

## Roadside Verges

To its credit, Basildon has an established history of managing several of the roadside verges in a manner that is sensitive to wildlife. This came out of collaboration between the Council's highways department and the Basildon Natural History Society, ensuring that sizeable verges were not simply gangmown in a manner which gave wildlife very little chance to thrive. Check out the verges of Staneway, and Mandeville Way, and Nethermayne, where at the end of the summer season some of the sward is mown but other sections are left unmown, thereby providing essential longer-term cover and sustenance for all manner of creatures. What's more, by removing the risings from the mowing, nutrients are thus removed, enabling many of our rarer plants to thrive. Otherwise, just a few robust species take over, and the verges become very much poorer. Look out for the seasonal mowing this October – and remember to express some appreciation to those doing the work. In recent years, Conservation Area notice boards have gone up, explaining the policy. We now look to the Council to extend the system to more verges.



## EWT working with local schools to improve the Langdon Living Landscape



Thanks to funding support from Veolia Pitsea Marshes Trust Essex Wildlife Trust are working with 7 local schools to deliver projects which will benefit the wildlife of the Langdon Living Landscape while enhancing the pupils learning through hands on experiences.

Schools Outreach Officer, Leanne Block, spent two days at Great Berry Primary School this summer working with pupils to plant up their wildlife area. Contractors had cleared out the pond which had become clogged with leaves and silt ready for replanting with native water plants. This will hopefully benefit creatures such as common newts and make it easier for the pupils to use the

pond when studying habitats. A meadow area was created along one side of the pond and various containers were planted with flowers and herbs to provide nectar for bees, butterflies and other insects. Parents and the local community donated unwanted materials, including wooden pallets and plant pots, to build a wildlife hotel. This will provide shelter and over wintering sites for a range of species from reptiles and amphibians to minibeasts.

Discussions have taken place with other schools, planning projects such as a willow dome for storytelling and to provide shade, development of an Early Years outside area and renovation of a pond.

## Get involved!

The vigour of any community is crucial to its health and success. The more people get involved, by and large, the happier and healthier they are, enjoying social contact and the feeling that they are helping to make a difference – and just getting to know what is going on, and identifying with it all. There are so many activities going on in the vicinity of Langdon, and it is a pity that we don't have a proper means of informing everybody what is happening. Perhaps we need a parish council (ideally, one which would straddle the ridge, to include parts of both Basildon and Thurrock). There is no single place – a village hall, or a library, perhaps – to which we all might look, while the demise of small local shops is gradually denying us an alternative means of dissemination (there used to be at least three sub-post offices on Langdon!). The various churches provide a means of keeping in touch, of course – and if we want the churches to remain in the landscape the one sure way of making that happen is to support them.

**Volunteers!**  
CONTACT SUE ADAMS  
ON 01268  
419103. ROD COLE  
ON 01268 553149  
OR NICK STANLEY  
ON 01268 542066  
TO SEE HOW YOU  
CAN GET INVOLVED !!

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# Langdon Living Landscape NEWSLETTER

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Number 3



## Coronation Meadow – a major triumph for Langdon EWT Nature Reserve!

In order to celebrate the sixty years of his mother's reign, the Prince of Wales promoted the Coronation Meadows scheme, whereby sixty special meadows – roughly one per county – were identified for this distinction. We were delighted to learn that Jonathan Wisbey's visit to Highgrove drew a splendid return, for one of the particularly rich flower meadows on the Willow Park section of the Langdon Reserve, ironically known as Rough Piece (for that it has been called for many, many years), has been designated as the Coronation Meadow for Essex.



What helped win this distinction was the proposal that the meadow could act as a donor site, to send green hay to a receptor site – a recently established meadow on the EWT's Thameside Nature Park at Mucking. The idea is that seed-rich hay mown from Rough Piece will be strewn on the receptor site, anticipating that seed from the wild flowers and grasses on Langdon will help to establish a correspondingly rich meadow in the new location. There is, of course, far more to the business of establishing species-rich meadows than this, for it is a process which takes decades, but it is a valuable first step.

As visitors to Willow Park will know, Rough Piece is a very beautiful flower meadow, with drifts of flowers of many different kinds, and hosts of butterflies, bees and other insects. It commands magnificent views for many miles, and it is hard to comprehend, when standing in its midst, that one is only a mile or so from several major built-up areas. It is part of what makes Langdon Hills special.

It is ironic that, just as the Prince of Wales was helping to promote the national legacy of our precious flower-rich meadows, for which the Langdon ridge is particularly famous, the local powers-that-be were agreeing to destroy the Dry Street Pastures, located less than half a mile away.

## Community Orchard for Dry Street ?

If enough people are interested in what could be an exciting and rewarding long-term project, a community orchard could be set up on what is currently scrub and woodland, located at the corner of Dry Street and One Tree Hill Road. The land is owned by the Essex Wildlife Trust, and they are happy to have the land used in this manner, especially if traditional Essex and East of England varieties of fruit-trees are included, thereby helping to sustain the biodiversity. Moreover, effective hedging, utilising native species, would enhance the richness of the site. With a grass sward, and perhaps the odd bench or two, this could become an attractive feature for the neighbourhood. It is hoped that through the offices of the Living Landscape system a lot of the funding for fruit trees could be found.



However, this cannot go ahead unless there are enough people signing up for the necessary work, planning meetings and commitment. The Wildlife Trust is ready to help in getting the site cleared, so long as there is sufficient volunteer help. If this project interests you, contact either **Sue Adams at the EWT Centre at Dunton (01268 419103)** or the Langdon Living Landscape Chairman, **Rod Cole (01268 553149)**. The first planning meeting would need to be held in November.

For more information on Langdon Living Landscape please visit its web-page :  
<http://www.bnhs.net/living-landscape>  
(Hosted by Basildon Natural History Society)





## Hedge-laying course, 2<sup>nd</sup> November

This one-day course, conducted by a very experienced hedgelayer, will take place on Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, and will involve work on a suitable old hedge in need of revitalisation. Appropriate leather gloves and tools will be made available to those involved in the course. A list of participants has been compiled, and there are still a few places. Contact **Sue at 01268 419103** if you wish to add your name. It is intended that a hedgelaying group will result from this one-day activity, perhaps turning its attention to other sites in forthcoming years. There is plenty of scope for such rewarding work!

**A Memory Lane walk on 2nd November, starting from Lee Chapel Lane car park at 1.30, will include the Green Lane in question. Phone 01268 411222 for further details.**



## Pond-clearing

Arrangements have been made for the dredging and revitalisation of several ponds located along the Langdon ridge. This work is due to take place during the period November 2013-January 2014, thereby operating at the time when least harm will be caused to the creatures and plants dwelling in and around those ponds. We are grateful to the Veolia Trust for the necessary funding for this useful work to take place, and to the parties of volunteers who worked hard last winter, cutting away scrub in order to create access for the dredging equipment.



## The best location for butterflies in the county

It has long been recognised that the Langdon ridge is the best county location, by far, for butterflies, whether seen in terms of the number of species (well over thirty) or the sheer numbers on the wing at a time. The meadows, hedgerows and woodlands have a lot to do with this, and so too does the south-facing aspect of the ridge. This year's fine summer has brought out the butterflies in plenty, including some of the nation's most dramatic and beautiful creatures – butterflies like the White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary, Purple Hairstreak, Green Hairstreak, Grizzled Skipper (the only site in Essex), Marbled White and White-letter Hairstreak. It is a privilege to have them all in our midst. There were fewer of the migrant Red Admirals and Painted Ladies this year, but some Clouded Yellows turned up. All told, it was a splendid season – with isolated examples of Chalkhill Blue and Dark Green Fritillary also appearing.



## Chainsaw training

Thanks are due to the Veolia Trust for other help as well, for it has provided the money for training six experienced conservation volunteers in chainsaw operation: two for the Essex Wildlife Trust, two for the Langdon Hills Country Park's team of volunteers, and two for the Basildon Natural History Society's team of volunteers based at Marks Hill Wood Nature Reserve. The Langdon ridge is so well endowed with woodland, but this means that there is an ongoing need to manage those woodlands skilfully. The gradual re-introduction of coppicing has been having a hugely beneficial effect in terms of wildlife, as well as in terms of the enhanced appearance and variety of woodland.



## Dormouse Surveys

Several sites are currently being monitored for evidence of dormice living on the Langdon ridge. The handling of dormice requires an appropriate licence these days, given their rarity and the fact that the dormouse is a species scheduled for protection. However, it is acceptable for dormouse tubes to be located in suitable bushes, hedgerows and woodland, thereby gaining some preliminary indication of the presence of these animals. From earlier years, we have two Langdon records of what were probably of this species.

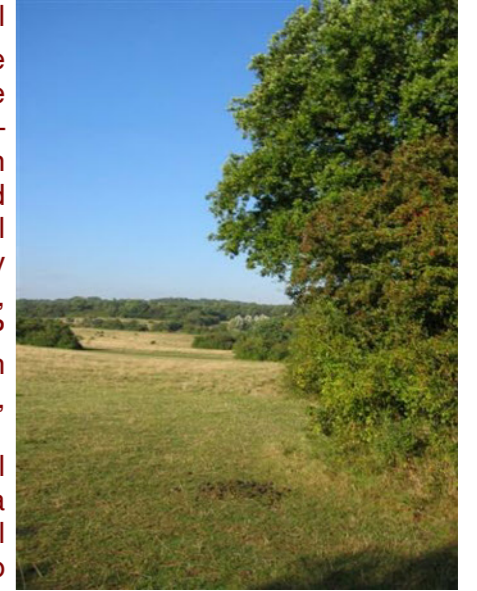


## Development of the Dry Street Pastures Local Wildlife Site

It is a source of dismay that outline planning permission was given for the building of 725 houses on the Dry Street site by Basildon Council's Development Control and Traffic Management Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> June. Earlier proposals to develop the land in question had been challenged successfully, and there had been the hope that Basildon Council would defend the site from such major development – indeed, the Council had at one point sought to place the meadows in question in the Green Belt. It is all the more disappointing that the Council has since embraced the proposal to develop this highly sensitive site. The development proposals will mean that the Longwood Equestrian Centre, located so sensibly and conveniently adjacent to the network of bridleways serving Langdon Hills, will be demolished, and that the associated meadows, scheduled as a Local Wildlife Site and a BAP site, will very largely be destroyed – despite the national shortage of such long-established meadowland. Moreover, the superb views across the meadows, not least that looking westwards from behind Basildon College, will be lost.

The loss to the Langdon ridge is grievous, not only in landscape and recreational terms but also in terms of its indigenous and very rich wildlife. The ridge has a network of Local Wildlife Sites and SSSI meadows, and the loss of this substantial chunk will have a knock-on effect upon the rest of the complex. There can be no doubt that the credibility of the Langdon Hills Living Landscape has been dealt a severe blow, from agencies which one would have thought would be far more mindful of its important strategic value, located as it is in so densely populated a part of the county. The greater the development of the immediate region, the more important is the Langdon ridge as a precious green lung for the region's inhabitants. It would be wonderful, were the relevant local authorities, Basildon and Thurrock, to come together to act determinedly to protect the ridge, rather than allow it to be steadily reduced in beauty, extent and value.

So serious is the potential loss of the Dry Street site that, we understand, moves are afoot to mount a legal challenge to the development decision.



## Bowers Marsh Reserve set for Autumn Opening

A brand-new marshland nature reserve opens this autumn, 290 ha in extent, on the doorstep of the Langdon Hills. Created by the RSPB, in partnership with Veolia Environmental, over the past three years, it will have free car-parking, as well as many viewing points and picnic areas. It will be open to the public from the end of October.

## Locations for Kestrel and Barn Owl boxes

Several nest boxes for owls and kestrels have been constructed, with a view to locating them at appropriately secure locations on the Langdon ridge, in places where there is a reasonable amount of hunting territory in the vicinity. If you possess such a spot – with sizeable tree or even a barn – and would be happy to have a box placed there, we would be interested to hear. Such boxes need to be put in place during autumn or winter, with a view to occupation in spring – quite possibly after a year or two, for these birds do not necessarily move in all that speedily. **Contact Jonathan Wisbey, Warden at Langdon EWT, on 01268 419103.**

## Rarities on Langdon

2. Upright Goosefoot, *Chenopodium urbicum*. This might look a somewhat unprepossessing plant, as befits a close relative of Fat Hen, but there is quite a story behind it. It had been thought to be extinct. A colony of these plants, springing from long-dormant seed, was discovered in a recently cleared stretch of scrub on Old Hill in 1995 – the first encounter with it in Britain since the 1960s (last seen in a farmyard in Dorset). It is an archaeophyte – a species associated with primitive farming practices. Ironically, for such a rare species, it grows and seeds vigorously if introduced into a vegetable garden: we cannot see what its problem is.



## Study groups for next year

**We plan to run various one-day courses next summer, including one on butterflies. Others include bumble bees (another Langdon speciality) and dragonflies. Look out for details in a future Newsletter.**