

**The Friends of Southend Museums**  
invite you to their meetings at  
The Beecroft Centre, Victoria Avenue, Southend.  
The first two meetings in **2016** are:

**Thursday 10th March:**  
The Thames Barge by Tony Earle  
The history and work of Thames Barges

**Thursday 14th April**  
Origins and Early History of Southend by Ken Crowe  
Owners, Tenants and Occupiers 1500 – 1700

# *South Essex Natural History Society*



Registered Charity No 231981



Goldcrest filmed in Betts Meadows by David Blackwell

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*Newsletter 95*

*February 2016*

## *Dates for your Diary*

### Indoor meetings

**9<sup>th</sup> March 7.30 pm**

Inter-Society Quiz at Milton Ave Baptist Church. Come along and support our team.

**21<sup>st</sup> April 2-4 pm**

**At The Beecroft Centre (old library) Southend-on-Sea**

Glowing Glowing Gone - A talk by Dr Tim Gardiner on Glow Worms.

### Field Meetings

**19<sup>th</sup> March 10.30 am**

Two-Tree Island. Meet in the car park past the bridge.

**9<sup>th</sup> April 10.30 am**

Bowers Marshes RSPB Reserve. Meet at the RSPB Car Park.

**14<sup>th</sup> May 10.30 am**

Belfairs Nature Reserve. Meet at Warren Rd entrance.

## **Contributions for the Newsletter**

**should be sent to:**

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Or by Email to: [v.tring@talktalk.net](mailto:v.tring@talktalk.net)

**Note:** accompanying photographs are particularly welcome.

**Did you know....**

**You can use your disabled toilet key to open the gates on RSPB reserves?**

together with an overflow system into a scrape and a small wooden pier built into the pond and is well used by the waterfowl.

The overall memory I came away with was of a job well done, making a peaceful, very interesting nature reserve. It was a privilege, thank you David.

*Pat Wortley*

## *Grey Common Seals on Chalkwell Mudflats*

These seals seem to have made Chalkwell mudflats a permanent venue when the tide is out. In January 2012 Iris Cotgrove reported as many as 88 on the mudflats but by 2013 the highest number was 27. In February there were between 10 and 20, but by 5<sup>th</sup> there were none. Then 7 turned up in March. Numbers dwindled in the summer of 2013 but by August and September there were up to 14 present on the Canvey bank when around 6-10 appeared there during the rest of the year. Now Leigh Times of 9<sup>th</sup> February 2015 has reported around 30 Grey Common Seals seen on the mudflats near Chalkwell by paddle boarder, Tony Whitehead.



Common Seals

Large numbers of Lesser Redpolls are being seen locally and a few Siskins are feeding on the Alders around the pond. I am regularly seeing Goldcrests, when I take the time to look! There were at least 3 Cock Pheasants, and a Hen, near the Caravan on Wednesday. Dave has been seeing Redwings, plus some Fieldfares, flying across the top fields late in the day.

I do see Max the Muntjak every now and then, roaming across the pond field. I suspect the cat is putting him off visiting the Caravan like he used to. Plenty of Chaffinches everywhere, but no woodcock.- yet! Frank the heron is ever-present at the pond.

#### 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015

A wonderful first for the farm! A Brambling was feeding on the ground nearby and was captured by David Blackwell..



#### *Betts Meadow, A Trip In The Natural Wild August 2015*

David Whitehead's invitation to visit his private nature reserve filled me with the expectation of something very special. For one man to have had the vision and commitment to create a suitable environment for wildlife is unusual. To find the plan carried out successfully is wonderful. On arrival, there was an immediate sense of tranquillity, of green open space and clean atmosphere. Even the sound of road traffic nearby faded away. A route has been created around the nature reserve which reveals new niches for different inhabitants, be it plants, insects, amphibians, birds or mammals. We had the pleasure of seeing some of each, from yellow irises, to butterflies, to ducks, geese and to squirrels. The variety in the site allows for unexpected visitors from time to time. For example, David has recorded the arrival of a colourful male Ringed Teal. A delightful first for me was getting a glimpse of a muntjac.

In addition to enhancing the environment, David regularly feeds his ducks and geese much as you would see the feeding of those at the Wildlife and Wetland Trust at Slimbridge. David's attention to the welfare of the flora, fauna and fungi is thorough and thoughtful.

So how was all this achieved? Partly, it is true to say, by muscle power. The transformation of the site meant creating a lot of fencing and pathways. Young trees and shrubs had to be planted and young stock for hedges put in. At the time of our visit the ecosystem was mature. Early on, David enlisted Don Down's valuable assistance in the layout and selection of species, together with practical hard work, too. A lake was excavated

#### *The Buzz in Winter 2015*

##### *Winter bees after the mildest late autumn*

After recording the odd worker Buff-tailed Bumble Bees on the Cordelines in November while the weather was still mild for the time of year they were killed off by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month with the first winter frost of 3°C on 21<sup>st</sup> and a second one on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 3°C locally which blackened my Dahlias and other tender plant species. At last I thought normal weather conditions had begun. However this was not the case, because the 26<sup>th</sup> November produced a spell of winter sunshine and I was surprised to record one Queen Buff-tailed Bumble Bee feeding from blossoms of yellow Winter Jasmine. The next morning a couple of small worker Buff-tailed appeared amongst the winter flowering Erica which was much advanced by the milder conditions.

Throughout December and January I recorded between 1 and 6 Buff-tailed workers and once into double figures nectaring on the heather and Yellow Jasmine. A couple of Queen Buff-tailed bees were in evidence until the end of December whilst



Tree Bumble Bee, *Bombus Hypnorum*

the weather was mild. One Comma Butterfly was recorded on 24<sup>th</sup> December. Another interesting record was a single Tree-Bumble Bee, *Bombus Hypnorum*, on 28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> December. However, as the rain and colder weather approached in January the numbers declined to between 1 and 4 Buff-tail workers.

When the forecast was for severe weather after the 12<sup>th</sup> January I ceased recording.

*Don Down*

*Field Meeting – Shoebury Ranges, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2015*

A few members attended this field meeting and on our walk, we found a Six-spot Burnet Moth (*Zygaena filipendulae*) just emerging from its pupa cocoon (perhaps Kathy photographed this). This was in Gunners Park. Butterflies we saw were Gatekeepers, the males of which were common, Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Green-veined White, Small White and Essex Skipper.

*Roger Payne*

*Sports Area close to Nature Reserve*

In the Southend Standard of 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2014 it was reported that residents feared for the future of the Shoebury Old Ranges Nature Reserve. Residents, 160 in number, signed a petition against a new skate park and multi-use games area between New Barge Pier Road and Gunners Rise. Planning Officers had recommended the development of the facility, which would include a hard surface for tennis, basketball and football. One resident, Mark Riley, was quoted as saying "Why create a nature park and then wreck it with this concrete jungle?"

This planning permission followed that granted in March for a toddlers' playground and a heritage centre. It was said then that Councillors would reconsider the sports area after concerns were raised about its impact on nearby wildlife. The skyline from the car park is grim with a line of tall houses. Further over the sports area rose up; a considerable wooden construction already, with a heritage centre to come presumably. So the consideration of the concerns for wildlife must have lost out again; on what grounds I wonder.

Nearby badgers were re-accommodated as they were deemed in the way in their home. A lot of earth was mounded up, on a spot easily seen by people walking with their dogs. A huge tunnel was thoughtfully provided into the mound. But are the badgers still there? Whose job is it to monitor the result of this edifice in mitigation? Where is the annual report on the badgers' translocation and its success or otherwise?

*Pat Wortley*

the garden and throughout the fields. Last year, Anna turned up very early one morning to capture on camera the unique picture of a seemingly endless image of thousands of webs in the meadows. It was just as enchanting and beautiful last week. That was "before" Gary came in with the tractor on Saturday, and minced the whole lot! Its grass-cutting time and us farmers can't afford to romanticise. Every year, at this time, there is a small window of opportunity, when it's not too wet, to give the fields a much-needed haircut. Not all the spiders got minced! Don asked Gary and me to set aside a large L-shaped area at the top of the pond, for his moths etc. There will be hundreds of arachnid survivors in there, breathing a sigh of relief

**4<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

.Gary is now extending the clearing he created behind the trailer, where the 7 Broad leaved Helleborines magically appeared. There will lots of logs for him and brash to be burnt off. time and weather permitting, Gary will be felling more trees elsewhere. The 20 acres don't hold many Maples but there is a healthy grouping where Gary is coppicing. Opening up that small area and removing competition will allow the Maples to grow to their full potential. That's the plan! In the meantime there are two huge piles of brash, stacked in the clearing which will be left to provide important cover for bugs and stuff should the weather turn nasty.

**4<sup>th</sup> December 2015**

Every autumn 50 or more Black headed Gulls take up residence on the pond. They await my arrival and dive bomb the ducks and moorhens in competition for the bread. As I speak the odds are in favour of the ducks. The reed beds haven't been battered by the weather and are structurally sound and up-standing! The ducks and Ringo can feed amongst the reeds in peace. Most winters the reeds die back or collapse and the open water becomes a perfect hunting ground for the gulls!

Peter, the exotic duck breeder, will box up two Ringed Teal females and bring them over any day now, to release on the pond. This could be an early Christmas present for little Ringo!

My friend Dave Blackwell has installed a lot of bird feeders near the top of the Monument field. With a lovely copse of trees and shrubs only a few feet away, the situation is perfect. It didn't take long for the birds to find this easy source of food. Lots of Blue and Great Tits, a family of Long-tailed Tits, Great spotted Woodpeckers, a female Greenfinch, 2 Linnets and some "charming" Goldfinches! There is a Sparrow-hawk hunting nearby. Luckily it's a female, feeding on the Doves but if a smaller male turns up, those little birds better watch out!

The acknowledgements do not include any reference to SENHS's correspondence with Ian Brown several years ago pleading for action in the Parks, giving references to relevant authoritative literature on suitable flowering plants. We also recommended that Ann Cushion, a well known Essex beekeeper, should be a member of the BEAWP.

The next step is to find out whether this initiative has developed or not.

Pat Wortley

### Whitewood Winter Diary

#### 16<sup>th</sup> August 2015

When that delightful Common Sandpiper spent the day on the pond on Friday, I only realised it was there because it flew low over the water trying to find somewhere to land! The fringes of the pond are overwhelmed by tall reeds on 3 sides and a forest of trees on the south side. The Sandpiper used the fishing "swims" kept clear of reeds by anglers and the fishing platform in the middle of the pond, as resting places!

Recently I was talking, with some friends from the South Essex Natural History Society, about the claustrophobic affect of the vegetation when the Kingfisher made a rare visit to the pond; it was on one side of the water, fishing from overhanging tree branches, and could only be seen, at a distance using binoculars!

In the "good old days" before nature took over, Green Sandpipers would drop in from time to time, and, I would enjoy seeing Common Sandpipers calling in to feed on their spring and late summer migrations. I want the best of both worlds; on the one hand I want the reeds to flourish, hoping Reed Warblers will move in and breed; on the other hand I want resting and feeding areas for the waders. It would also be nice to be able to "see" what is there, like the Kingfisher!

#### 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015

Ringo is alive and well, and fast asleep on an island, in Wat Tyler Country Park. There can't be that many Ringed Teal around, so it's got to be him. If he found his way there with a bit of luck he'll find his way back. My friend on Canvey, who bred him, has got a freshly hatched out, two week old, female, ready and waiting! So there's no rush. It will give her a chance to grow up a bit!

#### 16<sup>th</sup> September 2015

Would you believe it, Ringo has turned his back on the bling of Pitsea and returned.

#### 6<sup>th</sup> October 2015

All of us will appreciate the early morning sight of spider's cobwebs hanging in

### Canvey Wick – 10<sup>th</sup> September 2015

Roger Payne kindly gave me a car ride to Canvey Wick for a general Natural History walk in warm sunshine between 12.45 – 4.00 pm.

Roger recorded a number of species of bees including the now well-known, Shrill Carder Bee, *Bombus salvarum*. I know he would have recorded other species as well.

It was good to have some warm sunshine for it gave us the chance to record the following butterflies:

Large White	3	Green-veined	2
Small White	Doz	White	9
Small Heath	s	Meadow Brown	1
Brown Angus	4	Speckled Wood	3
Holly Blue	5	Common Blue	2
	6+	Small Copper	1

A few moths were disturbed from the undergrowth:

Yellow Shell	1	Shaded Broad-bar	2
Treble -bar	1	Pyrausta cespitis	3

There was a wonderful view of a female Adder sunning herself on the edge of a narrow walkway.

It was a pleasure to see many plants of the Blue Fleabane, *Erigeron acer*, growing and flowering well in the drier sandy areas.

I thoroughly enjoyed the day.

Don Down



Speckled Wood

*Betts Meadows – 10<sup>th</sup> September and 8<sup>th</sup> October 2015*

A quickly arranged moth session on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2015 in Betts Meadows with my friend Graham Bailey, by the invitation of David Whitewood, proved rather disappointing. Cloudy conditions which looked promising began to clear and the temperature began to fall away.

However, we managed record just fourteen species:

Square-spot Rustic	6	Common Carpet	1
Setaceous Hebrew Character	1	Light Emerald	7+
Large Yellow Underwing	1	Brimstone	4
Small Square-spot	1	Dusky Thorn	5
Centre-barred Sallow	4	Common Carpet	4
Dark Swordgrass	1	Dotted Rustic (rare species)	1
Lesser Yellow Underwing	1	The Snout	5

3 lamps were running from 8.00pm-10.30pm

A second trip to the same venue was made on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2015. It seemed quite a reasonable evening at first but once again temperatures fell away and the results were disappointing with fewer species and numbers. Moths recorded were:

Barred Sallow	14	Large Yellow Undewing	1
Common Sallow	6	Brindled Green	1
Square spot Rustic	2	Red-green Carpet	2
Rosy Footman	1	Marbled Carpet	4+
Brimstone	1	The Snout	2

By 9.00 pm it became very chilly, moths ceased to fly and with perpetual noise from the selection of ducks in the area that were sending us “quackers” we decided to turn off our lamps, pack up our gear and go home. We passed two foxes as we were leaving the site.

Thank you Dave.

*Don Down*

*Bee Happy  
A strategy on bees and pollinating insects  
for Southend-on-Sea 2015-2020*



Nectaring bee by Don Down

On 6<sup>th</sup> October 2015 a meeting of the Biodiversity and Environmental Awareness Working Party was convened by Southend Borough Council. Unhappily for three summoned participants because Council members did not arrive. there was no apology and no further communication has been received.

The agenda item 5 was accompanied with a 26-page third draft Pollinator strategy. It states:

"Understanding the importance of pollinators, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council has chosen to

adopt the Government vision on bees and pollinators:

**To see pollinators thrive, so they can carry out their essential service to people of pollinating flowers and crops, while providing other benefits for our native plants, the whole environment, food production and all of us.**

By adopting the Government vision the Council aims to deliver across key areas recognised in the Government policy:

- Supporting pollinators across the town and countryside
- Enhancing the response to pest and disease risks
- Raising awareness of what pollinators need to survive and thrive
- Improving evidence on the status of pollinators and the service they provide

"By delivering on these aims the Council is committed to delivering on the following outcomes:

1. More, bigger, better, joined-up, diverse and high quality flower-rich habitats including nesting places and shelter supporting our pollinators across the borough.
2. Healthy bees and other pollinators which are more resilient to climate change and severe weather events.
3. Enhanced awareness across the borough including greater public understanding of the essential needs of pollinators.
4. Evidence of actions taken to support pollinators."

Two case studies are included in this draft, one from the Coppermills Water Treatment Works in east London and the other from the Tregothen Estate in Cornwall.

experiments using local ingredients. Her intriguing recipes represent and re-imagine webs of connections between gastronomy and ecology within many environments: from human microbiomes, eels, fungi, geese, ships, landfills and human-made islands.

### **Graveyard of lost species**

The workshops include an appreciation of the local human inhabitants and local industry. The artists led enquiries with people of Leigh and Southend to gather local knowledge about 'lost species', i.e. of wildlife, livelihoods, fishing methods, landmarks and even local dialects that once flourished locally round the estuary and are disappearing. The aim was then to erect a temporary monument using a local boat rescued from the estuary mud, with the help of a team of local artists and enthusiasts. The 'Souvenir', a 40ft 12-ton Thames Bawley was to be cleaned and re-configured and set on the main thoroughfare between Leigh-on-Sea station and the old town. It is intended to cut into the sides of the boat and record their findings. The final act was to re-float the 'Souvenir' back to the marsh by October 2015.

*Pat Wortley*



Thames Bawley

### *Winter in Belfairs: What's about?*

The Little Egret seen kicking off the winter in Belfairs raises the question; what else might one see there during this season? I love the welcome I have experienced with a joyous song of a Song Thrush. But there is variety among the residents: Green Woodpecker, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Sparrow Hawk and Chaffinch. Others are there briefly such as Redwings and Goldcrests, soon to depart. While, for example, Mistle Thrush and Nuthatch are arriving. Has anyone heard a Tawny Owl in the dusk? Maybe the Muntjac seen in nearby Daws Heath a week or two earlier, might have made its way in, but you would be lucky to get a good look at it. The Southend Dormouse Group has been monitoring the Hazel Dormouse for years. Last year began with none found in April, but numbers picked up by 24<sup>th</sup> August, 31<sup>st</sup> September and 31<sup>st</sup> October. It is believed the weather in 2015 was responsible for the low numbers found. Again, you would be lucky to see a Dormouse without their help. Bat walks by Ashley Pinnock reveal that there are three species, the two kinds of Pipistrelle and the Noctule. The last one is not that numerous in Essex. To find out more about the wildlife in Belfairs, Essex Wildlife carries out surveys: Botanical; Heath Fritillary, Lizard, Song Thrush and an annual one for the impact of deer. Don Down, of course, has surveyed and nurtured the Heath Fritillary for many years. Volunteers can play a part in these surveys. Management work is carried out in the woods, again in part, by volunteers. In so doing, the first Dormouse for years was found by Betty Matson, after which monitoring of them was started through Southend's Environmental Officer, Paul Terry. The pond in the Nature Reserve had become overgrown and during the activity to let in more light, Palmate Newts were found. The survey of Lizards arises from the translation of Lizards from a site in Eastwood, some 10 years ago, with a view to finding out how well they may be surviving. There lies the rub. To support this small population of Common Lizards some light scrub removal work was done last year on the acid grassland area on the golf course. Afterwards some areas of this important grassland has been lost and become shaded out by self-seeded tree saplings. So these were removed. As a result small log piles were created for basking areas for the lizards. In conclusion, conservation measures are not served by a one fits all solution.

*Pat Wortley*

### *The Thames through Time*

On the 12<sup>th</sup> December we were treated to something of a tour de force, a truly fascinating and riveting talk given by an expert geologist, Ian Mercer. Before retiring, Ian worked for the Geological Survey and Museum. He has a degree in geology and x-ray crystallography and is a Fellow of the Gemmological Society. He certainly knows his subject, and his talk about the history of the River Thames embraced its entire history from many millions of years ago to the present day.

He described the endless changes in climate that have shaped the river's size and course through the landscape many times. He detailed the numerous means by which geologists have teased out the threads of evidence regarding its long history, including the analysis of pebbles and layers of sediments, vegetational evidence from pollen analysis, and paleo-ecological studies of insect and snail remains. Fossil remains of mammals and fish have also helped to tell the story, as have measurements of magnetic reversal, analysis of ice cores and deep sea core sampling. From all these multidisciplinary sources, Ian succinctly described how scientists discovered and gradually pieced together the long and eventful history of this great river along which we live.



The talk ended with a discussion about the future of the river and the effects of man-made global warming and how our knowledge of what has happened in the past will help us in adapting to the changes that are to come. It seemed strangely prescient that at the time of this talk, floods were already raging through Carlisle and would soon engulf York.

There were many questions at the end of the talk and we all gathered around a fascinating collection of rocks and minerals relevant to his talk which he had brought along. Each of these specimens he and his assistant explained to those clustered around the table. I can't think of a talk that I have enjoyed more at our meetings than this one. An article on the story of the Thames written by Ian will be included in the next journal.

*Roger Payne*

### *Wrecked on the Inter-Tidal Zone in Leigh-on-Sea, August 2015u*

This citizen science and art project was about the changing ecology, society and industry of the Thames estuary. The project was initiated by local and international artists with The Arts Catalyst. Part 1 was divided into two sets of workshops:

**Talking Dirty and Tongue** first.

Talking Dirty consisted of two citizen science sessions, led by Andy Freeman (Goldsmiths College) and Dr Mark Scrimshaw (Reader in Environmental Chemistry, Brunel University). Dr Scrimshaw is an expert on Two Tree Island, having studied the saltmarsh previously which was found to exhibit a relatively enhanced degree of contamination with respect to organo-chlorine insecticides and polychlorinated biphenyls. The first of these workshops aimed to investigate Two Tree Island, to explore the use of chemical testing kits for environmental monitoring. Participants made observations on a range of gases and contaminants found in and around the Thames estuary. Also, opportunity was given to measure air quality, background radiation and to test plants for absorbed poisons, with a view to uploading the data for sharing online. The second workshop aimed to bring together wildlife spotting, digital technologies and scientific testing for environmental contaminants. On a walk led by Mark Outen (Essex Wildlife Trust) birds were seen and identified. Other organisms of this complex nature were collected later on the way back. In the lab, some local food plants as well as local shellfish were tested for Polonium and Arsenic. Michael Stringer, who talked to SENHS about diatoms from Two Tree Island joined in and collected some diatoms.

Tongue First sessions were led by Fran Gallardo, creating a chance to taste the results of her open air cooking