However, that is something we will have to consider once we have a clear idea of the stock of veterans we have.

We have held several successful work parties recently, most of which have involved repairs to seats, gates and bridges to improve the infrastructure – hopefully those involved have enjoyed themselves. With the onset of the better weather the programme of events begin. I hope many of

you will be able to attend one or more of these.

Many thanks,

Chris Huggins

Countryside Ranger

Basildon Council

chris.huggins@basildon.gov.uk

Living Landscapes

We have agreement from Essex County Council to plant two areas alongside the A176 south of Billericay: one is opposite the reserve and is only a small area which we can fund; the other is more substantial hedge which will require significant funding and some large work parties. Following advice from EWT, we now have a plan for delimiting the conservation area alongside the footpath at Barrenleys Wood. For all the above, we have to work within the late autumn/ early winter window. We are also mapping additional country walks to complement the existing town and parish walks and to add information about the local wildlife and landscape. The 'homes for wildlife day' is set for 1st September and some of us continue to search for an area of land where we can establish a 'community conservation' area'. Locally, EWT and Essex and Suffolk Water have initiated work around Hanningfield, our neighbouring Living Landscape area. You can learn more about this at their open day – see events. Further afield, there are big ambitions for Danbury Ridge – if you are interested in this area you can read the Vision Document on the EWT web site.

The Agri-environment clinic was attended by several landowners from around the county and was a good co-operative event between EWT, the RSPB and also Essex County Council who talked about the importance of the historic artefacts within the landscape.



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

- *Responding to consultations and giving information and advice at regular meetings of the joint Management Committee*
- *Participating in work parties to give practical assistance*
- *Arranging talks and attending exhibitions and other events to stimulate public interest*
- *Issuing a quarterly newsletter to keep members and the general public informed*

Annual General Meeting

Notice that the Thirteenth Annual General Meeting of the Mill Meadows Society will be held at the Reading Rooms, Billericay High Street on Thursday 28th April 2010 at 7.45 pm. All members should attend; non-members will be very welcome but can not vote at the meeting.

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Matter arising from the minutes of the 12th AGM held on 22nd April 2010.
3. Report of Chairman.
4. Report of treasurer, accounts for 2009-10 - Copies will be available at the meeting.
5. Report of Membership Secretary
6. Election of general committee for the year 2011-12:-
 - Chairman
 - Treasurer
 - General Secretary
 - Membership Secretary
 - Events Officer
 - Newsletter Editor
 - Other Committee Members
7. Resolutions and motions.

Members are invited to submit motions for consideration and delivered to the General Secretary at 33 Langemore Way Billericay CM11 2BT or at rosswholland@btinternet.com, prior to 14 days before the meeting.

8. Maintenance and development of the nature reserve.
9. Any other business.

Nominations – if you wish to nominate someone as a member of the General Committee please give details, to the General Secretary at least 24 hours prior to the meeting. of the Position for which nomination is being made, name of nominee and your name.

Resolutions

The following resolution is submitted by the Management Committee:

An addition to The Aims of the Mill Meadows Society:

"to promote and support wildlife conservation and biodiversity in Billericay and the surrounding area, co-operating with other organisations when appropriate."



The Mill Meadows Society 12th Annual General Meeting

Held on Thursday 22nd April 2010 at 7:45pm
In the Reading Rooms, Billericay

The meeting was opened by the Chairman giving a welcoming speech to all attendees.

1. **Apologies for Absence:** These had been received from Mr & Mrs V Hare and Peter Randall

2. **Matters arising from the minutes of the previous AGM:** There were no matters arising.

3. **Chairman's Report:** The full report was supplied, the highlights mentioned were

- a. More joint events with Norsey Wood and Queen's Park groups
- b. New fencing and its impact on the visitors
- c. Tree Planting
- d. The Photo Competition
- e. EDF and the pending work
- f. The Byelaws and the consequences of re-issuing them
- g. Changes to the Newsletter
- h. Young people at work parties and B's NE's initiative
- i. Living Landscapes update
- j. Wildlife Report
- k. The need for new Committee Members

4. **Treasurer's Report:** The full report was supplied. Highlights were

- a. The donations are always gratefully received and in fact bring in more income than the membership
- b. When asked about the Marked Trail, the Treasurer confirmed that Lottery funding had been obtained for this project.
- c. Any ideas for spending the society funds are always welcome.

5. **Membership Secretary's Report:** The salient figures are as follows:

- a. There are 163 paid up members, 24 down on last year
- b. There are 6 new members, and 3 resignations
- c. 27 members are yet to renew
- d. 68 Members have elected to take the newsletter by Email, which is of great benefit to the Society

6. **Rangers Report:** The local Ranger thanked the society for all their assistance over the year. Walks had been well attended, especially the Bat & Moth evening. Special thanks were given for the clean-up operation after the prolonged sledging earlier this year.

7. **Election of Officers:** Geoff Forward had decided to retire as Secretary, and thanks were given for all his work. Only one offer had come forward as a replacement, Ross Holland, so with this amendment and no other resignations or proposals, the Chairman offered to re-elect the committee en bloc. This was proposed by Paul Hudson and seconded by Suzanne Hervey, and carried overwhelmingly.

8. **Resolutions:** Only one resolution was put forward and that was to include a post of Events Co-ordinator. It was decided that this should be left to the committee to appoint or recruit if it were thought necessary.

9. **Maintenance:** There were no issues to report that had not already been covered.

10. **AOB:** A tour of the new facilities at Norsey Wood had been arranged for Saturday 24th April 2010 at 10am.

11. **Guest Speaker:** Brian Dawson gave a fascinating slide tour of the Essex Coast seen both from the air, and then with more detailed shots from the ground. A lively discussion on the merits or otherwise of coastal defence projects followed, and the meeting closed at 9:30pm.



I would like to -

apply for membership

renew my membership

(please tick as appropriate)

Membership Year
2011/12

From 1st April 2011
until 31st March 2012

Name

Address

Post Code

Telephone

E mail

If you would like to receive your Newsletter by E-mail and so save the Society valuable funds, please tick here

In our household there are -

Adults

Children

Type of membership :

Household @ £3.00 p.a.

(of which all members are under 60 years of age)

Concessionary @ £1.50 p.a.

(household in which at least one member is 60 years of age or older)

Donation - thank you

(please state amount)

Cheques should be payable to " Mill Meadows Society"

TOTAL	£	:
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Please send this form together with your subscription to:

John Hathaway, Membership Secretary, Mill Meadows Society,
20 Atridge Chase, Billericay CM12 0HR

phone: 07802 921435 : e-mail: john.hathaway@hathaway.co.uk

Please use the reverse of this form if -

(a) you wish to air your views about the Society, its management or have suggestions of topics for future meetings

or (b) names of other persons who may be interested in joining the Society

For Society use only

date received	sage entry	card issued	membership number