

ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Roding Valley Meadows Nature Reserve by Patrick Bailly

At the October meeting of OWLS, Patrick Bailly gave a talk about his work as manager of the Roding Valley Meadows Nature reserve, where he is an Essex Wildlife Trust worker; in addition he is a volunteer warden, and responsible for two other local sites, Hawksmere Springs and Gernon Bushes which is at Coopersale. The Roding Valley reserve is situated by the M11 and is surrounded by Loughton, Chigwell and Buckhurst Hill. The site has much historical interest and was formerly a telecommunications centre and a base for RAF Chigwell. Old wartime bunkers are still in evidence today. The area is typically urban and is therefore a great site for visitors and guided walks are always arranged. In the reserve there is also an ancient green lane which has survived over 800 years. Because of the attractiveness of the site, many painters and photographers have taken advantage and spent valuable hours producing excellent work. In a reserve like this, the importance of wildlife conservation cannot be understated. The grasslands which are over 160 acres need to be flooded annually and as a result, the meadows 'come alive' in the summer. A lot of haymaking also keeps everyone busy and Highland Cattle, now replace Longhorn Cattle, which used to occupy the site.

The most difficult areas to manage are the fen and the wet areas. Essex Countryside Care assist with the work and in the future, with the help of a grant, it is hoped to extend the wet areas and fen into the meadow encouraging more habitat. The River Roding which runs alongside the reserve, is the responsibility of the Environment Agency who work with Roding Valley when problems arise with tree management. Patrick showed pictures of the fairly new woodlands and the mature hedgerows, which are in good order.

The Roding Valley reserve has only recently received grants and sufficient funding to have a proper purpose built building, including an office and a workshop so that essential work can be carried out and groups such as School parties can be accommodated. So much so, that a lot of plans and projects are planned for the future. So far, thanks to some volunteers, a new tarmac car park has been laid, new fencing erected, old hawthorn and blackthorn trees tidied up. Also with safety in mind, paths have been cleared and new steps installed for visitors. Projects which are ongoing are updating and clearing hedgerows and promoting new growth within, digging up old concrete posts nearby and protecting and pruning trees where necessary.

Another project which is underway, concerns the area bordering Oakwood Hill Estate. For too long this side of the reserve has been run down and now the site is overgrown and needs attention and has also been used as a dumping ground by fly tippers. Volunteers are needed to help existing workers from the Grace Academy and the Oakwood residents to restore this part of the land so that new planting etc can take place.

As a result of the outstanding work which has been achieved by the Reserve over the years, a Green Flag Award has been awarded, signifying a well managed public area in 2012/2013.
Bob Jenkins

*Next OWLS Meetings at the Zinc Centre are:

19 November 'Dragonflies' (Ted Benton) & 10 December 'How birds work' (John Buckingham).