



Bird Identification course, 24th May

Ruth Barnes (EWT volunteer) and Gareth Brookfield (RSPB) led this course, operating from the Dunton Centre. Despite the rain, a thorough grounding in survey techniques led on to bird identification by both sight and sound. This was followed by a bird survey, during which the territories of several breeding birds, including Lesser Whitethroat, were established. Thereafter, back in the lecture room, the group studied the kinds of breeding bird survey maps used by the RSPB on one of their reserves.



This course was a first-rate example of the collaboration between different conservation bodies made possible by the Living Landscapes programme.

Dormouse nest boxes

Further to last year's dormouse survey, work is going ahead on fixing nest-boxes into appropriate locations connected with the country park. Peter Jarvis and Natasha Lodge have been busily engaged in this work.



Follow-up on the courses

We are keen to have the skills and insights learned through the various courses applied in new situations. Extra bat-detecting sessions have been arranged at One Tree Hill, to develop what was learned on the bat course, while plans are afoot for wildlife gardening schemes. Meanwhile, nest-boxes for solitary bees, constructed on the wildflower-gardening course (see front page), are being fixed in various locations.

Courses and Contact Information

26th July: Butterflies of Langdon Hills. Led by Rod Cole. Based at Dry Street Church Hall but, weather-permitting, involving outdoor sessions a.m. & p.m. 10 a.m. start. Packed lunch needed, if staying for the whole day.

2nd August: Bumble bees and Dragonflies. Led by Professor Ted Benton. Based at Dry Street Church Hall but, weather-permitting, involving outdoor sessions a.m. & p.m. Packed lunch needed, if staying for whole day.

Contact Sue Adams (01268 419103) or Rod Cole (01268 553149) to book for any of these.

Other Contacts

- **Essex Wildlife Trust**, Details from 01268 419103
- **Friends of Langdon Hills Country Park**: Details from 01268 542066
- **Basildon Borough Heritage Group**, Contact: www.basildonheritage.org.uk
- **Essex Field Club**, Contact www.essexfieldclub.org.uk or phone 01375 371571
- **Basildon Natural History Society**: Contact 01268 553149, 01268 523882; website <http://www.bnhs.net>

For more information on Langdon Living Landscape please visit its web-page :

<http://www.bnhs.net/living-landscape>

(Hosted by Basildon Natural History Society)

Contact Sue Adams on 01268 419103, Rod Cole on 01268 553149 or Nick Stanley on 01268 542066 to see how YOU can get involved in the Langdon Living Landscape !!

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Celebration of the Langdon Living Landscape



Partly in celebration of the Silver Jubilee of the Langdon Nature Reserve, the Essex Wildlife Trust comes to Langdon for this year's AGM. In so doing, it also comes as recognition of the progress made within the Langdon Living Landscape, so far one of the most successful

ventures of its kind within the county.

The AGM event has been held at different locations across the county over the years, with many Trust members attending, to explore the host location and hear the talks provided by leading figures in the world of conservation. This year, there will be a members' address by Simon King OBE, the TV presenter and cameraman, and President of the Wildlife Trusts.

The event will take place at the Langdon Nature Reserve, Lower Dunton Road, on Saturday, 21st June, commencing at 10.30 a.m. after earlier registration, and attendance is open to all members of the Essex Wildlife Trust. This all marks yet further recognition of the importance of the Langdon ridge as an area of remarkable beauty and richness, some of which is sustained by the EWT on its 500 acre nature reserve – one of the jewels in the crown of the Essex Wildlife Trust.

We would urge all EWT members to attend the event – and other souls to join what is a vibrant organisation, achieving much in the cause of wildlife conservation in and around Essex.

Wildlife Gardening Course was a tremendous success



The sun shone gloriously on May 18th when twenty participants enjoyed an inspiring day's course at John Little's amazing wildlife garden. John's experience in managing a variety of urban sites in East London, as well as in building and equipping green roofs for a variety of situations, makes him a first-rate leader for such a course, where his enthusiasm, energy and knowledge ensure that the fascination is sustained throughout the day.

He and Fiona maintain an excellent wildlife garden of their own, with plenty of exciting and innovative ideas. One of them involves the creation of nesting holes for solitary bees – creatures which are so easily overlooked but which fulfil a vital role in the countryside, not least in pollination. Indeed, for oilseed rape and fruit-growers they are far more efficient at cross-pollination than hive bees, given their less tidy pollen-gathering arrangements, which have the effect of distributing pollen more generally.

Several solitary bee boxes of the kind shown here were made up during the day, while further inspiration came from the bee-tower wherein holes of various diameters were already being colonised by female bees. Each species has its own requirements. Absolutely fascinating!



Rarities on Langdon



4. Deptford Pink (*Dianthus armeria*). This delightful native plant, a close relative of the garden pinks, is now very rare in Britain, growing in just a few sites across the country. A UK Biodiversity Action Plan species, figuring on the UK Red Data List, it is protected under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.

Some of the meadows and hedgerows of the Langdon ridge still support this elusive species. Not so many years ago it grew on the roadside verges of Dry Street, but infrequent mechanical cutting has caused rank grasses and herbs to dominate the sward.

Our birds of concern

Several of the bird species which were quite plentiful on the Langdon ridge only ten or so years ago have now become worryingly scarce. Of the summer visitors, we are aware of only one nightingale singing here this year, while the cuckoo has been heard only sparingly. Willow warblers were quite plentiful in the past, but although they pass through the woodlands and hedgerows of the ridge while on migration, not many have stayed to breed, with none at all on the southern side of the hills. This contrasts with the numbers to be heard in competitive song on Hawkesbury Bush in the past. Neither the grasshopper warbler nor the turtle dove has been reported this year, whereas both were regular summer visitors.

Several factors may lie behind this sad state of affairs, but it is hoped that the planned increase in coppicing in the local woodlands will help to restore some of the required habitat. Much of the local woodland has not been systematically managed for several decades, and it shows, not least in the amount of trampling of springtime flowers, now that the canopy is so high.

The news concerning both skylarks and yellowhammers locally is more encouraging, reflecting conditions in the fields and hedgerows. But where are the corn buntings which once graced our hedgerows?

Hopefully, with landscape-scale conservation measures, it will prove possible to maintain enough varied habitat to sustain many of our traditional species in the long term.



Kestrel nesting boxes

Following hard on the heels of the barn owl nesting boxes, we are pleased to announce the construction of six nest-boxes designed for kestrels. These were made by David and Howard, who are volunteers at the Langdon Hills Country Park. The plan is to fix these boxes into place at various points along the Langdon ridge in good time for next year's breeding season.



Progress with ponds



Hawkesbury Bush pond recovery after restoration work earlier this year

As anticipated, the six ponds which were dredged, cleaned and relieved of their rubbish last winter are now recovering rapidly – and it is fascinating to see the pond-margin plants which have been germinating from long-dormant seed, in some cases appearing where they had not been encountered within living memory. Among them are celery-leaved crowfoot (germinating in veritable swarms) and gipsywort – the latter a somewhat scarce plant in this part of England. The dragonflies are already much in evidence.



The Gothic shrouds of Mandeville Way



The depredations of the Bird-Cherry Ermine Moth on Mandeville Way

Plenty of folk were fascinated by the masses of ghostly white silk festooned over some trees in Mandeville Way during the spring. The trees had been completely stripped of their leaves, standing starkly winter-like amid all the surrounding greenery. The culprits were hosts of tiny caterpillars, of no threat to us but clearly a nuisance for the trees – which are Bird-cherries, a kind of tree often planted in suburban settings. The caterpillars pupate within a few weeks, to produce bird-cherry ermine moths. The trees produce a new crop of leaves and do not appear to suffer much in the long term.



Identifying Bats Course, May 2014

Tonal qualities, rhythm, pitch and repetition rate were the topics of the day at the latest Langdon Living Landscape training course held at the EWT Langdon Visitor Centre.



Now you may well be excused for thinking this was some kind of music training workshop or jam session, but it was in fact the first of two courses set up to train volunteers in the use of a 'heterodyne bat detector'.

There are 18 species of bats in the UK, 17 of which breed here. Each species can produce distinctly different ultrasonic echolocation sounds when hunting for insects; and this is a key feature for identifying which species are present in a particular area. Unfortunately the frequency of these calls is too high for human ears, so this is where the heterodyne bat detector comes into play, cleverly converting the sounds into a range that we can hear.

During the evening a dozen or more keen volunteers tested their 'sonic memory' by listening to a range of specially created sounds designed to emulate the tonal qualities, rhythm, pitch and repetition rate of some of the more common species of bat to be found in the UK. Once these skills had been honed and perfected the volunteers were given a chance to put the theory into practice, so armed with bat detectors, torches and insect repellent they were led to the lake north of the visitor centre. It was not long before the first bats zoomed over the heads of the group; all agreed that the 'slip-slap' sound that came from each detector's loud speaker was produced by a Pipistrelle bat and indeed this was confirmed by Phil the trainer.

During the year the group will continue to meet and explore other sites along the Langdon Ridge. It is hoped that an accurate record of species and favoured feeding sites will emerge. If you would like to find out more, contact the group via the Langdon Living Landscape web-page <http://www.bnhs.net/living-landscape>.



Dry Street Community Orchard - Update



After a Herculean labour during the winter months, clearing the Augean stables that were the site of the soon-to-be Community Orchard (finds included at least one pair of boots, several items of clothing and a small safe, complete with contents and dutifully returned to the identifiable owner) work has ceased to allow for the breeding season and summer months.

Work recommences in the autumn with ground preparation and - we hope - planting of native species of various fruit trees.