

The Naturalist.

Newsletter of the BSDNHS

No 7. February 2009.

From Bob Reed:

Dear Member,

I apologise for the late arrival of this newsletter. Both Margaret and I have had very busy autumn terms at school in addition to the other things with which we involve ourselves. So far this winter season we have had an excellent programme of talks and presentations all due to the excellent forward planning and booking carried out by Carol Wylde - a big thank you from all of us! I am pleased to be able to report that the society is once again on a firm financial footing thanks entirely to the generosity of the National Trust allowing us the use of the meetings room free of charge. A big thank you in particular to Ade Clarke for arranging this and making us so welcome. 'Forest Nature' has had a reasonable start with a fair level of support for its activities, remember that the forest provides us with an excellent opportunity to carry out interesting surveying and monitoring which will be of use to the management of the woodland etc. Please try and support these activities as far as possible. Attendance at talks meetings has been good and we have been fortunate to recruit some new members, please keep coming and spread the word to anyone else who you think might be interested.

Stop Press News has just been received (30/1/09) that we have been successful in our Grassroots grant application. There is a detailed account of our application later on in this newsletter written just prior to the submission. We were encouraged by the National Trust to make this application and its success means that the society now has sums totalling £5,000 to spend! All this money is earmarked as in the terms of the application and the items are given in the newsletter entry. This is a great boost for the society and means that we shall not only be able to continue our conservation work but will also be able to carry out more efficient monitoring, on the Forest in particular, and also be able to have better publicity displays at the Wood Fest. More details coming soon with the summer programme.

Reports from the summer meetings.

Bat Group Meeting. We joined forces with the Essex Bat Group on an appalling may evening. Some of us were allocated a section of Emblems Coppice to survey and were surprised to find bats flying, but only in the sheltered areas. The Noctule bat was added to the list. Later in the summer several of us went to Spittlemore Coppice to verify the presence of the Barbastelle bat, one individual was recorded in the northern section as well as a number of glowworms which we were all pleased to see. In September professional ecologists with licences caught and radio tagged several bats in a forest area including a Barbastelle. This animal, a young male, was using a roost in a hornbeam pollard not far from the main entrance.

Big Forest Bird Watch.

The following is a report sent to me by Hugh Coe.

BSNHS set up a Big Forest Bird Watch on the 18th May this year in an attempt to establish the numbers of species endemic to Hatfield Forest during this time of year. Seventeen members of the

society and their friends participated and in one morning, managed to cover the entire area of the forest, where 58 different species of birds were recorded. No less than 567 individual birds were seen or heard during the survey and all of these were plotted onto maps to record their habitats that they birds were using. The star bird of the day was undoubtedly the Turtle Dove that was holding territory near the church at Bush End. The Turtle Dove is a declining species these days and it was encouraging that, having recorded it in this survey, it stayed long enough to support the possibility that it may have bred. The other significant bird in the forest is now, of course, the Common Tern. This has bred on the lake for the last three years ever since the National Trust built a tern raft for the purpose and on the occasion of the survey, a pair was rearing three young on the nest. The idea of a tern raft had been originally suggested by members of the BSNHS and was immediately initiated by the National Trust, reflecting the close working relationship that exists between the society and the Trust. The Great Crested Grebe was also recorded with no fewer than four pairs and five immature birds observed - and unprecedented number. The most common of the birds recorded was the Chaffinch (74), with Robin (60) second and Woodpigeon (43) third. Breeding birds in the forest have of course been monitored by the BSNHS on a regular basis since 1976 and this exercise, while only providing a brief snapshot of species present, did manage to add some species to those normally recorded, such as a Yellowhammer and Starling. Raptors were also of interest, with a Buzzard, a Sparrowhawk and four Kestrel recorded. Notable, however, was the absence of the House Sparrow even after careful searching around the workshop area. Add to this the Nightingale and Woodcock which, only a few years ago would have been present and today are just a memory of times past. While it is known that both the Little Owl and Tawny Owl occur in the forest, the time of the survey made it unlikely that these species could be recorded.

The survey certainly proved to be a worthwhile event and it is hoped that it will be possible to repeat it in the near future.

Hugh Coe. Bird Group.

Parndon Wood Nature Reserve.

For this meeting we joined forces with the Hatfield Heath Group. A pleasant evening was spent walking around this reserve which is increasingly well managed and has good protection against browsing by deer. It was interesting to find such an interesting reserve and well worth further investigation.

Gibberd Garden.

The first part of the evening was spent visiting the Hermitage where members of the society had carried out scrub clearance earlier in the year. Some interesting flora was noted and it is hoped that the area will continue to develop with further work planned early in 2009. As mentioned earlier this is not a nature reserve but is well worth survey and adopting by the society. True to form and typical of the summer we all got drenched in a heavy shower, this did not stop us running the moth trap in the garden and we were rewarded with a good number of moths including the Poplar Hawk. Bat detectors were on the go and recorded Pipistrelle bats in the garden and surrounding area.

Refreshments were served and a vote of thanks was given for the hospitality shown by the Gibberd Garden Trust. It is hoped to repeat the evening in 2009.

Lake Monitoring.

As part of our 'Forest Nature' interests we extended our monitoring of the lake, having already been unsuccessful in finding spawning frogs and toads. In the Decoy Lake we recorded a reasonable number of invertebrate species but low in number and small in size. We were pleased to find that the Freshwater Sponge is still present on the underside of submerged logs. The main lake was exceptionally disappointing, all that could be found was a solitary Swan Mussel and a large number of immature Signal Crayfish. There are obviously still severe problems with the ecology of the lake and this is especially obvious to those of us who knew its vast biodiversity in years past. It is planned to carry out an extended survey next year and try to provide sufficient data for a Biotic Diversity Index against which further changes can be more scientifically assessed.

Dragonfly Survey.

One of the original reasons why Hatfield Forest was made a SSSI was because of the 15 or so species of dragonflies and damselflies found here in previous years. The proposed survey foundered for a number of reasons this year not the least of which was the very poor summer and the indications from the sampling described earlier that there are not many dragonfly nymphs present. It is hoped that the survey can be carried out in the summer of 2009.

Wood Fest 2008.

As before we joined forces with the National Trust Coppicing Volunteers to mount a display and publicise the society. In our view the weekend was little short of a disaster - strong winds and squally showers contrived to wreck both the gazebos and display boards. Not surprisingly visitor numbers were down and considering the amount of work Margaret and I put in there was very little return for us or the society. If we are going to maximise on this excellent opportunity for publicity then we must have a rethink and a new approach for next year. Please support us as we participate in this annual event.

Publicity for the society.

As in the past David Sampson has produced posters for us to advertise meetings, currently these are put up in the forest but we would like volunteers to take posters and place them where they think interested people might read them. It is also apparent that circulating in other societies might well bear fruit in attracting people with a mutual interest, if anyone has any ideas along with lines then please let me know. I am currently running my own 'blog' or Weblog for the society, if you are able then please read it and if you wish I'll be pleased to place any article or pictures on it for people to see. The address is www.bsnhsdiary@blogspot.com. Please use the Internet Explorer address bar as going through Google or similar will not find it. PS. I have discovered that Google will find the blog under 'Badgers Patch' - its needs updating!

Grassroots Grant Scheme.

Currently, in association with the National Trust we are applying for a grant to both benefit the Coppicing Volunteers and the Society. We have applied to buy equipment to survey on the forest as well as a new tent and display boards for the Wood Fest. The equipment also includes small mammal live traps, professional pond nets, mobile moth traps and an infrared night vision viewer. The Coppicing Volunteers have applied for some new chainsaws and tools to carry out conservation work in the forest and any other conservation area locally. The application will soon be submitted and we await the result.

Bird Group Report.

Many of you will already know that the Bird Group have brought out their most recent publication describing the sightings and status of birds in our local area. It is very informative and well illustrated, it is hoped that it can be sold locally and if you would like a copy then please contact Chris Swan or Hugh Coe.

Coppice Project.

I am acutely aware of the need to keep the 'Forest Nature' side of the society moving forward and am proposing that we concentrate our surveying and monitoring efforts on the area covered by the Coppicing Volunteers. We have been at work here since 2000 and as far as I am aware there has been no in-depth study or record-keeping of the way in which coppicing changes of the ecology of the woodland. I suggest that we could do things like moth trapping, plant surveying and small mammal trapping in addition to monitoring the impact that deer and other mammals have on the woodland. A number of summer evening meetings could easily be organised- please let me have your views, it would be very important for people to participate, do not worry about being an 'expert' as we are all on a learning curve.

Stort Valley Living Landscapes Project.

Earlier this year I was contacted by Colin Plant who had been approached by the HMWT regarding sites in the Stort Valley which whilst being of wildlife interest are not included in nature reserves. I was able to supply a long list of such sites, the ultimate objective would be to try and create a linear nature reserve effect. This is a project which the BSNHS should be involved and something which we could plan for the future. As a start I am intending to record waterside mammal evidence along the length of the Stort this winter - this has obvious implications for the Water Vole population which may be returning with the ongoing success of the Mink Control Scheme. If anyone would like to help out then please get in touch. Please let me have your views as to whether you think we should be involved in the HMWT project and if so in what way?

Dormouse survey.

On the basis of what later turned out to be a 'possible' record we placed 60 nest tubes in what looked like ideal dormouse habitat in Spittlemore Coppice. We chose areas of thick bramble adjacent

to Hazel and put the tubes out in May as advised. They were collected up in October with negative results for dormice, three tubes had evidence of wood mice using the tubes for feeding and temporary nesting. According to received wisdom if you do not find a nest in 60 tubes then dormice are unlikely to be present. Personally, I feel that grey squirrels may be presenting too much competition in terms of the hazelnut feeding resource. We might well try a repeat exercise in a recently (2000) coppiced part of Collins Coppice in 2009.

Members discount at Outdoor Wear.

Members will be aware that a 10% discount had been made available to all members of the BSNHS, on production of your membership card, over the last two years or so. The Company has now been taken over by Nomad & there will be some changes to our discount arrangements, though it could well be that an improved offer might be made. As soon as we are advised of the new discounts, we will let you know via one of the Society's meetings or through this newsletter.

Working Parties.

Following on from the success of our work which started on the Hermitage last year, in collaboration with the Stort Valley Project, it is intended to carry out more scrub clearance at the site early in 2009. Please come and help, the date is not yet fixed but if you are interested please contact me and I will keep you informed.

Dunmow Railway Line.

Members will remember that many years ago we carried out award-winning work on this important butterfly site in collaboration with British Butterfly Conservation. I have a small group interested in restarting the work. What do members think? Once again please let me have your views before we move forward as support from the society members is essential.

Contact Bob Reed on 01279 600726 or e-mail coppicereed@hotmail.com.