



# Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 64

January to March 2014

*"When the last tree has been cut down, the last fish caught, the last river poisoned, only then will we realize that one cannot eat money."*

Native American Indian prophecy.

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### Frisky Cattle

The 'relief cattle (see Rangers Report) are a bit friskier than the ones we normally have and this caused some concern to visitors to the Meadows. Even the Chairman jumped when they came bounding up to his rear whilst he was engrossed in a soaring sparrowhawk.

Although these cattle are active and curious they will not harm people. We can only advise that you keep walking or stand your ground or wave them away.

We will collect any reports of harassment by the cattle



Photograph: Dennis Dear

## Events

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> Jan: Work Party\*\*.

Monday 27<sup>th</sup> January at 7.45pm: Hyde Hall – a developing future : by Ian Le Gros, RHS Curator. Event hosted by the Norsey Wood Society at The Day Centre, Chantry Chase

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> February, Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> March and Saturday April 12<sup>th</sup>: Work Parties\*\*.

Monday 31<sup>st</sup> March : Woodland Wonders - an exploration of trees in Norsey Wood by Chris Huggins. Event hosted by the Norsey Wood Society.

**Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> April : Kingfishers** : a superbly illustrated talk by **Jeff Harrison** at The Reading Rooms, 7.45 – after our Annual General Meeting

\*\* 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

## We need your help!

We need your help to increase our membership. With our numbers slowly declining we would like to enlist your support in spreading the word about our Society.

Please talk about Mill Meadows to your friends, family and neighbours. It is amazing just how many people are simply not aware of the existence of the Mill Meadows Society, or even aware of Mill Meadows itself.

The Meadows are a vital area of conservation which, if not maintained and supported, run the risk of disappearing altogether. Although there is a covenant protecting the Meadows,

the pressures of development and pressures on Council budgets mean that we can never take it for granted. There are areas of Green Belt land very close to the Meadows that

are, as I write this article, being seriously considered for re-development (see page 4) . If this happens, then the wildlife corridors to and from Mill Meadows will come under threat and possibly even the meadows themselves.

The greater the community support for the protection of Mill Meadows, then the stronger the public influence to maintain this special Local Nature Reserve.

So please help to spread the word and so increase our membership in order that we might continue our support.

Many thanks,  
John Hathaway  
Membership Secretary





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### *VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR BUTTERFLY MONITORING by Paul Hudson*

Please note that members of the Mill Meadows Society can get discount from **The Conservation Volunteers online shop**

<http://store.tcv.org.uk/>

use code COMM10 when purchasing.

We recently used it as a source for Snake's Head Fritillary bulbs in Brickfield.

#### MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

[john.hathaway@hathaway.co.uk](mailto:john.hathaway@hathaway.co.uk)

or phone 01277 658343

Many thanks

John Hathaway  
Membership secretary

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

[www.millmeadows.org.uk](http://www.millmeadows.org.uk)

2013 seems to have been a good year for most butterflies but the cold, late spring did mean that many species emerged later than usual. At Mill Meadows a Wall was seen in May, the first for many years, but in contrast, I am not aware of any records of Small Copper this summer.

If we are to develop any meaningful understanding of the butterfly populations in the Meadows, something more than casual records is required and Neil Sumner and I have endeavoured to do a monthly count in suitable weather over the last few summers. Neil, Chris Huggins and I are now keen to develop this into something more regular.

The preferred method for recording butterfly populations systematically is by "Transect Walks". This involves an observer walking a pre-determined route on a weekly basis, in suitable weather conditions, and recording the number of each species seen within each section of the route. The route needs to be walked each week (not necessarily on the same day every week as weather conditions have to meet specified criteria) from the beginning of April till the end of September. This means 26 walks need to be completed. The specified route will cover a number of habitat types within the Meadows and will be about 1.25 miles long and should take no more than an hour to complete. A team of about 6-8 walkers is needed so each participant develops some

experience of the route and the recording techniques but no-one has to do more than 4 or 5 walks during the season.

A weekly Transect Walk has been carried out successfully at Norsey Wood this year and some of those involved will be happy to assist with walks at Mill Meadows in 2014. We will need several more Mill Meadows Society members to make up the team however, so we are looking for your help! You do not need to be a "butterfly expert" though some familiarity with the commoner species would be an advantage. A copy of the *Field Studies Council Butterfly Identification sheet* will be supplied and an experienced observer will be happy to accompany you on your first walk to introduce you to the route and the recording form which you will need to complete as you walk.

If you are able to help or would just like further information, please contact Chris on 01277 624553 or e-mail [chris.huggins@basildon.gov.uk](mailto:chris.huggins@basildon.gov.uk).

For more detailed information on the Transect Walking procedure, visit [www.ukbms.org](http://www.ukbms.org) and follow the links to Methods and then Resources. Guidance Note G2 provides a good explanation of what is involved – but please don't be put off if it all sounds too complicated at first reading!

Paul Hudson



## Rangers Report –

### Habitat Management

- Grazing

By the time you read this the 'relief' cattle should have been removed from the meadows. The usual herd was taken off a little earlier than I would have liked, so I approached another grazier who I know and he was able to supply some animals to help reduce the height of the sward. It's still not down to the required level, but I think it's recognized that the grass kept growing very late this year due to the mild conditions. However, we will need to try and make sure we get a regular good hard graze over the coming years.

- Scrub clearance in SSSI

We also need to remove the scrub from the SSSI (brambles mainly, but also some trees, particularly in the corner of Cumborrow). Although scrub is a valuable habitat, it does encroach very quickly onto the grassland for which the SSSI fields are designated, and will take over if not removed quickly. The removal of the scrub from this area will be compensated for by allowing it to develop in other areas, and being managed for specifically in Watts, which is not in need of urgent work, but we will need to monitor so that the scrub here does not develop into mature woodland.

- Coppicing in Wards Hoppits

I have submitted the felling licence application for this to the Forestry Commission, and I'm hopeful that this will be granted early in the New Year. I have approached a contractor who may be interested, and will be meeting him soon to discuss how he might approach the work. This should help increase the variety of vegetation in this area.

- Hedge works

I am intending to get the top of the hedges in Greens Farm Lane and Chaffinch Crescent cut by a contractor this winter. The sides will be left this year to make sure that not all the food resource is removed, with some being left throughout the winter. There are also creatures that use only the tips of the branches to lay

their eggs, so this should help them too. The work party has continued its regeneration of the hedge between Wantsfield and Coles, with replanting taking place in several stages, including a successful work party just before Christmas. I have also met a contractor to discuss various work on the hedge along the Southend Road. I'd like to get part of it laid, but also to look at other stretches of it with a view to possible replanting and other management ideas. This work will have to be the subject of a grant application, but it seems that this might be a possibility in conjunction with other work at Queens Park County Park.

- Other habitat management tasks from the management plan that I'm hoping to get done over the winter include the woodland tasks in Coles, Hillmans and Bottom Mead.

### Estate works

The footpath improvement works in various places around the reserve are now complete, and I have asked the contractor to top up the level of shingle in some of the boxes.

### Events

Despite the weather, we had a successful Fungus Foray on November 9th, and although the number of waxcap species found was not as high as in some previous years there were still enough to maintain the special nature of the reserve for this group. A list of all the species seen on the day can be found elsewhere in the newsletter. Finally, work party dates for the first part of next year are as follows: January 11th, February 8th and March 8th.

Thanks for all your help and support in 2013 and all the best for 2014.

Chris Huggins  
Countryside Ranger  
Basildon District Council  
01277 624553



January to March 2014

You will have seen John's message on page 1 regarding membership. Recently our new members have been exceeded by the natural attrition. Our numbers are lower than at any time since I have been Chairman although this is in part due to us being more realistic about lapses. Sadly, this is symptomatic of society as a whole. For most local societies and other organisations the problem is the same – people are much more reluctant to get involved in the community nowadays.

But we soldier on and have agreed on some ideas for promoting The Society and increasing membership. One of these is updating the Marked Trail leaflet and adding details of how to join The Society and distributing these around the local community.

But as per Page 1, it is the existing members who are our best advocates so we ask that you all please do what you can to promote The Society and encourage new members.

On a positive note, we had an excellent turnout at our last events of 2013, the December Work Party and Fungus Foray. We invested in hedging plants for the former when filling gaps in the hedge between Wantsfield and Coles. As the hedge grows back we will be encouraging people to walk either side of it rather than through it, to allow it to re-generate.

We also have a New Year to look forward to and have booked our guest speaker for the AGM on 24<sup>th</sup> April. Jeff Harrison will give us a photographic talk on Kingfishers. I saw a version of his talk at the EWT Chelmsford Local Group and everyone agreed that it was one of the best talks they had ever seen. The photographs of kingfishers are captivating.

Proposed Development along Greens Farm lane.

Some of you will have seen the article in the Gazette on this. The draft revised Core Strategy has been published by Basildon Borough Council and is being reviewed by Cabinet before its release for consultation. This version actually rejects the land opposite Mill Meadows as a site

for development. But the debate is not yet over – there will be respondents who want to see this site developed.

Again, I urge that members of the Society respond to the consultation. The link to the press release from Basildon Council is below. The consultation may start before we publish the next Newsletter so I will email members for whom we have email addresses when this consultation starts.

2013 and Badgers

For wildlife, 2013 was a year of two halves. The cold late spring caused the delayed or non arrival of many of our summer bird visitors but the warm summer gave us butterflies in numbers not seen for many years. The abundance of natural food and mild weather is cause for optimism about winter survival-although it does seem to mean that we are down on winter visitors to the garden this year.

We had the terrific news about the Blackwater and Crouch becoming a Marine Conservation Zone this year – see link below. I often lament the decline in wildlife on land – in our seas it is hidden from view but apparently much worse. This designation is a chance to reverse fortunes for wildlife on the Essex Coast.

The saddest event for me in 2013 was the badger cull. Thousands have died and I am convinced it will only prove what many scientists already know: culling badgers won't stop TB. Essex Wildlife Trust are launching a badger vaccination program on their reserves where TB is a risk – hopefully this will prove that there is a better way of reducing TB and this will be the adopted method.

Neil Sumner  
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**Council unveils draft planning blueprint for next twenty years**

<http://www3.basildon.gov.uk/website2/newsroom.nsf/APR/8945BB4AF754DBF280257C3D00455CB3?OpenDocument>

**Essex Marine Conservation Zone designated**

<http://www.essexwt.org.uk/news/2013/12/02/essex-marine-conservation-zone-designated>



A hardy group of adults and children explored the meadows looking for fungi including the colourful waxcaps. The list of species identified by Tony Boniface is below.

Mill Meadows, Billericay

TQ 69

9th November 2013.

Grassland and open woodland\*

1. <i>Amanita muscaria</i> *	Fly Agaric
2. <i>Chlorophyllum rhacodes</i> *	Shaggy Parasol
3. <i>Clavulinopsis luteoalba</i>	Apricot Club
4. <i>Collybia nebularis</i> *	Clouded Funnel
5. <i>Daedaleopsis confragosa</i> *	Blushing Bracket
6. <i>Gymnopilus penetrans</i> *	Common Rustgill
7. <i>Hygrocybe calyptriformis</i>	Pink Waxcap
8. <i>Hygrocybe ceracea</i>	Butter Waxcap
9. <i>Hygrocybe chlorophana</i>	Golden Waxcap
10. <i>Hygrocybe coccinea</i>	Scarlet Waxcap
11. <i>Hygrocybe conica</i>	Blackening Waxcap
12. <i>Hygrocybe psittacina</i>	Parrot Waxcap
13. <i>Hygrocybe reidii</i>	Honey Waxcap
14. <i>Inonotus hispidus</i> *	Shaggy Bracket
15. <i>Laccaria laccata</i> *	Deceiver
16. <i>Lactarius quietus</i> *	Oakbug Milkcap
17. <i>Lepista flaccida</i> *	Tawny Funnel
18. <i>Lycoperdon perlatum</i> *	Common Puffball
19. <i>Mycena pura</i> *	Lilac Bonnet
20. <i>Mycena rosea</i> *	Rosy Bonnet
21. <i>Panaeolus papilionaceus</i>	Petticoat Mottlegill
22. <i>Rhodocollybia butyracea</i> f. <i>butyracea</i> *	Butter Cap
23. <i>Rhytisma acerinum</i> *	Sycamore Tar-spot
24. <i>Russula fragilis</i> *	Fragile Brittle-gill
25. <i>Stereum hirsutum</i> *	Hairy Curtain Crust
26. <i>Stropharia pseudocyanea</i>	Peppery Roundhead
27. <i>Tremella mesenterica</i> .* Parasitic on the mycelium of <i>Peniophora quercina</i> growing on a dead, attached branch of Oak. (Not <i>Tremella aurantia</i> which is parasitic on <i>Stereum hirsutum</i> .)	Yellow Brain
28. <i>Xylaria hypoxylon</i> *	Candlesnuff Fungus