

*South Essex  
Natural History  
Society*



Registered Charity No 231981



*Results from the Special General Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> June  
2011*

My 'whingeing' letter from the Chair prior the SGM brought encouraging replies from members. So first and foremost I want to thank one and all for your support.

The meeting itself was well attended, evoked good discussion and has had positive results. Donations have been most gratefully received by the Treasurer, one handsome one being anonymous, while others have been collected at our meetings.

Two members came forward, John Skinner and Roger Payne and were elected to our Council. Since then, we have co-opted Jim Bishop onto the Council. Their experience and expertise are most welcome and Council is immensely strengthened.

The Council has been emboldened to explore some new avenues and work goes on to that end. Neil Williams, Chair of the Essex Wildlife Trust, Rochford and Southend Group gave us a short article in their Newsletter last year. Also an A5 flier about the SENHS will be going out to all EWT members with the next issue of Essex Wildlife. Both initiatives from Neil are welcome and highly appreciated.

A drive for new members is a must. Existing members please bring a friend along to a meeting. How about a subscription for an interested youngster? At least that would be one Christmas present achieved!

From the discussion it was clear that a history of the SENHS would be good. Furthermore, a supplement to the *Hadleigh Great Wood* book was felt appropriate since nearly 25 years has elapsed since it was published in 1988. So efforts will be made to achieve them. As the exhortation goes: ONWARDS AND UPWARDS!!

*Pat Wortley*

*Essex Field club Invitation*

The Essex Field Club is the leading natural history society in the County of Essex, and we would like to invite you to be involved with us at our Exhibition and social meeting. This is our big annual event, which this year will be on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2011 from 2.30 to 5 pm at our new Centre at Wat Tyler Country Park, Pitsea Hall Lane, near Basildon. We have regulars who bring exhibits and different individuals and organisations bringing their own every year, so it is a county-wide show. We will be able to welcome even more members and guests and displays at our new venue!

It is easy to reach by train (Pitsea station is only a short walk away) or by road (the A13 goes by Pitsea, and is accessible from M25, M11, A12, A130, etc). Google will give you a map if you need it, or look on our website at [www.essexfieldclub.org.uk](http://www.essexfieldclub.org.uk) and follow the link on the home page to this meeting.

All are welcome and the whole event is free, including refreshments. It will appeal especially to those interested in living things and/or geology in Essex. Tables are free for those wishing to book one for some exhibits relating to your local area or anywhere in the historic county of Essex which includes 5 London Boroughs as well as the rest of the county. Maybe you could bring preserved bits of living things, photo displays, posters, microscopes with slides, laptop presentations, maps, rocks or fossils, etc, but no sentient living things that might escape please!

If your group have leaflets or small items for sale you can bring them too. Or bring a puzzle item for our experts to identify for you. And members can collect their new Essex Naturalist hot off the press, and if you are not yet a member you could join us. To book a table for an exhibit, or for further information, please contact Mary Smith (Sec) via the website, or use email [mary@smith33gpr.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:mary@smith33gpr.fsnet.co.uk) or phone her on 01708 228921 Or as a visitor or member just turn up!

### *Brown Field Sites*

Recently it came to my notice that a 189 hectare brown field site near Rochester in Kent is under threat to be turned into a great lorry park. Like many brown field sites it has a rich variety of invertebrates, some of which are very scarce. I can only hope that Natural England is aware of its possible destruction.

I have been studying and recording moths and butterflies etc on former petrochemical works next to Morrisons Superstore on Canvey Island, Essex. This was the first brown field site in Britain to be protected for its endangered invertebrate species including the Shrill Carder Bee, Hairy Dragon Fly, Crested Newt and many other Red Data species. Abandoned to nature in the 1970s it was designated a site of Special Scientific Interest in 2005 and was then one of the richest sites in South Essex for many rare and local moths. I have surveyed the area since 1989 and up to 2008 it gave myself and many friends much pleasure; it is in need of a proper management plan to bring it back to its original state of the late 1980s and early '90s where four species of Orchid grew in profusion and gave pleasure to real naturalists like myself and many others.

*Don Down*



### *Notes for your Diary*

#### 24<sup>th</sup> November 2011 - AGM

The AGM will be held in the Central Museum on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2011. Nomination for the **General Secretary** and other committee members signed and agreed by the candidates should be received by the Chairman two weeks before the AGM.

#### Badgers in the Spring

The proposed visit to Don Hunford's reserve has been postponed until the Spring.

#### 19<sup>th</sup> January 2012

**Our first meeting** after Christmas will be a talk by Ross Gardner entitled "Crickets and Grasshoppers of Essex."

### *Little Wheatley Wood*

On 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011 a group of 8 members of South Essex Natural History society set out to walk around the western end of the reserve. It was a cool, windy, showery day with occasional flashes of sunshine.

The meadows looked beautiful with many grasses drifting in the wind and they set off the spectacularly brilliant Grass Vetchling. Around the edges were Ox-eye Daisy, Meadow Buttercup and Lesser Spearwort. Butterflies and moths seen over the meadows were: Meadow Brown, Small Skipper, 2 Large Skippers and 1 five-spot Burnet moth. Larvae seen later included 1 Brimstone on its food plant, Buckthorn, Green Oak Tortrix and Cinnabar caterpillars on Ragwort.

Near the drainage pond were Dog roses, single cultivated roses and yellow flags. At other sites we noted: Cut-leaved Cranesbill, Hogweed, Tare, Hedge Bedstraw, Common Toadflax, Common Vetch, Greater Plantain, Field Bindweed, Bird's Foot Trefoil and Salsify.



The Blackthorn bushes had some sloes forming but fewer than last year. Don looked for the Blue-bordered carpet moth along the hedgerows but didn't find it. In the hedges we saw a nest of baby spiders and 1 Long-legged Spider.

There were many insects: Bush Cricket, a solitary bee, Roesel's Bush Cricket, Lacewing, Click Beetle, Red-tailed Bumble Bee, White-tailed Bumble Bee, many Harlequin Ladybirds, Bombus Fly and Longhorn.

Birds we heard or saw were: Chiff-chaff, Blackcap and Wren. The members were impressed with the site and thought it would repay a further visit. Thanks to all the members who contributed their knowledge and made the visit a success.

### *Has Wildlife Been Watching Us?*

If I have the odd slice off the end of a loaf to throw onto the grass in the back garden, two or three of the local wood pigeons are usually quick to arrive. However recently when it was raining on an otherwise fine day I looked out to see two pigeons on top of the TV aerial of the bungalow next door. They were making the most of the rain. They were indulging themselves in a very thorough preen of their feather as though the raindrops were providing an individual shower for each of them. After around five minutes with the task completed they flew off to shelter in the large oak tree three gardens away.

Another example of 'human' behaviour occurred while I was parked in my car outside Curry's Southend store. I looked over to the exit and saw a pigeon step from the path onto the pedestrian crossing to the car park. It walked very purposefully in a straight line between the markings across the road towards my side. After it reached the pavement, as a white van approached, it took off and flew over my car and the car park and away towards the town centre.

The third example of human behaviour was a more primitive kind. I was parked on the sea front looking at the seals hauled out on Canvey mud bank at low tide. They seem to regard this area of mud and the tidal creek alongside as their personal property. A canoe paddled by two men came up the creek from the estuary and approached the half dozen seals on the bank and the one in the water. As the canoe went past, the seal in the water gave two or three huge splashes accurately aimed at the canoe. Trespassing on Seal territory definitely risked a vigorous attack from the owners.

*Iris Cotgrove*

**Butterfly Records in Dodds Grove and  
main track in the Nature Reserve**

<u>Dodds Grove</u>		<u>Nature Reserve Main Track</u>
	<b><u>10<sup>th</sup> May 2011</u></b>	
3	Speckled Wood	1
1	Large White	-
2	Holly Blue	-
1	Orange tip	2
	<b><u>14<sup>th</sup> May 2011</u></b>	
2	Heath Fritillary	4
-	Speckled wood	1
	<b><u>1<sup>st</sup> June 2011</u></b>	
3	Heath Fritillary	14
2	Meadow Brown	1
1	Large Skipper	2
1	Brimstone	1
	<b><u>4<sup>th</sup> June 2011</u></b>	
4	Heath Fritillary	21
2	Meadow Brown	4
3	Speckled Wood	2
2	Large Skipper	1
1	Small Skipper	1
6	Brimstone	5

*Brown-tail Moth*  
*Eupractic Chrysoerithpea*

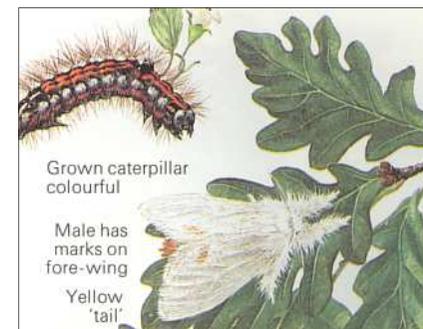
Plagues of Brown-tail moth larva were prevalent on Canvey Heights during the past season. Although I had reported the fact of many silken nests of overwintering caterpillars, nothing was done to eradicate them before the Spring sunshine encouraged the larvae to leave the nests and resume feeding, externally shedding their skins as they grew quickly in the warm sunshine.

By the end of April and early May the larvae were fully grown and now wandering everywhere after stripping the hawthorn and sloe bushes of foliage. This when local folk began to suffer allergies from the caterpillars' flying hairs especially when conditions are windy and the larvae are getting ready to pupate.

The moth usually flies in late June and has pure white wings and body apart from a tuft of brown hairs on the tip of its abdomen. They occur mostly in coastal areas but sometimes there are outbreaks inland. I had numbers of male moths visit the moth recording trap in my garden at Thundersley.

Should I discover any silken nests locally I will just cut them out with a pair of clippers wearing a pair of gloves.

*Don Down*



*St Mary's Church, Shoeburyness*  
*14<sup>th</sup> August 2011*

On this, our last but one summer walk, 4 members turned up on a lovely August day for the walk taking in the churchyard and the adjacent small wood and meadow. We then went through the labyrinth of new housing to the pond in Maplin Way in the hope of seeing dragonflies.

In the churchyard is a lovely old Copper Beech tree providing much needed shade on a hot day. As we passed under it we noticed many Seven-spot Ladybirds clustered on the trunk.

The wood itself has quite a few tree species, although none of great age (as tree go), but many Sycamores have reached a great height and are mostly clad in dense Ivy, making very thick cover, so that last year Sparrow Hawks nested there. I believe they may have done so this year too, as I have heard a young one calling, but unfortunately not today.

Other trees include some Hazel, Dogwood, Willows and the usual Hawthorn round the edges. This has been cut and laid by Conservation Volunteers who do some management in the site providing an aural and visual barrier to the adjacent busy road.

As we came out of the wood, we came to the wildflower meadow, where much of the sown mixture has survived for several years now. Plants here include Musk



*Art in Nature*

Gwyn Jordan gave an inspirational talk including some philosophical issues and asked why we study natural history? He pointed out that unlike other species we have the power of reasoning.

He gave examples of beautiful designs in nature, aided by excellent photography of a number of areas including birds, plants, butterflies, and scenery.

In the case of birds he showed slides of the Blue Tit, Gold Crest, Dartford Warbler, Robin, Song Thrush and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. His plant examples included the Sunflower, Iris, Bluebell, Wild Gentian, Fragrant Orchid and



Honeysuckle and his butterfly examples included the Heath Fritillary, Tortoiseshell, Comma and Common Blue.

He stressed form and design in nature such as the spiral pattern of seeds in sunflower heads, patterns in spider's webs and the intricate designs on adders (designed

to warn).

On a wider view he gave example of mountain scenes, waterfalls and Tintern Abbey ruins.

He concluded with a reading of: "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey", by William Wordsworth (1798) which surveyed the composition of the countryside.

**Editor's note:** The number of spirals and the angles of the seeds on the head of a sunflower conform to a complicated mathematical pattern. See on Google: 'Fibonacci Numbers and Golden Angles'.

60 flourishing plants on various sites on the Belton Hills and in the grounds of Hadleigh Castle. Hopefully this time their hard work will be appreciated and they will succeed!

On one of our recent guided walks one lady remarked: "I never thought I would ever get to see this lovely little flower on the Belton Hills!"

### *Public Guided Walks on Belton Hills*

Our member, Ken Adams, has suggested to us that we should provide a series of guided walks. He has held such events for the public to arouse interest and possibly new members for the Essex Field Club. This year, on the 29<sup>th</sup> July, Pat Wortley took members of the Leigh U3A on such a walk on the Belton Hills. The season does make a difference to what may be seen. Up to about 12 people at a time would suit the paths there. The idea would be well worth trying there in 2012.

### *Earthstar fungi saved*

According to the Daily Telegraph a multi-million pound housing development in the West Midlands has been delayed after the Earthstar Fungus (*Geastrum rufescens*) was found on the site.

Ecologists insist that no work can start until plans are drawn up to protect it.



Mallow, Ox-eye Daisy, several Vetches and Knapweed, the last of whose flowers were providing food for many insects. Earlier in the year there were two plants of Ragwort completely stripped of all their foliage by caterpillars of the Cinnabar Moth. I counted over 120!

In the corner is an old Horse Chestnut which everyone thought was dead, so much so that the council cut off all the branches like a pollard (so they couldn't fall on anyone) but there it was covered in new shoots all the way up the trunk, which also has a Woodpecker nest hole.

Beside the meadow is a poorly lit pond apparently devoid of water plants and yet frogs live there and every year when the Conservation Volunteers cut the meadow several are seen and they all make a beeline (frogline??) back towards the pond. Marginal plants are quite good and include Water Mint, Gypsywort and Great Pond Sedge, which as far as I know occurs nowhere else in our area. Two floating duck houses on the pond maintained by the Conservation Volunteers have both been used as nest sites most years including this one.

We then left the site - known as a Pyghtle - and found out way to the second pond in Maplin Way in the hope of seeing dragonflies, but apart from a few Ruddy Darters with the constricted "waists" they appeared to be over. That has been the case at many ponds this year as a result of the early start to Spring. Many plants have shown a similar early development. Although a poor year for frogs compared with the previous one, a few small froglets were seen round the margins.

I was unable to find and show a strange insect, the Narrow Ground-hopper - but I have seen it there before, and so our endeavours were concluded.

*Jim Bishop*

### *Natural History of Cherry Orchard, Eastwood*

Ron Bates, chair of South Essex Organic Gardeners, has asked SENHS to carry out surveys in the Spring and Autumn 2012 to discover what plants, animals and fungi are living there. This is an exciting project for us. It gives an opportunity for our recorders to focus on one site together. Members should be able to learn from the experience while they are at work. We hope to announce dates later.

A number of plots were made available to soldiers returning from WW1. Each had a house and smallholding attached. Paul Terry, when he was Environmental Officer with Southend Council, realised that owing to the age of these orchards they would be declared ancient orchards. One property remains in its original state. The occupant returned from an errand to find men with a chain saw about to fell fruit trees on the orders of the Council. When the resident remonstrated with them and informed them of the status of the trees they went away declaring that they would not be allowed to fell the trees in those circumstances. Fortunately, saved at the very last minute it seems! Why such action should have been planned is not known.



### *Deptford Pink on Belton Hills*

#### *Up-date on article in Newsletter 80, January 2011*



In the 1980s Joyce MacConnell recorded finding the Deptford Pink on Belton Hills and in her thesis made recommendations on management for the benefit of this and other rarities on the Hills. The recommendations were put to the relevant Southend Borough Council's staff and accepted. However, they have been the subject of numerous discussions on the site ever since. The continuing problem seems to be the hire of contractors to do the necessary maintenance. There is cost on the one hand and how much priority is given to the job. Contractors seem to attend at a time that suits them and this can result in a poor job, eg on very wet ground. Unsupervised, they do not seem to be aware of the management plan which often results in insensitive total clearance. There has to be a balance when cutting the vegetation to cater

for the differing needs of rare insects and rare plants. It is possible to achieve both given the will.

A different approach to enhance the chances of the Deptford Pink's survival has been implemented by our members, Betty Matson, Don Down and Evelyn Johnston (with tremendous input by her son, Colin). Recently they have sewn seeds near to some steps on the north of the Belton Hills. At suitable spots plants have been put in along the nearby path, especially by its edge, but unfortunately the promised preparation of the grounds for seeds did not happen and both seedlings and plants were mown off. Nevertheless, again this year our band of enthusiasts have again sewn more seeds and planted about