

# ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY

## *An Occasional Newsletter*

*March, 2005*

### *Number 8*

I hope everyone is happy with our move to Great Stony School. Numbers attending seem to indicate that it was a good move, and we have an excellent programme planned for the rest of this year.

We started 2005 with our usual New Year's party. Everyone seemed to enjoy the games that Rob and Anne had arranged and our attempts at farmyard animal noises were to say the least excruciating!

### ***OWLS Programme:***

The December talk, noted as "to be advised" in early copies of the OWLS programme, has now been arranged. Christine Lavelle will give a talk on the subject of "The Flora of Mt. Kenya and Mt. Kilimanjaro" on Monday, the 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2005.

***Otters:*** Mark Iley presented a very good talk on otters and otter recording at OWLS at the meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> March. It was perhaps surprising that Mark, The Essex Biodiversity Project Officer, had never seen a live otter in Essex, but the animals are very shy. Alas, dead otters had been seen occasionally on road in the country. The evidence of the otter is gathered from the discovery and identification of the droppings of the otter, otter "spraints". Good to report then that a small party from OWLS intend to join a short course in spraint identification to be held at Dedham. From this intelligence, it may transpire that there are otters locally on the River Roding. We look forward to receiving a report on the training!

Further information on otters and their distribution may be found in the Environment Agency and DEFRA websites.

***Programme 2006:*** The OWLS Committee are always keen to hear of suitable talks and speakers. If you have any appropriate suggestions for the programme for 2006 then please let the Committee know. We are also interested in possible visits, both local and distant, when a coach may be hired for the outing. Thanks in anticipation!

### ***UK Phenology Network – When did you see your first bumblebee in 2005?***

The UK Phenology Network sets out to monitor and evaluate changes to nature's events. The Woodland Trust has joined forces with the Centre for Ecology and

Hydrology to assist them in this work. Observing nature's calendar is easy. OWLS can help. OWLS needs to record the earliest dates of the following events:

Leafing:

*Silver Birch*  
*Horse Chestnut*  
*Elder*  
*Hawthorn*  
*Sycamore*

Flowering:

*Blackthorn*

Arrivals – first seen/heard:

*Cuckoo*  
*Swallow*

Nest Building and feeding young:

*Blackbird*

Butterflies – first seen:

*Orange Tip*  
*Peacock*

By recording these sightings and comparing them to previous years, it is possible to determine the effect of global warming and climatic change on our wildlife. Please add news of first sightings in the OWLS RECORD BOOK. It is useful to record a first sighting of a single example, and the first sighting of three examples, where appropriate. If you need further information on the UK Phenology Network this is available on [www.phenology](http://www.phenology).

**Reminder – Record Book:** Our record book is available at all meetings for you to make entries. Don't forget to keep your eyes peeled at all times when out walking and contribute to this year's recordings. The more people taking part in the "Springtime Watch" the better and this will be OWLS contribution to helping some of our key species survive.

**Lee Valley Birdwatching Fair – 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> February, 2005:**

On an extremely cold snowy Sunday in February, fellow member, Kathy Beeson and I set off on one of the organized walks at the Fair, and we were rewarded by the sighting of a Kingfisher on the river banks and also a pair of Great Crested Grebes displaying their head feathers. Unfortunately 2005 was not a good year for bitterns and we were not able to see any at the special Bittern Watchpoint at Seventy Acres Lake. We watched a bird ringing demonstration where a young Blue Tit, who had been ringed on the Saturday, had returned for more on the Sunday! However, the second bird to be caught, an adult Greenfinch, received its ring and we learnt how to tell the age and the sex of these two birds by the marks on their feathers. In the marquees were stands selling a large range of equipment and many books on sometimes individual bird species and on birds throughout the world. On leaving the fair we looked through the telescopes available to see one of a pair of Little Owls high in the trees. Entry to the Fair was £5 and on offer was a varied programme of events and talks. Keep a look out for this event next year as it is highly-recommended.

Browsing amongst the numerous stands in the marquees I picked up programmes of events at Rainham Marsh Reserve and also What's On at Rye Meads in the Lee Valley. For example at Rye Meads on 21<sup>st</sup> April there is a Nestbox watch and an opportunity to see ringing in action. These events are free to RSPB members and only £4 for non-members. If you are interested in any of these events remember I have the leaflet at home. (Tel. Tanya on 01277 363947).

***Epping Forest Field Centre Courses:*** A few pink leaflets were distributed amongst members at the February meeting, but if you were not present, I have a list of interesting courses throughout the year on a variety of wildlife subjects. These are one and two day courses costing between £10 and £40. All courses are led by experienced tutors.

#### ***ESSEX WILDLIFE TRUST NEWS:***

***Essex Trees and Woods Appeal:*** The EWT Appeal now stands at £22,533. When Gift Aid is taken into account this will be over £30,000 and the EWT are now applying the money to Essex Trees and Woods projects. OWLS contributed to this appeal with the two trees purchased in Brian Turnpenny's memory for the Abberton Reservoir Nature Reserve.

***Business Back up to Pre Foot & Mouth Levels:*** Remember the nightmare of Foot & Mouth, followed quickly by the Government announcement that Museum entry was to be free. People changed their leisure time habits. Visits to rural attractions dropped by 60%. The EWT teams at the Visitor Centres have been fighting to get those people back and THEY HAVE NOW DONE IT. For the first time all the Centres are at or above pre Foot & Mouth levels of visitors. Well done Centre Teams!

***EWT Annual Meeting – Sat., 11<sup>th</sup> June:*** The Annual Meeting this year is held at Abberton Reservoir Visitor Centre when the guest speaker will be from the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at Norwich and will be speaking on Global Warming as it might affect the wildlife and people in Essex. Due to field commitments, it is not known as yet whether the speaker will be Professor Andrew Watkinson or Dr. Jenny Gill but they have assured us that it will be one of these two speakers. OWLS are now affiliated to the EWT and any member can attend this meeting.

#### ***Summer Outings:***

***RSPBRainham, Wennington & Aveley Marshes: Sat., 14<sup>th</sup> May – Meet 9.00 a.m. at Lorry Park, Ongar.*** A guided tour has been arranged following the talk we had last year. The tour will start at 10.00 a.m. when we will be able to see the work done on this heritage site including the building of the new education centre. It is a lowland grassland area suitable for breeding and nesting birds

***Coach Outing: RSPB Minesmere, Suffolk: Tuesday, 21<sup>st</sup> June –*** Pick up coach 8.50 a.m. at Fyfield, 9.00 a.m. at Two Brewers Ongar and 9.10 a.m. Budworth Hall. It will take between 2 and 2½ hrs. to reach Minesmere where there is a good Visitor Centre with restaurant. It is a site of about 2000 acres of woodland, sea and meres and there are two nature trails both 1½ miles in length. Cost will be between £10 and £12 per head for the coach (depending on numbers). Entry to the Reserve is free to RSPB

members, otherwise £5 or £3 for concessions. Please telephone Tanya on 01277 363947 to reserve your place on the coach.

***EWT Abbotts Hall Farm: Sat., 16<sup>th</sup> July – Meet 12.45 p.m.(sharp) at Lorry Park, Ongar.*** Tour starts at 2.00 when gates will be shut for security reasons. The 700 acre farm was purchased in 2000 by the EWT and the coastal alignment scheme has been recognized nationally for excellence as the winner of the 2005 Living Wetlands Award. On the farm the hedges and ditches have been replaced and are managed along with arable land providing excellent habitat for breeding farmland birds. In particular we will observe the salt marshes and salt lagoons of the Managed Retreat of the coastal wall. Many bird species previously on the “Amber” list are now using the area.

***Lee Valley Regional Park: Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> August – Meet 10.30 a.m. Lorry Park, Ongar.*** Open waters and surrounding marshes and meadows providing an opportunity to see ducks and water fowl.

HOPE TO SEE YOU ON THESE WALKS.

***Date for your diary – AGM & BBQ: Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2005*** – A reminder about this event commencing 12 noon at Repentance Cottage, Greensted.

#### ***OWLS Committee***

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 Tanya Welford (Secretary)      Tel. 01277 363947  
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 Allan Cook (Programme Secretary)  
 Anne Brooks  
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*Rob Brooks,  
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