

Thurrock Thameside Nature Park

On 11th May 2013, this Nature and Visitor Centre was opened by Sir David Attenborough. What makes this initiative unusual is that the site was doubly altered by man; firstly, by the extraction of gravel for London until the 1960s and secondly, by the dumping of London's waste there until 2010.

Restoration was necessary on a huge scale. One hundred and twenty acres were completed fifteen years ago. Restoration capping was carried out over the waste to a considerable depth. Even so it will not be possible to plant trees as the substrate would not be suitable for them. By 2016 the restoration process is likely to be complete.

At first acquaintance this Living Landscape is a large grassy site enhanced by the joyous song of the skylark. But, in the fullness of time, it has the potential for much more. This Nature Park in Thurrock is surrounded by remarkable areas of woodland and coast bringing even more wildlife into view.

South Essex Natural History Society



Registered Charity No 231981



Answers to Quiz Questions

1	Syria
2	Ostrich
3	Of great interest to beekeepers –
4	Colony collapse disorder
5	On a spider
6	Flores
6	In the Amazon



Thames Estuary, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex

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Dates for your Diary

Please note two important changes to the Programme.

Sat 8th June – Belton Hill Nature Reserve for plants and insects. Meet Leigh Railway Station. Leader Roger Payne. This is to replace Meadowfields Nature Reserve.

Thurs 13th June – A talk by John Skinner on changes in the Essex Lichen flora. This is the talk which was cancelled on 24th January.

Walking on the Belton Hills Local Nature Reserve

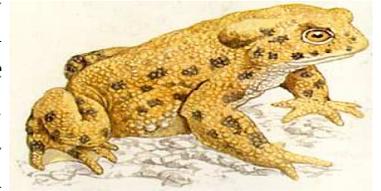
Our Society is represented on the Southend Borough Council's Biodiversity and Environmental Awareness Working Party (BEAWP). A range of matters are discussed. Southend's Local Biodiversity Action Plan reports each year on relevant items concerning specific habitats and species. Through the BEAWP it was decided that SENHS would undertake a Small Project on the Belton Hills. The aims are as follows:

1. to increase public awareness in this important Nature Reserve;
2. to involve the public in the study and recording of its flora and fauna;
3. to create a 'Friends of the Belton Hills' group under the auspices of SENHS;
4. to take part with English Nature and Southend Borough Council in reviewing the Management Plan for the Belton Hills,

To this end a programme of walks was drawn up as follows:

There was one area in the reeds where the toads were congregating -lots of "spare" males plus dozens and dozens of paired couples. I've never seen the like. The waters were alive with them I only picked out one pair of mating frogs and there was no Frog Spawn to be seen. There is already a necklace of Toad Spawn and, allowing for Frank, things are not going get a lot better.

All of this does answer the mystery of last year. Gary and I searched the reeds every day last year for Frog Spawn, and only ended up spotting one dollop late in the season. And yet, the reeds at the back of the pond were black with Tadpoles. There were millions of them, but we didn't get the usual show of thousands of Froglets



emerging from the pond on to the grass banks. They used to be impassable! Unbeknown to us the toads had "invaded" last year. There weren't dollops of Frog Spawn, just necklaces of Toad Spawn we weren't looking for or couldn't easily see. So isn't nature wonderful, so full of surprises.

In the sunshine of yesterday and today the bumble bees are out in large numbers on the pussy willows. Over the past couple of days I have watched as a Jenny Wren has been plucking nesting material near the van. It's the old brown fronds of bracken they are using. We have two pairs and they both nest in the wheel arches of the trailers, one at the top of the field and the other behind the old caravan. Clever birds!

This supports my boring argument. that the more you fly-tip hardcore and park old sheds or trailers, the more wildlife will move in and say "thank you very much!"

David Whitewood

60 fish a tide caught by anglers from Southend Pier were common, likewise the harbour at Dover has gangs fishing for Mackerel from its walls. I could go on but these are true facts.

“As for blaming other people or actions for failing stocks, one must look at the contraceptive pill, the drug turns nine out of 10 shrimps into males.

“R. Green mentions seals. Figures from research by St Andrews University states that there were 111,000 grey seals in 2011 and their numbers are growing. They eat approximately four to seven kilos of fish a day. That works out, when taken as an average of five kilos per day, to 555,000 kilos - again that is 202,575 tonnes per year. This only goes to back up the level of fish that are available. This does not take into account many thousands of harbour seals. We must remember we hunted these animals for thousands of years for meat and skins. By doing so we may have caused an unnatural increase in other fish as we removed a top predator.

“If a fisherman does not flag up a problem then who does? The level of fish stocks here in the Thames is running against the grain. We are seeing it and are speaking out, but is anyone listening? Who else can do this? Who else has the knowledge? The Environment Agency? Marine Management Organisation? RSPB? Essex Wildlife Trust? Greenpeace? They can all grab a headline that may fill their coffers as we have seen so often but do they have the knowledge or nous to back it up?”

Toad Invasion

Yesterday morning I first spotted Toads by the bucketful! You couldn't miss them. There were dozens of males, plus one "paired" couple

Frank the Heron was patrolling the far bank when I arrived this morning. He was spoilt for choice - frogs and toads are easy pickings. Frank flew off when I



walked down to feed the few remaining ducks on the pond. and I wasn't quite sure what I would find. I was gobsmacked!

WALKS with the SOUTH ESSEX NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY (SENHS)

on the BELTON HILLS Local Nature Reserve

The Flora and Fauna there are precious and interesting.

Free: No Charge Start time: 11am Duration: 1 hour approximately

Starting point: **In Marine Parade, at the top of the stairs leading down to Leigh-on-Sea Rail Station**

<u>Dates:</u>	<u>MAY</u>	<u>JUNE</u>	<u>JULY</u>
Wednesdays	1, 8, 15, 22, 29	5, 12, 19, 26	3, 10, 17, 24, 31
Saturdays	3, 15	13	
Sunday	5, 12 30	7, 21	

Book on: 01702 588115

Mobile only on the day 07505463162

Participants must make themselves aware of Health and Safety factors, especially on the footpaths.

A record has been kept of the contacts, observations and records made so far. The weather has affected the trees and shrubs holding them back. The Ash came out before the Oak. A watch will have to be kept over the Ash in case the Ash disease is about. The sloes were full of blossom eventually. There are few herbaceous flowers except some beautiful patches of Greater Stitchwort and the Buttercups. Already the Chiff chffs and the Whitethroats have arrived on the hills and taken up territories. The resident Chaffinches and Blue Tits added to the audible presence of the males. Most recently a Blackbird was searching the verge beside Marine Parade for worms to carry off to a nest in a nearby garden. But that is just a taste of what was there!

Pat Wortley

Two Tree Island West - 2nd February 2013

Three of us met in the main car park. We had already had several snow flurries that morning. The wind was coming from the East with a wind chill factor of -3°C and an ambient temperature of +1°C. The first bird to be seen was a Wood Pigeon on a tree; they are always guaranteed to be seen first, with the odd gull flying around. Next came a Magpie and a Green Woodpecker perched on a branch. We veered off the central track and went along the right hand path. It was good to see plenty of regeneration after the fires of a couple of years ago. As we approached the hides a small flock of 10 Teal were on the shore of Benfleet Creek. The Brambles were dominant along the pathways and we were lucky enough to spot a Dunnock's nest about 4 feet off the ground. Also I was able to point out some nests of Brown Tail moths on the ends of Brambles; they look like cotton wool draped on a bush. They make food for Cuckoos in the summer months!

The first hide we visited was very quiet, apart from a few Brent Geese. We quickly moved on to the main hide overlooking the lagoon and straight away we saw Lapwing, Black Tailed Godwit, Oyster Catcher, Shelduck, Ringed Plover, Snipe, Redshank and a Canada Goose. A flock of Knot was startled by a Magpie. A good number of Linnets were on Sea Purslane. We stayed for about an hour at the hide. On the way back, the biting cold wind on the face and body was numbing. There was the odd nest on several small trees, probably from the Greenfinch or Goldfinch family. As we approached the main entrance to the Reserve we were greeted by a Robin and a Wren. We met at 10.15 am and left by 12.15. This eastern/north easterly wind has been a big factor of the winter of 2012-13 and as I write this on the 3rd of April 2013 it is still the same.

Clive Dunmow

Dredging and Fishing in the Thames Estuary

The Leigh Times has had mixed correspondence on this subject discussing whether or not they are related. A recent letter blamed worldwide over-fishing as the cause for depleted fish stock in the Estuary and the following is the response from Paul Gilson, a noted Leigh fisherman.

“Sir, I am delighted with the reply to my letter from R Green (Government need to support the local fisherman). What it highlights so clearly is the lack of knowledge by the general public and the success of the media campaigns targeting the fishing industry. The general consensus if you were to ask a man in the street, be it a shopkeeper, housewife or butcher, about the fishing industry and the state of fish stocks you would most probably get R. Green's views- but are they correct?

“In most cases they are not. Let us start with Cod stocks. According to the Centre for Environment Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (CEFAS), the big Cod fisheries in Iceland and the North East Arctic, stocks are in a very healthy state and continue growing. Even in the North Sea, where the stock has had its problems, there are year-on-year increases in the biomass as it moves towards target levels. Likewise, Haddock and Whiting are in robust health. Plaice stocks in the North Sea and English Channel are at levels not seen in the historical record and again CEFAS states that the stock is going through the roof. The industry says in many areas there are too many fish to work as they quickly fill up their nets to bursting.

“Belgian and Dutch vessels confirmed this recently, when working off the Danish coast they have to avoid fish, as the shoals are so dense. In the SW approaches Haddock are so abundant that hauls of one ton are common, unfortunately because the quotas were set before the stock levels were identified many are discarded. Mackerel stocks are very high with a recent media storm about Iceland and Faeroes taking too much fish.

“It is the abundance of the stock and its overflow into northern waters where it was not previously that underpins the current international conflict about shares. Evidence from the industry confirms the scientists' view that Mackerel stocks are very high, one shoal three weeks ago covered 14 square miles, the shoal was so dense that fishing in the thickest area was impossible for fear of losing their gear. Last summer reports of

Evelyn Johnston

We were all very saddened to hear of the passing of Evelyn. I can remember the lovely times we had with her on our walks with the South Essex Natural History Society where she had been Outdoor Meetings Secretary for many years. Evelyn worked very hard and diligently behind the scenes whenever required. She was always on hand to help with refreshments at social events.

Evelyn loved the natural history and was especially fond of the Deptford Pinks and together with her son, Colin, helped to plant many specimens on the Belton Hills and other suitable sites.

She was a lovely lady, full of enthusiasm and lived life to the full. In recent years she moved to stay with her daughter in Sandy, Bedfordshire, but we corresponded regularly and always looked forward to hearing from her.

Evelyn will be sadly missed by all who knew her.

Ann Loveday Barnstable 23/4/1936 - 2/4/2013

Ann was born in Leicester, but her family moved to Westcliff and ran the Palmeira Hotel. Ann was business like, and a very caring and helpful person. She involved herself fully, whether it was e.g. at St Georges Church, or e.g. in South Essex Organic Gardeners. Ann always had her diary in her handbag keeping tabs on all the organisations and their events, which she and Syd attended. Dancing was their real joy, going out four or five times a week. Ann also helped in the running of our Society. She acted as Publicity Officer sending notices of meetings to the local papers. In her quiet way she played her part on social occasions and could be relied upon to help with refreshments. Ann and Syd were a strong team and had a loving marriage of 45 years. Ann was a loving mother and grandmother. She bore her ailments bravely with never a complaint. To Syd and their family we have sent our sincere condolences.

Shoebury Old Ranges - 13 April 2013

Contributed by Barbara Williams, Pat Wortley, Jim Bishop and Roger Payne

On her way to the walk in Shoebury Old Ranges on the best **almost** spring day of the year so far Barbara saw her first Swallow. Five of us assembled in the car park at Gunners Park and made our way to Essex Wildlife Trusts Old Ranges Nature Reserve.

Flora

Because the weather has been so cold up to now very few flowers were in bloom but those we did see were very welcome. Common Field Speedwell, Daisy, Gorse, Lesser Celandine, Dandelion, Early Forget-me-not, Blinks, Lesser Chickweed (*Stellaria pallida*), and Alexanders. Little Mouse-ear, Coltsfoot and Ground Ivy were all in flower.

Lichens

A lichen was collected and was later identified by John Skinner as *Cladonia foliacea* which has disappeared from most of Essex. This is the first record he has from the Ranges for 10 years.

Birds

As we walked around we saw and heard some predictable residents, but the Wheatear did not arrive in time for us. A Green Woodpecker was heard. We saw Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Long Tailed Tit. Other birds recorded include Greenfinches (common with males singing and displaying with their 'butterfly' flights), Stock Dove and Linnets (both seen by Jim), Blackbird, Carrion Crow, Wood Pigeon, Black-headed Gulls and Blue Tits. On the holding lake were several Dabchicks, A female Long-tailed Duck in winter plumage has been reported on the pond since before Christmas and we were fortunate to see it diving and swimming. Also seen, were 3 Little Grebes, Mallards, a pair of Mute Swans (the female on a nest on the island), a Moorhen, 2 Redshanks and a Pied Wagtail along the shore.

Insects and other invertebrates

As for the invertebrates, we found a large female mining bee clutching a willow flower. This had bright fulvous hairs on the thorax with jet black abdomen and legs and was almost certainly *Andrena thoracica* (see photo). Unfortunately, the only bumblebee seen was a dead queen Buff-tailed Bumblebee just outside the gate but inside the reserve. Beneath bricks and various pieces of wood in the reserve we found nests of the Common Black or Garden Ant, *Lasius niger* and a nest of the Meadow Ant, *Lasius flavus* under wood in the depression in front of the butt. In amongst most of these nests the scavenging tiny, pure white commensal woodlouse, *Platyarthrus hoffmannseggii* was common. It apparently eats the droppings produced by the ants, so it performs a useful function and the ants tolerate it. We also came



Andrena thoracica



(Ground Beetle) larvae

across a couple of large Carabid (Ground Beetle) larvae, which like the adults have large jaws and are fierce predators. In the depression near the butt there was a large velvet mite and a couple of spider species, a Crab Spider (*Xysticus* sp.) and a few Wolf Spiders (*Pardosa* sp.). As far as flies are concerned we saw one Flesh Fly (*Sarcophaga* sp.) on sand in a ditch and a Drone Fly (*Eristalis tenax*) visiting Coltsfoot flowers.

Two beetles were identified, both Ground Beetles. Jim found a dead specimen of *Notiophilus substriatus*, not previously recorded from the reserve and Roger captured a specimen of *Amara eurynota*, an attractive metallic bronze coloured beetle which is a local species of sandy ground, though it has been previously recorded from the reserve.

of insecticides is clearly the problem even in gardens. Song Thrushes feast on Slugs and Snails. It does not help the Birds by being too zealous in tidying the garden and eliminating some of the so called pests.

2013 Inter-Society Quiz



On Monday 25th March at Great Wakering Community Hall some of our members supported their team for an exciting quiz whose scores kept everyone guessing until the end. Our team consisted of Barbara Williams, Sue Stacey, Jim Bishop and Beryl Murfin. The questions were set by Roger and the question-master was John Skinner. There were 8 rounds of question, 2 of them pictorial, and silence reigned while the teams cogitated. There was more of a hubbub when the audience discussed their answers.

After 4 rounds, a delicious spread of refreshments was provided and then both teams and supporters, greatly invigorated, returned to the fray.

The scores were recorded and displayed on computer, which gave the quiz a more 21st century feel. You'll be dying to know who won so here are the scores:

Basildon 59; Wickford 55; SEEssex 53; Great Wakering 43.

Congratulations were offered to the winning team, Basildon, and the trophy was presented to them. They in turn will be hosting the next Inter-Society Quiz on the second Wednesday of March 2014. Our thanks were expressed to Roger and John for the hard work they had expended.

In preparation you might like to try these questions:

1. The hamsters we have as pets have been bred from 1 litter brought from which country?
2. What is the fastest running bird?
3. What is CCD?
4. Where would you find a pedipalp?
5. On which Indonesian island were the remains of a small extinct human found?
6. Where would you find a pink dolphin?

Answers on page 16

public interest and led to the development of viewing facilities. Protecting their eggs from egg collectors soon became a very necessary course of action requiring wardens. Minismere is a flagship reserve of the Society. Avocets returned there to Britain after a long absence. Their handsome appearance added to the excitement then. Majestic Marsh Harriers fly over the reserve. Migrant Hobbies seek out Dragonflies. The boom of the secretive Bittern is another iconic bird there.

The RSPB reserves include many rare species which are not birds, such as Swallow Tail butterflies, Water Voles, Wood Mice, Dormice, and even Otters and Muntjac. Therefore, RSPB's remit is changing. There will be a new corporate logo. Their policy is to be inclusive and set out to include looking after the other inhabitants of their sites as well as the birds.

In Essex, two new reserves have been created recently. Wallasea required extensive work relating to the sea walls and inrush of water. The reward came in the arrival of the Great White Egret, Peregrines, Woodcock and Avocets.

At Rainham, scrapes were created, resulting soon in more Lapwings and Little Egrets. This site has a Visitor Centre where children are encouraged to take an interest in the wildlife. The future of wildlife is in their hands.

RSPB has turned its attention to the need for reserves overseas. In Indonesia, for example, the destruction of rain forest in order to plant plantations of palms to produce palm oil is cause for concern. There is a problem because locals can purchase land but not foreign organisations. Wetlands in Poland are under consideration.

Graham ended by reviewing the measures we all can take to help the birds, with feeders and Sunflower seeds, leaving old apples out growing Pyracantha and Rowan (Mountain Ash). The cause of the biggest decline in birds is thought to be lack of insects. Chicks need the protein obtained from insects. Use

Eastwood Orchard and Park – 18th May 2013

At the invitation of Ron Bates four of us spent a delightful morning at this splendid little oasis situated near Southend airport. The grasses were thick and lush. The weather was just right – sunny but not too hot and the air was perfumed with the many and magnificent full blossoms of the apple trees.

The excellent eyes of Pat, Jim and Roger spotted the following wildlife:

Birds:

Wood Pigeon, Starlings, Greenfinch, Whitethroat, Blackbird, Carrion Crow, House Sparrows, Dunnock and Robin.

Plants:

Fifty species were recorded including; Broad-leaved Dock, Burdock, Cow Parsley, Red Campion, Dandelions, Chickweed, Groundsel, Elderberry, Goose Grass, Wilted Thistle, White Dead Nettle, Blackthorn, Vetch, Betony, Dewberries, Willow-herb, Green Alkanet and Comfrey.

Insects:

Green-veined White Butterfly, Speckled Wood, Brimstone Moth, Nettle-tap Moth, Woundwort Shield-bugs, a tiny nymph of Dark Bush Cricket, Click Beetle, Weevil, Buff-tailed Bumble Bee, Common Carder Bee, 3 species of sawfly, a Conopid Fly, 5 species of hoverfly, a Soldier Fly (*Beris chalybeata*) and St Mark's Flies.



The many starlings were making optimal use of the old wood on the apple trees and had made their nest-holes at the most unlikely angles and one could hear their young inside busy calling out for more dinner.

As well as a multitude of varieties of apple trees, Ron also has a greengage tree there along with many plum varieties and raspberries.

We do thank Ron for taking us round and for looking after this wonderful heritage so well.

Marion Erk-Mitchell

*Help for the Brimstone Butterfly, *Gonepteryx rhamni**

I made plans to help the Brimstone Butterfly to recover after a few years of decline in this species, particularly during 2011-12, when very few specimens were recorded locally in my part of South East Essex. I found very few larvae during the spring and summer of 2012, the odd males were seen flying on the warmer days of March and April, but it was not until the 12th May that a female was recorded depositing ova in my garden on Alder Buckthorn.



I have planted a number of Alder and Purging Buckthorn in my local woods hoping this will help the recovery of this beautiful butterfly which brings joy to the first warm days of Spring. Also I hope it will help the spread of two scarce local moths, The Tissue, *Triphasa dubitata*, and the Brown Scallop, *Phitoterema vetulata*, both of which have been recorded sparingly over the years. Their larvae also feed on the foliage during the months of May and early June just as the larvae of the Brimstone should be developing well.

Don Down

The Waterways Trust

This new organisation regards itself as:

"At last a charity to protect the fragile beauty of our waterways. On Britain's historic rivers and canals, wildlife habitats are under threat".

A wide variety of inhabitants will be helped by the proposed conservation measures. These include nest boxes for Barn Owls; re-seeding canal banks and hedgerows; encouraging otters to return with a man-made holt or home and by providing a "vole-habitat" that helps water voles burrow into the soft earth behind the hard canal banks.

Nature reserves – our last sanctuaries *by Graham Mee 18/4/13*

Nature reserves are important. Green spaces are disappearing at a fast rate of knots. Graham cited the example of a Scottish Estuary with a gas terminal, where native birds have to face: pollution; a wind farm and plastic refuse. Birds have to adapt or die.

The RSPB has created 240 nature reserves. RSPB lobbies Parliament over relevant problems, e.g. when the site at Cliffe was threatened. Volunteers are a significant part of the organisation. An early, inspirational reserve is that run by the Wildlife and Wetland Trust in London at Barnes. Peter Scott was the driving force in its creation out of some disused reservoirs.

The RSPB has reserves in a wide variety of habitats, which support a significant mix of species. Managing the sites appropriately for the different species requires expertise, which has evolved over time. Some sites have to be brought back into a suitable state for the intended occupants by a process of restoration ecology. The tasks are many and varied from planting more reeds, operating sluices to control water levels, and so on. In some cases domestic animals are used to graze grassy areas e.g. Highland Cattle, Water Buffalo and ponies.

Graham gave us an engaging account of 14 sites he chose, with humour and excellent pictures from the RSPB picture library and some of his own. He picked out three magnificent Scottish locations: Isle of Mull, with White Tailed Eagles; Islay, with its Geese, and Loch Garten, with its Ospreys. The return of the Ospreys created a lot of



Osprey