



# ELMBRIDGE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

(formerly Weybridge Natural History and Aquarist Society)

**BULLETIN**  
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## SPRING/SUMMER 2011 PROGRAMME

*Wed 9 Mar* "Hedgehogs". Talk by Dr Nigel Reeve, Head of Ecology, The Royal Parks.

*Wed 13 Apr* AGM: see next page for details.

*Sun 8 May* "Hidden Hatchford". A walk, 10.30-12.30, led by Dick Alder, in Hatchford Woods to look at trees and any other natural history. Meet at Pond car park (TQ080583) on Old Road, off the A3 at the M25 Junction. (This is not the one with the café, but the second one, 200 yards along on the same side beyond the park.)

*Sun 19 Jun* A walk on Fairmile Common, led by Dave Page, to look for silverstudded blue butterflies. Meet at 10.00 at the car park on the access road to the ACS International School, a turning on the right from the A307 before the bridge over the A3. The walk should last for an hour or so.

Indoor meetings are held from September to April, at the Methodist Church Hall, Mayfield Road, Weybridge, at 8.00pm. Non-members are welcome to all meetings (£2.00 charge, refundable if you join the Society).

Refreshments charge (winter meetings): 50p. Details of the summer/autumn 2011 programme will be published in the next issue of the *Bulletin*.

### **Request from Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group**

Danial Winchester of SARG has requested records of any sightings of reptiles and amphibians by members. These can be entered directly onto the website [www.surrey-arg.org.uk](http://www.surrey-arg.org.uk) by clicking on The Animals and then on Enter Sightings. As much detail as possible would be valued - grid reference, site name, date, species, sex (if known), life stage (adult/juvenile if known, or egg), and any other information. Anyone without email can write to him at: 17 Badger Court, Broad Ha'penny, Boundstone, Farnham, Surrey GU10 4TZ. He would also welcome suggestions for potential survey sites for SARG in Elmbridge.

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING/URGENT CALL FOR NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

The Annual General Meeting will take place on **Wednesday 13 April 2011** at the Methodist Church Hall, Weybridge. Members are reminded that, in accordance with the Constitution, the text of resolutions for consideration at the AGM, and nominations for Officers and Committee, duly proposed and seconded, should be submitted to the Honorary Secretary by **16 March**. Resolutions affecting the Constitution must be with the Secretary in time to be written and circulated to members at least three weeks before the AGM. Technically we do not have an Honorary Secretary but David Morgan will accept these on behalf of the Committee. *[As David will be away, please send these to the newsletter editor, details on last page.]*

At a recent Committee Meeting the future of the Society and composition of the Committee was discussed. Chris Brading and David Morgan stated that they were only prepared to stand for election for one more year, subject to good health. Chris will then be a few months short of eighty and David will have already passed that mark. Chris has served on the Committee for sixteen years, fourteen of them as Chairman. David has served even longer and preceded Chris as Chairman.

Chris and David consider that they have served long enough and no longer have the drive and enthusiasm for continued executive function. It is necessary for members to come forward and join the Committee with an intention to take over from them. It is for this reason that they have agreed to offer their services for one more year so that there can be a smooth and orderly transfer. David Taylor will be stepping down this year. Do not expect them to find their successors. Enough is enough.

## **ENHS MEETING NOTES**

### **Fungus Foray, Esher and West End Commons, 7 November 2010**

As in the previous two years, this was a joint foray with the West Weald Fungus Recording Group, led by Brian Spooner. Twenty-two people attended, including eight members of ENHS.

The morning session covered the south-west end of West End Common and the north end of Esher Common (between Portsmouth Road and Black Pond). In the afternoon, Brian Spooner and Mariko Parslow, with Ray Tantram of WWFRG, did a circuit of Black Pond, whilst Ted Brown of WWFRG visited part of the south end of Esher Common.

The result was a list of 200 species. Six of these were new to the site, namely *Cortinarius subbalustinus* and *Cortinarius tabularis* (both identified by Geoffrey Kibby), *Hebeloma fragilipes* (under birch), *Lactarius quieticolor* (under pine), *Tapesia griseovitellinum* (on bramble branch), and a possible new species of *Arthrimum?* on bamboo leaves. A full list is available on request.

DICK ALDER

## Wealden Woodlands, 8 December 2010

This talk was presented by Jill Fry, a botanist who has had long associations with Thursley Common, where her husband was at one time warden, and also with the wealden areas south of there. Over the years she has recorded, notably in the Chiddingfold woods, and built up a large collection of photographs of plant and butterfly species in particular.

A significant influence upon natural life within the woodlands is the shelter provided from the most extreme winter weather. This advances the arrival of flowers in the early part of the year, and also aids survival of insects. In the woodlands there is sufficient light to encourage plant development. Wild daffodils are found flowering in mid-February, as well as lesser celandines and the expected snowdrops. At this time too, moschatel, a native of old woodlands, can be seen, and, in wetter areas, golden saxifrage and marsh marigold.

March and April bring out the butterflies, the comma from hibernation and the speckled from pupation. In coppiced areas anemones and wood goldilocks flower, and, where denser woodland has been cleared, large numbers of primrose and English bluebell. Where bramble has been cleared down to underlying clay violets are quick to regenerate. Other flowers seen at this time are the conspicuous bugle, and the familiar stitchwort, lady's smock and wood sorrel.

May is notably the time for orchids to appear, among them the early purple and the common spotted. However the greater butterfly orchid, which used to be found, is disappearing. Among butterflies, green hairstreak, wood white and small pearl-bordered fritillary can be seen, Chiddingfold woods being one of the best areas in Surrey for these species. Regrettably the pearl-bordered fritillary is now uncommon. The hawthorn encountered in the area is the Midland hawthorn, characterised by less indented leaves than those of the generally more common hawthorn.

As the year advances foxgloves flower, notably where the ground has been disturbed, and at the margins of woods, field rose. Betony is generally less common now than in the past, but 2009 proved a good year. Butterflies at this time include large and small skippers, silver-washed fritillary, the second brood of brimstones, gatekeeper, ringlet, purple hairstreak, and purple emperor with their habit of appearing at a regular time daily on pine trees. One species that Jill failed to see in 2010, however, was the Essex skipper. Late in the year commas from a second brood are there, feeding on ivy.

Jill's talk was marked by the large number of interesting photographs shown, many more than referred to here. The subject was of great interest to me, as it was about an unfamiliar area, and one, I suspect, not well known to a number of the members of our society.

DAVID MORGAN

## New Year Bird Walk, Wey Meadows, 9 January 2011

After experiencing so many cold, wet and miserable days it was a pleasure to be greeted with blue skies, excellent visibility and only a light breeze, ideal conditions for bird watching. Fourteen members gathered at the Weybridge station car park. We walked down through the woods adjacent to Brooklands College where many of the common woodland birds were seen. The best sightings were of three nuthatches and a treecreeper, long-tailed tits and great spotted woodpecker. We crossed the green and walked through the houses to the Quadrant in order to pick up some garden birds. We saw many jackdaws but not much else and even the house sparrows usually found here were neither heard nor seen.

From there we walked to the lock and along the river road. There were mute swans and mallard on the river but not much else. We hoped for siskins in the alders but none was seen. We had good views of a male reed bunting feeding on the tops of the reeds. The meadows are usually a good place to see Canada geese and winter thrushes but they were empty of all but a few magpies. We crossed over the railway and walked along the river, again seeing very little. The meadows have been restored after gravel extraction. The new lake has been surrounded by a willow fence that has grown up and obscured the view. Gravel extraction seems to be temporarily in abeyance but they have left an unrestored area with several small lakes where there were many birds including four species of gull, including a third-winter herring gull, lapwing, teal, tufted duck, moorhens and Canada geese. The new lake just to the north of the railway is now obstructed by dense vegetation with very few gaps and was almost empty but for swans and a few gadwall. We did however have a good view of siskins high in the canopy.

We crossed the railway to the old established pond where there were quite a lot of waterfowl, including gadwall, tufted duck, heron, great crested grebe, and two goosander. After crossing the River Wey we walked back through the Dell, unfortunately doomed to housing development, to the Locke King estate and the station but saw very little more. In all we saw 41 different species:

Blackbird	Great crested grebe	Moorhen
Black-headed gull	Great spotted woodpecker	Mute swan
Blue tit	Great tit	Nuthatch
Canada goose	Green woodpecker	Reed bunting
Carrion crow	Grey heron	Ring-necked parakeet
Chaffinch	Herring gull	Robin
Coal tit	Jackdaw	Siskin
Common gull	Jay	Song thrush
Coot	Lapwing	Teal
Cormorant	Lesser black-backed gull	Treecreeper
Feral pigeon	Long-tailed tit	Tufted duck
Gadwall	Magpie	Wood pigeon
Goldcrest	Mallard	Wren
Goosander	Mistle thrush	

## Members' Evening, 12 January 2011

**Manor Farm, Byfleet.** My brief talk at the Members' Evening was intended to introduce people to this, the newest of Surrey Wildlife Trust's reserves. Few members seem to have been aware of its existence, and admittedly it is in a bit of a hidden corner, but it is quite large, at 28 hectares. It was until recently an intensively farmed market garden, a prairie of nitrates and sand. Now it has been converted back to small fields surrounded by rapidly growing hedgerows. It will probably take years to reestablish an interesting grassland flora, but skylarks have already returned and the SWT herd of Galloway cattle have begun to graze it. The southern end of the reserve, however, was unsuitable for cultivation, and has remained for decades as an undisturbed grassland bordering the River Wey.

Some recording has begun in this area; of the flora by Surrey Botanical Society, assorted invertebrates by Scotty Dodd, and butterflies and moths by Richard Jewell and I. Graham Collins and Jim Porter should be visiting this summer to record micromoths, Ross Baker and Lynn Whitfield hope to record the bats. An artificial otter holt has been installed here, in the hope of attracting tenants.

Already we have some interesting records. The flora includes a large stand of common meadow rue, which also hosts an uncommon associated fungus, (found by Mariko Parslow). Another uncommon fungus, *Clitocybe sinopica*, was found on the farm's former dumping/burning ground. We recorded a moth, the dotted fan-foot, which was until last year thought to have been extinct in Surrey for 100 years.

A pair of barn owls were quartering the meadows during the summer. SWT have been given a grant to turn a derelict pump-house on the riverside into a bird-hide, which might be accessible under a membership scheme. It is hoped that we can arrange a recording visit for the society this summer.

DICK ALDER

**Mistletoe.** Brian Spooner gave us a fascinating illustrated talk on mistletoe of which there are many different species worldwide, but only one in Britain, *Viscum album*, also found over much of northern Europe and into Asia and North America. In England the main concentration is in the South-west Midlands (Hereford, Somerset, Gloucester, and Worcester) where it particularly favours mature apple orchards and is harvested for sale at Christmas. In the South-east it is more scattered and nearly always found in or near old parkland (e.g. Bushy, Richmond, Claremont and Clandon) and only rarely on native trees, much preferring hybrid and introduced species, particularly common lime, robinia, poplars (but not the native black polar) and maples (e.g. Norway maple). In Surrey rare occurrences on true native trees include ash and field maple but not in natural woodland settings. On the continent two subspecies have been recorded on conifers, but these do not occur in Britain.

Mistletoe is a hemiparasite with chlorophyll but no true roots, taking water and nutrients from the host tree through haustorial roots; it usually causes prominent swellings (galls) where attached to its host, and plants are either male or female. Its

method of colonisation is still rather obscure and its results are haphazard. Birds, especially the mistle thrush, eat the sticky berries and may disperse the seeds in their droppings or by wiping their beaks. When single growths occur it is assumed that these are male plants, and to proliferate in a particular tree males and females need to be present. Brian suggested that heavy infestation might rather be due to the systemic nature of the parasite spreading perhaps by means of its invasive haustoria and forming outgrowths at will rather than relying on birds as seed vectors and a difficult germination process.

Although fairly widespread, if rather erratic in occurrence in southern England, only six insects are associated with it here, four recorded only since 2000. Hardly any of these are found in Surrey. Despite various surveys, most recently in the winters of 1993-4 and 1994-5, Surrey mistletoe records are hard to come by and much of the data seems to have practically disappeared. Brian illustrated some rare hosts such as the Albury Walnut and a cotoneaster in Leatherhead churchyard. Mistletoe oaks, long associated with Druidic ritual, may once have been more widespread. One such native oak (*Quercus robur*) at Burningfold Farm, Dunsfold, was last recorded in 1949. J.E. Lousley failed to find any in his mid-1970s survey of the Surrey flora, but recently mistletoe has been found on two pin oaks (*Q. palustris*) within the Surrey border in Windsor Great Park. Another exciting recent discovery was of deciduous mistletoe, *Loranthus europaeus*, on *Q. velutina* in Kew Gardens. The tree was grown from seed and no-one planted the mistletoe, never before recorded in Britain, so where did it come from? Yet another mystery attached to this enigmatic plant.

*After refreshments Mariko Parslow showed us examples of microphotography she had undertaken with very simple equipment, well within the capability of amateurs.*

RICHARD JEWELL

## OBITUARY

### **Peggie (Winifred Emlyn) Millson, 1910-2010**

Members of the Society will remember Peggie with affection and considerable admiration as a lively participant at meetings until her 98<sup>th</sup> year. She could always produce questions and reports of her observations of the natural history around her, and her great sense of humour was ever evident.

Peggie had her roots in rural Norfolk on her mother's side, and in Bucklebury in Berkshire (one of the remaining habitats of the nightjar) on her father's side. Her parents met and settled in Weybridge, and Peggie was born there, the first of four children. Whenever possible the family went to Bucklebury to stay with relations living on or around the common. It was an area known for its insular character, having few roads and no railway to communicate with the outside world. Bucklebury was visited in 1926 by H.V. Morton and in his book, "Discovering England", he tells of his encounter with George Lailey – "the last bowl turner in England", one of whose bowls remains in the family. One may be certain that, as a little girl, Peggie was greatly influenced by this close rural community.

A musical upbringing with later siblings and a time at Sir William Perkins School in Chertsey led eventually to a teaching post at a girls' boarding school in Ashford in Kent. At the outbreak of war, the entire school was relocated to a large vicarage in Preston-on-Wye, Herefordshire. In her spare time Peggie cycled the lanes with her new-found friends in the farming community. Below the vicarage is a water meadow called The Flitts. It is now an SSSI and the habitat of many native species including globe flowers and several orchids. After leaving the school, from the 1940s to the 1960s Peggie revisited it in the Easter and Summer holidays, taking various nieces and nephews and their friends and encouraging them to enjoy nature.

By the 1940s Peggie was teaching, principally art and music, at Yateley Manor Prep School in Hampshire, returning to her parents' house in Weybridge at the weekends. She remained at Yateley until her retirement. After that Peggie continued for many years with her music, teaching privately, giving piano concerts at Norfolk House Retirement Home in Weybridge and accompanying singers and instrumentalists. She also sang for some years with the Weybridge Ladies' Choir.

Throughout her life Peggie took an active interest in the natural world, the landscape, its churches, architecture and houses and the lives of the people. Her pleasure in painting all around her reflected this. And only a few days ago a Herefordshire friend told me that about forty years ago he and Peggie visited a derelict house (1319). It was largely due to her inspiration that, years later, it has been restored to its original condition. What a tribute!

NICK GREEN (NEPHEW) - WITH MINOR ADDITIONS BY SOCIETY FRIENDS