

ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY (OWLS)

Professor Ted Benton gave an illustrated talk on Dragonflies to members of OWLS at the November meeting. Dragonflies have been recorded in Great Britain for over 1½ centuries. Professor Benton himself has been conducting surveys for many years and together with John Dobson, another expert on the subject, they have recently put together a book. Dragonflies are now increasing in numbers due to better water quality perhaps and conservation. It was thought in the past that some species had become extinct, but then fortunately there had been sightings.

There are damselflies and dragonflies, the latter being divided into Hawkers, the smaller Darters, Chasers and Skimmers. The large Southern Hawker is the dragonfly you are most likely to see in gardens. The Emperor is the largest and will probably be seen hawking across ponds looking for food. Professor Benton explained the life cycle of the dragonflies and damselflies which has been spent under water for part of the time, and then they emerge from their skin ready to fly in early summer. Some species can still be seen as late as November. The life span of a damselfly is three weeks and that of a dragonfly up to two months. They exist in the borrow-dykes and surrounding vegetation of the marshlands: at Hadleigh Castle Country Park they live happily close to industrial sites: they can be seen in the Roman River Valley south of Colchester, along the banks of the Thames Estuary and in the ponds of Epping Forest. An exotic damselfly, the Beautiful Demoiselle can be found in Essex, and the iridescent Banded Demoiselle exists in great numbers at the Cornmill Meadows site of the Lee Valley.

The book referred to above is entitled “The Dragonflies of Essex” by Ted Benton and John Dobson and is published by The Essex Field Club in association with Lapinga Books.

The next meeting of OWLS is Monday, 10th Dec. 2012 when we will hear “How Birds Work” by John Buckingham. Monday, 21st Jan., 2013 - “Hope Farm- food production and wildlife living side by side” by Ian Dillon, Monday, 18th Feb. 2013 sees the return of Barry Kaufmann-Wright to speak on “Pond and River Life.”

Meetings are at Zinc Arts, Great Stony, High Street, Ongar commencing at 8.00 p.m. They are held normally on the third Monday of the month – September round to May. For further information contact: Tanya Welford on 01277 363947.