

ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY

An Occasional Newsletter



December, 2005

Number 10

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO EVERYONE

The Committee wish all our members a very Happy Christmas and New Year. We have planned our Lectures for next year, our outings and first and foremost our **New Year's Party**. This will be held at Great Stony School at 7.30 p.m. on Saturday, the 7th January. Tickets are on sale from Tanya Welford (01277 363947) at £5 so hurry now and buy your ticket!

For anyone not in possession of a 2006 programme speakers for the early part of the year are as follows:

Monday, 16th Jan.: Marine Life of Essex by Mark Iley, Essex Biodiversity Project.

Monday, 20th Feb.: Owls by Mark Everett.

Monday, 20th March: Climate Change & Essex Wildlife by John Skinner.

Monday, 10th April: The Value of Ringing for Bird Conservation by Jacqui Clark.

FIELD STUDIES COUNCIL

The FSC have sent me a brochure for the 2006 courses throughout the UK. There are courses on many wildlife topics to be held at the Epping Forest Field Centre at High Beech and the next nearest place to Ongar is Flatford Mill where there are some week-end courses. I attended one of these at High Beech last year and it proved to be successful and worthwhile, so if you want to look at the Brochure it will be at our meetings or please telephone me (01277 363947) if you want to borrow it. Day courses cost between £30 and £40 (£10 if it is just a guided walk).

A member has asked me to print in the Newsletter some of the courses for information. The following are held at Epping Forest Field Centre:

Sun. 22 nd Jan. Identifying Trees Without Leaf	Ken Adams	£40
Sun. 29 th Jan. Winter Birds of Lea Valley	Andy Fleming	£32
Sun. 26 th Mar. Botany for Gardeners	Tricia Moxey	£32
Sat. 8 th Apr. British Amphibians	Lee Brady	£32
Sun. 9 th Apr. Advanced British Amphibians	Lee Brady	£40

Sun. 23 rd Apr. Spring Walk.	EF Staff.	£10
Sat. 29 th Apr. An introduction to British Reptiles.	Anne Riddell	£32
Sun. 30 th Apr. Natural History of Veteran Trees.	Tricia Moxey	£32

There are more courses throughout the year, and if you require further information or booking form please telephone the Epping Forest Field Centre on 0208 502 8500 or for week-end courses phone Flatford Mill Centre at 0845 3307368.

A "BEAR" ENCOUNTER!

In September this year David and I visited our son, Richard, who is working in Berkeley University, north of San Francisco. Richard took time off work and drove us to Yosemite National Park, Lake Mono – a migration Lake, and Lake Tahoe – Tahoe City (5000 inhabitants) being a ski resort.

It was on the wooded banks of Lake Tahoe that we came across two Black Bears, possibly mother and juvenile. Black Bears are in fact a very dark brown colour, stand 3ft. 6 ins. in height and are mainly nocturnal. In the area of Yosemite it is recommended you leave all food, cosmetics, etc. in a Bear Box provided and not in the car as bears can badly damage your vehicle. If you come across a bear on your walk you should start waving your arms around and shouting a little but do not run! Bears can move very fast indeed! After a fairly long walk to the beach of Lake Tahoe and back it was about 6.00 p.m. and our car was the only one left in the park in the middle of woodland. We got into the car and as our son, Richard, was leaving the park he said "One thing I never want to see is a Black Bear". I looked to the side and through the window saw two bears at quite close proximity, coming towards us. Richard took a quick glance and put his foot down hard on the accelerator!

The Pacific Coast both north and south of San Francisco is excellent for bird watching. We saw colonies of Pelicans but I admit I was not too keen on the Pelican which was determined to fly in a circle just above my head! Alongside these colonies were many Brandts Cormorants (a far more sleek and smaller bird than our Cormorants with their shaggy plumage). On a rock just in front of the birds wild seals could be seen. In remote estuaries in the north we saw the Snowy Egret, Heron, Dunlins and Willets, and in the gap remaining from the 1906 Earthquake (San Andreas Fault) we stood and watched the Turkey Vultures flying above. Most of all I wanted to see the American Avocet which I understood would be at the migration Lake Mono. These birds are just like our RSPB logo but have colourful pink breast feathers. Unfortunately I missed them by about a fortnight – they had migrated south.

In the Yosemite National Park a fairly common sighting was the Stellar Jay, a bird different from our own Jays, with shiny black and metallic blue plumage and a raucous call. Richard is a mountaineer and knew all the names of the peaks in the area. Half Dome was his favourite and the most famous and he hoped to scale this in the future. Richard was a very good guide!

Lastly Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay Area, is not only famous for its prison. It was a bird island (its Spanish name means 'pelican'). The island now is full of tourists but the Brown Pelican can still be seen flying over the Bay.

Tanya Welford

CHRISTMAS FROM BIRGUIDES

Christmas is approaching and you have not yet bought a present for the close friend or family member. Maybe that friend is not easy to buy for...but for a keen birdwatcher, panic no more! The solution is to be found within Birdguides.

A few years ago I bought a DVD guide to British Birds from Birdguides. It is a version 7 and contains details of 330 birds. These details comprise 700 video clips, 500 sound recordings and 500 illustrations in addition to maps, text, quizzes and lists. Almost all birds that have been seen over 100 times in Britain are included in the DVD. I thought the DVD easy to use and simple to manage the additional facilities to compare birds on the same screen. This version, still being sold, can be recommended at £39.95. However, version 8 has now been issued and is advertised in a recent catalogue received from Birdguides. Although sold at £49.95 it is recommended by *British Birds*.

Birdguides have a seductive slant to their publicity, demonstrated by their award-winning web site. They are also innovative. It is now possible to access bird information through a mobile phone service; information includes options for an Internet news service, access to photographs of almost any British species and on-line identification, text messaging alerts and e-mail information. A keen birdwatcher might just deserve the £95 for all options for a whole year.

Rob Brooks

Contact details are:

Birdguides Ltd., Jack House, Ewden Valley Bolsterstone, Sheffield S36 4ZA.

Tel: 01909 560992

Fax: 0114 288 5711

E-mail: sales@birdguides.com

Web Site: www.birdguides.com

...CHRISTMAS FOR GARDEN WILDLIFE

Do your birds deserve gourmet food? Will your garden birds enjoy a slap-up Christmas lunch? Better to feed them throughout the year, of course. To this end, you may have studied the catalogue offered by CJ WildBird Foods. We did! The catalogue title is *Handbook of Garden Wildlife 2005-2006*, giving a clue to the wide range of ideas for your wildlife. Foods, feeders, nest boxes and baths for birds are followed by a selection of items for hedgehogs, dormice, badgers, foxes (no food, just books!), ladybirds, butterflies, bats and bees. Hygiene practices are not neglected.

We recently ordered some food to attract a wider range of birds into our garden. In the order we included some peanut cakes with insects and seed, kibbled sunflower hearts and mealworms for that special occasion. If you feel that your birds deserve such culinary treats, then request the 92 page catalogue. It is highly recommended.

Rob Brooks

Contact details are:

CJ Wildbird Foods Ltd., The Rea, Upton Magna, Shrewsbury SY4 4UR.

Tel: 0800 731 2820

Fax: 08870 010 9699

Web Site: www.birdfood.co.uk

WASP SPIDERS IN SEVEN KINGS PARK

I am sure most of you will have been watching *Life in the Undergrowth* by David Attenborough on television on Wednesday evening, and the most recent episode explored invertebrates' use of silk, focusing on the different ways that spiders employ the material.

A report from Redbridge Nature Notes issued by the London Borough of Redbridge states that earlier this summer Wasp Spiders were spotted in undisturbed tall grass and herbs in the South East corner of Seven Kings Park. These spiders originated from the continent around the Mediterranean Sea and are relatively new to our shores. First recorded in 1922 in the south coast they have moved gradually north with sightings as far as Cambridge.

The name Wasp Spider comes from the female's white, black and yellow striped abdomen (resembling the colour of a wasp). The male, however, is coloured a pale brown and is significantly smaller being 4 mm with the female measuring in at 15 mm. He waits at the edge of the female's web until she has shed her skin to become mature. He then takes advantage of the fact that the female's jaws are soft, to mate with her in safety. As with most arachnids it is not uncommon for the male to be eaten during mating!

As well as snacking on each other Wasp Spiders feed on grasshoppers, crickets and flying insects caught on their web. The sight of a Wasp Spider encasing a grasshopper in silk is definitely worth seeing, the speed and the tenacity of the action is fantastic. The Wasp Spider's habitat is long grassland not regularly managed. The egg sacs are made on grass leaves and many were seen in the Seven Kings Park, so expect even more next year.

Redbridge Wildlife requests that if you have any wildlife records that you would be willing to share with them, please call them on 020 8501 1426 or e-mail to Fiona.oconnor@redbridge.gov.uk with details. Their address is The Nature Conservation Team, Hainault Forest Country Park, Romford Road, Chigwell, Essex IG7 4QN.

OWLS Committee

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