

The Naturalist
Newsletter of the BSDNHS
No 14.December 2012.

From Bob Reed:

Dear Member,

Thank you all for your support during this last year. Along with this Newsletter you will find your subscription renewal for 2013. Financially, the Society remains in good health and the committee has decided that we have no need to raise the subscription rate for the time being at least. What we are finding is that Speaker's fees have risen but this is countered by the fact that we do not have to pay for the Meeting Room through the good auspices of the National Trust. Membership numbers in the Society have declined slightly due to a variety of reasons and it is felt that it would be good for us to do some recruitment, it is acknowledged that the best way to do this is through personal contact so if you know anyone who is interested in nature locally, then it would do no harm for you to point out the fact that we are the local Natural History Society with a full programme of Summer and Winter Meetings with additional involvement in many nature conservation projects. Once again I am pleased to include items submitted by members of the Society and would encourage others of you to contribute items no matter how small as long as they are of natural history interest! For the first time, this newsletter will have been distributed electronically to members who indicated they would like to receive it as such. This will help save us costs, we are very grateful to the National Trust for allowing us to do photocopying in the Office, the arrangement is that we provide the paper and that the Trust covers the photocopying cost, as such it is in all of our interests to keep the bills as low as possible.

Summer Programme summary.

The visit to Therfield Heath in April was a little bit disappointing largely on account of the bitterly cold and inclement weather typical of the year. A reasonable number of members attended but the Pasque flowers were very small and almost stunted. The highlight of the afternoon was a pair of Red Kites circling overhead at close range, one of them landed on part of the Heath opposite to us and we had a good view of it eating its prey. The Badger Hide evening was well attended and we all sat expectantly in the silence as the ducks stole the Badger food. Eventually at least three badgers appeared and we had good close up views of them feeding. We were also treated to Muntjac passing by the glass windows and feeding at very close range. The evening visit to Thorley Wash with the light trap was reasonably successful in spite of the bulb overheating a couple of times! A good number of species was recorded and a Barn Owl was seen from the nearby bridge over the River. The Big Forest Bird Watch went ahead as planned and added another set of records to the annual series which has helped the National Trust plot the changing bird population in the Forest. Once again we just about had enough participants to divide the Forest up between us for surveying. We had a very pleasant evening at the home of Doris Clewett Price and after a short walk in Birchanger Wood we checked the contents of the light trap which had been running the evening before. We then retired to the house for refreshments - thanks go to Doris for her hospitality for the evening. Because conservation management work was due to start on Thorley Wash we were asked to move venue and went downstream below Spellbrook Lock. In spite of the difficulty in obtaining samples from the deep river we nevertheless managed to record a wide variety of invertebrates as well as fish fry, a pleasant afternoon was spent by the river by all who attended. In character with the inclement weather of the year the evening visit to Patmore Heath was blighted by extremely heavy rain. On the way to the Heath, roads were awash, and we were forced to return to our cars by a sudden and dramatic downpour. Eventually, the rain cleared and whilst walking on the Heath we were joined by the Warden who very kindly gave us a guided tour. Yet again the Hatfield Forest meeting for dragonflies had to be called off due to bad weather. Your Chairman was on holiday when the wildflower visit to Thorley Wash took place but a good number of members were accompanied by Jenny Sherwen, the new Community Warden for the Reserve. A good number of wild flowers were recorded and the work due to take place on the Reserve was outlined. Once again we joined the Coppicing Volunteers for a joint display at the annual Wood Fest in early September. This year the Society activity was making rather

spectacular models of dragonflies using multicoloured pipe cleaners, beads and acetate wings - over 100 of these were made by children during the two days. A very big thank you to all who helped with the display and working with the children. Because work was starting at Thorley Wash the small mammal trapping was relocated to Sawbridgeworth Marsh Nature Reserve. Again, it was a wet evening and night, the catch was very poor catches with only 3 of the 17 traps recording Wood Mice in the drier parts of the Reserve.

New Programme Secretary.

We are very grateful to David Sampson for stepping into the above post when Gemma Kiff resigned at short notice after having changed jobs and moved away. David is making good progress in putting together the Winter Programme for 2013-2014 but will need us to keep on supplying ideas and possible contacts for talks in the future. As I explained in the appeal for Programme Secretary, this post is absolutely essential for the future of the survival of the society so please give David support and ideas whenever possible.

Kingfisher Nest Bank update.

As you will be aware the Society is funding the construction of an artificial Kingfisher Nest Bank at the western end of the Lake in the Forest. We are funding this project as a token of our appreciation to the National Trust for allowing us to hold our meetings on the property free of charge. Without this, the society would have failed for financial reasons some years ago so we are very grateful. At present the site has been cleared by a work party from Glaxo SmithKline and the shuttering and first layer of concrete mix in sandbags put in place. The next stage will be to construct the concrete base for the construction of the blockwork and soft sand fill which will constitute the nest bank. A licence can only be obtained at this time of year from Natural England due to the sensitive nature of the site and there are obvious restrictions with the weather. If anyone would like to help with the construction or just have a look at progress then please ask me for details.

HATFIELD FOREST BIRD WATCH

Sunday, 27th May 2012

The society's long involvement with the National Trust at Hatfield Forest has resulted in the production of many reports, particularly on the birds of the forest. This report continues on the theme of a "Big Forest Bird Watch", in which members of the Society spent a morning recording as many as possible of the birds present in the area being surveyed. The number of areas surveyed depends on the number of people present; this year 8 members attended and this enabled surveys to be made in four of the five areas into which the forest has previously been divided for this purpose; the fifth area was addressed separately by a ninth member on the previous day. The weather was hot and sunny with a light easterly breeze.

The Forest was notionally divided into five areas, described as northwest, northeast, southwest, southeast and lake. The surveyors covered as much of their areas as was practicable and recorded both the total numbers seen for each species and also noted whether birds were breeding using the usual commonsense indicators, such as birds observed holding territory, sitting on nests, carrying food or nesting material, or the presence of young birds. Where young birds were counted, numbers are shown; otherwise "Yes" is entered to indicate that breeding is considered likely to have occurred using the other criteria.

The results are presented in a spreadsheet that is appended as an Excel document. For purposes of comparison and interest, the total species numbers recorded in the 2009, 2010 and 2011 surveys are shown in addition to this year's results.

As with the surveys of previous years, it must be remembered that a survey such as this is not claimed to be comprehensive; it is simply a "snapshot" of those species seen on a particular occasion. As a result, a repeat survey a few days later may give different numbers of species, and indeed even additional or fewer species compared with

this exercise. Nevertheless, since the methodology is essentially unchanged, the results may be compared with earlier years and valuable information may be gleaned on the status of the various species observed. Some duplication may occur; for example, the corvids noted in all areas are very mobile and it can be difficult to obtain accurate counts as the birds constantly come and go. It is also difficult to be certain that the same group of birds is not counted twice as a result of moving from one survey area to another during the morning. This is particularly true this year for the Grey Heron, where the 3 birds seen in two areas may be the same birds.

Not too much concern should be shown regarding the apparent paucity of juvenile records. The survey took place on a very hot day in which birds had already been active for several hours by the time the survey started (dawn was around 04.30 a.m. on that day) and although relatively few juvenile birds were observed, there was ample evidence of territorial behaviour by adult birds. The Society is again undertaking a full breeding bird survey this year so any apparent anomalies will be smoothed out since the combined results of this cover several months of breeding activity, as opposed to just one morning.

Encouraging aspects of this year's survey are the successful breeding of the Great Crested Grebe with two young to date and a pair nesting, together with the return of a pair of Common Tern which were observed mating on the Tern Raft. After years of apparent decline, it is particularly pleasing to note a pair of Turtle Doves observed in the southeast area of the forest. Warblers were counted in reasonable numbers again this year. An amazing 11 records of Cuckoo were noted on 27th May, although this probably represents fewer than 11 different birds since Cuckoo territories are quite large and so individual birds may have been counted more than once.

The total of 54 species observed this year is broadly similar to the average of the previous years' surveys. Please see summary spreadsheet at the end of this Newsletter.

Chris Swan

1st December 2012

Sawbridgeworth Marsh Update – November 2012

The marsh has certainly seen its fair share of water since April. The low water levels at that time were giving cause for concern, but it has scarcely stopped raining since and the lower parts of the reserve have been flooded a number of times, including several occasions during the Spring. At this time of year, with nesting birds and insects about, floodwater can be a real environmental disaster. The long term effects will not be known until next year probably, but insects, most noticeably butterflies, did seem to be in short supply this year. Better news came in the form of the reintroductions to the marsh. In common with many small reserves, isolated in a sea of unfavourable surrounding habitat, the marsh has steadily been losing some of our rarer species over the years. We have made an effort to reintroduce some of these species, including Nodding Bur-marigold, Meadow Saxifrage and Common Frog. I raised a large quantity of seedlings of Nodding Bur-marigold last autumn and most of these were planted both on the peatbank and on the margins of the pond in Little Valet Homes. They flowered well this year and set seed, so I look forward to seeing whether a viable population has resulted from this next Spring. This plant was last recorded in 1962, during the survey by Dr JG Dony for his "Flora of Hertfordshire" (1967). He was shown the marsh by John Fielding. Meadow Saxifrage was clinging on in the shape of two plants on the peatbank when I took over as warden in 1990. After a number of years, they disappeared. Shirley Watson kindly donated some plants to me this year, which I have planted on the top of the peatbank. I look forward to watching them flower as well next May. Frogs were common all over the marsh when I first started as warden, but again their population dwindled to extinction without being noticed at the time. We think now that the main culprit was the American Mink. Having got the Mink population under control, I have been reintroducing Frogs to the marsh over the last 3 years - buckets full of both spawn and tadpoles, mostly released into the large pond on Little Valet Homes meadow. We have been seeing a number of mostly small frogs in various places this year, which is very encouraging. Grass snakes, too, have been

making a comeback, no doubt attracted by the reappearance of their prey. There are still other reintroduction projects that we would like to complete however, including Quaking grass, which last appeared 8 – 10 years ago on the peatbank, and Water Vole, not seen since 1997. Shirley has come to the rescue once more, donating some Quaking grass seed to me last Autumn, which I will plant in the spring. The Water vole was another of the victims of the Mink. Bob Reed is currently in negotiations with Darren Tansley, of the Essex Wildlife Trust, who occasionally relocates Water Voles in Essex. Nowadays, the marsh would represent an ideal habitat for these threatened mammals. The cattle have done a great job in maintaining the condition of the peatbank and Round Moors. Both areas looked fantastic in May and June, with strong populations of both Southern and Early marsh orchids, both occurring also in locations where they had not been seen before. The wetter lower reaches of the peatbank and the sedge beds of the open fen are not grazed, however. Both areas are mown, the peatbank every September and parts of the sedgebed in the period February – May. The arisings are either stacked in permanent heaps or burnt. The Essex Wildlife Trust are concerned that this is not ideal management and would like to reintroduce grazing here too, either by Water Buffalo or by Konik ponies, both wetland specialists. Bob, myself and Trust staff have visited Rye Meads, to look at the Buffalo, and Wicken Fen, to view the Konik ponies, but we are still not decided what we want to do.

Butterfly and Moth Report

Butterflies The spring started off well with reasonable numbers of the overwintering Butterflies emerging from hibernation, followed by the species that overwintered as pupae, like the Orange Tip, Holly Blue, Whites and Speckled Wood that benefited from the warm/dry spring. The summer species suffered from the poor weather, I don't think I have ever seen the Buddleia bushes so devoid of Butterflies, I did not see a single Painted Lady for the second year running. One species that did do well was the Red Admiral, I saw the first one in Early March and the last ones in early November making the most of the late flowering ivy blossom. Here's hoping for a better summer next year.

Moths

Numbers of moths remain depressed, but we did manage to add one new species to our garden list, a Jersey Tiger that appears to be expanding its range. Unfortunately the autumn migration that normally occurs was poor and certainly did not reach Bishop's Stortford. Hummingbird Hawkmoths were scarce this year, I had one sighting in September nectaring on Verbena Bonariensis, It is always a delight to watch these busy little moths darting about with their long proboscis taking nectar from the flowers. As moths are not so dependent on weather conditions as Butterflies different species are flying throughout the year so the Moth Trap will be in use on most nights.

Balls Wood Sunday 15th July 2012

Trying to arrange a trip to Balls Wood to see White Admirals and Silver Washed Fritillaries was a bit of a trial as the weather had been appalling and emergence of the butterflies had been delayed, however the forecast looked promising so we decided to go for it. Sunday morning dawned with a clear blue sky and warm sunshine. Six of us met at the wood at 2pm but by this time cloud had begun to build and we had brief sunny periods we set off down the main ride and saw Ringlets, Meadow Browns, Skippers and a Comma. We met a man with a camera who showed us pictures of White Admirals and Silver Washed Fritillaries that he had taken earlier. We went to the area where I had seen the butterflies during the week, an Elephant Hawkmoth (one of our most colourful moths) was spotted in the grass and eagerly photographed, we then noticed a White Admiral nectaring on Bramble flowers A few people managed to get a picture before it flew up into the trees when the sun went behind a cloud. Moving on we saw a lady walking briskly towards us, this turned out to be Pat who had arrived after we had set off. We kept looking at the sky for breaks in the clouds but these were very brief, we had further sights of White Admirals and Silver Washed Fritillaries but were unable to get photo's as they did not settle and kept going up into the trees. At least we did better than last year when most people did not see any.

Jim Fish

08 ad	08 Y	09 ad	09 Y	10 ad	10 Y	11 ad	11 Y	Species seen 2008 - 2011	NW ad	Bred	NE ad	Bred	SW ad	Bred	SE ad	Bred	Lake ad	Bred	Comments
2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	Marsh Tit	0		0		0		1		0		
24	0	38	11	43	26	24	5	Blue Tit	8	3	3	2	3		8		2		
39	0	19	5	46	10	9	0	Great Tit	1		2	Yes	0		4		2		Holding territory
2	0	0	0	9	3	0	0	Nuthatch	0		0		0		0		0		
1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	Treecreeper	0		0		0		0		0		
9	0	5	0	14	0	5	0	Jay	3		2		0		0		0		
10	0	4	0	22	0	4	0	Magpie	2		0		1		0		1		
2	0	69	10	39	2	71	0	Rook	20		30	Yes	1		0		20		Nests visible
7	0	22	0	15	0	22	0	Carrion Crow	5		3		0		3		11		
16	0	91	2	189	0	104	0	Jackdaw	0		48	Yes	16		16		24		Nests visible
1	0	9	20	23	0	0	0	Starling	0		0		0		0		0		
0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	House Sparrow	0		0		0		0		0		
74	0	36	0	51	0	36	0	Chaffinch	5		13	Yes	4		7		7		Carrying nesting material
4	0	4	0	10	0	4	0	Greenfinch	0		0		4		0		0		
1	0	3	0	2	0	2	1	Linnet	0		2	1	0		0		0		
1	0	7	0	12	0	7	0	Goldfinch	0		0		3		1		3		
1	0	2	0	6	0	2	0	Bullfinch	0		0		2		0		0		
1	0	1	0	3	0	1	0	Reed Bunting	0		0		0		0		1		Carrying food
								not Forest breeders											
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Turtle Dove	0		0		0		0		0		
1	0	4	0	7	0	4	0	Swift	2		0		2		0		0		
2	0	1	0	4	0	1	0	House Martin	0		0		0		0		1		
4	0	4	0	6	0	11	0	Tufted Duck	0		0		0		0		11		9 males, 2 females
1	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	Buzzard	0		0		0		0		0		
0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	Lapwing	0		0		0		0		0		
								not local breeders											
0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	Lesser Black-backed Gull	0		0		0		0		0		
0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	Grey Heron	0		0		0		1		1		
1	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	Cormorant	0		0		1		0		0		
1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	Gadwall	0		0		0		0		0		
206	0	320	48	519	41	311	6	sub totals	46	3	103	3	37	0	41	0	84	0	