

WHY WE VOLUNTEER...

"I thoroughly enjoy what I do with the Friends group, whether it be rounding up sheep and Highland cattle, ditch clearing, making scenery and props for the "Santa" event. Meeting new people is always interesting and learning new skills is always a pleasure."

Peggie King



...WITH 'FRIENDS OF LANGDON HILLS'

"Volunteering on the park can include repairing or installing fences, coppicing, drainage work, hedge laying litter picking general maintenance, assisting at events that are organized on site or when invited to shows where we can promote the park and sell wooden items that are produced at the workshop at Westley Heights (Bird boxes, bug boxes, compost bins etc.)"

Bob Rigden.

...FOR 'LANGDON LIVING LANDSCAPE'

"I am one of the volunteers helping to clear ground for a community orchard in Dry Street. It is particularly special to me as my aunt and uncle once lived here at Providence Cottage and I remember the house and garden with its many different fruit trees – particularly the cooking pears - delicious!"

Linda Williams



volunteer [vəl'ən tɪr']

noun

The definition of a volunteer is a person who donates his time or efforts for a cause or organization without being paid.



Langdon Living Landscape

Autumn 2014

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From Langdon's shoulder the glad beholder
Gains sweeps yet bolder o'er hill and lee,
Where, widening ever in long endeavour,
The glistening river o'ertakes the sea.

Reginald Becket, "Romantic Essex"

More Hedge Laying Adventures

Last winter's hedgelaying resulted in some first-rate work, appreciated by many. This autumn, work resumes on the long Green Lane hedge, near Lee Chapel South, with Saturday morning work sessions (9 am start). The team is now highly experienced – and new recruits are welcome to join in and learn. It is first-rate exercise, with very gratifying returns in terms of landscape enhancement and fostering wildlife – and it is jolly good fun: plenty of chirpy humour.

What's more, new hedges present themselves for attention, not least at the Dunton Community Orchard site, where there is a long-neglected hedge crying out for attention.

Langdon Living Landscape Bat Group

Following on from a one day bat course provided by Veolia Pitsea Marshes Trust, a Living Landscape Bat group has now formed. Under the guidance of Pat Hatch (Essex Bat Group) and using knowledge and skills gained from the course the group have been out across the ridge looking for these fascinating creatures.

We have run a number of surveys this year and already confirmed 3 species on the ridge. Given the range of habitats we can expect to find more – as historical records suggest.

It hasn't all been late night activity either! We have also had a daytime roost event looking for features in trees that could provide a bat with a good home. This is valuable information to have in an area with so much managed woodland.

Unfortunately this year's bat season has come to a close as the bats have begun hibernating. However the plan is to continue surveying next year (with continued support from the Essex Bat Group) and get a clearer understanding of the bats we have and where they are on the ridge. So watch this space for bat news in the new year!



If you would be interested in joining the Living Landscape bat group or for more information please contact John Hunt on 07803203270 or e-mail to langdon.hills@btconnect.com



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 and the other organisations that care for our local natural environment !!

WE ALL NEED VOLUNTEERS !

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

The publication of this newsletter is made possible by a grant from the Veolia Pitsea Marshes Trust

Essex Field Club



The Essex Field Club's Annual Exhibition and Social Meeting will be held on Saturday, 6th December 2014, 11:00 – 4pm. The venue will be in the Carstairs Room at the Green Centre, at Wat Tyler Country Park, Pitsea, SS16 4UH. Admission free – and some buffet food will be available (a financial contribution is appropriate if you wish to partake).

This is a traditional event, open to visitors as well as members. It is a great opportunity to discover so much of what is happening in the county in terms of wildlife conservation, and it is both inspiring and highly enjoyable.

Update on the ponds

As expected, the restoration of six ponds last winter proved to be enormously beneficial for wildlife. The disturbance stimulated a lot of pond-margin plants to germinate from long-dormant seed – to the effect that several scarce species have made their appearance, in some cases where hitherto they were not known. Among others, celery-leaved crowfoot, hemlock water-dropwort and gipsywort have come as surprises (in some abundance in the case of the crowfoot), joining such rarities as galingale, already known from the Lee Chapel South pond. Dragonflies and damselflies were quick to take advantage of the renewed conditions. Wonderfully, several rarities have turned up, including emerald, red-eyed, small red-eyed and willow emerald damselflies: a couple of these were virtually unheard of in this country a decade or so ago.

Moorhens reared their young on at least three of the restored ponds, while the local herons were clearly finding good cause to linger. The pond restoration has clearly been a great success. The Basildon Natural History Society plans to monitor the ponds' progress next year. If you wish to get involved, contact via the BNHS website (www.bnhs.net), or one of the contacts given on page 4.

So successful was the effort on those six ponds that plans are afoot to seek funding for restoring a few more, as well as creating a new one where there is clearly a case for so doing. In this way, a valuable series of water bodies is ensured across the landscape, to the benefit of a wide range of wildlife which might otherwise dwindle and die out. Such connectivity is what the Living Landscape is all about, thereby helping to reverse what has been an alarming decline in wildlife over the past decade or so. Oh, and bear in mind that garden ponds play a valuable role in sustaining and building such connectivity.



Dry Street Community Orchard

After a respite of more than 6 months, allowing for the breeding season and summer months, it's back to work with a vengeance at the Dry Street community orchard site. The work party meets on Monday mornings, weather permitting. Parking is available at Dry Street Church. If you would like to get involved, ring Rod Cole on 012268 553149.



Christmas at EWT- Langdon Reserve

Santa at The Haven – Sunday 7th, 14th & 21st Dec, 12pm-3pm
Join us for a traditional Christmas experience - see the Elves workshop, Rudolph's stable (sorry no real elves or reindeer!) and meet Father Christmas by the cosy log fire. Drop in event, no need to book in advance. Requested donation £3.50 per child including gift.

Christmas Crafts – Sunday 7th, 14th & 21st Dec, 12pm-4pm
Join us throughout the afternoon for some festive Christmas crafting, making cards, decorations or gifts. Four to choose from, something to suit all ages. Requested donation £1 per craft. Drop in event, no need to book in advance.

Plotland Christmas – Friday 19th Dec, three sessions starting at 7pm, 7.20pm & 8.40pm

Dry Street Pastures and the Battle to Preserve a Local Wildlife Site

The growing pressure on our green spaces has been well demonstrated by the proposals to develop the Dry Street Pastures Local Wildlife Site over the next decade or more. Sadly there remains a lack of understanding amongst The Powers That Be of the inter connectivity of our eco-systems and, locally, of the need to maintain the integrity of the Langdon ridge and its indigenous wildlife.

In this context we quote some lines written in 1991, with ominous prescience, by the late Stan Hollands, a founder member of the Basildon Natural History Society and a doughty fighter for the local natural environment:

“To ensure that everyone can have the chance of living a full, healthy and enjoyable life, the need for conservation of the countryside complete with its farmlands, woodlands, fauna and flora is great, and any plans for the locality must take into account the matters I have mentioned, plus many more. It is essential therefore that when planning applications are put forward for approval, members study them very carefully and take whatever action they can to ensure the conservation of the natural environment for their own well-being, together with that of the fauna and flora. We are complementary to each other.”



Fascinating insights into the worlds of Bumblebees and Dragonflies

Thanks to the financial support of the Veolia North Thames Trust, and the expertise of Professor Ted Benton, much was learned about the bumblebees and dragonflies of Langdon during a one-day course based at Dry Street on 2nd August. Worryingly, remarkably few bumblebees could be found on the flower-rich meadows that were inspected – and this was consistent with experience elsewhere this year. The nation-wide decline of these fine insects continues to be a cause for concern. Five of the six species still considered as common were found, and one of the ridge's rarities, the Brown-banded Carder-bee, but none of the cuckoo-bees, which parasitize the nests of other species, were found. There was rather more success in studying the dragonflies, with several species being identified.



Christmas in the Country Parks



Country Park Rangers have been working with children to make decorations for the big Tree Dressing event on November 16th at 2pm. Decorations will be hung on the 400-year-old Oak Pollard, and there'll be mince pies, music and dancing. This annual event celebrates trees, and reflects the ancient practices to decorate trees in winter (which led to modern Christmas trees). The Country Park's Santa in the Woods event has sold out already, and from now until December there will be lots of work to prepare scenery, props, costumes and more – if you're interesting in helping with prep or the event itself, please get in touch! Langdon.hills@btconnect.com or 01268 542 066.

The Thurrock Council Rangers at Langdon Hills Country Park have over the years supported a number of worthy causes, amongst which is the Thin Green Line Foundation (thingreenline.org.au), which aims to help the families of Rangers throughout the world killed or maimed in the line of duty. Over £300 was raised by the Rangers and Friends of Langdon Hills Country Park at a recent “Food from the Wild” meal. Two of the Rangers, Nicola & Tom, are now planning to do an 8K mud run to raise more money for this worthy cause. If you would like to donate, please visit www.JustGiving.com/Tom-Heenan/.

By now, you are thinking what have the plight of Rangers abroad got to do with the Langdon Living Landscape? By helping and supporting fellow Rangers abroad, we are showing that protecting wildlife and habitats is a global issue in which we all have a part to play, whether here or abroad.

If you would like to help the Thurrock Council Rangers and Friends of Langdon Hills Country Park protect our local wildlife and habitats, or even help at events, while at the same time enjoying social opportunities like the “Food from the Wild” meal, please contact us at langdon.hills@btconnect.com or 01268 542 066.

The Rangers at Langdon Hills Country Park – Nick, Alastair, Tom, Nicola & John.

