

The Naturalist.

Newsletter of the BSDNHS

No 6. March 2008.

From Bob Reed:

Dear Member,

What a pleasure it is to be able to write this newsletter in such a positive way. Our move to Hatfield Forest has proved to be very beneficial to the society. It is sad that we have not seen some of the old faces but equally well we have recruited a significant number of new members and each evening meeting is now regularly attended by 30 or so visitors and members. We are very grateful to the staff of the National Trust for allowing us the use of the Meetings Room and getting it ready for us each evening. This new venue has a totally different feel and ethos about it and when I stand at the entrance, looking out over the ancient forest, blanketed in darkness with the stars shining above, then I realise, as we all should, how fortunate we are to have this opportunity given to us. As we do not have to pay for the hire of the room and with the healthy state of subscription renewal and new members we can go confidently ahead and book a range of interesting speakers for the coming winter season. In the meantime I have been very keen to promote 'Forest Nature' and its activities regarding monitoring and recording Forest wildlife. By the time you read this, 'Forest Nature' will have been officially launched at the AGM. Several activities have already gone ahead and a number are planned for the coming summer. As I suspected, support for these activities, has come as much from other Forest volunteers as from members of our society. This is fine, but do please try and support our surveys and monitoring on our local National Nature Reserve, any work that we do will be eagerly received by the staff who simply do not have time during the working day to carry out these activities. Below, I have given reports on the surveys undertaken to date.

Spawning frogs and toads.

12 visitors and members braved the darkness with torches and unfortunately found not a single sign of spawning activity although it was happening in our garden ponds. We did see three fish- one perch and two roach and we disturbed the ducks but otherwise the Decoy Lake in particular was very disappointing with its lack of life. There are a variety of measures proposed to restore the lake to its original state of high biodiversity and 'Forest Nature' has been invited to carry out a baseline survey during the summer against which improvements can be measured.

Deer Census.

Several brave souls ventured out on to the Forest towards the end of March, in driving rain and deep mud. Transects were walked from one end of the Forest to the other recording presence of Deer droppings. A formula applied to this can give an estimate of the Fallow Deer population. We also walked the perimeter of six coppice compartments and recorded the use of Deer paths entering or leaving the woodland. The last exercise was the use of a thermal imaging device to look for deer at night. This device shows up any warm source as a white shape. The survey met with varying degrees

of success but does show that the Forest is almost carpeted with the white images of rabbits after dark. A fox was observed hunting rabbits and there were several sightings of badgers in the open. Success with Deer was variable because most of them were out feeding on the perimeter of the Forest!

Dormouse survey.

The nest boxes have been collected in, repaired, and are waiting to be put out again along with the nest tubes. This must happen as early as possible in April and the nest tubes will need checking during the summer.

Oxlip Survey.

This proved to be a highly successful and interesting afternoon and it was disappointing that only six people attended. The aim of the exercise was to check and monitor colonies of Oxlips located in previous years. This we were successful in doing and learnt how to tell Oxlips from Primroses and Cowslips. It was interesting to see the typical Forest floor flora of Oxlips, Herb Paris, Wood Sorrel, Primroses, Barren Strawberry and Violets. The afternoon gave us an insight into the interesting and varied flora found on the Forest.

Bat training in Epping Forest.

On Saturday 29th of March 10 members and visitors spent the day in Epping Forest being instructed by two of the Forest staff. There is a five-year study being undertaken in the Forest and we were shown roosting and feeding sites for bats as well as the use of ultrasonic detectors and the subsequent analysis on a PC to identify the bat that made the call. It was a thoroughly interesting, absorbing and stimulating day with many ideas to bring back to our own Forest. It is hoped that we may be able to form a small Bat Group within 'Forest Nature' to help the Essex Bat Group with their survey of the southern part of the Forest on the 17th of May. They have already recorded nine species of bats last year including the rare Barbastelle, and there is obviously a lot of scope for further research and recording.

The Hermitage.

Earlier this year, in conjunction with the Stort Valley Project, a group of us carried out Hawthorn scrub clearance on this area of unimproved, neutral grassland adjacent to the River Stort between Sawbridgeworth and Old Harlow. The land is not a nature reserve and the farmer has given us permission to manage and study it for primarily, wild flowers and butterflies. This is an excellent opportunity for a society to adopt a small study area of its own. During the summer there will be an evening visit combining a moth trapping session at the Gibberd Garden.

Wood Fest 2008.

It is proposed to mount a display of the work carried out by 'Forest Nature'. It will also be an opportunity to publicise the BSNHS and recruit new members. Please sign up to help even if only for a couple of hours.

Dates for your diary.

Sat May 17th Essex Bat Group Meeting.

Sun May 18th. Big Forest Bird Watch. Meet main car park 7:30 a.m.

Tues May 27th. Parndon Wood Nature Reserve. 6.45pm. Joint meeting with Hatfield Heath group.

Fri June 6th. Evening visit to the Gibberd Garden. Meet at 7.00pm, park at the garden. Walk to the Hermitage and then return to the garden for moth trapping. We have suggested a £2 donation per head to the Gibberd Garden.

Fri 4th July. 6.30pm Main gate. Pond dipping in the Decoy Lake to collect baseline data.

September 6th and 7th. Wood Fest.

If you would like to be included in 'extra' bat evenings and checking dormouse nest tubes then please let Bob Reed know.

For all of the above please make sure that you have signed up and left a contact number or address.

Full details of any events can be obtained from Bob Reed 01279 600726 or

coppicereed@hotmail.com

Our relationship with the 'stortvalleywild' website has not proved to be as fruitful and useful as it could be. The way in which the site is run is to invite controversy and criticism and this has resulted in alienating many of those who should be contributing to this website. It is proposed to start our own weblog or 'blog' to try and ensure that we continue to have Internet participation. The aim of the blog will be to inform interested individuals of what might be seen on local nature reserves at any particular time, it will also seek to celebrate our local wildlife and will also hold our forthcoming list of events and details - at least that is what is proposed! There will also be the facility to listen to sound recordings made on our local wildlife sites. Watch this space! If anyone is interested in reading this blog then please contact Bob Reed for logon details. The site is to be 'read only' and does not invite comments, I should be pleased to hear comments verbally or through telephone and e-mail contact. The idea is to start small and see how we go.

The fact is that we have made an excellent new start, please support the events and keep things going so that we can fulfil the potential and build on the success of 'Forest Nature'. Bob Reed.