

## OWLS (ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY)

### The changing wildlife of the Ongar area

by Dr Tim Gardiner

In Ongar, we are very fortunate to have large areas of forest land, woodland and plenty of wildlife of all shapes and sizes.

Dr Tim Gardiner, who has worked with the local Countryside team, spoke at the recent OWLS meeting about the changing wildlife in our local area and beyond, describing how things have changed over the years, not only through climate change, but also through farming and the pressures on the use of agricultural land. Organic farming has made a big impact in recent years and relies on crop rotation, green manure, biological pest control and mechanical cultivation. Using slides, he showed how, over time, small field boundaries and paths had been lost because of modern agriculture requirements and where hedgerows had been replaced by crossfield paths. However, there is good news, as wildlife meadows still provide excellent areas for insects and habitat and over the last thirty years, with temperatures getting generally higher, insects such as grasshoppers, bush crickets and wasp spiders have become more common. In certain parts of our area, there are 'green lanes' where old woodland and trees have survived for hundreds of years and evidence that hedgerows are beginning to appear again. However, small fields are probably gone for good. Ideal conditions for prosperous woodland are where the ground has been properly maintained and where there is a 'balanced site' which is created because of adequate light and where the greenery is not overgrown and out of control.

Dr Gardiner went on to say that certain flowers such as the cowslip and the poppy are not as frequent, whereas gorse and some heathers are returning slowly as well as certain orchids. As far as insects are concerned, certain types of butterflies have disappeared and bumble bees will only be attracted by large areas of clover in a field, types of damselfly also enjoy vegetation around ponds. Over the years, a lot of trees have been chopped down due to the demands of man and of course, there have been many cases of our rivers being polluted and heathland being neglected. It is encouraging though, that nature reserves have been created, not necessarily by funding but by the hard work of volunteers. Dr Gardiner concluded his talk by recommending that we should look out for glow worms! Despite their rarity in Ongar, he suggested that they were something which had to be seen.

Bob Jenkins

\*Next events: Lambourne End Outdoor Centre  
Family Funday - Sunday 12 September 11am to 4pm  
and OWLS meeting 'Bill does Britain' - Bill Coster  
Monday 20 September at Great Stony (8pm)