

**The Naturalist.**  
**Newsletter of the BSDNHS**  
**No 11. December 2010.**

From Bob Reed:

Dear Member,

I am writing this newsletter in the middle of one of the coldest early winter periods we have had for many years. This part of the country seems to have got off lightly regarding snowfall but I have recorded temperatures of 21degF(-6 deg C) in our garden a few nights ago. Yesterday, as I was walking in Pishiobury Park a small flock or 'wisp' of six Snipe settled briefly on the frozen pasture near to the spring. Birds like this must be having a really hard time of it and will go to some of our spring fed wetlands which still have unfrozen areas to feed. I am pleased to be able to include news from some of our members on various local items of natural history and would welcome more of you to contribute items of wildlife interest, even simple records and observations would be well received. We have reports from Jim Fish on the moths and butterflies, and from Chris Swan on the birds. The full report for the Big Forest Bird Watch is available in hard copy or on the Bird Group website. Hugh Coe has been soldiering on with the survey of Bloodhounds Wood. He has had the support of several members and has produced an interim report. There is more surveying to be done here in the New Year so please put yourself forward to help. Hugh has got this project off to a really good start and even if you are a novice at natural history there is no reason why you should not team up with an 'expert' who I am sure will be more than happy to share their knowledge with you. I shall be doing some small mammal trapping in the wood during February and would welcome some help with setting out and checking the catch. Similarly, we could very easily have a mothing evening and set out a Malaise trap to catch hover flies etc - there are many possibilities so please join in!

With this newsletter you will receive your subscription reminder for 2011, please do pay promptly as this will avoid extra costs incurred if the Treasurer has to send out reminders - thank you!

And finally..... this newsletter seems to get longer each year which is excellent! I do not think we are in the position to produce a 'Transactions' in the old style but may be this is the modern equivalent, it depends on your contributions so please keep them coming in. With my retirement from school teaching I have lost my photocopying facilities but this newsletter has been copied courtesy of the National Trust at Hatfield Forest who are happy for us to use their machine. This facility is very much welcomed and we are very grateful to the Trust to allow us to do this - thank you!

And very finally..... don't forget 'Badgers Patch' if you are a website user, now I am retired I am endeavouring to keep this more up-to-date and will report on society activities as well as other items of local wildlife interest. To get to 'Badgers Patch' go through Google and don't forget the capital letters!

**Report on the Summer Programme.**

We had a good start to the year with our afternoon visit to Garnetts Wood where we were treated to what looked like snowdrifts of Wood Anemones interspersed with Primroses. We did our usual thing of making our biodiversity count and came up with a total of 60 species of birds, plants, insects other invertebrates etc. We had a very interesting evening guided walk around Birchanger Wood with the warden who explained and demonstrated the effect of the woodland management. We were pleased to be able to find some Early Purple Orchids on bloom in amongst the Bluebells. It must have been a good walk because it was dark by the time we got back to Oaklands Park where Doris Clewett-Price treated us to tea and refreshments. The Big Forest Bird Watch went ahead on the 16th of May as planned and was reasonably supported by 12 members of the society and Bird Group. As in previous years a good variety of birds were recorded, a detailed report on the data and findings has been produced by David Arch and can be provided on request. Please support this more in future, it is really good to get out on the forest before the general public and 7:30 a.m. is really not too early! On the 4<sup>th</sup> June we went pond dipping in the River Stort at Spellbrook. This stretch of river still retains a good cross-section of weed beds and we found a good variety of invertebrates including a lot of fish fry. We were able to assign a biological index score of over 80 which is much different to previous years down at Parndon where we could only manage a score in the region of 20. It just shows

you what difference having a healthy weed bed population makes. One spectacular find was a long bodied dragonfly nymph probably an Emperor. On the 15th of June I led a joint meeting with the Hatfield Regis History Group to look at Pishiobury Park. We had special permission to walk up to the House and look at the ha-ha wall. As you will be aware the Park is on my doorstep and I have always had a special interest in the area. The relevance nowadays is that the Park represents one of the very few areas of unimproved grassland left in Hertfordshire. There are 70 acres here with scattered ancient trees as well as access to wet meadows and wet woodland. As far as I can see there has never been any proper recording done here and I have made it my aim to record as much as possible of the biodiversity to flag up its importance. If anyone would like to help with this task I would be only too pleased for them to get in contact with me. If people would like to come along when I am doing some recording e.g. small mammal trapping, bat recording, wild flowers etc then please let me know and give me a contact. The meeting on the 3rd of July to survey the new pond on Sawbridgeworth Marsh had to be cancelled because of the unusually dry Spring and early summer, this meant that there was hardly any water left. A few members attended and had a good guided walk of the reserve. Since that time these ponds have refilled and have colonised with several different types of water weed, they are an excellent resource for the Marsh and it is all the more pleasing as our late President, John Fielding and long-time warden of the Marsh always wanted a pond dug out here. The Big Forest Butterfly Watch was not given a date due to the difficulty in choosing the best weather. In the event Jim Fish chose an excellent hot July afternoon for us to look for the Silver Washed Fritillary in the western coppices, we had a superb afternoon which was well attended. We were privileged to see numerous Silver Washed Fritillaries disporting themselves in the glades along the forest rides. On the 11th and 12th September we participated in the Hatfield Forest WoodFest with our experimental 'BioBlitz' to highlight biodiversity in the coppices. The very first event 'Mushroom Madness' got off to a flying start with a number of people and children collecting a huge number of fungi for Shirley Watson to identify! After that, and a bit disappointingly, in spite of all our efforts including a Heath Robinson public address system we only managed to attract a nucleus of people for the other events. I found the weekend personally exhausting and walked backwards and forwards to the woodland block 16 times! I think the principle of the event was sound but it was just not appropriate for this particular event. The small mammal trapping was particularly disappointing as all of our traps yielded not a single animal, as a consequence and because this was very poorly attended I cancelled the planned trapping the following weekend. You will be receiving your copy of the Summer Programme in the New Year. Please support these events as they are core activities for the society and are always interesting and informative not to mention refreshments afterwards!

### **Barn Owl Boxes.**

Mention has been made earlier this year of these boxes whose construction was spurred on by the successful breeding of Barn Owls at Thorley Flood Pound this year. The idea was promoted by the HMWT and finances were generously provided by the Stort Valley Project which closed earlier in the year. Eight boxes were built and I reconnoitred sites for them with Peter Wilkinson. To date, six boxes have been put up at Tednambury Farm, South House Farm, Sayes Park, Parndon Mead and Stanstedbury Farm. Two more will be put up around the Pishiobury Backwater Loops early in the New Year. Interestingly, whilst putting up one box we decided to investigate a hollow Oak nearby where we found owl pellets during our reconnoitring. Much to everyone's surprise, Peter fished out an adult male Barn Owl, there was also a female in the tree! The male bird was weighed and found to be in good condition, it was ringed and recorded and put back in the tree. Peter said that the tree was unsuitable for breeding and so hopefully they may use the nearby nest box. We hope for success for these boxes in the future and they are an important element for the Living Landscapes Vision for the Stort Valley.

Proposed marina site at Bishop's Stortford.

### **Proposed Bishops Stortford Marina.**

I was asked to give a short presentation to the 2020 Vision Committee regarding this proposed development and its impact on the River. The presentation was well received and I was pleased to be supported by John Bryden from the Environment Agency. We wait to see what happens in the future but if the development goes ahead it will have a damaging effect both on the biodiversity of the Navigation and the river above Bishops Stortford. I understand from the EA that in these circumstances their priority is to protect the very important and special

biodiversity in the backwater loops and they seek substantial litigation to ensure that the impact on the River is at as low a level as possible and could in the long run be beneficial if managed properly. It is really refreshing to see a change in attitude of the EA who in previous years have been responsible for such brutal treatment of our local waterways. Nowadays, they are much more sympathetic and are very keen to reinstate natural channels and waterways where there is no threat to property from flooding. We have established a very positive and fruitful relationship with the EA and this is something that I feel we should be exploiting in the society. We have been offered the opportunity to attend workshop type sessions run in conjunction with the EA, teaching us sampling and identification techniques, the results of which will be used by the EA in monitoring the health and quality of our local river. I have two find out more details but would ask you to support this project if the opportunity of Wales itself to us. More details later.

## **Butterfly and Moth Report.**

### **Butterflies**

It certainly wasn't a Butterfly Summer with a few exceptions.

More numerous Species included Ringlet, Comma, Brown Argus, and Common Blue.

The highlight of the year was the Silver Washed Fritillary in Hatfield Forest, on our

Visit in July on probably the hottest day of the year, 20 plus of these beautiful Butterflies were observed including two pairs mating. I visited the Forest on three more occasions and observed three more matings, which hopefully bodes well for next season.

The Marbled Whites on the old Rye Street allotment site and adjoining fields also did well with 23 seen on one day. Small Tortoiseshells had a better year than they have had recently, possibly helped by the immigration that occurred during 2009 when good numbers arrived from the Continent.

The Painted Lady had a poor year with mostly singles being seen compared to the thousands seen during 2009.

### **Moths**

The total number of Macro Moth Species recorded in our Garden moth trap (the trap is shared between myself and a friend whose garden abuts on to mine) was 271 of which six species were new to the gardens.

Seven species of Hawkmoth were recorded, Lime, Privet, Large Elephant, Pine, Eyed Poplar and the day flying Hummingbird Hawkmoth.

This year has also been poor for migrants, the Vestal and Red Necked Footman being the most notable ones caught.

A Micro moth *Diaphania Perspectalis* (sorry no English name) a native of China,

Japan and Korea where it is a pest, was caught on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August only the fifth British record of this species. It is thought that it was probably imported as a larva on ornamental Box shrubs.

With the six new species this year our cumulative species total between 1993-2010 now stands at 429. This total for Hertfordshire is second only to Rothamsted who have been going since 1932.

Jim Fish.

## **BISHOP'S STORTFORD AND DISTRICT NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY**

### **Interim Bird Report for 2010**

2010 will no doubt be remembered as a year with two severe winters, but for birdwatchers there is no inactive season since birds may be observed throughout the year.

Reports from the far north of Europe suggest that 2010 was a very good breeding year for the Waxwing and very large numbers of this attractive winter visitor have been recorded arriving in the UK. Some of these have now reached the Bishop's Stortford area and it is well worth keeping an eye open for them. Look for Starling-sized birds in berry-bearing trees and shrubs and you may well be rewarded with views of Waxwing. In addition, good numbers of winter thrushes (Fieldfare and Redwing) are making the most of this year's bumper berry crop in hedgerows and gardens. Golden Plover are again being seen in local fields and are worth looking out for in the area around Trims Green, where a flock of 321 was observed on 2<sup>nd</sup> January.

Some highlights of the earlier months of the year now follow. There is no doubt that 2010 has again been a good year for raptors, with very many sightings of Buzzard in the area, together with increased sightings of Red Kite (including one over central Bishop's Stortford on 28<sup>th</sup> May), Merlin, Hobby and Peregrine. Little Egrets are being seen with increased frequency in the River Stort valley and a male Ring Ouzel was seen near Trims Green on 10<sup>th</sup> April.

Hatfield Forest has been graced again with successful breeding of the Common Tern on the tern raft on the lake, and the Grasshopper Warbler has been heard in the marsh near London Bridge.

Stansted Airport Lagoons have again had Little Ringed Plover, with 8 adults observed on 17<sup>th</sup> June and a splendid drake Garganey graced Sheering Lower Road Scrape throughout the early summer months.

The foregoing can only be a small sample of very many sightings, which are available in full on the Bird Group's excellent web site, the address of which is <http://www.btinternet.com/~bsbirdgroup> This site also contains trip reports and a host of additional information. In addition, the Bird Group continues to meet on the first Monday of each month (or the second Monday if the first is a Bank Holiday) at 8.00 p.m. at The Bricklayers Arms on Hadham Road. These meetings are completely informal and new members and visitors are most welcome to attend.

Chris Swan

## **BLOODHOUNDS' WOOD SURVEY**

Members will recall that David Harvey, who owns Bloodhounds' Wood to the north-east of Bishop's Stortford, had contacted the Society to see if we would be interested in carrying out a bio-diversity survey of the wood, prior to forestry work being undertaken. The wood is recognized as a relic of ancient woodland & was last coppiced around twenty-five years ago. It has great beauty in all seasons, where the coppice stools of hornbeam are a visual reminder of the past. In the spring, primroses, wild daffodils & bluebells carpet the understory, while small colonies of early purple orchid, & nettle-leaved bellflower add to its diversity. This autumn, which has perhaps been one of the most colourful of recent years, certainly provided a reward to those venturing into Bloodhounds' embrace. Here, at this time of year the first woodcock has been flushed &, encouragingly, a few goldcrests have returned following an absence since the harsh winter.

Some work has already been undertaken by members, but we still need more members to take an interest in this survey. Fortunately, David has found that his own schedule has had to be put back, with the work now unlikely to begin until next autumn. Thus we have the opportunity to fill in some of the gaps that need to be filled. The flora, in particular, does need a more specialized presence &, because this specialism is the more likely to show more dramatic changes once the light is allowed into the wood, it is vital that we establish a baseline before forestry work takes place. Here I have to apologise to those members that expressed an interest in the survey & who have not been contacted. I had hoped that I could put members in touch with a member prepared to lead a particular specialism. Unfortunately this has been difficult to achieve, but I am still trying to get as many members involved as possible. Surveying is the one sure way of mastering the subject area!

To date, we have managed to carry out surveys on birds, flora, mosses, lichens, moths, butterflies & fungi, with small mammal traps being set up as soon as the shooting season is over. Furthermore, we have also managed to establish a baseline for the tree species in the wood. So in spite of our limited presence, we should have some valuable data against which to assess changes in the wood's bio-diversity in future years. This, surely, is what any self-respecting natural history society should be about?

My thanks to the following who have contributed to the survey so far:

Jim Fish, Ralph Gilbert, Michael Hurford, Colin Plant, Bob Reed & Andy Saunders.

It is hoped that we can arrange another members visit early next year when we can perhaps recruit more participants to the project. Meanwhile, if you wish to just enjoy a walk around or through the wood, please ensure that you stick to the footpaths as you will understand that I do need to clear the names of members involved with the survey with David. Meanwhile, if you have any observations or enquiries about the project, please ring me on 01279 651050

Hugh Coe 8 November '10

**Postscript:** Many of you will have known the excellent local naturalist and our stalwart member, the late Charles Watson. Charles specialist areas were entomology and plants, he was an excellent field recorder and along with John Fielding and Geoffrey Sell carried out moth light trapping in many locations locally. Shirley Watson has donated Charles' various traps and petrol generator to the society, we are very grateful for this equipment and hope to make good use of it in projects like the Bloodhounds Wood Survey.

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