

# NEWSLETTER

No.2 Spring 2013



In this Newsletter : Events update - project progress - how YOU can get involved



## Veolia Funding Bid

We are very pleased to announce that our application for funding from the Veolia Pitsea Marshes Trust for a series of wildlife- and landscape-related projects on the Langdon ridge has been successful. The money is to be spent over the coming two years, on a series of specified ventures, all aimed at safeguarding wildlife and/or enhancing public awareness of what is in our midst. The funding is being matched with volunteer effort from our participating organisations - and from us, meaning members of the community who wish to contribute effort in one way or another. Between us, we can ensure that the Langdon ridge continues to be an area of quite outstanding beauty and wildlife richness. Watch out for the further details, and for opportunities to get involved. Some are given below.

## Ponds Restoration Project

The previous newsletter drew attention to our programme of renewal of several old ponds. Work started on this during March, with the removal of sections of pondside scrub by volunteers working for the country park, the Basildon Natural History Society or the EWT, according to the pond in question. This creates spaces from which mechanical dredging can be undertaken during next winter, while also obliging hibernating amphibians to opt for other spots for their winter sleep, thus avoiding getting caught up in the action unintentionally. In the short term there is of course considerable disturbance, but after that the ponds should enjoy renewed leases of life, and continue to enhance our landscape for many years to come.

Pumphouse Pond Clearing Exercise



## Hedge-laying Course

For those who would like to learn or further develop this ancient and incredibly useful rural skill, the LLL group is organising a Hedge-Laying Course for Saturday 2nd November 2013. Register your interest now by ringing 01268 553149 or email at [langdonlivinglandscapes@gmail.com](mailto:langdonlivinglandscapes@gmail.com)



## Song birds Disappearing from our Midst

In recent years there has been increasing concern about the decline of some of the songbirds which hitherto were such a delightful – and reliable – feature of Langdon Hills. We appear to have lost our Nightingales and Turtle Doves, there having been no singing males of these two species in the last two springs. There is a marked decline in the number of Cuckoos (many folk not having heard one this year), and precious few Willow Warblers remain in our midst. The number of Yellow Hammers has also declined steadily.

Fortunately the population of Skylarks (a species declining elsewhere) appears to be stable. However, it is saddening to contemplate the birds that have gone – joining the Tree Pipits and Red-backed Shrikes which used to be characteristic of the area, half a century or so ago.



When did you last hear a cuckoo ?



The Lark - if not Ascending, at least stabilising



Not so the Nightingale or Yellowhammer



## Orchard Revival - Community Orchards

This is a very exciting business. We have the remnants of many orchards and cottage- and plotland-gardens, and these are now arousing considerable interest, bearing in mind that there were so many regional varieties of fruit, some of them in danger of dying out. There is such an organisation as the East of England Orchards and Apples Association, dedicated to locating and propagating these traditional varieties. Thanks to Mark Iley of the Essex Biodiversity Project it has proved possible to secure a couple of dozen excellent young trees from the Association, and these were planted in early March by an impressive team of volunteers in the ground of Holy Trinity Church, working under the direction of Father Dominic Howarth. So the first community orchard in our area has now been set up, using Essex and East Anglian varieties.



We now have the possibility of setting up another community orchard, on a section of EWT-owned land in the Dry Street area. This is likely to involve clearance of some of the land during the coming winter. If you would like to get involved in what is currently being discussed, let us know. Such a venture cannot go ahead without the commitment of volunteers prepared to work at the scheme. The long-term benefits should be profound – and action now would constitute an impressive vote of confidence and faith in the longer-term business of maintaining the Langdon ridge in perpetuity. It would be a welcome shift away from short-termism

**Rareties on Langdon:** 1. A brown lacewing, *Drepanopteryx phalaenoides*. This remarkable insect was discovered in Marks Hill Wood during April this year. It is a quite large, leaf-like insect which would not surprise if you met it in the tropics – but in an English woodland it comes as quite a revelation. It is associated with sections of the original wildwood, such as on parts of Langdon – and ours was the first record for Essex. Elsewhere, over many years, it has been encountered in some southern counties, and a few northern ones, but it is very rarely met with. It is a highly elusive creature, not least because of its excellent camouflage.



## Dormouse Survey

The Langdon ridge is known to support quite a few of our scarcer small mammal species, including Harvest Mice, Yellow-necked Mice, Water Shrews and Water Voles. Some of the evidence has come over the years from dissection of owls' pellets, but all of those animals have been seen in the wild as well. We know far less about the Dormouse, but unconfirmed reports suggest that these elusive creatures might also be dwelling in some of our woods and hedgerows. This year several small groups of field-workers have been set up and are now in operation, having placed dormouse tubes in various woods and hedgerows located along the ridge. These are being checked at regular intervals throughout the year for evidence of dormouse activity, operating under the auspices of Kerry Precious, an EWT staff member who holds the necessary licence for handling these rare animals. If you would like to get involved, phone one of the numbers given below.



A modest  
place – but mine  
own.

## Hedge-planting

If we do indeed have dormice on Langdon, their interests would be served if more hedges were planted at strategic places, especially if they link up existing woods and coppices. After so many years during which hedges were being removed – with government subsidy – the emphasis is now upon strategic planting. We have the necessary grant support to undertake some such planting. We would be interested to learn of any farm or similar site where hedge-planting could be undertaken next winter. A whole lot of other creatures and birds would be the long-term beneficiaries of such an operation.



**For more information about Langdon Living Landscape and about how YOU can get involved, please contact us on 01268 419103 or 01268 553149 or by e-mail to [langdonlivinglandscapes@gmail.com](mailto:langdonlivinglandscapes@gmail.com)**