

ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY

An Occasional Newsletter

August, 2007

Number 13

OWLS have met on several occasions during the summer months for walks and for the Society AGM. At the AGM in June the current Committee were re-elected. In addition Alan Brett was elected as Vice Chairman. Alan works for Ernest Doe's of Fyfield and therefore has connections in the local agricultural community. He is also a member of the Ongar Tree Strategy Steering Committee and is Ongar's Tree Warden. He is a volunteer for Country Care helping to maintain the countryside. He is involved in the general running and fundraising for the Essex Ferret Welfare Society, a Society founded by his wife, Wendy, in February of 1986. We welcome him to our Committee.

Despite the inclement weather the AGM was an event enjoyed by everyone in the beautiful setting of Allan and Rita's home at Mill Lodge, Fyfield.

The first guided walk of the year was on a lovely Spring afternoon in April, when Tricia Moxey took us on our Shelley Tree Walk, starting at Shelley Lodge, across the path to the Church. The churchyard revealed many species of wild flowers, ferns and mature trees. We then passed an area which was thought to have once been an old orchard and then on to Bundish Hall, occasionally stopping to enthusiastically measure old and coppiced tree trunks (two of which were 9ft. and 10 ft. in circumference and probably 150 to 200 years old).

We once again ventured through Ongar Park Wood, this year the weather being dry and warm on an evening in June (last year it had rained throughout the walk)! The walk started at Highwood which runs adjacent to the original Deer Park. The bank from the Deer Park was still quite visible although altered in height. This bank, once five miles in length was considered to be 1000 years old, and Rob told us that in Tudor times it would have taken 32 men to produce 20 meters of bank on one day typically. We walked along the path enjoying the Rhododendrons in flower, the Scots Pine and Sweet Chestnut trees until we reached the M11 bridge. The evening ended with a chat and drink in The Mole Trap!

An apology: It is regrettable that our May speaker, Adam Rochester from Chafford Gorges, did not turn up at the meeting and Rob, our Chairman, has written to the Essex Wildlife Trust stressing that, had we known beforehand that the speaker could not be present, we could have prepared an alternative meeting. We still went ahead with our walk in July when our Guide, Matthew Minter (Adam's colleague) was most apologetic for the Society having been let down. Matthew felt partly responsible as he had had so much time off from work with an ankle problem and then a new baby arriving. Adam had been placed under a lot of pressure at work.

CHAFFORD GORGES – Saturday, 14th July, 2007



Speckled Wood



Pyramidal Orchid

Eight members enjoyed a guided tour of this new 200 acre EWT Reserve created within an urban environment built in the former chalk quarries. The reserve consists of chalk cliffs, sand deposits and deep gorges containing large lakes. We came across some Sarsen stones, their surface unusually lumpy due to the fact that they had been buried for so long under the quarries. Several meadow areas have been created. These are managed by scrubbing out and cutting half the meadow in the winter and the other half the next winter, thus supporting many plant species including Kidney Vetch, Bladder Campion and nine species of Orchid. Our guide explained that it was in fact the presence of the Man Orchid growing within the Gorges which enabled the site to become an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and thus promoted the interest in saving the area from further development. The Orchids we were able to see were the Pyramidal, Common Spotted and Twayblade. In the woodland we spotted Toothwort (a parasitic plant lacking chlorophyll) and Round-leaved Wintergreen, a pretty woodland plant with a pronounced pink stamen, Chafford Gorges being the only place that it grows in Essex.

There are 20 breeding pairs of Heron on the site together with their young. Sand Martins lived within the sand cliffs and the local pub was named the Sand Martin after these birds! Water Rail and Kingfishers could also be seen. The lakes and meadows revealed many species of Dragonflies including the Red Darter, Emporer, Brown Hawker and Black-tailed Skimmer. Many species of butterflies were spotted in the diverse meadows of the Gorges, including Comma (a typical pose of this butterfly being sitting on the ground with black ragged and closed wings), Peacock, Red Admiral, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Speckled Wood, Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Brimstone and Large White. The Cinnabar Caterpillar and Burnet Moth were seen and a wasp gall clung to a plant close to the ground. The sand hills in this area support the Solitary Wasps and Bees. The meadows themselves consisted of much Marjoram, saplings of Dogwood and Silver Birch: Cecil Oak in the hedgerows. Some of the wild flowers were Broomrape (another plant lacking chlorophyll and it is parasitic on the roots of its host), much Centaury and Rose Bay Willow Herb, Agrimony, Teasels and Hairy Bladder Campion. We were not able to see the Kidney Vetch as this was too close to a "sheer drop" over the cliff!

The old tunnels once used in the quarries had proved an excellent habitat for bats and the species in these tunnels were Pipistrelles, Daubenton's, Natterer's and Serotine. A bat walk would be taking place in September. Near the road were Badger sets and our guide told us that badgers could even be seen during the day as they had become tame due to the urban proximity of the Gorges. Birds of Prey which had been seen at the Gorges were Peregrine, Kestrel, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and lastly Hobbys liked the area as dragonflies were part of their diet and they could be seen feeding on the wing.

The new Visitor Centre is built so that the outside eating area stretches out over the Gorge allowing the visitor an excellent view of the lakes and cliffs. We gathered here at the end of our three hour tour, together with our excellent guide who introduced us to his wife and new baby.

RSPB LAKENHEATH FEN, NR. BRANDON, SUFFOLK

The Visitor Centre at Lakenheath Fen has now opened and the 736 acre Reserve is becoming established with new reedbeds. When the RSPB took over the acreage it had been used for agriculture, but the seeds of 100 species of aquatic plants have survived for decades in the peaty soil and they all grew once the marshland was created. Cattle and sheep maintain the grazing marsh for wading birds and ditch plants. The Poplar plantations have been expanded and are popular with the Golden Orioles. The time to see them is in the summer before September when they migrate to Africa. The Reserve is signposted from the B1112 just north of Lakenheath village and the Visitor Centre is open daily from April to September inclusive and weekdays from October to March. The staff are very helpful and for more information call on 01842 863400. A good time to visit the Fen is in May, June and July when there are many different species of Dragonfly and Butterflies. The Brown Hawker was seen and the Black-tailed Skimmer with its beautiful silvery transparent wings and fluorescent blue body. Kestrels, Hobbies and Sparrow Hawks hover over the grassland areas. Cranes have nested at Lakenheath this year – the first in the Fens for over 400 years, and Bitterns can be seen in all seasons of the year. A good day out would be to include the nearby Norfolk Wildlife Trust Reserve of Weeting Heath or Suffolk Wildlife Trust Reserve of Lackford Lakes.

HOLIDAY ACCOMMODATION:

Whilst holidaying in the Western Highlands of Scotland this year David and I unexpectedly met David Baker in the Glencoe Visitor Centre. David Baker and his wife, Christine, previously members of OWLS moved from Fyfield Mill recently and now live in historic Glenn Leac Na Muidhe, Glencoe, Argyll, where they have taken on two fully equipped holiday cottages, each sleeping 6 people in three bedrooms. The cottages are located one mile from the main A82 road and are ideally situated for walking or as a centre for touring the sea lochs. Their home telephone No. is 01855 811598 and they have their own website (www.Glencoemountaincottages.co.uk). David and Christine offer a warm welcome to anyone visiting.

A BEE ORCHID (*Ophrys apifera*) by Rob Brooks.

A Bee Orchid flowered in our Greensted garden this summer. Perhaps this is not surprising; members of Ongar Wildlife Society will have seen occasional proliferations of the plant in recent years, notably in Toot Hill and Fyfield. It seemed strange that our garden plant was a singleton; the soil was characteristically poor and

gravelly but the ground around the plant had not been disturbed and it was a first appearance of the flower in that location in thirty-one years!

The Bee Orchid has figured in several wildlife talks in recent years. The *Flora of Essex* records that it is "a plant with widespread distribution and sporadic and uncertain occurrence." Furthermore "established sites may support a relatively small number of plants for many years. New sites can be discovered with small colonies or large *swarms* of one to two hundred plants in peak years."

The flower is quite distinctive, as OWLS members will know. The extraordinary bee-like flower is even furry to the touch. In *Flora Britannica* it is noted that the flower was thought to have evolved with the intention of encouraging real bees to mate with the flower and so transfer pollen. Apparently, this has never been observed (at least at the time of writing) and, perhaps disappointingly, the flower in Britain is self-pollinating.

Our plant remains. The mower has carefully and thankfully skirted the plant and we eagerly anticipate further developments next spring.

REMINDER: A Walk around the Woodland of Lambourne - Sunday, 19th August. Meet 2.00 p.m. at the Lorry Park, opposite The Two Brewers.

Although within two miles of both the M11 and M25, Lambourne is surprisingly secluded. There has never been a direct route from Abridge to Lambourne. Church Lane, leading to its church, St. Mary and All Saints, starts about one mile east of Abridge. The climb up the lane from the flood plain of the River Roding is perhaps unexpectedly steep, allowing good views of the valley.

The Woodland of the parish is notable and interesting. There is a collection of small, scattered woods. These include the established woods of Ape's Wood, Alder Wood, Great Wood and Soapley's Wood. However, Jubilee Wood is more recent planting. The Essex footpath, Three Forests Way, bisects the parish. The ancient, pollarded woodland of Hainault Forest lies just two miles to the south of Lambourne.

In Pevsner's *Essex* the church is said to be "of quite exceptional charm and historical range". The nave and chancel date from the C12 and the belfry is C15. The interior of the church hosts several monuments to the Lockwood family, one memorial commemorating the loss of a Lockwood at the Charge of the Light Brigade.

Come and enjoy a friendly walk around Lambourne!

MEETINGS – September to December, 2007:

17 th Sept.	Wildlife and Culture of Northern Japan.	Speaker - Paul Hale.
15 th Oct.	Conservation Problems in Paradise.	Speaker – Tricia Moxey.
19 th Nov.	Wings over the Reeds.	Speaker – David Garner.
10 th Dec.	Pond and River Life.	Speaker – Barry Kaufmann-Wright.

OWLS Committee:

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