

Ongar Wildlife Society

An Occasional Newsletter

Number 1

December 2001

Next Year's Programme

Allan Cook, our Programme Secretary, has put together a varied and interesting programme for next year, 2002. The first talk is on Monday, 21st January, and is titled "Myths and Legends of Wild Flowers". The talk will be given by Fred Etheridge Meeting is in the Essex Rooms, Castle Street, of course.

On Monday, 18th February, we welcome Jacquie Clark who will talk about the "Movement of the Birds of Britain and Ireland". Later in the year, talks have been arranged on local nature reserves of Hanningfield Reservoir, Pitsea Tip and Old Hall Marshes. Other talks will describe the wildlife of the Welsh Island of Skomer, the Pyrenees and the Galapagos. More details are in the programme card.

Walks and Visits

Your committee are keen to arrange some events, additional to those shown in the programme. Provisionally, we hope to arrange these, with the following themes and dates:

Birds	April
Nightingales	May
Moths	June
Butterflies	July
Dragonflies	August
Fungi	September.

The arrangements for these will be announced in advance, but precise dates and venues will depend a little on the weather, but be prepared !

OWLS Nature Diary

Recent instances of "extreme" weather cannot be generalised to provide evidence of long-term climatic variation. However, recent experiences have been remarkable. Temperatures have been above the average for the time of the year for long periods. The leaves have remained on the trees well into November and there was little demonstration of widespread, familiar autumn colours until late November.

We noticed a single, confused cowslip, which had flowered for a second time, during October. Primroses, usually dying back during the summer, continued to grow again until in the early autumn they resembled small cabbages. As far as we can remember, these are unique occurrences in our period of residence of more than twenty-five years.

Some years ago, OWLS set out to record such events. Despite the fact that the real value of recording lies in the continuity of such records year-on-year, our recording gradually fell into disuse. We intend to try again!

Richard Cook will be the custodian of the OWLS Record Book. All members should make a resolution to participate in contributing. We need to collect records not necessarily of unusual observations but also of the more regular happenings. The recording should be about some local aspect of natural history. When was the last date in the year on which your grass was cut? When was the first? Have oak trees produced acorns this year? *Will the lesser spotted woodpeckers nest in our garden again next year?* If we all endeavour to enter one record per month, OWLS will end up with a valuable archive. You can enter your own record into the book, report the record to Richard Cook for entry, or even contribute short press cuttings, for example.

Where have all our blue tits gone?

We feed our small garden birds peanuts. We do this regularly without a break. We support six feeders, one of which is devoted to seeds. The traffic is such that our bird feeders in the height of the summer were being emptied every two or three days. It was not just small birds that visited, two pairs of greater spotted woodpeckers also feasted . . . at considerably greater rate, it must be said. Inevitably, there is a squirrel, of course, as well.

Then, suddenly, the garden emptied of tits so that consumption declined to just a trickle. At the beginning of December, they have not returned in anything like the previous numbers. We believe that the local sparrow hawk, who often flies through the garden has only occasional success. So, where have our blue and great tits gone?

Country Care

Epping Forest Country Care have recently published "Countryside News – Issue 44". Its entertaining! In this issue are some short nature notes, details of the projects that the group are undertaking. The group welcome volunteers to assist with the projects. A diary of volunteer days is included.

The group is also intending to carry out a survey of wild service trees in the Epping Forest District. OWLS help may be required here.

For more information please ring Epping Forest Countrycare, c/o Planning Services, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping, telephone 01992 700 203.

OWLS Committee:

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