



Mill Meadows Society Newsletter

Issue 67 Oct to Dec 2014

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 11th October : Work Party

Saturday 18th October : Fungus Foray at Norsey Wood

Saturday 8th November: Fungus Foray – meet at The Scout Hall at 10.30

Saturday 15th Novemeber: Work Party

Saturday 6th December: Essex Field Club Exhibition, Green Centre Wat Tyler Country Park 11-5

Saturday 13th December: Work Party, which will be curtailed to allow time for seasonal refreshment

Thursday 5th February (tbc): Indoor Meeting: talk by wildlife photographer Russell Savory.

Chairman's Report

As we go into the autumn and winter we have a programme of work, in line with the management plan, for which our Chris is busy obtaining quotes for and ensuring that our work parties are contributing to the programme. This is good news, and gives me a comfortable feeling that Mill Meadows is moving in the right direction. The Red Poll cattle have been really good for the meadows this year too – I hope you saw the article in Around Town Magazine – its still available online: go to http://issuu.com/aroundtownmagazines/docs/september_edition_billericay_2014 Page 19.

On behalf of the Society, my thanks to those who have been checking the cattle throughout the summer and autumn months, as we couldn't have the benefit of the Red Polls without that work.



We need more cattle checkers though. If we could get the number to 14 – currently there are just 8 – then it wouldn't be as onerous as we could implement a fortnightly rota. Please consider volunteering for this – it's a great motivation to get you out enjoying Mill Meadows on a regular basis. And the cattle are lovable.

My concern at the moment is membership – the renewals are a bit slow this year. If you haven't renewed yet please do so, and better still please pay by standing order as this reduces the work for our Membership Secretary and Treasurer. There are some members who also haven't paid for 2013-14 – we will start to lapse those members soon. I hope you agree with me that we should do this as it is unfair on the members who have paid if we don't.

We are booking an Indoor Meeting for early 2015. Russell Savory is a local wildlife photographer from Stow Maries Aerodrome and both have featured regularly on TV.

<http://www.russellsavory.com/>. Russell spoke recently to the EWT Chelmsford Group and the venue was full to capacity. Consequently we may have to limit numbers so we will ask for bookings, offering first refusal to Society Members (paid up members, that is!) before publicising wider.



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Further details will be published in the next Newsletter but if you want to book now please email me or phone.

Finally, I ask once again for someone to volunteer to be Secretary. The role is little more than publishing an agenda and recording minutes for around 4 committee meetings per year and 1 or 2 indoor meetings including the AGM. Most modern computers have a simple office program that would help with producing the documents and emailing them. I do find it difficult having to act as Chairman and Secretary, so please do consider joining the Committee in this role.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy the Autumn, which promises to be a fruitful and colourful one following the warm dry weather.

Neil Sumner, Chairman
Chair@millmeadows.org.uk, 01277 630849

Ranger's Report

Grazing

We now have 33 cattle of various sizes on site. The new arrangements continue to work well, and I have recently closed the gate at the boundary of the SSSI, so all the cattle should now be penned in there with the target (they have all been appropriately "incentivized") of reducing the sward (*grass - Ed*) height to 5cm by November. This is the level set in our Higher Level Stewardship agreement, and is a guide to ensuring sufficient nutrients are removed to reduce the competitive advantage of some of the less desirable species. It should also mean that the seed from the desirable species have a chance to reach the soil and germinate. Some areas of bare ground should also be produced if this target is reached; further increasing the chances of successful spread of the plants we want. The cattle should therefore be on site for a few more weeks yet.

Winter habitat management

In consultation with the Society's committee I have drawn up a plan of what we would like to achieve this winter. This includes some woodland, scrub, grassland and hedgerow

management, the creation of a new pond, and some work to improve the view across the meadows. I'm sure you're all aware of the pressure on local authority budgets, so I'm hoping that we will be able to get a grant to cover as many of these items as possible, but I'm still in the process of drawing up the bid at the moment so it will be a while before I am able to be certain of exactly what can be achieved this year.

Events and work parties

We had a very well attended Bat & Moth evening again this year, and although there were fewer bats present we did find enough to keep everyone interested - I think. This year I made some recordings of the echolocation calls on the night. I haven't had the chance to analyze them yet, but when I do find the time I'm hoping that we might be able to confirm that the reserve is used by a wider range of species than we are currently aware of.

Work party dates for your diary and the Fungus Foray are at the front page of the newsletter.

Chris Huggins

Countryside Ranger Basildon Council

September 2014

John James

It is with great sadness that The Society learnt of the death of Mr John James on 29th July this year.

Many of you will know that John was one of the founder members of The Society and its first secretary. John also wrote the Short History of Mill Meadows.

John was greatly respected, well known and well liked within the community. He was active in local politics and supported other charities too.

He continued to support The Society and to use Mill Meadows for as long as his health would allow. He will be greatly missed and our thoughts are with his wife Pat and his family.



Notes From a Butterfly Walk:-

On a sunny morning on July 26th at Mill Meadows there was an extended butterfly walk attended by an enthusiastic group. With so many eyes checking for our flitting and elusive quarry, we all managed to locate and view fifteen species for the site. And the site had potential for several more species that day! A short talk was given and the information is recorded and fleshed out below.

Enticing Plants:-

Although it is obvious that plant nectar attracts insects and pollen is used by bees to feed their young, what strategies lay within? Nectar is composed of sugars and carbohydrates, an enticement of energy packed food, whereas pollen is full of fats and protein. The plant offers nectar to attract insects and during the free meal, pollen is deposited on their legs and abdomens. Pollen of a particular plant species is unique to it and successful pollination requires an insect to visit a similar plant. Butterflies are not as efficient pollinators of plants as bees are. To a lesser extent, butterflies will partake of pollen and many butterflies will feed on the nectar of several plant species, bramble being a popular choice.

It is often noticeable that butterflies are fluttering closely over herbage and along hedgerows without settling. The males are looking for hidden females and the females are using the taste sensors on their legs to identify a specific plant species for egg laying. Then the caterpillars emerging from the eggs have their plant food available.

Over the years, butterfly recording at Mill Meadows has recorded 26 species. Norsey Wood has recorded 24 species. Both sites have overlaps, that is, several species that the other does not have. The obvious difference in habitat types explaining the difference.

Egg to Adult – But How Long Between?

The lifecycle of a butterfly is egg (ovum), caterpillar (larvae), chrysalis (pupa) and finally an adult emerges. Most butterflies survive the winter

in the earlier forms but only four species of Britain's butterfly regularly overwinter as adults.

The Brimstone, Comma, Peacock and the Small Tortoiseshell. And this is the clue to answering the question as to how long does a butterfly live? Those that have several broods a year generally have shorter lives. The Holly and Common Blue a case in point and may live for little more than a fortnight. The overwintering ones can live for as long as ten months and maybe longer. Emerging in late July or August they later feed frantically on rotting and fermenting fruit to build up reserves for hibernation over the winter (and at times becoming inebriated in the process!). These are the lodgers in our outhouses, sheds and lofts! And then to come out of hibernation in the spring and live on to mid-May after mating and egg laying.

In mid-May at Mill Meadows, there are sometimes aged Peacock butterflies that are so abraded and faded that their flight ability is impaired and they are hardly recognizable at the species level. Timeworn diehards, now on their way out, that have survived the winter and successfully avoided the predation of birds.

It becomes apparent that after studying butterflies over several years, their fortunes, abundance or scarcity, varies considerably in line with the overall climate of any particular season or year, current or previous. Illustrating that within their survival ability and evolutionary wiring, butterfly populations can endure significant climatic variations and extremes. But they will always be vulnerable to habitat loss. This is where our nature reserves play their important role.

Up from the South and Back:-

Perhaps not a contender to the "stepping stone" (multi-brooded) migration of the Painted Lady butterfly out of Africa, the travels of the Red Admiral are nonetheless still spectacular. It is a butterfly that does not overwinter in the British Isles in any of its lifecycle stages. Current understanding of its lifestyle is that it is a butterfly that can start its adult life on the shores of the Mediterranean, and already mated, will head north across Spain and onto the northern shores of France. There to await the favourable weather



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conditions that will assist its passage across the English Channel to alight on our southern and eastern coasts. From there, many will journey onto Scotland and even onto the Shetland Isles. Its progeny will then, after imbibing as much energy rich food it can, commence on the return journey from whence its parent came. The Red Admiral's identification can be clinched in the field from 30 paces away by flashes of its white wing markings as it skims over the landscape; nectar and solar powered! In butterfly terms, it is heavy, and the dynamics of its highly efficient mode of flight has only recently been understood. The Red Admiral also occurs in Asia and North America as an indigenous species. Its name is a corruption from the earlier title of 'Red Admirable'. The caterpillar's food plant is the nettle.

The Purple Hairstreak:-

Mill Meadows (as does Norsey Wood) plays host to a butterfly that is difficult to see, the Purple Hairstreak. An insect that thrives in colonies at the top of oak trees and feeds on the honeydew mainly produced by aphids. Oak trees that have sun trapping niches in the canopy with the further criteria that there is a red ant's nest at the tree's base. For there is a relationship between the butterfly and the ant. Although not fully understood, the butterfly chrysalis ends up in the ant galleries earning its protection by exuding a sweet substance that the ants find irresistible. Later, the butterfly emerges from below ground to repopulate a new colony at the top of the oak. Sometimes, if one is patient, and lucky, a Purple Hairstreak will drop down and feed on the bramble blossom below.

Small and Essex Skippers:-

Two grassland species that occur at Mill Meadows (and also occurring on the outskirts of Norsey Wood) are the Small and Essex Skippers. At a glance, they can appear moth-like and identical. They form distinct colonies amongst the medium height meadow grass and do not interbreed. It can be difficult to differentiate between the two unless one gets a close view of the underside of the club like structure that forms the tip of the antennae. The Essex is glossy black

and the Small is chestnut brown. Much stooping and waiting for the breeze to die down can be a regular uncomfortable antic of the butterfly watcher...

(Front page) Small Skipper – The underside of the antennae is brown. Photo: John Smart – Norsey Wood – July 2013.



Red Admiral – A long distant migrant.

Photo – Lyn Smith. Northlands – August 2013.

Literature referred to:-

"The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland" by Jeremy Thomas & Richard Lewington (BWP).

"Britain's Butterflies" by David Tomlinson & Rob Still (WILDGuides).

"Guide to the Butterflies of Britain" John Bebbington & Richard Lewington (The FSC).

The "Butterfly Conservation" society:-
<http://butterfly-conservation.org/>

John Smart (31/07/2014)



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Hen Harrier Day

On 10th August myself and a fellow member John Smart arose before dawn to journey to the Derwent Dam in the Peak District National Park to join one of several mass protests about the unlawful killing of Hen Harriers. Okay, its not a local issue but Hen Harriers do winter in our county and killing birds of prey is something we feel strongly about.

<http://birdersagainst.org/projects/hen-harrier-day/>

Hen Harriers are one of most graceful birds of prey, nick-named the Skydancer. They live primarily on moorland which is where they come into conflict with grouse moor managers. In England there is sufficient habitat for around 300 pairs to breed. This year there have been 4, and these have had to be watched. 2 of the young from one of those broods that were electronically tagged have already mysteriously disappeared.

Killing birds of prey is illegal, but it happens, and it is very difficult to find a perpetrator on large areas of moorland. Many of us have signed two petitions on the subject. One is to implement a law making the landowner responsible for unlawful actions carried out by gamekeepers on their land. Another is to stop driven-grouse shooting altogether.

Moorlands used for driven-grouse shooting are managed with one objective only and that is to maximise the number of grouse that can be bred and released onto the moor in time for the so-called Glorious 12th when the shooting of grouse starts. The more Red Grouse, then the more income for the landowner – it is about money.

Red Grouse eat young heather so the moors are managed with rotational burning to ensure that plenty is available, and this has side-effects.

<http://markavery.info/2014/10/01/ecosystem-disservice/>

The Moorlands Trust argue that if they didn't manage the moors it would become a wilderness. That may be true and its no bad thing, although

eventually it would revert to scattered forest so some management is needed.

Many arguments are put forward in favour of driven grouse shooting, such as its creates some local employment. But managing the area in line with the National Trusts vision could also provide employment and would benefit more people by providing areas for recreation and enjoying nature. It leaves room for shooting but with less intense management:

<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dark-peak/our-work/high-peak-moors-vision-and-plan/>

The return of raptors to our countryside has been one of the good stories of the last 40 years. Its barely believable that we still persecute them in some parts of the country, but we do. I hope you will join me in campaigning for it to stop.

We thought it was a worthwhile day. I still have the tee-shirt and John followed it up nicely with a poem, now on made Mark Avery's blog:

<http://markavery.info/2014/08/14/guest-poem-blood-purple-mark-hen-harrier-day-john-smart/>

Neil Sumner





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Photo call



A view from the air: Mill Meadows in the foreground, then Norsey Wood behind it with Hanningfield Reservoir in the distance, right. Photograph courtesy Terry Joyce



John Baron MP recently took a tour of Mill Meadows with The Ranger and Society Chairman

One of the benefits of living close to Mill Meadows is that you can have wildlife on your doorstep – literally. This tiny grass snake was found by the front door of a house in Gainsborough Close. Grass Snakes can give off a rather unpleasant liquid when picked up so, not wishing to risk this, a dustpan was used to 'sweep' it up and return it to Mill Meadows





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For Society use only

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				



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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) - _____

F g 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 :.....



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