

Ongar Wildlife Society

An Occasional Newsletter

Number 4

January 2004

... Last Year

We hope that you enjoyed the 25th Anniversary Year with the Ongar Wildlife Society. The Barbecue . . . and the Annual General Meeting . . . and the Silver Jubilee Meeting were perhaps highlights within the programme of talks and visits.



Ongar Wildlife Society at Old Hall Marshes in June 2003

Next Year's Programme

This newsletter is enclosed with the programme for the OWLS for the coming year. Once again, Allan Cook, our Programme Secretary, has arranged a varied and interesting programme of talks that we hope you will support and enjoy.

Included with the programme of talks are a number visits. We have been less specific about the dates for these to allow some flexibility in choosing the day for the visit, but dates and meeting places will be provided in good time.

In the early days of OWLS, the society visited Welney. Welney, in the Fens, is a wintering area for swans and the sight of hundreds of swans during feeding is quite spectacular. It is intended to organise a coach for an evening visit. We hope such a visit will be well supported.

Subscriptions

At the December meeting, it was stated that the financial position of the Society is stable but costs are rising slowly. The costs have been offset both by an increase in the membership and the excellent attendance at the social functions of OWLS. Accordingly, the committee have decided that there is not a need at present to raise the annual subscriptions. However, it has been agreed that it may be necessary to make a special charge to support the cost of some lectures in the future. Any such charges will be announced well in advance.

Essex Field Club

While browsing in a library, I rediscovered *Essex Naturalist*, the journal of the Essex Field Club. The recent volume (No 20, for the year 2002/2003) is very interesting. There are well-informed review papers on wildlife and conservation within Essex, some of them treating specific animal and plant species in some detail. Other papers of immediate interest include one on the otter in Essex over the period 1996-2002, another on bats in Essex, and another on glacial erratic boulders in Essex and one titled; "The woodland flora of the Forest of Writtle and surrounding area".

In addition, a well-produced newsletter is published three times a year. Family Membership of the Essex Field Club has just been increased to £17.50 – the Journal alone is worth this. This is especially good value since the focus of the club is Essex. We joined!

OWLS Nature Diary

Tanya Welford reports:

The year 2003 has been one of concern for the survival of the small furry **bumblebee**. Intensive farming methods have led to fewer hedgerows, and the production of silage has meant hay meadows rich in wild flowers were harvested before flowering. The lack of nectar has driven the bumblebee to the town garden to find mainly hybrid varieties of flowers, devoid of the nectar so important to the bumblebee. Native species of bumblebee have declined since 1970. There were once 26 species in Britain. Four have disappeared and several more are on the verge of extinction. We can help by this year planting more nectar-producing plants such as foxglove, berberis and campanula. The French and African marigolds and large-petalled pansies are totally lacking in nectar. For more information about the bumblebee and the type of plants, take a look in our OWLS record book.

The good news is that **GM crops** are reviving endangered wildlife. The planting of such crops has led to a higher density of weeds, seeds and insects so important to the survival of wild birds such as the lapwing and skylark.

Also keep a look out for the **Humming Bird Hawk Moth**. Seen in a Fyfield garden in August and September, the hawk moth is a summer visitor that migrates regularly each year from the South of France where it is extremely common. About 50 such moths are reported each year in Britain but in the warm weather of 2003 there could well have been

many more sightings between May and September. For illustrations and an article about this moth, see our record book

The year 2003 was the 30th anniversary of **National Tree Week**, a campaign which started with "Plant a Tree Year" in 1973, which followed the devastation to the landscape caused by Dutch Elm Disease. Tree weekends on 7th December but its cycle begins at the end of October with the gathering of seeds, seed germination and then planting the following year. This is organized by the National Tree Council that maintains that up to a million trees are planted every year during the special week.

It is now 25 years since the **Big Garden Bird Watch** was first organized by the RSPB in 1979. It all started with 30,000 children taking part, and by 2001 the event was opened to everyone, 52,000 participating, and for the 24th event in 2003, 314,000 took part. The first bird watch revealed the song thrush was the seventh most common bird in our gardens, and it is now the fifteenth. An average of fifteen starlings per garden was recorded in 1979 and now it is under five. An average of ten house sparrows per garden in 1979 has dropped to five in 2003. These species are now on the "red list" and are of high conservation concern, whereas collared doves first colonised in the UK in the 1950s are now extremely widespread. Of interest also are the greater spotted woodpecker and the nuthatch as these species have also increased in numbers. Why not take part in this year's bird watch over the weekend of 24th/25th January, and help to make it the biggest ever bird watch.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of OWLS will be held in the Essex Rooms 7.45 pm for 8.00 pm, on Monday, 19th January. The title of the talk, given by Bob MacDonald, will be "The Woodland Trust in Essex".

The Woodland Trust, through Bob, is keen to recycle Christmas cards. Please bring any old cards to the meeting for collection.

OWLS Committee

At the 2003 Annual General Meeting, Brian Turnpenny announced that he would be relinquishing the duties of Treasurer from the next AGM. Although the election formality must await the next AGM, the committee have welcomed one nomination for the post. The current Committee is:

Rob Brooks (Chairman) (tel: 01277 364305)
Tanya Welford (Secretary) (tel: 01277 363947)
Brian Turnpenny (Treasurer)
Allan Cook (Programme Secretary)
Anne Brooks
Richard Cook
Mike Devonald
Rosina Lacome

*Rob Brooks
Chairman*

