



## 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

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July: Laindon Common Open Day**

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> July: Butterfly Walk Meet at The Scout Hall, Greens Farm Lane at 10.30.

August: the popular Bat and Moth evening

- date to be confirmed

Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> September: Work Party

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> August: Work Party

November: Fungus Foray

- date to be confirmed

## Chairmans Report

The talk at the AGM on Kingfishers this year was well-attended and well received. Thank you to those members who came along and also thank you for the excellent feedback we've received since the meeting. We shall certainly consider Jeff Harrison as a candidate speaker for future talks.

**The Management Committee still needs a secretary.** The role is not onerous – it only requires attending 4 or 5 meetings per year and taking minutes and dealing with a handful of items of correspondence each year. If you can help us, please let me know – my contact details are below.

**We still have quite a few membership renewals and we would be grateful if you send these in, if you haven't yet renewed.** The membership form is attached. Of course if you pay by standing order, then you won't have to worry about renewing every year. This will also make it easier for David, our Membership Secretary.

This time of year always feels like one of transition. For those of us who value song-birds above other wildlife it is the end of the best time of the year. Although I did count 14 species of birds singing in Suffolk in the latter days of June,

Photo by Lyn Smith



there is no longer the chorus of blackbirds at dawn and the woods feel distinctly silent. For those who love our orchids, it's also the end of a season. But if you like to indulge in insects, especially butterflies, it's a time when the numbers ramp up. We have a rota of weekly butterfly counts this year and I am sure that if you wanted to learn more about butterflies, you would be welcome to join one of us (see below for an article of butterflies).

We added some colourful nest boxes, courtesy of Billericay 8th Cubs this year. 2 of the 3 were occupied by blue tits which is not a bad first year. 2 were placed near the dramatically changed area in Wards Hoppits, which over the next few years will develop a low understorey for the benefit of wildlife. The layered hedge along Southend Road has enhanced the profile of Mill Meadows– I've had a few comments from people who were unaware what lay beyond the hedge. It's particularly nice to see those Red Poll cattle which have also generated many compliments.

The hedge between Wantsfield is showing signs of re-generation now, although we have had to put a lot of brush on it to keep the cattle from trampling the whips. Some of the re-growing coppiced plants have been nibbled, probably by Muntjac deer. It is nice to see a few of these but if the numbers grow too much they will be a problem as, like any unchecked deer species, they can browse a woodland understorey to oblivion. Lets hope that the proximity of the town and the open access to dogs will keep them from being too numerous. More welcome wildlife news



is that tawny owls have bred on land adjacent to the meadows this year.

On the subject of the cattle, these have to be checked daily and we do have volunteer rota for this. **We do need more people to join the rota** - if you can help with this, please contact myself or Chris, our Ranger.

[NeilSumner123@aol.com](mailto:NeilSumner123@aol.com)

01277 630849

## Rangers Report – Mainly cows, with some butterflies

Not the weather forecast, but the main contents of this article!

### Grazing

Since my last report, the new grazing arrangements have got into full swing. Two batches of Red Poll cattle were delivered (15 each, one from Suffolk, the other from Yorkshire). These have settled very well and certainly provide an attractive feature. Society members have done a sterling job in conducting the daily checks that needs to be done, and the owners seem very pleased with the arrangements, so it's a big "thanks" to everyone concerned They've been getting through the grass so fast that 15 have been removed (to Thorndon CP), until we can open up the SSSI (mid-July at the earliest), at which point they should all be back. The graziers seem confident that there is enough grass to keep the remaining 15 going outside the SSSI until then. I'll be doing a condition assessment of the SSSI in a few weeks, so although this won't reflect the new grazing arrangements, it should give us a baseline against which to judge future years.

### Butterflies

Thanks to Paul Hudson, who has used the successful experience of last year's butterfly survey at Norsey Wood, society members and others have started a butterfly transect at Mill Meadows in 2014. A transect involves walking as set route around the reserve once a week (providing the weather conditions fall within certain parameters) and noting the species and

numbers of butterflies seen. Whilst "casual" records are good (and keep them coming in please!), this sort of survey is important, as, if the same methodology is used each time, valid comparisons of (in this case, butterfly), populations can be made from year to year. There can be many different reasons why they might vary that are beyond our local control (e.g. weather, national population trends), but it can also help us to assess whether we are getting the habitat management right. Things were a bit quiet to begin with, but have started to take off, with 129 butterflies of various species seen on the 23rd of June. Hopefully, this is the start of a trend.

The species recorded so far are as follows:

Peacock  
Small Tortoiseshell  
Orange Tip  
Speckled Wood  
Comma  
Small White  
Painted Lady  
Large White  
Green-veined White  
Holly Blue  
Meadow Brown  
Marbled White (*new one for the survey*)  
Ringlet  
Large Skipper  
Red Admiral  
Small/Essex Skipper  
Common Blue

*Chris Huggins*

*Countryside Ranger, Basildon Council*



# Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 66

July to September 2014

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

## Life in an oak tree

Last month on a fine sunny morning, a few of us who were surveying birds on a local farm found ourselves watching a pair of lesser whitethroats collecting food in an oak tree and delivering it to a nest somewhere deep in an adjacent hedgerow. The tree seemed to be the sole larder for the forage by this normally elusive little bird.

As we watched, several other birds came to the tree to feed. A male chaffinch picked bugs from the leaves and made occasional short sallies into the air to catch insects in flight. Great and blue tits dangled from leafy twigs, a robin picked from the branches, and a chiffchaff danced around the tree, also catching food in flight and from the foliage.

We paused our survey and contemplated the value of the oak tree. The specimen we admired is mature but not grand, having reached the stage of "Early Ancient". The lower foliage is lush but some topmost branches are dead and bleached by the sun. Some might look at it and think it is unhealthy, but this is not one of the many oaks that have been hit by disease. This is a stag-headed oak, common on farmland and, by dying on the top, it has effectively lowered its own crown to reduce the likelihood that it is toppled by winds.

The English Oak can host up to 280 species of insect. Many birds nest or feed within it, and mammals munch the fallen autumn acorns. For us too it has great value, providing timber for ships and buildings since the time of the Vikings. The oak represents strength and longevity and a mature oak's age is measured in centuries. Many have been lucky to remain as our insatiable demand for land transforms their surroundings. A mature oak along a busy road is not just a site to enjoy and a refuge for wildlife, it is a monument to nature's survival.

Mill Meadows oak trees are protected of course, but only some of the oaks around Billericay town and neighbouring villages are protected by tree preservation orders (TPOs) and we sometimes find them that unprotected ones are no more. If you enjoy an oak tree, or any tree, it is worth

checking with your Borough Council if there is a TPO on it, and, if not, ask for one to be added. An ancient oak cannot be replaced even in the lifetime of your children, whatever your age.

In July, the leaves on an oak turn dark green whilst small birds feed often undetected in the canopy and fresh broods of moths and butterflies emerge. The purple hairstreak butterfly caterpillar lives on oak leaves and the butterflies flutter around their upper branches. In the quiet summer months, finding wildlife in an oak tree does require patience but can have rewards. Please feel free to send me a picture of your favourite oak tree.

The above article appeared in Around Town Magazine -

<http://www.aroundtownmagazines.co.uk/#/online-editions/4569575655>

*(thanks to John Smart for help with this article. Neil Sumner).*





## Painted Lady at Mill Meadows:-

The butterfly World has been more than surprised by the finding of an adult Painted Lady butterfly (*Vanessa cardui*) at Mill Meadows on the 24th April this year. Neil Sumner was undertaking a butterfly survey on the transect route prescribed for the Reserve, when he happened to deviate off the path to check for the presence of Grass Snakes.

To his surprise a Painted Lady was flushed. In situations where an unusual sighting occurs, it is always a good thing to get a digital to present to the national recorders. Neil took a quick shot with his mobile phone as the insect flitted about. The image is slightly blurred but good enough to verify the species. Robert Smith, the Butterfly Recorder for the Cambridgeshire & Essex branch of "Butterfly Conservation", indeed verified the image.

As far as we are aware, it is the first spring record of the species in the British Isles this year and only several others have been recorded to date (end of May). We speculate that this was an early migrant from Africa / Southern Europe and perhaps the forerunner of many more to come. (Overwintering is very unusual but has been recorded in the past down in Cornwall).

Every ten years or so, in June or July, the Painted Lady arrives in the British Isles in vast numbers having left Africa and bred in Europe on its "stepping stone" migration. The last "Painted Lady Year" was in 2009 involving unimaginable numbers. Some even managed to journey well

beyond the Arctic Circle. It has only recently been shown that the Painted Lady attempts to return to Africa in the autumn. Thus it is now considered a migrant rather than an immigrant. This exceptional record is good PR for both Mill Meadows and for Essex wildlife.

*(Thanks to John Smart for the above article)*

*The front page has a picture taken by Lyn who undertakes butterfly transects in Norsey Wood. Look out for butterflies in July and this variety frequently inhabits gardens feeding on plant nectar – Ed*







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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) - \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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**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	£	_____
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£</b>	<b>_____</b>

Due Date: IMMEDIATELY then 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL ANNUALLY

Commencing: .....

Last Payment: Until Further Notice

And debit the following account :-

Account Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Account No: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed : .....

Date : .....