



Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 74

July to September 2016

www.millmeadows.org.uk

In this issue

Chairman's Report	1
Committee details	2
Ranger's Report	3
Sounds of Spring	3
Hopes and Fears	4

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 9th July : Butterfly Walk on Mill Meadows. Meet at The Scout Hall, Greens Farm Lane at 10.30.

Sunday 10th July : Summerfest at Sun Corner

Saturday 13th August : Tree identification on Mill Meadows. Meet at The Scout Hall, Greens Farm Lane at 10.30.

Thursday 8th September : Evening Bat Walk on Mill Meadows. Meet at The Scout Hall, Greens Farm Lane at 19.30.

Saturday 10th September : Work Party

Saturday 1st October : Work Party

Monday 31st October: Amphibian Talk. 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

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



Hobby

Photo by Bill Moss (see page 4)

Chairman's Report

I write on another soggy June morning, having woken early contemplating the implications of our separation from the EU. This was not the result I wanted, primarily because the Wildlife Trusts and RSPB analysis was that it was better for the environment if we had stayed in, despite identifying some shortcomings within the EU policies and implementation.

Much of our habitat and species protection comes from the EU Nature Directives and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Not all is well with these. The former is already under review by the EU, which was causing concern, and reforms to the latter are driving many landowners away from the schemes that compensate them from protecting wildlife. Of course we can now make our own rules on how we protect nature and subsidise farming. Whether this is good or bad depends on what kind of new national leadership we get. It may be that 'this green crap' will continue to under-valued in which case I will fear for our wildlife, our rivers and seas and our resilience to climate change. But if we have leadership that recognises that "the natural world is not a luxury, it is vital for our health, well-being and economy" then we can potentially look after it better as a stand-alone nation by setting our local policies and schemes and continuing to co-operate internationally.

Having joined the dog owning fraternity of The Society, I have spent probably as much time on Mill Meadows in the last 3 months as I usually spend in 2 years. I have come to appreciate several things much more: the rural feel of it, the tranquillity and the variety of habitat in the relatively small space. Having realised how many dogs are walked on the Meadows I have also come to appreciate how the vast majority are considerate in



Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 74

July to September 2016

www.millmeadows.org.uk

keeping dogs under control and picking up the mess. Of course, one offence is lamentable, so I am not going to say that there isn't a problem. Of greater concern is that there have been fires lit on top of badger setts and serious worrying of the cattle by some large dogs and young people – all of which have been reported. A reminder – please use the Essex Police number 101 to report or pass on information about incidents and let Chris or someone in The Society know.

In percentage terms of people using the Meadows we do not have a high rate of breaches of the Byelaws. When I walk there, I am much more likely to engage in friendly conversation and enjoy the vistas and wildlife than to see something displeasing. As Billericay expands, there will be more pressure on the Nature Reserve and it is important to get its users to appreciate that it is a nature reserve and to value its natural beauty – and we can all play our part in this. On that note, The Society was asked to contribute its Hopes and Fears for the future which we have included elsewhere in the newsletter.

I have no news yet to report on the much needed footpath improvements through Oakfield other than that we weren't successful with one funding application and are about to embark on another.

Spring brought the return of the Nuthatches and good numbers of Blackcaps and Song Thrush (I counted 7 singing birds in and around the Reserve on one walk) but the decline of African migrants continues with just one regular Whitethroat territory for which I have yet to find proof of breeding. It's been a good year for their cousin the Lesser Whitethroat pretty much everywhere and we have had 2 of these singing regularly. But the skies are generally empty of summer visitors with just handfuls of Common Swifts appearing. Bullfinches did seem to have disappeared but a pair did make a late appearance recently. Our cowslips and orchids continue to flourish and the wonderfully-named Corky Fruited Water Dropwort is propagating across the SSSI. Tadpoles have appeared again in several ponds and we also found a Common Toad on the Wildflower Walk. Let's hope now for some better weather as we enter what is probably the best time of the year for Mill Meadows.

Steve Prewer, who runs Basildon's Parks and Nature Reserves, has just retired. Steve was the driving force in the setting up of the Society and has done much for Mill Meadows. He joined Basildon Council from Essex Wildlife Trust in 1997 having been a Reserve Manager at Hanningfield where one of his tasks included making space for the Visitor Centre and walks and installing bird hides. He progressed through Countryside Services to lead it and more recently assumed responsibility for

all the green spaces. He has done much to help create and manage wildlife habitat across The Borough. Many of you will recall from one of the earlier AGMs that he was promoting the concept of Wildlife Corridors even before the Living Landscapes initiative. The Society wishes him and his wife well for the future and a long and happy retirement. Steve is planning to attend the Tree Walk on 13th August so if you want to say farewell in person please come along at 10 am.

Neil Sumner, Chairman.

Contact details for Committee Members

Chairman, Neil Sumner

email: chair@millmeadows.org.uk

home phone: 01277 630849, mobile: 07908139080

Secretary, Peter Croot

email : petercroot@btinternet.com,

home phone : 01277 651956

Membership, Dave Slawson

email : mms-membershipsec@hotmail.com

Treasurer, Alan Talboys

Newsletter editor, Ken Williamson

mobile: 07759990230

Committee member, Frances Adams

home phone: 01277 626621

Committee Member, Paul Jarmy,

Basildon Council

Ranger: Norsey Wood Info Centre 01277 624553,

Countryside Services 01268 550088

Out of hours emergency number 01268 286622

Customer Services 01268 533333





Rangers Report – Spring 2016

Grazing

This has been going well this year. We managed to get the early graze in the SSSI that I said I was hoping for in the last newsletter. We have had to do a bit of juggling with the cattle (interesting image!) to ensure they had enough to eat, but recent warm and wet conditions means this situation seems to have eased. They should be OK outside the SSSI for a few more weeks, but we'll keep the situation monitored. Unfortunately, we did have one incident when some of the cattle were 'spooked', probably by an out of control dog, and leapt one of the fences, causing some damage and an injury to one of the cows. They seem to have settled down again now, but it took a while and it was definitely an incident we could have done without. Thanks again to all those involved with the cattle checking. It certainly takes a large weight off my shoulders.

Invasive pond plant

One of the work parties earlier in the year made a good start on dealing with the Water Fern *Azolla filiculoides* that we found in the pond in Brickfield. It will need repeated treatment though to keep it under control. We are using mechanical methods only, rather than herbicides, at the moment and I sincerely hope we won't need to resort to chemicals, which would very much be a last resort. It's probably best to steer clear of the pond in Brickfield until it has been eliminated, as it is very easily spread, and we really don't want it in any of the other ponds.

Benches and bridge

All the work on replacing benches and repairs to bridges is now complete, although we have discussed some 'tweaks' to the exact siting of a one or two of the benches.

Butterfly surveys

These have been started again at Mill Meadows this year, but so far it has been a fairly poor year for butterflies. Hopefully the weather will improve towards the end of summer and we will see an increase in numbers.

Bat surveys

With the support of the Norsey Wood Society I have obtained funding to purchase some really quite clever bat survey equipment. This is intended to support the work of the Essex Bat Group's Woodland Bat Project, which is designed to help identify bat species using woodland areas around the county. The Norsey Wood Society has kindly agreed that this can be used within the 'Living Landscape 34' area, which includes Mill Meadows. I am only just starting to work out how it functions, and obviously it will be used first at Norsey Wood, but I'm hoping we will be able to find out more about the bats in Mill Meadows at some stage.

Events

The wildflower walk was enjoyable and well attended with a variety of new faces turning up, which was good to see. Forthcoming events are shown on the front page.

Chris Huggins

Countryside Ranger, Basildon Council



The Sounds of Spring by John Smart

In early May at Thurrock Stanford Warren, the reed beds become the home once again of the returning Reed Warblers from their African winter quarters. Cuckoos call from the top of the bushes and the skulking Cetti's Warbler, whose startling and explosive song can be rendered as 'Listen! What's my name? Cetti-Cetti-Cetti – That's my name! calls behind a leafy curtain. The Reed Warblers uttered their jittery churring notes also unseen. Swifts high up, scythe through the distant heat haze and wrens invisibly emit their nervous 'zerrr' & 'zek' calls from the bushes. A Blackcap expresses its annoyance at us passing by with its scolding 'tack' call. Common Whitethroats, back from south of the Sahara and in goodly numbers, emit their scratchy & dry nasal songs from deep within the bramble tangle before rising 15ft up in the air to prove how



fit they are to the females! A Garden Warbler with his continuous outpourings, and almost thrush-like timbre song, calls from the heart of a flowering hawthorn.

Farmland birds have generally declined, but there is still a plentiful supply of small birds in reedbed locations. Also they attract the Cuckoo and Linnets that criss-crossed to and fro at bush height. The collective calls from the reedbed and adjacent bushes created their own 'sound world' of spring.

Fellow denizens of the reedbeds are the Bearded Reedlings whose 'pinging' calls betray its presence among the swaying phragmites. But patience will reward the onlooker as one or two surface for a few seconds before disappearing back into the reed-forest. Quick reactions are required of the photographer to catch the moment!



Bearded Reedling – Photo by Bill Moss.

Later, somewhere amongst the clumps of dense bushes and bramble, a Nightingale beguiles us with its spellbinding strains. A bird that is the object of poets, where the pauses in the repertoire can leave you suspended in a place as yet to be defined.

During the visit we often scanned the landscape with the optics for birds of prey; a distant Common Buzzard or a wind-hovering Kestrel, but only corvids plying the wider landscape were to be seen. Then out of the blue a hunting Hobby appeared. It was too early in the season to predate the dragonflies so now to chase the hapless off-guard little songbirds. An acrobatic chase ensued, low to the ground with mind boggling acrobatics from the falcon! The little be-feathered target this

time makes the safety of the bramble patch. Shaken and stirred!

All across the apparent peaceful and sultry landscape, under a warming sun, the food chain is red in tooth and claw. Juicy plum aphids, squidgy caterpillars, rancid nestlings and much more, are lining the bigger stomachs! Keeping out of the bellies of others is the recommended survival strategy!

Hopes and Fears

for Mill Meadows Local Nature Reserve

(these were requested by Billericay District Residents Association for their Time Capsule)

Hopes

1. Mill Meadows remains undisturbed as a nature reserve by housing and other developments and continues to be a place of quiet recreation for the residents of Billericay
2. The diversity of wildlife species found on the meadows increases, with annual grazing by cattle having a positive impact on the rarer flora species.
3. That local residents, especially younger generations, take a keen interest in wildlife, obtain pleasure from the observing that wildlife and contribute to the upkeep and development of Mill Meadows
4. Any housing developments in the proximity of Mill Meadows or other Billericay nature reserves and wildlife sites are sympathetically developed with suitable wildlife corridors and extending habitats.

Fears

1. That reduction in local authority funding and support has a negative impact on the upkeep of the meadows and on the grazing regime that contributes to the diversity of species
2. Apathy, reluctance or disinterest, or a lack of understanding by future generations of Mill Meadows's value as a nature reserve, contribute to its decline as a wildlife site and its diversity of habitats
3. That the continued urbanisation of the environs of Billericay results in a reduction in the variety of wildlife found on the Reserve with the loss of long standing native species



Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 74 July to September 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 :