

ESSEX FIELD CLUB Presents...

The Essex Natural History Show

on Sunday 21st August 11am – 5pm.

Free entry and car parking.

at The Green Centre, Wat Tyler Country Park, Pitsea, Basildon,
Essex, SS16 4UH

- Craft activities, identification drop-ins, natural history displays, pond dipping and lots more.
- Living reptiles, spiders, scorpions, live birds of prey, Stone Age dwelling, making flint tools.
- Bats in Essex, RSPB activities in the Wildlife Garden.

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South Essex Natural History Society



Registered Charity No 231981



Clearing Alexanders on Belton Hills

SOUTH ESSEX NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY [SENHS]

(A registered Charity England & Wales - Number 231981)

An Update for Members as at June 2016

The Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) of members held on 31 March 2016 passed the resolution that SENHS be wound up. No member voted against. The resolution also contained the stipulation that the Society's surplus funds be utilised firstly to ensure a future updated of the Society's existing publication 'Hadleigh Great Wood' and other SENHS publications, with any surplus thereafter being utilised in accordance with the Society's constitution.

The Charity Commission, which regulates all charities, has decreed that all SENHS assets must be disposed of prior to it receiving final accounts showing that position. Shortly after that stage SENHS will be removed from the Register of Charities, after a life of some 82 years.

SENHS Council is examining ways to achieve The Charity Commission's requirements. Present plans indicate that it may be possible to achieve final closure by the end of 2016. At the present time Council is looking to have one final Members' indoor meeting on Thursday 27 October at the Beecroft from 2-4pm followed by the Annual General Meeting on Thursday 24 November at the Beecroft from 7.30 to 9.30pm at which any remaining legalities will be considered. It is hoped to produce one further Newsletter before October.

At the EGM the Chairman asked members to write to her with:

- any views he/she might have about donating any surplus on winding up, and
- any other suggestions for the future and in particular whether any member or members wished to assist in forming, or joining, any future "informal" group which would meet occasionally - possibly with a similar name to the existing one and with similar aims - but not having Charitable status.

Any view on those two topics will be welcome and should be passed on to Pat Wortley.

GCC Capon 21 June 2016

have arrived. A few butterflies are coming out of hibernation on warm sunny days.

The Buzzard turned up again yesterday and I got a fabulous close-up view of the magnificent bird! I was sitting at the patio when the Buzzard "mewed" as it flew, low, over the tree-tops. The Doves etc were alarmed and instinctively flew up. I thought no more of it, till the Buzzard returned and alighted on a big Ash branch above the van. It was only 30 yards away. Incredible!

19th April 2016

A lovely, freshly emerged, male Orange Tip arrived this afternoon. My first of the year. I walked over to admire the Snakes Head Fritillaries and was delighted to see the Orange Tip flying up and down the ride.

20th April 2016

I was early at the red boat this afternoon when a Kestrel flew in and hovered over the bottom field. It was immediately joined by another bird. They flew together, as if to celebrate, before flying easterly and away.

We are seeing a lot more butterflies and more migrant warblers are arriving. Everywhere is alive with the sound of birdsong. Muntjak sightings are getting more frequent.

12th May 2016

I saw my first emerging St Mark's Flies this morning. I was delighted to watch as a Grass Snake swam across the scrape yesterday afternoon.

29th/20th May 2016

Some of Ann's bees enjoying the bank holiday weekend! Ann will arrive today, with all her clobber, to sort them out!

12th June 2016

The flower meadows are full of young growth and are as pretty can be with a back-drop of an amazing variety of short and tall grasses, Oxeye Daisies pop up in small and large numbers; the tiny red flowers of the Grass Vetchling, multi-coloured Clovers, the tall Meadow Buttercups and so much more add to the wonderful tapestries we see in the fields in Spring. On the scrape there is a beautiful area at the entrance, where large numbers of Common Spotted Orchids "fight" with the carpet of Yellow Rattle for space. no photograph can capture the beauty of it all,



Ann's bee swarm

David Blackwell's Diary – Betts Meadows

9th January 2016

Recently the ground on the reserve has become saturated, and overnight rains are starting to run off into the pond and scrape. Over the Christmas period I could walk across the dry base of the scrape and cut back some of the overhanging Poplars on the island. Yesterday I was able to walk the scrape but it's now under a foot or more of water. Once the ground gets soaked, any additional rainfall washes down the corner of the 10 acre field, and ends up in the ditch behind the big pond. That ditch runs toward the scrape and is blocked to feed excess water into the scrape. Works every time!

The real highlight this winter is Dave and his feeders. Betts Meadows needs people like Dave, who will take the time to sit and observe. His feeders attract birds from all around, including from Pound Wood next door. An inquisitive Tree Creeper called in recently.

4th February 2016

The big Geese over-shadow little Ringo. What a contrast! If it weren't for the Black-headed Gulls, everything would be in perfect harmony. Today there were 5 Tufted Ducks (4 males and a female; 40 or more Moorhens and 150 Mallards.

The water level on the pond is at the overflow pipe, which means it's full up. If we get a lot more rain between now and the end of March, the excess water will feed into the scrape below, and guarantee constant water throughout most of the summer months. That will be good for all the tadpoles and bugs!

17th February 2016

When I drove out this morning, I got really close up views of that female "Sprawk" plucking the carcas of a freshly downed Dove. I drove on and watched her from the second front gate. She made two attempts to fly off with the remains and failed!

21st February 2016

There was an Egret at the red boat, late this afternoon. After months of waiting, I was delighted to see a Muntjak feeding on the peanuts opposite the van.

31st March 2016

First time I've seen any Frog spawn in the pond for some years. And there's a few strings of Toad spawn next to the Frog spawn! It's odd to think that Don and others have been reporting Frog spawn in their ponds since February. The less obvious amphibian is the Newt! They go about their business of reproduction each year, out of sight and unobserved. It's only when you take the time to sit and look, that you spot Newts coming to the surface for air!

Bluebells and Wood Anemones, plus a few Celandine, are a picture and the small flowers of the Violets add to the colour. A few Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs

James Howard Stewart Bishop
27/6/1944 – 26/4/2016

Chipmonks stimulated Jim's love of natural history at an early age, when his family moved from Southend to Canada to farm. Back in the UK this very intelligent Old Westcliffian trained as a teacher, but turned to various other jobs. He enjoyed sailing and fishing with his father. Once he cycled to Cornwall, sleeping under the stars. He liked architecture and travelled to museums. He even collected stamps in addition to his other natural specimens.



He was an inveterate forager and tasted all sorts of organic material. He was particularly fond of a dish of fungi after a field trip. Latterly, Jim made friends across all walks of life, while volunteering on many conservation projects from the Belton Hills, to the Prittle Brook, and over to West Wood. He was handy with a chain saw and a scythe. He enjoyed helping with the inspection of Dormouse boxes in Belfairs Nature Reserve.

Jim was an excellent observer. His curiosity checked out any puzzling items like some little circular blobs of jelly he found on the foreshore. They turned out to be egg cases. Jim's knowledge was encyclopaedic across all three Kingdoms. Therefore, he was sought after for the Inter Society Quizzes, first by Great Wakering and then by South Essex. He helped their scores significantly.

Jim became a member of our SENHS Council, and was also our bird Recorder. Jim led walks, wrote up field articles and talked about his findings. His knowledge was always freely imparted. Jim had some tough times in his life. This brave man took part in a gruelling clinical trial at UCL, because he thought he should. His sense of humour stayed to the fore and he was smiling to the end. He will be sadly missed by his many friends.

The Belton Hills - Local Nature Reserve
Friends Of The Belton Hills



Deptford Pink by Kathy Greenwood

This impressive river bank left by the Thames supports a diverse range of species, even some relicts of the Ice Age. The iconic images here are the nationally rare Deptford Pink.

Ecological studies have revealed over 100 kinds of plants, like the Salsify and over 600 invertebrates, including butterflies, like the Essex Skipper.

The Friends of the Belton Hills, under the South Essex Natural History Society, appreciate this unique site for its

enjoyable green space, its trees and hedge, the birds, both migrant and resident, and the bats hawking up and down.

In 2014 the Belton Hills received a severe 'haircut' without any regard for the indigenous wildlife. It was then left with nothing done until 2015. The essential point is that the long coarse grass and Alexanders must be kept under control. What is required is two cuts per year; one **before** the Alexanders seed and another later on. This would allow the necessary flowers to survive for the benefit of the Shril Carder Bee and all the many other invertebrates which need to nectar on the flowers.

In addition special areas need to be set aside which are maintained in a suitable condition for the Deptford Pink. Don Down, Kathy Greenwood and Harry Hunter planted young plants and seeds of the Deptford Pink on both sides, at the top and bottom of the steps leading up from the station where they found suitable spots of clear ground. On the 28th June 2015 Harry Hunter counted 30 thriving specimens. However, it is feared these will be destroyed when the steps receive necessary repairs. There are plants surviving in other areas but the widespread encroachment of the Alexanders is ruining their habitat.

We as a natural history society request that the areas on the Belton Hills be cut frequently for the benefit of the Deptford Pink. Places where we know that they have been recorded in the past need to be given special care.

Bowers Marsh Saturday 9th April

The weather forecast was not too good with heavy showers promised. Fortunately we only had light rain on and off for our walk, at least Pat and Roger walked while I rode on my buggy. A large flock of about 30 Feral Pigeons were back and forth to the cow shed roof and numerous Black Headed Gulls were everywhere. It was lovely to see and hear the Skylarks singing and for me the first couple of Swallows for the year. We heard more Reed Bunting than we saw but a flock of Goldfinch made up for that.

We saw a pair of Great Crested Grebe and one Little Grebe a few Avocet, Gadwall, Shelduck, Shoveler, Mute Swans, Teal, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Redshank, Moorhen, Coot, Little Egrets, Greylag and Canada Geese. We also saw Herring and Lesser Black Headed Gulls and a single Green Woodpecker, also Pied Wagtail Tufted Duck and Jackdaw. A single female Pochard was flying round being pursued by five males. In the hedges we saw House Sparrow, Wren, Robin, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Starling and Blackbird.

Not many flowers were blooming but there were several patches of Red Dead Nettle, some White Dead Nettle, Groundsel, Cow Parsley, Creeping Buttercup, Sticky Mouse Ear, Dandelion and Common Field Speedwell were all in flower. Several other plants like Yellow Iris, Common and Tufted Vetch and Common Birds Foot Trefoil had not yet come into bloom.

Roger found some Thistle Galls that were rock hard so the small flies were well protected.

We were followed by large swarms of three different types of non-biting midges (Chironomids). Roger caught some, one male had very fluffy antenna.

It proved to be a very interesting morning out with 44 species of birds seen. Not too many places can give that number in just over three hours.

On arriving home I looked out of the window and on my bird feeder was a female Siskin.

Barbara Williams

The Night Camera

On three frosty nights in March, 6th, 8th and 16th a single Hedgehog appeared, as it was so cold and not much food about we bought some Hedgehog food.

Since the 31st of March to today 8th June we have not missed a night of visitors to our garden. Our camera has been activated up to 35 times in a night by at least 8 Hedgehogs and possibly up to 10 different ones. Four together at one time was our maximum but two or three are not unusual.

It is fairly easy to see the differences between the Hedgehogs. Some have pale patches in different places others have dark ears or nose and one has pale coloured legs and some are noticeably larger or smaller than others.

Also we have a pair of Foxes and the female is obviously feeding young; they are quite partial to the Hedgehog food and on several occasions have shared the dish at the same time with a hedgehog.

We do not know which is male and female but at times they can be quite aggressive to each other. Some quickly back away but others stand their ground.

A huge amount of time is spent each morning watching the night's pictures. Hopefully in a few weeks any mums will bring their young (Hoglets) so we may have to put out extra food to fatten them up to survive the winter. We have no idea where they come from or where they go as they can appear from four different directions in the garden.

Barbara Williams

Management requires a watch on changes, such as the aggressive spread of the Alexanders. Friends can contribute to the management of the reserve by helping to survey and monitor the wildlife. For example, more information is wanted on the fungi growing there.

Money has been made available through Leigh Town Council to refurbish the steps up from Leigh station, used by commuters and many taking exercise.

The signage was in such a very poor unreadable state that it has all been removed. A Nature Reserve to be proud of deserves several high quality signs, especially at the top and bottom of the main steps.

To support, find out more, contribute, learn how to survey, record data,

Call: Pat Wortley On: 01702 588115
email: pjwortley@btinternet.com visit: senhs.org.uk

South Essex Natural History Society has been involved for many years in the creation and management of this Reserve, and holder of many relevant records on its flora and fauna.

Dates for your Diary

Indoor meetings

27th October – 2-4 pm

Members' and Recorders' Reports plus anything members wish to discuss by way of Natural History observations.

24th November – 7.30 pm

AGM and Social

Canvey Wick – 12th May 2016

Peter Ray-Smith and his friend Tony were both keen to visit Canvey Wick to have a butterfly walk in hopes of recording Green Hairstreak and Wall Brown butterflies. I paid a visit to the site on the 6th May in warm condition and failed to record either of these species, but knew they were due to emerge soon.

So I was very pleased to enjoy a second visit with them and this time we were delighted to record both species in warm conditions together with eleven other spring species as follows:

Large White	2
Small White	4
Green-veined White	dozs
Orange tip	8 + 2 females
Brown Angus	1
Holly Blue	3
Small Tortoiseshell	1
Red Admiral	2
Comma	1
Peacock	4
Speckled Wood	2
WALL BROWN	9
GREEN HAIRSTREAK	4

One Brimstone moth was disturbed from the undergrowth whilst walking. Two Broad-bodied Chaser Dragonflies gave pleasure.

We heard at least two Cuckoos including a female. Peter is very knowledgeable on bird song and together we listened to Reed Warbler, Chaffinch, Cetti's Warbler, Blackcap, Song Thrush, Wren, Robin, Linnet, Skylark, Jay and Green Woodpecker.

in my garden. Apparently it is spreading in natural habitats and farmland as well as in urban situations.

The details of the find are: Southend-on-Sea, Thorpe Bay Broadway, TQ 914 850, 1 September 2015.

John Skinner

Silent Cotoneasters

Over the last three years during the flowering period of a Cotoneaster Horizontalis I have been recording the outstanding number of bees that were nectaring from the tiny flowers during the period 14th May – 4th June.

Buff-tailed of all sizes were very common. Tree Bumble Bees averaged 5-6. Red-tailed were quite common with the occasional queen of all species. Honey Bees were always present when weather was suitable. The buzzing was a delight to hear. However, this year, 2016, has seen a serious decline with just the odd worker Buff-tailed being recorded. I know this spring has been very contrasting with some very warm days interspersed with some severe cold and frosty interludes especially here in the South East of Essex. Is this just local in my Thundersley, SS7 3YA or is the experience Country-wide?

I did a survey of bumble bees earlier in the year from 1st January until 20th April when Buff-tailed were seen nearly every day, sometimes in double figures. Good Friday was the warmest day of the spring with new Queen Buff-tailed and Tree Bumble bees emerging from hibernation. Two days later the weather turned very cold with some local quite severe frosts. In fact April has been a very cold month here when I became aware of the decline of most species.

The most common bee recorded during April and May has been the Hairy-footed Flower Bee. In fact the mostly black males are still on the wing.

The last few days of May a few small workers of the Buff-tailed Bumble Bee are beginning to appear. I recorded one worker of *Bombus hypnorum* today, 30th May.

Don Down

A Thorpe Bay Slug

On the first day of September last year, while walking home from buying a newspaper in Thorpe Bay, I spotted an unusual slug. It had been a rainy night and the slug was also making use of the pavement. My wife was not really surprised that I carried it carefully home and spent a happy half hour photographing it.

This large slug was distinctly green in overall colour, the greenish colour actually coming from large blotches of dark olive green against a paler background. The tentacles were a steely blue. Extended, it measured around 8cm.



I remembered that a few months previously, at a talk to our members, June Chatfield had shown photographs of this species and asked us to keep an eye open for it as it is apparently spreading. Looking at the descriptions in the superb Aidgap key 'Slugs of Britain and Ireland' (2014) I was fairly sure this was the creature to which she had been alerting us, *Limacus maculatus* or the Green Cellar Slug or the Irish Yellow Slug, take your pick.

I emailed my photograph to Simon Taylor, Essex Mollusc Recorder, and he confirmed that my find was that species. He wrote that he has numerous records for Essex and it is indeed increasing in abundance at the same time as the similar Yellow Cellar Slug (*Limacus flavus*) seems to be declining. Simon said his garden in central Essex was home to hundreds of *L. maculatus* although I have not yet found it

The site was very dry on our visit and the lack of nectar plants was very noticeable. Most butterflies were happy to feed from the flowers of wild apple and hawthorn blossoms.

Nevertheless we enjoyed the day very much. It was a treat to stroll around in warmer conditions. Here I would like to thank Peter Ray-Smith and his friend Tony for the car lift there and back. Thank you too for Dave Whitewood for the previous visit on 6th May when only 5 species were recorded. It shows what a difference a few days make in the Lepidoptera world.

Don Down



Wall Brown by Don Down

Glowing, glowing gone

This was the topic for the talk on 21st April 2016 given by Dr Tim Gardiner, ecologist, poet and author who amongst his many other activities has done a survey of Essex glow-worms, started in 2001 and recently published.

They are not worms but nocturnal beetles (*Lampyris noctiluca*). The males have wings and large eyes and look like typical beetles but the female has no wings and its segmented body looks more like a woodlouse. Neither adult can eat.

Only the adult females glow, from about 10pm to midnight. They climb up a stalk and the two hind segments glow to attract males. The adults cannot feed and only live for about 14 days. Once mated the female turns out the light, lays eggs in the sub-soil almost immediately, and dies. Peak glowing times are June and July but can be as late as September and glow for a few hours at a time.

The glow is "bioluminescence" caused by luciferin reacting with oxygen in the presence of an enzyme to form oxy-luciferin (a higher energy state) which then reverts to the original luciferin giving out energy in the form of light.

After a few weeks the eggs hatch into larvae and they remain larvae for one or two summers, perhaps temperature and moisture dependent, feeding on small snails, as many as 70 in a lifetime, which they inject, paralyse and suck empty.

Little is known about where the larvae live. They also glow from one or two points but only for a few seconds at a time. The eggs can also glow.

They are thought to be in decline due to light pollution from street lamps, housing developments, climate change and changes in farming habitat, but the two-summer breeding season causes problems with surveys as a good year may be followed by an apparently bad year.

There are a number of well-known sites which are monitored by enthusiasts to try to come to a more definite conclusion. Gardens, hedgerows, railway embankments heathlands and woodland rides are all possible habitats.

Footnote Richard Attenborough recently did a TV program on the bioluminescence of fireflies which have a much greater control of the luciferin-oxygen reaction, enabling different species to flash at different intervals.

Jack Tring

33rd Inter Society Quiz 2016

Composed by Roger Payne, this was held at Southend on Wednesday 9th March 2016.

John Skinner, who was not involved in the question setting this year and so was able to join the SENHS team together with Don Down, Barbara Williams and Jim Bishop.

Questions this year were possibly harder as the run of marks seemed slightly lower than last year, which had been hosted by Wickford. This year SENHS came second which was an improvement on last year's fourth.

The final score was as follows:

Wickford	51
SENHS	48
Basildon	45
Wakering	33

All present enjoyed the refreshments at half-time, thanks to Marion and helpers.