

ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY

An Occasional Newsletter

September, 2011

Number 17

I hope everyone has had a good summer break, and it is now time to think about the OWLS' September meeting! Since the last meeting in May, OWLS have met for walks and for the AGM and Garden Party which was held in the delightful setting of Allan and Rita's garden at Mill Lodge in Fyfield. It was a lovely sunny afternoon and those of us feeling energetic finished the afternoon with a short walk. At the AGM the Officers and Committee were re-elected. Additionally John Millar was elected onto the Committee and we welcomed him as a new Committee member. John is a member of a group called Friends of Bedfords Park, and he has written an article about the Park and the work he does there (See page 5).

NEW HOME FOR OWLS

As from the **19th September** when Micky Andrews will entertain us with a presentation on *Wildlife Photography*, OWLS will have a permanent home once again and will hold monthly meetings at **St. James Church Hall**, St. James Avenue, Ongar, CM5 9EL.

We have now learned that Great Stony has increased the price of a meeting room to more than double that paid currently with no guarantee that the cost will not increase significantly in the near future. If we remain at Great Stony this would mean a substantial increase in the annual fee. However, by choosing St. James' we can minimise the additional cost to members. We are aware of the case for Great Stony but on balance feel that St. James' is the venue that is both suitable and affordable.

Just to remind you of the other talks this year:

17 th October:	Rebecca Inman	<i>Farming and Wildlife</i>
21 st November:	Angela Rooney	<i>Birds of Prey</i>
12 th December:	Ralph Todd	<i>Galapagos – The Enchanted Isles</i>

(NB: The December meeting is the second Monday in the month and not the normal third due to the proximity of Christmas).

Outings:

8th October: Coach trip to Sheffield Park Gardens and the Bluebell Railway. The coach is now almost full. Only a couple of seats remain unsold at the time of writing.

12th November: Visit to Abberton Reservoir. Walk to be led by Jo Wray. (Meet at Lorry Park 10.00 a.m.).

During the year we have enjoyed our walks led by Tricia Moxey and also the talk on Fungi. We appreciate Tricia giving up her time to OWLS for this purpose.

Fungi Foray – Saturday, 23rd October, 2010 led by Tricia Moxey



Owls group with Tricia showing them fungi

Eighteen members and friends went on the walk in Gernon Bushes Wildlife Reserve. This woodland, managed by the EWT, was ideal habitat and we were surprised at the many different types of fungi we saw. There were Butter Caps, Wood Woolly-foots, Wood Blewits, Fairies' Bonnets, Spindle Shanks and Spotted Tough-shanks, and small Puff-balls where Tricia demonstrated the powdery spores coming from their centre when pressed. Tricia said it was best not to eat fungi collected from the wild unless you are absolutely sure that they are edible and then it is best to leave a little behind after eating some for possible identification! We saw the Amethyst Deceiver which is edible but apparently not particularly tasty.

We found the Birch Milk Cap *Lactarius tabidus* which is common in deciduous woodlands often being associated with Birches. This brown fungus exuded a milk juice. The milk caps or *Lactarius* species are ones which form a symbiotic relationship with tree roots and help the trees to grow. We also found the Tawny funnel *Clitocybe gibba* and this tends to form fairy rings on the ground under brambles or bracken. Rather an 'oddity' in the fungi world was the White Saddle *Hellvela crispa*, of which we saw many along the side of one path in the wood.

We all enjoyed watching the collection of so many different fungi, each species of which Tricia explained to us, holding a specimen in her hand for us to photograph.

Tanya Welford

Wasps by Keith Snow:



There are many types of wasps but the most familiar are the social wasps with striking black with yellow bands on the abdomen, yellow and black markings on the head and thorax, a very narrow waist and wings folded along the body when at rest.

As the name suggests, social wasps live in large groups called colonies and exhibit a high level of co-operation and dependence on one another. Each colony consists of a fertile queen, a small number of males (drones) and numerous sterile female workers. For much of their time the workers forage for insects to feed the wasp larvae in the nest, and in exchange the larvae exude a sweet substance on which the workers feed. Because they are predators of caterpillars and other nuisance insects, wasps are important controllers of pests in our garden.

In late summer to early autumn, after the queen has stopped laying eggs, the workers are no longer fed by the larvae, which forces them to search for other sources of sugar. This may be rotting fruit but is often sweet food like jam and cordial drinks, which explains why wasps become a particular nuisance as autumn approaches.

Unlike honeybees, wasps do not die after they sting. A wasp sting has no barbs and can be withdrawn with ease and used over and over again. The sting is derived from the female egg-laying tube, so as male wasps clearly do not possess such a structure, they cannot sting. At the base of the sting is a venom-filled sac which the wasp can squeeze and so inject chemicals to either paralyse its prey or defend itself.

Social wasps live in papery nests made from chewed wood mixed with their saliva and construction of the home is begun in the spring by a fertilised queen wasp that has survived the winter. The nest is usually in a hole in the ground but may be in a loft or a garden shed. At first the nest is about the size of a golf ball and the queen forages and rears her first brood, all female workers. Their role is to take over the gathering of food for the developing larvae, collect wood to make more cells and so enlarge the nest, as well as defend the nest against intruders. The queen's role is to lay more and more eggs to increase the size of the colony.

In the late summer larger cells – known as *royal cells* – are constructed to rear the queens that will start the next year's colonies. Males are also reared at this time and leave the nest to mate with the new queens which have also taken to the air. The mated queens then over-winter in protected places to begin the cycle again. As winter approaches, the original queens, males and workers die, leaving an empty nest which once contained many thousands of wasps.

Chairman's Ramblings:

21st Aug.

Hello Everyone,

I hope you had an enjoyable summer and our Newsletter for the Autumn Term finds you well. I am compiling this piece sat on the viewing mound of the new Bobbingworth Park. It was a choice between here or Hawksmere Springs before it receives the summer hay cut later this week. I could have relaxed amongst the meadowsweet but with the heady intoxicating aroma of that plant who knows what ramblings I would have created!

OWLS visited Bobbingworth park just two days after the official opening: it is now open daily. The 22 acres comprise mainly of developing grass sward, areas of newly planted woodland, shrub, hedgerow and a wetland area. As a Wildlife Group I

understand that we are mainly interested in what is happening in the areas I have previously mentioned, but what is going on underneath and around the perimeter of this site is of great importance, so much so that the full title for this site will always retain evidence of its past incarnation – Bobbingworth Nature Reserve (former Landfill Site).

This thin strip of land was rich in sand and gravel deposits, hence a large hole was opened up as a result of the extractions, and as we still do to this day (hopefully to a slightly lesser extent) it was refilled with rubbish, domestic and building waste which all seems like an easy and cost-effective means of disposal until in the intervening years problems develop, leachate being the main one of these. To contain this problem a grout wall up to 5 meters deep in places was created on the northern, eastern and southern boundaries, that is the sides and the edge nearest the Cripsey Brook. Although impressive and costly this is not the really clever bit, as I tried to explain when we visited, with limited success (thank goodness for the hand-out kindly supplied by Country Care, also available at our next meeting). I think I pointed to the fact that the systems put in place in this and probably other restored landfill sites across the country aim to be sustainable, allowing controlled amounts of water to flush out the contaminants from the landfill. The water is then treated in the on-site treatment works (reed-beds), before being fed into the Moreton Sewage Works, eventually turning the waste from a potentially polluting material to an inert strata within the soil.

Getting back to the wildlife Tricia was able to identify 40 different plants not including individual grass species. We looked in on the slow worms basking under their felt squares. These had been moved as a result of the Ongar Station development to this purpose-built herbaculum and seemed to be very happy here. We had an impromptu bug hunt as I was looking after a friend's 8 year old daughter.

During a downpour we scurried back to the car park by which time it had stopped raining. Whilst we all dried out the conversation turned to rubbish (the subject of waste, not the quality of the conversation!) Without having had a chance to read the concluding passage of the hand-out we discussed points that are raised in it, namely the true cost of waste – all this expense and additional work to restore mistakes made in the past, too much packaging and possible ways forward for the future such as packaging made from natural materials like starch and of course recycling. Please do visit Bobbingworth. I had an enjoyable summer's afternoon here.

On the subject of waste or litter, can I take this opportunity to inform you of a volunteer litter-picking event, we that is Ongar Town Council and I, are planning for the 15th October. I am hoping this event will be supported by many Ongar wombles. I use that name because recycling will be a big part of it. Street waste or litter is often just placed in landfill without being sorted. We will be meeting at the Ongar Leisure Centre at **10.00 a.m. on Sat., 15th October.**

Another date for your Diary: Sat., 1st Oct. 11 a.m. – 4 p.m.: Unto the fields celebrating 25 years of Country Care and the Roding Valley Reserve – An Autumn Fayre on the Roding Valley Meadows Local Nature Reserve, Loughton. Parking by Pavilion, Grange Farm Lane, Chigwell, IG7 6DP.

Alan Brett

Bedfords Park by John Millar:

I have been a member of the Friends of Bedfords Park for about four years. The Friends formed about eight years ago and have recently received full recognition as a Friends group by the owners of Bedfords Park, The London Borough of Havering. As a result of this, the Friends receive financial supported from the Council each year to achieve agreed targets. The work we do to fulfil our recognition is entirely extra to and does not overlap with the work performed in the Park by the Council. We consult with members of the local community and from this suggest the projects we feel would be beneficial to the Park. The Council then sanction those which they feel are most appropriate to our status.

The activities we have taken on include periodic removal of reedmace and burr reed from the Damselby Pond, clearing of three specific rough paths through areas of woodland and construction of railway sleeper and hoggin steps on particularly steep slopes on one of these paths. We also work on removal of saplings and invasive scrub in the Wildflower Meadow to enable easier mowing by the Council, to maintain and improve the quality of the meadow for scarce indicator grassland plant species.

Our work parties take place on the second Sunday of each month and recently I have been working an extra afternoon a week removing scrub (mostly Turkey oak saplings, hawthorn and wild rose) from the Wildflower Meadow.

One particular member of the Friends has been recording wildlife in the park for the last decade and the data from his surveys, along with information from the Essex Wildlife Trust and an officer from the Council, have been instrumental in providing the evidence for official declaration of Local Nature Reserve status for the Park in 2010.

The Park itself has a long history going back to the days of the Normans, the first record being from 1212 during King Johns' reign. A display with information and a time line can be seen in the EWT Visitor Centre.

The Secretary of the Friends has been involved with the Council in developing a guided walk leaflet which takes in the historical and wildlife interest of the area including Bedfords Park.

Essex Wildlife Trust became involved at Bedfords Park when they were looking to develop a visitor centre adjacent to an urban area. This came to fruition eight years ago when the Visitor Centre was opened. The Trust are involved in education activities with local schools, families with young children and the local community at large, running a Caterpillar Club for younger children, work parties for teenagers, nature based Birthday parties mainly for younger children, tree identification walks, bat evenings, owl evenings and many other activities with which members of the Friends sometimes assist.

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