

# The Naturalist.

Newsletter of the BSDNHS

No 3. April 2007

From Bob Reed:

First of all a big thank you to those who have helped to keep the society going in the past year. Especially, Carol for keeping up bookings for evening speakers, to Barrie for keeping our books in order, to Francis for being so reliable and willing in providing the tea and coffee break, to Chris for the admirable way in which he runs the meetings and lastly for Margaret who keeps track of the Minutes.

We cannot pretend that it has been a great year for the society. Although there has been a steady attendance at meetings, for which we are grateful, there has been a reduction in people renewing subscriptions meaning that, after Christmas, we shall only be able to hold meetings once a month. If you look back at the attendance register for meetings 10 years ago you will realise just how many people have either moved away or moved on to that great nature reserve in the sky. All this means not only loss of members but also of their knowledge and expertise. Currently, we are finding it difficult to replace this and very few new members are coming forward. Nevertheless, it is important to be positive and to keep the society going. We live in a very fortunate area for wildlife with the whole length of the River Stort Valley and Hatfield Forest freely available to us. I feel that these are areas we should be concentrating on and this is reflected in the direction in which I would hope to see the society going in the next year. I think that it is important that we recognise what we have to offer new members. Probably, an evening talk and a cup of tea or coffee will neither attract nor hold new and especially younger members. I am proposing some new ideas both at the AGM and in this newsletter which may make our society more attractive. One of the things which is not always clear is exactly what does the society do? Originally, people probably came together not only through a common interest in nature but they may well have been collectors of moths or butterflies etc. Today, these the collecting reason no longer exist so I have written out what we might consider to be the modern aims and objectives of the society for your perusal. It is envisaged that these would be included on an information sheet available to potential members.

## *Proposal for statement of Aims and Objectives for the society.*

1. Provide a forum and meeting point for those interested in natural history in the Bishops Stortford area.
2. Promote interest and study of natural history in the Bishop Stortford area through a programme of talks, visits, workshops, activities, surveys and publicity.

3. Develop a particular interest in the Stort Valley area through ongoing surveys and project work, including nature reserves and the wider countryside.
4. Where possible be able to provide records and information relevant to development and planning applications in the area.

Communicate and liaise with other wildlife and environmental groups locally and in the wider county regions.

### **Themed evenings.**

It is proposed that each meeting have a theme known in advance. I will do my best to provide either specimens or photographs and invite people to name them. It will be a quiz type approach. Obviously, help would be appreciated in the form of members bringing in specimens or objects related to the theme.

### **Records, observations and sightings.**

Every meeting we assiduously record these and then do nothing with them. It is proposed that the records be entered into a 'Naturalists Diary'. This would be in looseleaf format and can easily be added to. The records could refer to a specific area for which members have developed 'ownership'. It would be nice to restart weather records which always used to be a regular feature. Volunteers?

### **Studying the Stort Valley.**

I will say again that we are very lucky to have such a facility close to hand with such good access. How many of us really know the valley and have walked its whole length? As a local natural history society it might be expected that we know a lot about its wildlife. We might know something about the birds and plants but what else? I have divided up the river according to sections delineated by the locks. Above Bishops Stortford it can be divided into the section which has water all year and that which dries out in summer. It is probably too ambitious at present but I think that it should be the ultimate aim of the society to have a member(s) who regularly walk 'their section' and can report back items of wildlife interest. These items could go into the Naturalists Diary and be a valuable record. Please volunteer if you are able to adopt a section of river. I hope this can be a developing theme for the society.

### **Summer programme.**

I have put together a summer programme which focuses on nature reserves and wildlife sites locally. You will have received the summer programme either at the AGM or with this newsletter. Please support these meetings, there is the added incentive of refreshments available each time! Please let me or the organiser know if you are planning to attend. Potential new members have shown an interest in the summer programme and therefore we are producing posters for what I believe is the first time, please volunteer to take one and put them up in a prominent position.

### **Photographic competition.**

It is proposed to hold an ongoing competition for the best natural history photograph which tells a story. Photographic quality is important but the entry will be judged on what is being shown. The photograph will need to be produced as a print for judging. Details are being finalised but it is likely to be judged at the next AGM. There will be a prize(s) for the winners! Please go out and get photographing!

### **Offer of a new venue for meetings.**

Those of you who attend meetings regularly will know that Ade Clarke, Hatfield Forest property manager offered us the use of the education base at the Shell House. For a range of reasons it was decided that this would not be 100% suitable especially in the winter. Subsequently, Ade has offered us the use of the Meeting Room in the office block. The room is not large but is comfortable, heated and well-equipped. It has parking and easy access. It may well be that members may feel that the same objections apply as did to the Shell House. However, it is free, it is on National Nature Reserve and we would almost certainly attract the younger members of staff and volunteers from the National Trust. It may well be that finances may eventually make the choice for us.

### **Stort Valley Wild website.**

This is an exciting development which may well hold the key for the society's future. Whether we like it or not this is the direction in which natural history is going and one which we must follow if we have any thoughts of recruiting younger members. The administrator who we hope will attend the AGM has kindly allowed us to have a page on this web site, this means that we should achieve more publicity. This web site is dedicated to publicising wildlife in our local area. There are areas in which items and photographs can be posted. There are sections for Hatfield Forest and Birchanger Wood. There is a forum section in which people are invited to communicate with each other and exchange ideas, views and information. This is an up-to-date opportunity for the society to go forward in the next stage of its development but it is totally dependent on input from individuals. So please, if you have an Internet connection please log on to [www.stortvalleywild.co.uk](http://www.stortvalleywild.co.uk) and contribute. This is an opportunity which we have looked for a long time and could be the making of our society but only if we make it so. Please do not miss it, even if you do not have a computer then please let me have your comments, ideas, records etc and we can post them onto the web site.

### **Bishop's Stortford carnival opportunity.**

The society is planning to have a publicity stand at the carnival on 23<sup>rd</sup> June on Sworders Field. We need volunteers to a) help set up from 10.00am, b) man the stand during the afternoon from 12.00 until 5.00pm. If you are able to help then please call Bob on 600726 as soon as possible. If you have any ideas about the stand and would like to help prepare it then that would be even better. The theme will be 'Nature Conservation and Wildlife in the Stort Valley' with an emphasis on publicity and recruitment. We could run some type of competition for added attraction and as a fund raiser. Ideas? If only one or two people volunteer then we cannot go ahead so please put yourself forward to help.