



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 April: Bird Walk at Norsey Wood– meet at 7am at the Education Centre

Saturday 11th April : Work Party**

Saturday 11th April : exhibition with a wildlife theme at the **Cater Museum**, from 12noon- 4pm

Thursday 23rd April : illustrated talk by Ray Bowler of the **Red Poll Society**. At The Reading Rooms, 7.45 – after our Annual General Meeting

Saturday 9th May: Work Party **

Sunday 10th May : Green Woodlands Day at Norsey Wood

Saturday 16th May : Bird Walk at Queens Park Country Park – meet at 6am at the car park

Monday 22nd June : illustrated talk: **Hanningfield Reservoir**. Paul Grimwood, of Essex and Suffolk Water, will talk about the innovative Reed Bed Water Cleaning System. Event hosted by the Norsey Wood Society: 7.45 pm Day Rooms, Chantry Way

Chairmans Report

It's been an 'ok' year for The Society and a very good year for the Local Nature Reserve. Our actual membership seems to have dropped but this is primarily because we are being a bit more strict on lapsing members who have not renewed, which is fairer to those members that stay with us. We have a good core of active members who participate in work parties, cattle checking and the butterfly transect survey.

But we always welcome new faces at work parties and **we do need more cattle checkers** to share the workload a bit more out. A cattle check just requires walking around the Meadows, counting the cattle and checking that they look healthy. On some days they are grouped very obligingly, on others you may need to do a bit of searching, but it gets one out onto the Meadows at the nicer times of the year.

On the cattle theme, the Red Polls have been a real welcome addition. So it's appropriate that Ray Bowler,



**Conservation Grazing : a talk
by Ray Bowler of The Red Poll
Society**

**Thursday 23rd April, 7.45pm in
The Reading Rooms, Billericay**

the secretary of the Red Poll Society who look after the herd, is our guest speaker this year. Ray has some interesting anecdotes to relate, not just local ones. Please do try and come to the AGM this year and hear his talk. It is also an opportunity for you to learn more about the importance of grazing in maintaining the special meadow habitat of the Local Nature Reserve.

In February, Russell Savory spoke to us about his work with wildlife at the old Stow Maries aerodrome. As well as being very interesting for those who attended it was good for our profile: we advertised this on Billericay Streetlife and attracted new interest in Mill Meadows.

I'm delighted with the winter works programme that has been conducted – see Chris's report. But some of us have been disturbed by the condition of the path through Oakfield. Whereas we have to accept that the paths in winter will always be 'wellies only' the condition through Oakfield has meant that we haven't achieved what we set out to do with the Marked Trail in 2006.

We have obtained a quote for a firmer surface and Chris has approached Natural England. *If* they agree to it then we will have to obtain a grant, similar to the one we obtained for the Marked Trail. These are two big hurdles to overcome, so we are a long way from this happening. I hope it does happen: nature reserves work best when people are able to follow a defined route and the natural areas and wildlife are left



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to flourish around them. When footpaths are in poor condition they tend to get wider and, in our case, reduce the amount of grassland.

On the subject of wildlife it's been a poor year for birds with both winter visitors and summer visitors being low in number, reflecting national trends. The BTO report good breeding success last year so we can be hopeful for a better breeding season this year. It was an excellent year for butterflies, as reported in our last Newsletter. Spring has begun with good sightings of frogs and their spawn.

Outside Mill Meadows, many of our members have also contributed to local Living Landscapes projects: helping to restore the pond and plant small strips of woodland at Sun Corner being one of these, a project driven by Nathan Hume.

Last month saw the launch of the second series of the Countryside Walks, supported by the Town Council, Round Table and EWT. Our member Paul Hudson worked very hard on researching and writing these walks. These leaflets are very professional and informative and should make it easier to discover what lies just outside Billericay which should promote more interest in protecting and enhancing our local wildlife. Another essential activity in Living Landscapes is responding to planning consultations and applications and Paul has again been active in this area as the EWT Local Group representative.

In closing the year I'd like to thank all the Committee Members. Special thanks go to Ken for continuing with the Newsletter, Dave for being our Membership Secretary even though he works away during the week (and also moved house). Also we should be grateful to 'chancellor' Alan the Treasurer and to Paul and Frances for continuing to support us year after year, as well as Peter for standing in as Secretary which has made my life much easier. Finally, thanks to you, our members, without whom we could not continue as an influencing body on the management of Mill Meadows.

Neil Sumner, Chairman.

Neilsumner123@aol.com

Rangers Report – Spring 2015

Now that the winter works programme has been completed, it seems a good time to reflect on what has been achieved at Mill Meadows since this time last year. I've mentioned the very successful new grazing arrangements and the beginning of butterfly monitoring in previous articles, so no need to mention them again except to say that I they represent a real step forward

in the management of the site, and hopefully something that continue and be built upon in future years. I know Paul Hudson has put in place the plans for this year's butterfly transect and I have also been in touch with Ray the grazier again to discuss arrangements for 2015. The first thing to do will be to check that all the fences are intact and I have made arrangements to walk round with Ray in April.

In addition, I have been very pleased with the winter habitat management that we have been able to achieve this year – probably the most successful winter in recent years. The major items completed (apart from the usual hedge and other works were:

Thinning in woodland belt in Coles.

The increased light levels should enable any buried wildflower seed to germinate, and subsequently result in the development of an understorey of shrubs and coppice regrowth, improving the variety of woodland structure and providing an increased diversity of feeding, roosting and nesting sites for various birds and other creatures.



(picture by Peter Croot)

Removal of trees in Hilly Field and Hurlocks

The first area (near the bench at the top of the slope) has allowed a view across to Cumborrow.(see photo in the benches report) Only two trees have been felled of the original three proposed. Once the lower branches of the third were removed the tree acquired an attractive shape, and seemed (when leafless!), no longer to be obstructing the view. Should that prove not to be the case as time goes on, it can be felled at a later date.

The second area (in the bottom corner towards Bottom Mead) was just to prevent too much scrub and tree encroachment to the grassland here. Not much was done here, but more can be removed later if necessary.



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The thinning of the trees in Hurlocks near to Hilly Field will hopefully allow the ground to dry out in a damp patch on the path and may also encourage the development of ground flora.

Creation of new pond in Wards Hoppits

This increases the number of ponds on the reserve and provides one at - jargon alert! – an 'early successional stage' (meaning on in the early stages of colonisation by plants etc.) supplying a different type of habitat to the several mature ponds we have.

Hedgerow in Oakfield

This has been trimmed back and coppiced and replanted in places to create (over time) a thicker hedge that should provide more protection for nesting birds.

Creation/restoration of 'Bee bank' in Greens/Watts

An area of vegetation has been removed to create a sloping area of bare earth in a warm spot suitable for bees and other invertebrates.

Other items

We have also been able to create wider paths through the woods in Greens and Hillmans(see picture below), removed some invading sycamore from Greens, and eventually managed to remove substantial amounts of scrub from the SSSI fields. It was still too wet to get machinery on to all of the areas I would have like, and I think any future scrub removal will have to be done in the autumn, before the wet weather arrives.



Chris Huggins

March 2015

Countryside Ranger, Basildon Council

There are more than ten benches sited within Mill Meadows. Should there be more? If so, can you suggest an appropriate location?



(picture by Peter Croot)

The benches serve a variety of purposes including;

- Enable rest for the weary, infirm or disabled
- Provide a quiet spot for observing the wildlife and the cattle
- Provide a quiet spot for thought and reflection
- A meeting point for friends
- A meeting point for romantic liaison

The Mill Meadows management committee is currently undertaking a review of the location and condition of each of the current benches and would welcome suggestions for possible sites for new benches. How about at the top of the recently widened diagonal ride in Hillmans above the Jackdaw Close entrance? Any thoughts to chair@millmeadows.org.uk

Benches in Mill Meadows



Minutes of the 16th Mill Meadows Society Annual General Meeting

Held on **Thursday 24th April 2014** at 7:45 pm.

The meeting was opened by the Chairman giving a welcome speech to the (25 plus) members present.

1. Five apologies for Absence were noted
2. No matters arising from the previous AGM
3. The chairman's report was circulated.
4. Treasurers report was distributed. Some money is being held for the Living Landscapes project.
5. Membership secretary report was distributed and no questions arose.
6. Rangers report was given by Chris Huggins thanking the work party volunteers and contributions from committee members. Chris mentioned the successful habitat management including a new grazing regime by red-poll cattle and the co-operative response by the graziers for requests to when and where they graze. Fencing repairs require 10 days work and the cattle arrive on 7th May. A group of people enrolled and given training as "lookers" to perform daily checks on the cattle. Chris asked if any more people were interested. Wards Hoppitts will be allowed to regenerate as coppice with a layer of shrub. The brash may be tidied up later. Hedge laying by Southend Road is a pleasing feature and passers-by can see in to the meadows. Butterfly transects started on a weekly basis. Knowledge gained of the butterfly population will influence future habitat management. Path improvements start in a few weeks.

There was a question if the cattle were used to dogs. The reply was they are and are docile and hornless.

7. Election of Officers: The position of secretary remained vacant. All the other posts can be voted en bloc as the current holders will continue. This was formally proposed by John Hathaway and seconded by Allan Sheehy.

The meeting concluded at 8:05 and was followed by a talk on Kingfishers by Jeff Harrison.

Notice that the 17th Annual General Meeting of the Mill Meadows Society will be held at the Reading Rooms, Billericay High Street on Thursday 25th April 2015 at 7.45 pm.

All members are invited to attend; non-members are very welcome but cannot vote.

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Matter arising from the minutes of the 16th AGM held on 24th April 2014.
3. Report of Chairman.
4. Report of treasurer, accounts for 2014/5.
5. Report of Membership Secretary
6. Rangers Report
7. Election of officers and general committee for 2015-16: nominees so far:
Chairman: Neil Sumner
General Secretary: Peter Croot
Treasurer: Alan Talboys
Membership Secretary: David Slawson
Event Organiser: **POSITION VACANT**
Newsletter: Ken Williamson
Other Committee Members: Paul Jarmy, Frances Adams, James Dansey,
Nominations – if you wish to nominate someone as a member of the General Committee please give details, to the General Secretary at least 24 hours prior to the meeting. Include the Position for which nomination is being made, name of nominee and your name.
8. Resolutions and motions.
Members are invited to submit motions for consideration and delivered to the General Secretary prior to 14 days before the meeting.
9. Maintenance and development of the nature reserve.
10. Any other business.



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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
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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 :