

ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY

An Occasional Newsletter



December 2004

Number 7

Christmas Greetings!

Trip to Welney

A packed coach of members and friends set off for Welney Wildfowl and Wetlands Centre on Sunday, 5th December. The observatory provided a most impressive view of the swans flying in towards the back of the Ouse Wash and settling on the water, the whole scene most spectacular against the setting sun. The Mute Swans and Whooper Swans were in abundance together with pochard, mallard, tufted ducks and coots. An Egyptian goose rested on the water's edge but infrequently lifted its head from its feathers to help in identification. Then followed the floodlit feed, a spectacular and memorable event. The Warden told us that in the 1970's there were only a handful of Whooper and Berwick swans in the area, but due to intensive agriculture providing a plentiful source of food and to the development of the Welney reserve, these numbers had increased to thousands. The afternoon was unforgettable and enjoyed by everyone. Although we had very good weather whilst we were there, our journey home was foggy, and on leaving the motorway our Chairman, Rob's "Swansong" was of concern as to our final roosting place – was it Orsett, Orpington or Ongar!

OWLS on the move!

I am sure most of you will have heard that our new venue for next year is Great Stony Arts and Education Centre, and as from Monday, the 17th January, 2005 we will meet in Room 2, or occasionally in the Main Hall, at Great Stony at the usual time of 7.45 p.m. This is a comfortable venue with easy parking and I hope that everyone will be happy about this move and will come along to our lectures next year.

New Year's Party – Saturday, 8th January, 2005 7.30 p.m. – ESSEX ROOMS.

Tickets are now available at £4. If you haven't already got yours, then please telephone Tanya on 01277 363947. It has for a long time now been the practice to bring along a savoury dish to this event, and we would like to know what you are able to contribute? The evening is always enjoyable, so come along and join in the fun!

Continued.

Programme 2005 – venue GREAT STONY.

This is about to go to press, but as a forerunner, dates for your diary are as follows:

- Monday, 17th January: *The Management and Wildlife of Hatfield Forest*
Ian Pease
- Monday, 21st February *Hen Harriers, Merlins and Peregrines*
Kevin Briggs

As we look back on 2004, OWLS have had a good year with interesting walks and excellent lectures ranging from the very small to the very large creatures. Micky Andrew's superb slides of such tiny insects had on occasions been the results of hours of patient waiting and exposure to dangers, once culminating in hospitalization. He even photographed the bug in his wound before its excision by the Surgeon! We also had an opportunity of keeping in touch with the progress and development of the very latest projects such as the Rainham Marshes Reserve, and we are hoping next year to follow this up with a visit to Rainham.

2004 was the RSPB of Scotland's Centenary year. It started in 1904 with the protection of Peregrine Falcons nesting in Edinburgh and seabirds in St. Kilda. It has helped to bring the White-tailed Eagle back to Scotland, and in 1954 the Osprey returned to breeding in Scotland after almost 40 years absence from the UK – certainly a centenary to celebrate!

Seasonal Ramblings!

Our National Bird – The Robin

Our much-loved Robin is about to be featured on many Christmas cards which adorn our shelves at home. The name of the bird has changed over the years from redbreast or ruddock (meaning reddish-colour) to our familiar Robin. The name of Robin Redbreast originated from country folk giving him that name: later the redbreast part of the name was dropped. Other examples of first names are Jenny Wren and Tom Tit. Robins are in danger in the winter of dying of starvation, and we should put out stale grated cheese and raisins amongst our breadcrumbs. Apparently mealworms are a real delicacy for robins.

A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all our members.

OWLS Committee

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