



Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 75

October to December 2016

www.millmeadows.org.uk

In this issue

Chairman's Report	1
Ranger's Report	2
Membership secretary report	3
Lake Meadows wildlife	3
Speeding	5
Purple Hairstreak	6

Events

**** Work parties: Meet at The Scout Hall, Greens Farm Lane at 10.30. Tools/gloves provided – wear old clothing and wellies or water proof boots**

Saturday 8th October : Fungus Foray at Norsey Wood. Meet at The Information Centre, Norsey Wood, off Outwood Common Road.

Monday 31st October: Amphibians and Reptiles of Norsey Wood. Illustrated talk by Ray Cranfield. 7.45pm in the Day Centre, Chantry Way, Billericay hosted by The Norsey Wood Society

Saturday 12th November : Fungus Foray on Mill Meadows. Meet at The Scout Hall, Greens Farm Lane at 10.30.

Saturday 3rd December : Veteran Tree Walk on Mill Meadows. Meet at The Scout Hall, Greens Farm Lane at 10.30.

Saturday 10th December : Work Party. Ending shortly after mid-day to enjoy mince pies and mulled wine.

Saturday 7th January: Work Party.

The new financial year subscriptions are due from April. Please use the form at the back of the newsletter. If you have not previously set up a standing order why not use the form on the last page



A veteran oak – see page 2

Chairman's Report

We have submitted a project enquiry to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project I have termed Mark 2 Trail. This is to request funding for the footpath improvements through Oakfield as referred to in previous Newsletters, as well as improvements to bridges and benches and a refresh of the information boards and waymark posts and a new leaflet. At the time of writing we await a reply to see if the project qualifies for a full funding application.

Many of you will have seen that Basildon Borough Council have published a Draft Consultation response to the Local Plan. <http://tinyurl.com/jkzcbqb>



Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 75

October to December 2016

www.millmeadows.org.uk

There is no direct reference to the proposed site opposite Mill Meadows along Greens Farm Lane nor do we have news of any further communications from the developer. We did make a request to conduct some seasonal wildlife surveys of our own on the site but this was declined. The ecologists did assure us that they were conducting surveys throughout the year. We await the results with interest.

Being fortunate enough to be able to walk Mill Meadows regularly it has been a nice change to have done so on a dry surface for many weeks, especially after a succession of wet winters. But the wildlife has been mixed this summer. An article in The Guardian (<http://tinyurl.com/z967a5s>) stated that this could have been our worse year on record for butterflies, caused by a combination of a mild winter and cold wet spring. See Ranger's Report. .

After mentioning the fortunes of our birds in the last Newsletter I can confirm unfortunately that we found no evidence of breeding by African migrant birds. Twenty five years ago there were 4 warbler species, Turtle Doves and Cuckoos breeding on the reserve.

Without repeating too much of what is written in Nature Notes in the October *AroundTown* magazine, the decline of our wildlife here in the South is written on our car windscreen. The summertime litter of splattered insects is gone, which is why we often drive under skies devoid of insect-eating birds. The recent State of Nature Report highlights agricultural practices as the main cause. The National Farmers Union feel that this is unfair, citing how many landowners have done much to provide wildlife habitat. The report does state some positives, including that bats have increased on farmland. <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/stateofnature16>

Happily there were enough insects for Common Pipistrelle bats on our annual bat event this year, which was very well attended. We also held the Tree Walk where Chris tested our ability to inspect leaves and branches and follow charts and a process of elimination to identify the common trees on The Reserve. Steve Prewer, recently retired from Basildon Council, joined us as planned (albeit a little late !) and also imparted his knowledge on the flora. We provided Steve with a picture album spanning the lifetime of The Mill Meadows Society, which he did so much to set up.

Chris has a further tree walk planned for us in December when we look at veteran trees. When staring at one of our oaks, the age of which is numbered in centuries, I pondered on how many species of birds, other animals and insects had used the tree for food, shelter or just a temporary stopover in its lifetime. And are there new ones yet to come as the landscape changes around it and our climate warms? I'm sure that all members will want to join in protecting that oak and others for future generations.

Neil Sumner, Chairman.

Neilsumner123@aol.com

Rangers Report – Autumn 2016

Grazing

The cattle were recently removed from the SSSI fields where they had been contained, to allow them access to the more recent growth of grass on the rest of the site. Due to the recent dry weather there has been very little growth, and the concern was that they were not getting enough nourishment. The last time I checked the sward level in the SSSI it looked acceptable to me if the season closed now. We'll keep it monitored and allow them back in if we get a late period of growth. They should be around for another month or so, but obviously this depends on what the weather's like. If it gets too cold they will have to be removed to winter quarters. The big news on the grazing front is that the Grazing Project, Mill Meadows Society and Basildon Council have been given a 'Living Landscape Award' by the Essex Wildlife Trust, for our work at Mill Meadows. Colin Kidner and I went to collect the award at the EWT's AGM at their new centre at the Naze last month. (The site looks well worth a return visit.) This is a welcome recognition of our work, notably the volunteer cattle checkers, without whom, (as they say), none of this would be possible.

Butterfly transect surveys

Butterfly numbers appear to be well down on last year (640 compared with 1040 for the whole of last year), although I am still waiting for a few weeks' data, so the gap may close slightly. No Brimstones, and only one Small Copper, have



Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 75

October to December 2016

www.millmeadows.org.uk

been recorded on the transects this year, although we did have a probable Clouded Yellow for the first time since 2006, and our first Marbled White for a couple of years. Bucking the trend was Meadow Brown (272 this year, 252 in 2015). Fuller analysis will be possible when all the results are in, and when we are able to compare with national trends and those at other local sites.

Bat surveys

I managed (with assistance), to deploy the new bat logging equipment at Mill Meadows for a few days in a couple of locations. This generated several hundred recordings at least, which will need proper analysis over the winter months (once more training in this has been received), to establish if we can confidently say we have species other than pipistrelles. Personally, I think this is quite likely, but we shall see. The bat walk event seemed to go well, with about 20 people attending and bats (once they got going), in regular supply.

Our forthcoming events are shown on the front page.

Chris Huggins

Countryside Ranger, Basildon Council
[01277 625976](tel:01277625976)

Membership secretary report

We are half way into the 2016/17 membership year for the Society, and much like the butterfly sightings over the summer, numbers are also sadly down on last year. Whilst it is unlikely that the cold Spring affects the Society membership numbers, I have given thought as to why membership renewals are (at the time of writing) 10% down on last year. My conclusion is that most likely a few people have simply forgotten to renew, so please do find attached a membership form to this newsletter! If you have renewed, why not pass the form on to a friend or neighbour and encourage them to join?. The Society does valuable work to help Chris the Countryside Ranger look after the reserve, as well as representing the interests of the reserve and SSSI in local matters. With a great speaker at this

year's AGM, regular site work parties, as well as a number of wildlife walks on the site this year, it's important to keep the Society's size and standing. New members with new ideas are always welcomed, and there is currently space on the management committee for anyone who wants to take a more active role.

If you are unsure if you have renewed or not for this year, please do write or email me – details on the renewal form.

After three years as Membership Secretary I will be stepping down from the role in March 2017, in order to hand the role to someone who can inject new life in to the role, grow the membership numbers, and who perhaps has more time to publicise the Society at local events. I still plan to take an active role in the Society, but feel that it is time for the membership baton to be handed over to a new member of the committee. It would be wonderful to see the committee filled for 2017/18 and the Society grow and continue to build on the great work it has done over the last near-twenty years!

Dave Slawson

~ Lake Meadows – Wildlife Aspects ~

By John Smart 14/06/2016

Lake Meadows and its 40 acres is a good example of how biodiversity can thrive in the urban environment. With its extensive lake, surrounding collection of mature specimen trees and shrubs, various forms of wildlife are attracted in goodly numbers. The lake itself plays host to a variety of birds throughout the year and especially so now that the lake is oxygenated with the two fountains. This has had the effect of boosting the fish and fry population that has benefited the anglers as well as the birds!

In winter up to 5 species of gulls occur, mainly Black-headed Gulls, probably plying between the Thames Estuary and Hanningfield Reservoir, or after following the plough for invertebrates in the



Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 75

October to December 2016

www.millmeadows.org.uk

surrounding countryside and break their journey to bathe and preen. Many of these birds would have travelled in from Eastern Europe and Scandinavia to winter in the less extreme conditions of Britain.

Various species of wildfowl also visit in the winter, the most intriguing are up to 15 Goosanders. Where these birds breed in the summer is a matter for conjecture as they have a vast breeding range extending from Scotland to Scandinavia and beyond. It has been noticed that Goosanders, usually very wary birds, are now moving into public parks with lakes to feed across Europe, much like the Great Crested Grebe did some 40 years ago. Behavioural evolution in action.

Canada Geese at the lake have a mixed reception. The H&S aspect of their droppings from the flock that at times can peak at c.90 has been controversial. At the request of the Billericay Town Council and the Friends of Lake Meadows (FoLM), a team of local birders are undertaking a monthly census to establish how the numbers fluctuate throughout the year. Summer of course has the additions of the breeding population but a temporary influx of birds from Hanningfield Reservoir must surely be the case. Geese become flightless during their wing moult and need to find a habitat that provides food and security as during the period of replacing their flight feathers they become highly vulnerable to predators. Lake Meadows provides such a safe haven. This species already has its problems as some roost on a local golf course and at times are 'dispatched' for management reasons.

So far, birders have compiled a list of 68 bird species recorded 'in' and 'flying over' the park. Notable species not already mentioned have been:- Great Crested Grebe, Grey Heron, Red Kite, Sparrowhawk, Tawny Owl, Green & Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Swift, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Swallow, House Martin, Mistle Thrush, both the winter thrushes, Fieldfare & Redwing, Blackcap and Chiffchaff, Goldcrest, Long-tailed

Tit, Coal Tit, Treecreeper, Siskin & Lesser Redpoll. (A deceased Woodcock was also found).

Notable species that have regularly bred successfully in the park are Great Crested Grebe and Grey Wagtail. Indeed, this year, the grebes have raised two broods, each of two youngsters.

These interesting bird species, summer migrants and winter visitors, all in the centre of our town, demonstrate the fact that built-up areas need not be scant of wildlife. Provide the habitat, even if surrounded by bricks and mortar, and life moves in and flourishes.

Discovered only recently is how good the park is for several species of bat. The woodland has Common pipistrelles hawking the midges high up at canopy level and they sometimes dropped down to feed about our heads. Maybe our body heat attracted midges which in turn attracted the bats. Out over the lake there were at least fifteen or so white-bellied Daubenton's bats that skim over the water surface to snatch the emerging aquatic insects with their large feet. Once, a Brown long-eared bat, a slow flyer, flew so close to me that I could feel the turbulence made by its wings on my face.

The flower meadow has proved to be a boon for feeding bats. The amount of insects arising off the bountiful inflorescence is a great attraction and all three pipistrelle species, Common, Soprano and Nathusius' have been recorded. The last named species of which are uncommon. So far in the park, six species of bat have been identified.

Members of the Angling Club report the following native and naturalized fish species:- Common Carp, Mirror Carp, Bream, Roach, Perch with a few Pike and Gudgeon. There are three introduced species of catfish to be found in the lake. The Wels Catfish made the news headlines when Pete Hudd caught 'The Beast of Billericay' in April 2013. It weighed just over 50lbs and was 6ft long and thereafter was returned to the lake. Proof of this giant can be seen by googling its



Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 75

October to December 2016

www.millmeadows.org.uk

pseudonym. Even Jeremy Wade would be impressed! Visitors to the park are asked to look out for the orange coloured 'Roy the Koi'!

As I understand it, the park is run and managed more for its use to the community for recreation, the ambience of its pleasant surroundings and the children's play area. The scent garden being a particular joy and the flower meadow is a veritable delight to view. And amongst the 41 specimen trees a mature Sierra Redwood and the Dawn Redwood are both reminders of different far- flung continents. Even with the several major events held there, including the fireworks display, musical concerts and rowing competitions, a good range of wildlife can find a haven.

The parks management regime is making room for nature. The banks of the lake are allowed to be given over to native vegetation to soften any manicured aspect whilst providing useful insect habitat. A grass strip is kept mown between the perimeter path and the vegetation to provide a contrast between order and wildness. Both of these are subject to a sustainable mowing



regime.

Great Crested Grebes with their young at Lake Meadows (11/06/2016).

Their second brood this year. Photographed by Bill Moss.

Also, blocks of native vegetation are left growing on the sloping bank of the west elevation. Native plants are allowed to flourish for the benefit of butterflies and other insects, thus providing the necessary nourishment for the food chain. Here again, a grass strip is kept mowed to provide an aesthetic managed counterpoint to the wildness.

It is thought that the woodland at Lake Meadows is Ancient and was once connected to Norsey Wood in the long distant past. Apparently, a lone peahen roams the park!

I know that Rosie Novis and Peter Williams, two stalwarts of FoLM, will want me to encourage new members to their society! So here is the website details :- <http://www.lakemeadows.org.uk/>

Timeline for Lake Meadows:-

Pre-1500s, the lands were owned by Barking Abbey / 1539 – Henry VIII grants William Petre the land / 1858 – Thomas Jenner Spitty inherits the land from his father / c.1874 he pays out-of-work agricultural workers a shilling a day, including meal, to dig out the lake / 1935 – The Billericay Urban District Council buys the land / 1936 – The park is officially opened / 2013 – FoLM was formed.

Many thanks must go to Peter Williams, a Trustee of FoLM and Rob Baker of the Basildon Borough Council (Parks & Countryside Operations) for providing me with helpful advice and some finer detail for this article. Thanks also to Neil Sumner (EWT local representative) for organizing the annual bird survey in the park.

Residents Fight Back Against Speeding Motorists (by Alan Talboys)

A group of residents are campaigning to reduce speeding in Greens Farm Lane, Billericay (*part of which form the eastern boundary of the reserve*). The speed limit in the residential section of the road is 30 mph, however it is very obvious to most residents that the majority of motorists simply ignore the limit. This is supported by



official statistics. A traffic/speed survey, conducted for 7 days in September 2015 by Essex Police, reveals that a daily average of 180 vehicles exceed 45 mph and a staggering 2200 vehicles exceed 35 mph. According to Essex Police, "the posted speed limit of 30 mph was exceeded by 72% of southbound vehicles and 68% of northbound vehicles".

Amongst the local residents there is genuine concern that such speeding will result in serious injury or worse, involving other motorist and/or other users such as pedestrians, school children, cyclists and wheelchair users.

In order for the campaign organisers to prove the extent of concern regarding the speeding, 500 residents signed a petition. The petition, along with a number of other documents, was served by the campaign organisers to Kay Twitchen, Essex County Councillor for Billericay and Burstead. These documents propose a number of suggestions for potential solutions to address the speeding issue.

The present position is that we have been informed that it would not be compatible with Department of Transport guidelines which they are claiming that because there are many "dropped vehicular crossings" i.e. driveways and because it is a PR2 route, it is not possible. We pointed out many precedence i.e. Hillside, Meadow Rise, Rettendon, Ramsden Bellhouse but all ignored.

It would appear that the present attitude of the Essex Transport Department is that until you have several accidents i.e. people injured etc or a child is KILLED nothing will happen. Billericay Town Council have every sympathy with the residents of Greens Farm Lane but given the response of the Transport Department all we could ask for is that the speed limit of 30 mph is extended the whole length of Greens Farm Lane.

The residents in Rosebay Avenue have the same speeding problem and have organised that any spare cars are parked on the road to slow traffic down. Speeding is also mentioned in the RESIDENT this month, listing problem roads such as Mountnessing Road, Tye Common Road, Queen's Park Avenue, Perry Street and Stock Road. So parking in one of these roads may save a life, but remember not to park with two wheels on the pavement.

Purple Hairstreak (by Ken Williamson)

During the tree identification walk Paul Hudson mentioned while in Bottom Mead that it could be a location for Purple Hairstreak. I had never seen this butterfly despite looking in suitable habitat i.e. various tree canopy during my regular transect and they are rarely recorded by other participants. A few days later I was dog walking in this area and saw an unknown (to me) butterfly resting in the sunshine on some bramble in Bottom Mead. It was a copper brown colour with a purple sheen to the body. After a little while I saw a white streak on the underwing. I immediately thought of the hairstreak but official pictures I had seen gave more prominent markings. I called in to Paul's on my way home. Within a short time he had visited the site and confirmed my sighting including the photo evidence below. Local butterfly reports had seen similar coloration. Thanks to a chance sighting Bottom Mead is now part of the transect route.





Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 75 October to December 2016 www.millmeadows.org.uk

date received	s.a.e	date card issued	S/O received	date S/O to bank	xl entry	date subs to Treas	membership number
	YES / NO		YES / NO				



Pay by STANDING ORDER

Please complete the form below and return it to :-
Membership Secretary, Mill Meadows Society,
c/o 19 Gainsborough Close, Billericay CM11 2DB

STANDING ORDER MANDATE

To: (name of your bank) _____

(Your bank's postal address) - _____

Please make the following payments to :-

Bank: LLOYDS TSB Billericay Branch

Sort Code: 30 – 90 - 80

Beneficiary: MILL MEADOWS SOCIETY

Reference: Mem No: _____ Name: _____

Account No: 0 1 0 4 2 8 2 3

Amount:	Annual Subscription	£	4.00
	Donation	£	_____
	TOTAL	£	_____

Due Date: IMMEDIATELY then 1ST APRIL ANNUALLY

Commencing:

Last Payment: Until Further Notice

And debit the following account :-

Account Name: _____

Account No: _____

Signed :

Date :