

ONGAR WILDLIFE SOCIETY

An Occasional Newsletter

August, 2008

Number 14

I hope everyone enjoyed the summer holidays despite all the wet weather! Now it is nearly time for OWLS Autumn meetings. Unfortunately the speakers for our October and November meetings have altered, and the 17th November has still to be arranged.

15th September: Bats by Sylvia Jiggins.

20th October: Wallasea Island – from beginning to end by Brian Dawson.

8th December: Golden Orioles by Paul Mason.

21st September (Sunday): Local Walk around Ashlyns Organic Farm, Bobbingworth. Meet 2.00 p.m. at Ashlyns Shop on the A414.

Our AGM and Picnic was held at the end of June and everyone enjoyed a lovely afternoon in Rob and Anne's garden with wine, food, a beautiful setting, a quiz about trees and then a walk to see a nearby veteran Oak tree. This was a hedgerow Oak, the trunk very knarled and knobbly, an ideal haven for Woodpeckers and Owls.

The Chairman paid tribute to Mike Devonald who sadly died on the 25th June. Mike had been an active member of OWLS for many years and joined the Committee in 2003. Mike was involved in the preparation of the New Constitution for OWLS. He was very knowledgeable on wildlife, and many of us are grateful to him for helping us identify bird species on our walks and visits. He will be missed very much by our members.

Two new members were elected to our Committee: Elaine Jacobs who has lived in the Ongar area since 1967. Elaine is now retired but previously was a Practice Nurse in Ongar. Elaine has been interested in wildlife and the countryside all her life. Also Keith Snow joins the Committee. Keith is fairly new to the Ongar area moving from Chingford just a year ago. He has taught and undertaken research on Mosquitoes for almost thirty years and he has written an article on the subject for this Newsletter. We welcome both Elaine and Keith to the Committee.

Committee 2008/2009: Rob Brooks (Chairman: 01277 364305), Tanya Welford (Secretary: 01277 363947), John Turnbull, Allan Cook, Alan Brett, Anne Brooks, Richard Cook, Christine Feetham, Rosina Lacome, Elaine Jacobs, Keith Snow.

TREE WARDENS FOR ONGAR: The EFDC Ongar Community Tree Strategy document is now published and is available for anyone to look at in the Library. The outcome of the meetings of this Tree Strategy Committee, is the formation of a new group of Tree Wardens consisting of four OWLS members and a co-ordinator, Bob MacDonald who is also the Ongar Representative of the Woodland Trust. The Tree Wardens are as follows:

Alan Brett, responsible for Shelley area. Rob Brooks and Tricia Moxey responsible for Greensted. Bob MacDonald – Ongar central and Tanya Welford – Marden Ash.

If anyone has any concern about a tree/hedgerow in any particular area then please contact your local Tree Warden. The action plan for the future will be planting in new areas and conservation of trees. Conservation of ancient and veteran trees is of particular importance because of the enormous biodiversity found in them and because they are part of our national heritage. The Woodland Trust monitor ancient trees through their Web Site www.ancient-tree-hunt-org.uk. An **ancient** tree is one which is in its final stages of life. A **veteran** tree has reached a mature phase of its life and a **notable** tree is one of local importance. More information on the important trees in the Epping Forest area can be found on the website www.favouritetrees.com.

VISIT TO KEW GARDENS: A full coach of members and their friends set off from Ongar to Kew on Saturday, 12th July. The weather was thankfully dry for most of the day. In the glasshouses were some interesting and exotic plant species, and not to be missed was the new Treetop Walkway with fantastic views over the gardens. The oldest pot plant at Kew was in the Palm House, and this palm, now much supported, had been there since Kew was first opened.



One plant species in the Temperate House was Strelitzia which has been grown at Kew since 1773 and was named after Joseph Banks, the first official Director of Kew in honour of Queen Charlotte, Duchess of Mecklenberg-Strelitz who lived at Kew for many years. Its more common name comes from the flower which resembles the showy Birds of Paradise.



Andrew Bailey, a previous member of OWLS and son of Carole Bailey a current member, won first prize with his photograph of a robin entitled "Tug of War". His photograph has appeared in an earlier issue of the RSPB magazine, and is now on display just outside the Pavilion at Kew. Andrew was in the process of digging out a new pond in a wild part of his garden in Suffolk and the opportunity arose to take this shot of the Robin pulling out the

worms trying to find safety in the lawn. Congratulations to Andrew as the winner of the "Wild Life in the Garden" section of the International Garden Photographer of the Year competition. Some of you may remember that in the past Andrew came to show us some of his beautiful wildlife slides.

Tanya Welford

Mosquitoes

Mosquitoes, or gnats as they are commonly called in this country, can be troublesome insects especially during the summer months.

Mosquito bites lead to raised wheals and reddening of the skin accompanied by intense irritation. This is the result of an allergic reaction to the secretion that the mosquito pumps into the skin as it feeds. This fluid contains an anticoagulant which prevents the blood from clotting and an anaesthetic to allow the mosquito to bite without causing pain, and hence feed unnoticed. The fluid also serves to dilute the blood, so making it easier for it to be sucked through the mosquito's fine feeding tube.

Before condemning all mosquitoes, two points should be made. Firstly, a quarter of the thirty-three species of mosquito recorded from this country feed on birds and small mammals and do not bite humans. Secondly, only female mosquitoes are blood feeders - male mosquitoes feed exclusively on nectar and honeydew.

All mosquitoes need water in which to start their lives, but the type of water may vary considerably. Some kinds of mosquito develop in ponds and ditches; others are found in pools of water that form after autumn and winter rain and which dry by the following spring. Another group of mosquitoes occurs in water that collects in rot-holes in trees which are formed after large branches have broken off. Yet others mature in containers such as rainwater barrels and horse troughs, as well as buckets, watering cans and other similar items left in gardens. One British mosquito even selects underground water that collects in flooded basements, the foundations of dwellings, drains and in underground railway tunnels.

On summer evenings swarms of mosquitoes may be seen. These are mating swarms and are made up of tens or even hundreds of male mosquitoes, all of the same species, performing an aerial figure of eight dance. The purpose of the male swarm is to attract female mosquitoes of the same species. When a female enters the swarm, one of the males immediately mates with her and she then flies away to find a blood meal so that her eggs will develop. When they have matured she seeks a suitable place to lay her several hundred eggs. Depending on how long she survives, she may lay up to three further batches of eggs.

In this locality there are three different *Anopheles* mosquitoes with the potential to spread malaria, given sufficiently long spells of warm weather for the malaria parasites to develop within their bodies. Warm periods are predicted to occur more frequently in the future as a result of global climate change, and hence there is a possibility that malaria may return to this country after a long absence.

Keith Snow

Leaf Miners and the Horse Chestnut

The large horse chestnut in our garden is the parent to numerous small saplings. In the spring, the mature tree is fully decked in 'candles', white flowers that become the most prominent natural feature in the spring garden. The display is short-lived, but rather than a graceful passage into full leaf, followed by the usual heavy crop of conkers, the leaves become affected by yellow or brown patches. Some of the afflicted leaves are even forced to desert the tree in early summer. This is the second year in the locality of a very heavy incidence of leaf mining. The discolouration is ugly and at first sight it might be concluded that the horse chestnut could be severely stressed.

The source of the problem is the leaf miner, the larvae of the *cameraria ohridella* moth.¹ The larvae mine into the leaf to cause damage, and this may be considerable with up to 700 larvae present on a single leaf. First observed in Greece in the 1970's, the moth has moved through N Europe with the initial outbreak in England discovered in the Borough of Wimbledon in 2002. Since then the moth has travelled at a rate of 40-60 km/year to cover much of SE England, the Midlands and East Anglia. The leaf miners now populate the N Norfolk coast. Of course, this spread has not only been attributed to windborne moths but is also accelerated by humans and cars, apparently explaining the rapid increase of disease into town-centres.

The damage is unsightly. Small patches of diseased leaf expand to cover much of the leaf, which shrivels and drops from the tree in early summer. The remaining leaves on the tree darken but from a distance the chestnut tree can still appear reasonably healthy. It may be that the leaf size is reduced but no research has been noted to support this. The crop of conkers appears normal. Strangely, bearing in mind the extensive damage to the leaf, the disease does not kill the tree, and the long-term health of the tree does not seem to be impaired. However the disease is in its early stages in this country and it remains to be seen how it will develop in the changing climate. Despite the impression, the disease and its effects do not seem to arouse serious alarm among arborists. Surprisingly, the horse chestnut has been observed to fight back – trees that have lost a large proportion of their leaves have been observed to re-flush and flower later in the season. The red chestnut is not affected.

What can be done to limit the effect of the disease, or even to hasten its eradication? It is acknowledged that spraying is impractical especially in a mature horse chestnut. Forestry Research, on whose website this note is based, propose only the thorough collection of fallen leaves in autumn followed by their incineration, if permitted, or composting the leaves below a 10 cm covering of earth to suppress the pupae and reduce the breeding of the moths in the spring.

Where are the horse chestnut trees in and around Ongar? Have you noticed the affliction on the local horse chestnut trees? Have you noticed significant stress in any local trees, over and above that described above? Are there any local trees that are free of the leaf miner? As autumn approaches, have you noticed any trees that have re-flushed? Please report all information and sightings to Ongar Wildlife Society!

¹ www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/leafminer