



Did you know?

*you don't have to remember our web site name or email address. If you enter 'Mill Meadows' in the Search Window of Google our web site comes out at the top. From there, you can click on an email link to the Chairman or Secretary (webmaster).*

*Tell people who want to know about us how easy it is to find out and to get in touch!*



## Membership Renewal for 2011-12

*A reminder that membership renewal is now due. For those who haven't yet renewed, a Membership Form is attached - if you please send the form with your remittance we'd be grateful*



## Events for your Diary



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

**9<sup>th</sup> July work party.** There are a number of repairs to be carried out on fences, benches –**please try and join us**

**16<sup>th</sup> July - Mini-beast walk.** Discover some of the interesting small creatures that dwell on The Meadows

**25<sup>th</sup> August - Bat & Moth walk (evening: start 7.30 pm)** Detecting and spotting bats and looking at what comes into the Moth Trap

**1<sup>st</sup> September – Homes for Wildlife** day: creating nestboxes for bats and birds and a home for reptiles. To be held at Norsey Wood workshop

**10<sup>th</sup> September work party.**

**8<sup>th</sup> October work party**

**5<sup>th</sup> November – Fungus Foray.** Our ever-popular family event to look for colourful species of fungi on the meadows

**... November – Indoor Meeting: Food and Farming:** a talk by The Co-operative Society on how they encourage environmentally-friendly and ethical food production

**19<sup>th</sup> November work party**

**10<sup>th</sup> December Work Party.**

## Chairman's Report

Sometimes I think I spend as much time in spring watching the weather forecast as being outside. Bird walks and surveys are much better if its not too windy, not raining heavily and not in bright sunshine. The dates for walks have to be set in advance so, like weddings, festivals and open days, we set the date and cross our fingers. When it rains we are disappointed but not surprised.

However, back in November, when we set the date for this year's Wildflower walk we didn't expect that the orchids would be almost totally over by the time it came around. The warm dry weather in early spring not only accelerated their progress, it also reduced the amount of grass for the cattle on the west side. Hence the grazier took it upon himself to release the cattle into the SSSI and the remaining orchids had almost all been grazed by mid June. Still, the walk was enjoyed by all those who attended: as much for the banter and meeting of people as for the flowers; and it only rained briefly. My day was completed when The Society acquired two new members.

We did manage to count the orchids earlier in the week before our beefy friends found them but they were past their best and the count of 1,272 - less than 25% of last year's figure, was hardly indicative.

We had our first Tree Id Walk this year and this was also an enjoyable one. Chris gave us handouts and little tasks to use these to identify the trees ourselves. Nice one, Chris, but please warn me next time the brain needs to be activated on a Saturday. Our bird walks, again well-attended, did not throw up anything spectacular this year. But in general its been quite a good year on The Meadows, and locally, for long-distance migrant warblers, with whitethroats up to about 6 territories, a brief visit from a willow warbler, and garden warbler and lesser whitethroat holding territory for a while. The dry weather meant that many resident worm-eating birds had a poor start to the breeding season but they are now having more success so we may expect a bit of bird-song for a while yet as they try for further broods.



*"time and money spent on fixing the results of vandalism could be better spent on more positive changes to The Meadows"*



*"My friend wasn't lamenting the loss of turtle doves or the pond being churned up by unfenced cattle. He was glad just to be there."*

## *Chairman's Report (contd)*

Conversely, butterflies did well earlier in the year, with many seen in April, but few in May and June.

The presentation by Bill Coster at the AGM met our expectations. The attendance was good but it would have been nice to have seen a few more non-regular attendees. Hence the investment was more of a deserved reward for many of those who regularly support our meetings, rather than a lure for new faces.

Vandalism has been a significant problem this year. The fencing has been ripped out entirely around the ponds near Greens Farm Lane, boardwalks have been broken, fence posts uprooted, gates broken and benches ripped out and dumped. It is not just the appearance and impact of the cattle wandering outside their managed zones but a more general irritation is that time and money spent on fixing the results of vandalism could be better spent on more positive changes to The Meadows

Please could we ask that if members witness any vandalism to report it immediately to the police and subsequently to The Ranger (number at the end of his report, below). I did have an encounter myself one evening, after receiving an intelligence report that a group of youngsters were heading into the meadows with armfuls of wood. I found the police to be very responsive. The vandals were pretty responsive too when I shouted at them, as they were in the middle of uprooting fence posts to add to their firewood pile. Their hoods were pulled over their heads faster than I could raise binoculars at a red kite. They retreated slowly and some of them bared their bottoms at me – reminding me of Rhesus Macaques monkeys who use this as an expression of the

ultimate insult to a rival tribe during a border dispute. I was insulted but did not feel threatened. But I would, of course, *not* encourage people to put their personal safety at risk by confronting vandals in action. But please do report it – the more reports we have then the more the police may have sufficient evidence to identify the perpetrators.

I recently showed an old friend around The Reserve. It was his first visit. When I pointed out yet another piece of damage he stopped me and started talking about the good things – the peacefulness, the view across the valley, the bird-song and how lucky we are to have this green space close to the centre of town. I realised how easy it is to focus on what is wrong and miss seeing what is right. It reminded of one of my favourite books 'Don't Sweat the Small Stuff' – one I find very easy to read but less easy to practise. My friend lost his wife last year. Perhaps this recent experience made him appreciate the beauty of the natural world around us at that time. He wasn't lamenting the loss of turtle doves or the pond being churned up by unfenced cattle. He was glad just to be there.

That is not to say that we should be complacent. The repairs need to be done – so we have an additional work party on July 8<sup>th</sup> to do this. And the reason for the loss of species needs to be understood – they are telling us that something is going wrong with the environment. So we should conduct our surveys and report our sightings and try corrective conservation measures. There is always work to be done but we should also take time just to stand and enjoy. (or even to sit and enjoy... if we can find that bench that was here a few weeks ago...)

Neil Sumner, 01277 630849



The picture above is of a Snakes-head fritillary and was taken on 3<sup>rd</sup> April. The editor has never seen this flower on the meadows before and only on a few other occasions in the surrounding South Essex area. Can any other members recall seeing them in previous years? By the time I returned with the camera the stalk was damaged but this picture still shows the delicate nature of the flower with its chequered pink colouring.

## Rangers Report

The first item in this edition's report is the dreadful spate of vandalism that has been taking place in the meadows over the last few weeks, and discussed in The Chairman's Report above. Apparently the police think they know who is responsible, so hopefully things should quieten down. Unfortunately it only takes a small group, but if they are determined to be a nuisance they can do quite a lot of damage in a comparatively short time. We will be attempting to repair what's necessary, but so far I have been reluctant to repair things only to find them vandalised again. I will continue to try and make contact with the police to see if they have had a definite result, and we will begin to make good the damage whilst keeping an eye on the situation.

Unfortunately this has had a knock on effect on the grazing progress this year as we have been unable to confine the cows to our preferred fields due to damage to the fencing. However, there are cows present (as you will have noticed!), so some grazing is taking place. I'm sure in the past, when Mill Meadows was part of a working farm grazing would have varied with things like seasonal changes in the weather and so on,, and variation can introduce diversity, so I'm not overly concerned for one year.

Regarding the reduced orchid count this year, I should add that the count on the ride at Norsey Wood was also

lower this year so I think other factors are probably at work. I was reading a discussion about another orchid (Monkey, I think) having reduced number this year and the speculation being discussed was that the fungus on which the orchid depends may have had a bad year because of the cold winter followed by the dry spring. Whether this is the case, and if it applies to Heath-spotted Orchids I'm not sure, but it may be an explanation.

I was also pleased with the successful tree & wild flower walks this spring which were well attended and (I think!) enjoyed by those who attended.

You may also have noticed some coloured markings and numbered tags appearing on some of the trees just lately. This is part of a tree safety survey that has been carried out on our behalf by the council's arboriculture officers. I haven't received the full report yet, but the trees that have been marked are ones that are going to require some sort of work doing to them to reduce the risk of accidents. However, any work carried out will be the minimum necessary for safety or habitat management reasons.

Thanks,

Chris Huggins  
Countryside Ranger  
Basildon Borough Council  
01277 624553 or 01268 550088



The cable laying equipment was very successful in keeping the disruption to a minimum. As soon as the mechanical shovel had dug the trench then the cable was laid. The trench was then re-filled and a small tracked "roller" compressed the soil. By the time the editor visited the meadows the work was completed and the site was left with a tidy path. Thanks to Paul Jarmy for supplying this photo.



***Nuthatches** nested in Barrenleys Wood, near Outwood Farm Road this year. Above is a photo of one of the adults feeding young. This was the first positive breeding record for nuthatch since 2004 when they nested in Norsey Wood. These birds have recently declined in Essex, especially near the coast but they are expanding in the North West. Let's hope this is the start of a local recovery. Thanks to Colin Brodie for the photograph. The birds nested just above one of the Paintball arenas so were certainly not bothered by his distant camera.*

## THE RIGHT TIME AND THE RIGHT PLACE

The saying is certainly true when walking in the countryside. On a recent holiday in East Devon a day of drizzle was followed by a clear morning. I set off early for a short walk from our accommodation to a nearby combe (a small beach formed where a river had carved a valley through the soft cliffs). My original intention was to take some exercise and see the seascape from the cliff top. Though the temperature was cool the sun was out and so were lots of the local wildlife. The flowers in a wild flower meadow attracted several butterflies and the birds seen in the scrub included several yellowhammers, finches, blackcaps and a bunting while overhead a buzzard and a kestrel were circling. The view from the cliff top was beautiful with the cliffs stretching around the bay. What made this day was an unexpected close-up of a (red?) deer that was just as surprised as me by the looks of this photograph. It was purely by luck that I had taken my camera and happened to have it in my hand when it appeared. If I had deliberately intended to find a deer I doubt if I would have seen one. The moral of this story is to always look out for wildlife and you can only take a picture if your camera is with you rather than left in a drawer at home. If you have taken some wildlife photos that you would like share with the members why not email them via our web-site.





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** £ :

**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