

The Volunteering Newsletter

Of Harlow Wildlife Conservation volunteer groups



January 2014 Edition

Containing

A summary of the work carried out by the conservation volunteer groups in the Harlow area, describing how local groups are working together to maintain, protect, and improve wildlife habitats,

Showing groups in action, stories and pictures about people and wildlife living together in our natural environment,



Harlow Biodiversity
partnership

Working together with the community, wildlife groups, and commerce,
all caring for the natural environment in Harlow and Essex.



HARLOW CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS



Chairman's chat

Review of 2013

HCV maintained a varied programme of work in 2013 on Harlow's woodlands, wetlands, and meadows. With a couple of exceptions due to bad weather (snow and persistent rain) the fortnightly Sunday tasks continued throughout the year. There were no major projects in the year but there were a few notable tasks.



Stewards' meadow maintenance



Reed cutting Marshgate Spring

In July we replaced the damaged liner of the pond at Stewards Meadow; to refill the pond with the nearest tap further away than any hose to hand, we repeatedly filled a couple of wheelie bins, wheeled them as far as we could, and then used a bucket chain – remarkably we got the pond more or less full by the end of the afternoon.

In September at Challinors Pond, Church Langley Country Park, a new site for us, we were cutting back overhanging trees – for a relatively inaccessible site it never quite ceases to surprise me what people will dump in a pond and surrounding woodland.



N. Plantation summer path maintenance

In October we had quite an eventful day at Netteswell Plantation: first Colin got a little over-confident about where he could take his van; no sooner had we got Colin out of the mud when Marilyn spotted water draining into the Toddbrook in an unusual place. Venturing closer we were greeted with the sight of a mound of sewage and foul water gushing out of one of the manholes to be found in the wood.

We phoned the Environment Agency and then directed

Thames Water and EA personnel to the site – needless to say we didn't get all the work done we had hoped to.

At the end of November we had a tree planting task at Jean McAlpine Park; at Mike Levett's suggestion we managed to get these for free through TCV (The Conservation Volunteers, formerly BTCV) as part of the Big Tree Plant, although it was touch and go as to whether they would arrive in time. With our numbers swelled by a scout group and staff from Tim Moya Associates we managed to plant all 400 trees (whips) ordered plus some 50 others which had been donated in pots. ———>



Scout Group helping to plant trees

We also had a couple of days out to places of wildlife interest a bit further afield. In April we combined a trip to the RSPB reserve at Rainham Marshes with a visit to the newly opened Thameside Nature Park at Mucking run by Essex Wildlife Trust. At Rainham Marshes you are almost spoiled with all the boardwalks and hides, to say nothing of the café. By contrast driving up the track to the new centre at Mucking, felt a bit like venturing into the wild-west, there is still much to do in establishing this reserve on what is a capped landfill site. Then in October we went to the Marks Hall Estate near Coggeshall: we had an excellent custom guided tour of the gardens and arboretum with a very experienced member of staff – it was mostly informative about learning how they were converting ancient woodland previously planted with conifer back to native deciduous woodland, and about their attempts at wild flower meadow creation.



Andrew Tomlins

New - Landscape and Biodiversity Officer - I started with Harlow Council at the beginning of



September 2013 and have spent the past three months getting to know the many wildlife sites and volunteers helping the Council with wildlife matters across the District and have been impressed with the variety of habitats that we are managing and the numbers of volunteers helping us to achieve that.

Previously to starting with Harlow Council I worked for 17 years for the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham and had a number of jobs there before being made redundant at Easter 2013. The jobs including managing the Councils Ranger Service and Millennium Centre at Eastbrook end Country Park; restoring Barking Park as part of a Heritage Lottery Fund project and creating a new Country Park for the Borough.

I moved to Essex in 1990 from Hampshire to work for the Essex Wildlife Trust at the Tilbury Energy and Environment Centre for five years and enjoyed getting to know the Thurrock area of the county well. I live in Brentwood and the commute into Harlow (when the M11 is not blocked) is a joy compared to commuting in East London on the A12 and A13!

I am originally from Norwich and still have family there and some of the wildlife sites in Harlow remind me of growing up in Norfolk. I enjoy a variety of music and quiz nights so if ever HCV wanted to have a quiz night I would be happy to make up a team!



I look forward to meeting you all in 2014 and working with you to improve the biodiversity of Harlow and having a catch up with things over a cup of tea on one of the many tasks organised by HCV. Thank you for all your support and assistance in my first three months.

Mike Levett

SOME OF HARLOW'S PAST NATURAL HISTORY

Latton Park (Woods) and Harlow Park were part of the royal forest of Essex until 1301, and the first recorded coppicing took place in 1334

Herbert Mace* describes a walk along the southern edge of Latton Park on a sunny August bank holiday in the 1940's and finding it teeming with life and there being nowhere else in the district with such a variety of butterflies, hundreds of them, 17 species in all, among them such species as Silver washed Fritillary, Small Heath, and Wall Brown.

Talking about migrating species of butterflies: he recalls sitting on a log in Latton Park in July 1940 and watching a swarm of Small and Large White butterflies passing by from west to east and estimating that there were about 1,500 flying through in a hour, and from his limited range of vision that numbers were probably 3-4 times greater than that.

On foxes Mr Mace states that most foxes are to be found in and Latton Park, Harlow Park, and Parndon woods and that in the year before the war (second) the total number killed by the hunt in the Harlow area that season was 93.

Parndon Woods Area Mr G. Dent** informed Herbert Mace that the Red squirrels after almost dying out 25 years ago, had recovered and were quiet common at Parndon before the late war, also Long-eared and Pipistrelle Bats were common at Parndon but Noctule less, with Serotine in his own house, and Natterers Bat in Parndon church.

In notes given to him by Mr Dent notable birds in the area were Nightjar and Redstart breeding in Parndon woods and Latton Park, plus several pairs of Nightingale, with Red-backed Shrike-frequently nesting in gravel pits in the area.

Herbert Mace talks of the dark coloured strain of Fallow deer only found in Epping Forest and how Mr Dent tells him that the bucks of this strain come to Parndon woods in summer and remain there until autumn, when they return to the forest for the rut.

The Stort valley by 1066 the Saxons had constructed a string of water mills through the Stort valley: at Harlow, Netteswell, Latton, Gilston, Burnt Mill and Little Parndon.

The Stort navigation was opened in October 1769, and the Northern and Eastern railway line had been built through the valley by 1841.

Herbert Mace- in his 'Natural History of Harlow' recalls seeing: in spring at Rowmead the whole field turning into flaming gold with marsh marigolds, he talks about the abundance of Lapwings nesting through the marsh, Snipe drumming overhead, and that Redshank nested here before it became too dry, but some things still survive in the same locations: he records Latton lock as a good place to find the Kingfisher and a of a single clump of Meadow Rue grimly holding on in a ditch a distance from the river, and he mentions a wood well known in the district for its Bluebells plus a vigorous patch of Raspberry canes, *(where we can still see these same plants growing in abundance on Marshgate Spring nature reserve today).*

**Herbert Mace lived at 'Faircotes' in Station Road Old Harlow, and was author of two acclaimed books on bee keeping, he compiled a large mounted collection of butterflies, moths, and insect species, and recorded a list of at least 400 plant species in the area around 1933.*

*** Mr Geoffrey Dent 1926-1950 of 'Passmores House' Parndon was member of the Truman's brewery family.*



GREENTEAM VOLUNTEERS



The Greenteam have been busy this year, as usual. We did more work at Parndon Wood than last year, coppicing in a couple of different areas and helping Wildspace to make a dead hedge. We worked every week in the winter, so that we could get more coppicing done mostly at Hospital and Risdens but also at Maunds Wood, Stort Valley Meadow and Parndon Moat Marsh. Coppicing willow is always quite exciting and challenging. We had a good time planting reeds around the edges of one of the newly scraped out ponds on the Marshes and it looks as if all the plants have taken. It has been really enjoyable to see all the work completed on the Marshes and nobody fell in this year!! The new footpaths have opened up varied winter walks that would otherwise have been flooded. The Wednesday Volunteers from Hertfordshire joined us a number of times and the extra workers were much appreciated.

We also returned the favour on a very hot summer day at



Broxbourne Woods and were treated to a delicious picnic

lunch. We had another 'day out' in the spring with a guided walk with Glenn in Epping Forest. We really enjoy working in a lot of different areas of the town and on a wide variety of tasks. Footpath clearance is not our favourite – a bit like housework – the work is never done, but very important to give access to the woods for as many people as



possible. Our favourite activity might be bonfires! But whatever the weather and the task we always have a great time and a sense of achievement. **Sally Naylor**



WILDSpace VOLUNTEERS

Wildspace have had a busy year keeping Parndon Wood Nature Reserve in tip top condition. With spring not arriving until late in 2013, they completed all the coppicing in the area behind the Conservation Centre — and it is now showing good signs of regeneration. When spring finally arrived, everything came to life with a vengeance. Just trying to keep on top of the brambles became a full time job, clearing them from the trails and bluebell and primrose glades. As well as these tasks Wildspace made several visits to Hospital and Risdens Woods, mostly to keep the trails clear of bramble and vegetation, but also spreading hundreds of barrow loads of wood-chip on the trails and paths around the areas close to the kissing gate. Back at Parndon they



undertook many other tasks: like clearing a large area of reedmace that was starting to engulf the main pond — this was a very wet and muddy job they all got stuck into; no one escaped getting soaked. Then there was the new trail to be cut through. This was a major task that is still ongoing and hopefully will be completed by summer 2014. These are just some of the tasks that Wildspace carried out in 2013. With winter here it is coppicing time again, and Wildspace are concentrating on the area opposite

the front of the Conservation Centre and towards the main gate. In addition, there are all the other tasks to be done like clearing the ditches, litter picking the car park area, and too many more to mention. I would like to thank them for their dedication and all the hard work they have contributed to Parndon Wood Nature Reserve. **Lenny Collins.** (*Wildlife Sites Assistant*)

HARLOW WILDLIFE PROJECTS



2013 finally saw the Stort Valley Meadows phase 2 project go ahead with the creation of an area of reed bed on part of the meadow just west of the zigzag bridge. This was finally able to proceed after extra funding had been found from Natural England for transport and disposal of soil which it had earlier been hoped to put elsewhere in the Town Park. The excavations were overseen by Rebecca Banks of the Essex Biodiversity Project. This was followed up by GreenTeam, Hertfordshire Wednesday volunteers, and HCV to plant reeds in the shallow parts and marginal plants round the edges. As part of the phase 2 project the vehicle bridge into the “orchid” meadow was widened by means of a culvert and some



The Boardwalk pools



Reed planting

scrapes dug on the lowest parts of the meadow. Seasonal ponds were also dug either side of the new boardwalk sections on the path bordering Maymeads Marsh nature reserve.

HWP also had the sustainability grant from the Big **Lottery funded Community Spaces programme linked to the phase 1 project**. This has allowed some useful tools to be bought for HCV's use including some additional heads for brush-cutter half-shaft engine and a mower, plus some hand tools. There is also a new noticeboard to go in by the river to advertise conservation tasks and other events in the area.

An educational walk took place through the meadows led by Essex Biodiversity Project to discuss the best management for the meadows: ideally periodic surveys should be undertaken to guide which areas should be cut and when; it was clear that funding cuts that had led to the orchid meadow not being cut last year had had a seriously detrimental effect and that a cut was urgently needed – this has now been done but funding remains difficult. There is the possibility of establishing a traditional wild flower meadow on one of the raised meadows which is currently almost exclusively rank grasses was also discussed.

[Wildflower meadow restoration](#) looking ahead to the coming year provided we can sort out a suitable approach to maintenance, the main project for the group will be to secure funding for the wild flower meadow creation project. The existing nutrient rich topsoil needs to be removed and disposed of off-site to get the fertility down to a level at which wild flowers can compete against the grasses. This will be the major cost of such a project – it would be pointless to just sow wild flower seeds or plant plugs into the meadows as they stand, to promote this meadow project we had a display at the Essex Field Club's annual event at the Wat Tyler Country Park in December 2013.





18 HARLOW BUTTERFLIES

All images taken by Colin Lincoln
in Harlow see if you can identify
them all

(Answers found on last page)





A FOREST GARDEN - Woodlands were always seen as a renewable resource and were carefully managed to exploit their produce, over the centuries much of our wildlife has adapted to live in these managed woodlands and has flourished as a result, however as the demand for woodland products has fallen, many woodlands are now neglected reducing the number of animal and plant species living in them and resulting in a negative effect on the overall biodiversity of our woodlands.



Female Blackcap
feasting on Elderberries

Today, with just under 12% of land under woodland cover, the UK is one of the least wooded countries in Europe making gardens an important refuge for many species. Those bordering woodlands can have a huge role in providing sources of food and shelter for wildlife that is now missing from our woods. These transition areas between woodland and garden often have greater biodiversity due to scrubby hedges, ivy growing over fences and flowering border plants which all provide the conditions of a well-managed woodland.



Feeding Green-Orb Spider



Southern Hawker



White-tailed
Bumblebees

For many gardens, trees may be too large to plant but biodiversity can be enhanced by creating layers of plants, shrubs and climbing plants to provide shelter and sources of nectar. Many varieties of shrubs can be cut back encouraging growth to provide thick cover for birds to nest and roost, a pile of logs or stack of leaves in a shady corner can provide a refuge for beetles, woodlice, toads or hedgehogs.

Ponds of any size also create an important habitat in gardens and are an important breeding ground for many amphibians and invertebrates, this in combination with areas of long grass and shrubs provide feeding areas and overwintering sites for amphibians.

If the State of Nature Report 2013 is correct and 60% of species monitored have declined over the past 50 years then gardens will form important pockets of biodiversity making it vital for us to look after them.

Glenn Mulleady - Forest Keeper

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Brimstone
2. Large Skipper
3. Speckled Wood
4. Small Skipper
5. Purple Hairstreak
6. Red Admiral
7. Small Tortoiseshell
8. Orange Tip
9. Painted Lady
10. Common Blue
11. Gatekeeper
12. Silver-winged Fritillary
13. Comma
14. Ringlet
15. Small Copper
16. Holly Blue
17. Brown Argus
18. Peacock

A sonnet "To a Primrose" John Clare 1820

Welcome, pale primrose, starting up between
 Dead matted leaves of oak and ash, that strew
 The every lawn, the wood, and spinney through,
 'Mid creeping moss and ivy's darker green!
 How much thy presence beautifies the ground!
 How sweet thy modest, unaffected pride
 Glows on the sunny bank and wood's warm side!
 And where thy fairy flowers in groups are found
 The schoolboy roams enchantedly along,
 Plucking the fairest with a rude delight,
 While the meek shepherd stops his simple song,
 To gaze a moment on the pleasing sight,
 O'er joyed to see the flowers that truly bring
 The welcome news of sweet returning Spring.



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