

Essex Wildlife Trust

Braintree Local Group Newsletter

April 2018



Chairman's comments

Spring has come! So now is the time to get out and about. There are interesting walks and speakers arranged....see below... so hope to see many of you enjoying them

We welcome Julia Todd as Treasurer, but are sorry to lose Ian Hill as Magazine Co-ordinator and Martin Stallion as Newsletter Editor

Operation Turtle Dove



January's excellent talk by Emma Stobart of the RSPB attracted an audience of 35 people and a lot of questions. At the end of the meeting, Jonathan Nott offered the Group a guided walk round his farm at Pebmarsh. He has recently created a Turtle Dove patch and the farm also includes two acres of garden, ornamental wildfowl and a 17½ acre lake. The farm is popular with Barn Owls: 11 chicks were raised last year. We were delighted to receive and accept the invitation: details opposite

CHAIRMAN Arleen Houlding
01787 272862. mrshoulding@yahoo.co.uk
TREASURER Julia Todd
01376 585775. julia.todd@btinternet.com
SECRETARY Marion May
07951 700751. marionmay144@gmail.com
NEWSLETTER & PUBLICITY Martin Stallion
01376 551819. stallion@supanet.com

For your diary

Sunday 15 April at 2pm. Spring walk at Wethersfield MOD site
FULLY BOOKED

Saturday 19 May at 2pm. Guided walk round Jonathan Nott's farm, Pebmarsh
The walk will last 1½-2 hours. Tea will be included. Limited to 20 people: **booking essential** with Tracey Kay, T 07742 294358 kay.tracey@yahoo.co.uk. £3 donation payable on the day

🌀 **Tuesday 18 September at 7.30pm**
St Andrews Hall, Parsonage Street, Halstead
Lin Wenlock from Froglife/EWT will be *Leaping forward for amphibians and reptiles*

Events marked 🌀: No need to book. £3 donation payable on the day

Please note: The Danbury walk on 20 May has been postponed as Adam Rochester, who was to guide it, is no longer the EWT Reserves Officer

And still to come
Full details in the August Newsletter
Saturday 6 October
St Andrews Hall, Parsonage Street, Halstead
The natural history of veteran trees. Talk by Tricia Moxey

Tuesday 20 November
St Andrews Hall, Parsonage Street, Halstead
East Anglian birds. Talk by Barry Williams

MAGAZINE DISTRIBUTION *post vacant*

EVENTS CO-ORDINATOR Tracey Kay
07742 294358. kay.tracey@yahoo.co.uk
COMMITTEE
Christine Burden christine.burden@live.co.uk
Derek Chavner derekwilliam07@mail.com
Ian Hill ian.hill1141@btinternet.com

“A grand day out. I made it 33”



Christine Burden reports on last November's walk at Abberton

The weather was fine and bright with a rather brisk northerly wind. Sixteen people came on the walk, not just committee members, thank goodness

Our first stop was at Gwen's Hide, where among the birds we saw were many Cormorants sitting on a mud bank along with various Gulls, Grey Herons and Little Egrets. No Great White Egrets unfortunately, but far out on the water was a solitary duck which we eventually agreed was a Goosander (female or male coming out of eclipse). Other ducks included Shoveller, Pochard, Tufted, Wigeon and Goldeneye. One or two Great Crested Grebes were diving and a solitary Redshank was working his way along the shore. A Wren was busy in the vegetation in front of the hide. Further away, Starlings, Rooks and Carrion Crows were foraging. A Skylark flew up in front of us and we added to our tally a Pied Wagtail and a hunting Kestrel

From here we moved on to the Island Hide where there were good views of a number of geese. Most conspicuous were Canadas, but Greylag, Brents and a solitary Egyptian were also present. Tracey spotted a pair of distant Buzzards and a possible Tern. Among the other birds we saw were Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gull. While looking at a possible Teal, which refused to turn round and be conclusively identified, we spotted a Black-tailed Godwit

We walked on to the Bay Hide, which was getting the full benefit of the north wind. The nearby mud flats were very dry, so the waders had moved. There were Lapwing on the far bank of the reservoir, and Green Sandpiper and Ruff in the more distant wet area to the west. Teal and Gadwall were also feeding here. A cock Pheasant was the only new land bird

Somewhat chilled we made our way back to the Visitor Centre. A Stonechat and Blue Tits were sighted and Arleen saw a party of Long-

tailed Tits. Altogether it was a very satisfying morning. After refreshments and a warm-up at the Centre, we went our separate ways, some of us moving to new areas to see what was about. My personal best was a Redhead Smew among the flooded trees by the far western causeway

Wanted: Postman (or Postwoman) Pat

No uniform required. Black and white cat optional!

The Group urgently needs volunteers to deliver the magazine and newsletter in several areas of the district. They would be delivered to you, packaged and labelled. All you have to do is distribute them as soon as possible, at a time and day to suit you

The areas and the current number of members in each are:

- Braintree, off Coggeshall/Cressing Roads – 23 members
- Braintree, off Rayne Road - 21
- Feering – 50
- Sible Hedingham - 32
- Castle Hedingham - 15
- Wethersfield/Shalford - 26

If you live in or near one of these areas and can spare a few hours, three times a year, please contact Ian Hill

News from the Phyllis Currie Reserve, November 2017 - February 2018, by Susan Sampson, Assistant Warden

Looking back at what we've accomplished during this period it strikes me as mainly controlling rampant vegetation both on land and in the water! Of course, some cover is essential for both habitat and protection from the weather and predators for our wildlife, but, every so often it needs to be kept in check, whether to maintain access for ourselves and visitors or to ensure our young trees can grow and thrive. So, the mower and brush cutter were much in evidence, but with only one of each, loppers and shears are equally necessary

We are well aware from the litter found in the car park that not every visitor is interested in watching wildlife, so another annual job is cutting the car park hedge to keep cars visible and deter unwanted attention!

Checking the nest boxes this year suggested a successful breeding season. We have added three new wooden boxes made by one of our volunteers. The owl boxes are more of a challenge as they are sited higher and can hold surprises like several squirrels or even a hornets' nest! We have also replaced one of these with a super deluxe model, again constructed by another of our volunteers



Every few years, we borrow the metal punt from HQ to cross to the lake to the island, you've guessed it, to coppice Blackthorn and bramble from one half. This time the crew also built a rather fancy jetty to make getting in and out of the boat safer. Rather than rowing, the boat is pulled backwards and forwards with ropes



Licensed chainsaw users from HQ have visited again to fell a few more of the non-native Pine and a couple of dead trees in dangerous positions beside the boardwalk. We have continued replacing the felled Pines with our own sapling Oaks, Hornbeam, Small-

leaved Lime, Field Maple, Hazel, Hawthorn and Holly

All of those we planted last winter have taken well and are looking healthy. Fortunately (for the trees at least) it has been a fairly wet start to 2018. No doubt some of our regular visitors have been sorry to see these open spaces but the new planting will eventually create a more natural woodland and diverse habitat

Ratty's return, by Jane Giffould

For heritage, people often consider buildings as the only aspect to be retained. The environment is an essential part of our lives. Buildings can be considered as part of the environment; however, the natural world must be considered as well

Last November, for the Halstead Conservation Group AGM, Darren Tansley of EWT gave an excellent presentation on *Ratty* with special reference to the River Colne, including Halstead. Ratty of *Wind in the Willows* was, of course, not a rat but a water vole. Darren showed us how once there was a good spread of water voles; however, the introduction of mink decimated the water voles. A concentrated effort to remove mink and re-introduce water voles is having a positive effect with water voles slowly approaching Halstead. The EWT river wardens of Halstead keep a close watch on the river for mink and water voles



In addition, Darren showed how water voles and other wildlife needed a healthy river to be able to live. Part of the healthy river is the essential part played by woody debris from fallen trees and branches. These do not cause flooding but help alleviate flooding by slowing the water. They provide important refuges for all wildlife and hence Darren's

term *fishes live in trees*. Removing woody debris harms the river and its wildlife. Similarly man-made structures such as sluice gates stop the natural flow of the river and so spoil the natural habitats. Darren pointed out that many of the fish inhabiting our river need reasonably fast-flowing and hence well-aerated water. He liked the Halstead Causeway now with the natural growth and the proper level of the water

Rivers find their own courses which are their best way. Humans have other ideas as Darren showed in his *Ratty* talk. We are currently looking at what humans have done to the River Colne, especially in the town area of Halstead. The sluice gate is one example, along with some straightening of the river to provide a faster flow for the mill. We are currently researching maps of the area to see how the shape of the river has been changed by humans rather than nature. For this, we would be grateful if anyone has anything on this that we could use

Butterflies



Over 40 people attended the talk by Mark Wood following our AGM last month. His photographs were spectacular, even if we were sometimes slightly confused by blue butterflies that were not always blue but could be brown. Mark's dedication to his subject was clear from the impressive statistics he keeps of species spotted each year in the paddock at his home in Great Yeldham. An excellent evening

The next Group Newsletter

will appear in August. If you'd like to contribute an article, a news item or a photograph of an unusual sighting, please send it to the Editor by **1 July**

WEA Day School: *The Wildlife and Habitats of East Anglia*

Saturday 21 April, 10am – 4pm
United Reformed Church, Kings Road,
Halstead CO9 1HJ

This course looks at a wide range of wildlife habitats in East Anglia and the flora and fauna that can be found in these areas. An extensive range of habitats and nature reserves are shown through seasonal and colourful slides of landscapes, nature reserves, birds, butterflies, dragonflies, plants and mammals. Topics will include: RSPB Minsmere, heathland and woodland, the Brecks and Thetford Forest, Estuary wildlife - including saltmarsh habitats and the wildlife that depends on it, the Suffolk and Norfolk Broads, North Norfolk coast, Cambridgeshire Fens, Essex marshes and conservation organizations in East Anglia. There is plenty of opportunity for discussion during each session - especially regarding conservation issues, coastal erosion in East Anglia and any wildlife sightings or nature reserves visited by students. A group field trip may be arranged later. The course fee is £15. Full details at

<https://enrolonline.wea.org.uk/Online/2017/CourseInfo.aspx?r=C2225152>

Walkies!

Tracey Kay would like someone else to take on the role of organizing our walks and other outdoor activities, although she will still be running our indoor events (talks etc). If you'd like to know more about what's involved, please contact Tracey

And a new Editor, please

Do you fancy editing this *Newsletter* (three issues a year) and publicising the Group's events? To find out more about this dual post, or to take it on, please contact Martin Stallion