



# ELMBRIDGE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

*(formerly Weybridge Natural History and Aquarist Society)*

**BULLETIN**  
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## SUMMER 2011 PROGRAMME

*Sun 19 Jun* A walk on Fairmile Common, led by Dave Page, to look for silver-studded blue butterflies. Meet at 10.00 at the car park on the access road to the ACS International School, entered on the north side of the A307 about a mile from Cobham centre. The walk should last for an hour or so.

*Sun 10 Jul* Joint meeting with the Dragonfly Society on Esher Common, Black Pond area, led by Don Tagg. Meet at Horseshoe Clump car park (GR TQ127627), A308, at 10.30am.

*Sun 17 Jul* Dragonflies and other natural history at Thursley Common, led by Don Tagg. Meet at the Moat car park (GR SU900415), south of Elstead, at 11am.

*Sat 6 Aug* General walk on Molesey Heath. Meet at Approach Road entrance, West Molesey, at 10.30am.

*Fri 19 Aug* Moth night at 16 Rectory Close, Byfleet (Dick Alder), 9pm. Park in Rectory Lane if necessary; phone 01932 400966 if weather looks unsettled.

*Wed 14 Sep* "Invasion of the Aliens: Climate Change and Invasive Species in Britain". Talk by Geoffrey Kibby, writer, mycologist and arachnologist.

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 (£3.00 charge, refundable if you join the Society).

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

## **CHAIRMAN VACANCY**

I had been prepared to stand for election for one more year, but this was conditional on members coming forward to serve on the Committee with the intention of taking on the executive functions of Chairman, Secretary and Programme Secretary. This was set out in the November Bulletin, the AGM papers and in subsequent emails including a list of the jobs that were undertaken by the Chairman and current Programme Secretary. There was no response before the AGM. The AGM was rather poorly attended, perhaps because of this contentious issue. I asked for nominations from the floor but nobody volunteered for any of the three principal vacancies.

I had thought long and hard about this and had come to the conclusion that if I stayed on for another year without support there was unlikely to be any change. It was better to bring things to a head. I therefore decided to withdraw my nomination and step down from the Committee completely.

I regret having to do this but I am sure that the Society will survive and I hope to remain an active ordinary member for the foreseeable future.

CHRIS BRADING

## **ENHS MEETING NOTES**

### **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 13 April 2011**

The venue was the Methodist Hall, Mayfield Road ,Weybridge. Chris Brading took the chair and opened the meeting at 20:10 with an attendance of ten members.

#### **1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Olive Boroughs, David and Ann Morgan, Janet Ripley, Kath Brading, Brenda Chapman, Ray and Lynn Wilson, Lynn Whitfield, and David Page.

#### **2. Minutes of the last AGM**

The minutes were agreed and passed as a true record. Proposed by Lorna Sandford and seconded by Mariko Parslow.

#### **3. Matters arising**

There have been no changes to the rules on liability insurance, so there were no matters arising - but see AOB

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#### **4. Committee Report**

This was presented by Chris Brading. Overall the Society had a good year with a wide-ranging programme of events. Membership has remained stable, with new members balancing losses and membership now stands at 37. Sadly, one member, Peggy Millson, passed away during the year at the age of one hundred. Our finances remain healthy but an increase in expenditure, particularly for speakers, has led to a further slight deficit over income, despite increased use of email and the small charge

for refreshments. The Committee has therefore decided that a small increase in subscription charges is now a necessity. The Committee only met formally once during the year but most business was conducted at the monthly meetings and by email.

Chris Brading (Chairman) and David Morgan (Programme Secretary) have announced that they will stand down at the next AGM (but see under Item 6). David Taylor, after many years' service, has also decided that he will not be standing for reelection this year. It is therefore imperative that other members come forward to serve on the Committee to replace them. Lynn Whitfield has continued to produce the quarterly Bulletins to a very high standard, while Colin and Pauline Poyton continue to maintain an excellent website. The Committee extends its thanks to them and all others who have helped over the year.

The acceptance of the Committee Report was proposed by Keith Sandford and seconded by Avril Davies.

### **5. Treasurer's Report**

The Society had funds of £583.54 in the bank as at 28 February 2011 as against £607.79 a year earlier – a deficit of £24.25. Total income was £307.75 while expenditure was £332.00. The cost of speakers continues to cause some concern with costs rising to £155 last year (approximately £40-£50 per meeting when we had an outside speaker) against £110 for the previous year. Income from refreshments was £79.75, slightly up on the previous year, against expenditure of £23, giving a profit of £56.75. The visitor (there was only one) was charged £2, which included refreshments. This was well down (£17 was taken in 2010). Hall hire came to £126 but for only seven sessions, as against £144 for eight sessions in 2009-2010. Mailing costs rose to £18 as against £16.91 for the previous year.

Acceptance of the Treasurer's report was proposed by Lorna Sandford, seconded by Alan Forno and agreed unanimously by the floor.

### **6. Election of Officers and Committee**

The following Committee members have agreed to stand for a further term:

President Brenda Chapman

Treasurer Dick Alder

Membership Secretary Peter Hambrook

Programme Secretary David Morgan

No specific post Ross Baker

In addition, **David Page** has agreed to join the Committee without specific duties.

Acceptance of the above was proposed by Chris Brading, seconded by Mariko Parslow and agreed unanimously by the floor.

As there have been no volunteers to take over the post of Chairman, **Chris Brading** has decided to resign with immediate effect. This therefore leaves three vacancies on the Committee, for the posts of Chairman, Secretary and Minute Secretary. In addition **David Morgan** has said that he will stand down as Programme Secretary at the next AGM, by which time a replacement will need to be up to speed. A

Committee meeting will be called soon to discuss how to cover the unfilled posts until replacements can be found. Dick Alder agreed to arrange this and Brian Spooner will also attend.

### **7. Election of Honorary Scrutineer**

Brian Spooner has agreed to take on this role for a further year. Acceptance was proposed by Ross Baker, seconded by David Taylor and agreed unanimously by the floor.

### **8. Resolutions**

The Committee proposed that subscription fees for 2011-12 should rise to £8 for a single and £12 for a couple or family, while visitors would be charged £3, which would still include refreshments. The proposal was carried unanimously.

### **9. A.O.B**

**Insurance** – although there have been no changes in the law, it was felt that there was some risk to the Society should an accident occur either at an indoor meeting or on a field trip. A discussion took place regarding the possible risks and as a result the Committee agreed to investigate what insurance was available on the market.

**Thanks** – Mariko proposed a vote of thanks to Chris Brading for his 14 years of service as Chairman over a period of 16 years and this was applauded by those present.

The meeting came to a close at 21:35.

PETER HAMBROOK

## **What's Going On in Elmbridge, 9 February 2011**

This talk was given by ENHS member David Page, Countryside Estates Officer for Elmbridge Borough Council, who began with some facts and figures about the Elmbridge Countryside Estate and its workforce. The area involved is some 510 hectares, and includes an assortment of SSSI, LNR, SNCI and 'Open Spaces'. There is a workforce of eight, full time. The team has its own equipment including a tractor, a digger, flail and chipper, with which it carries out site maintenance.

A lot of time is also spent on policing work such as night patrols, on keeping an eye on encroachment along boundaries, and trying to reduce the fly-tipping of rubbish (currently running at around 100 tonnes per annum). And there is always litter to be picked up. More positive jobs are the running of public events and volunteer days, and providing signage and interpretation boards. 'Outdoor classes' for schools have been given for about 20,000 children so far. Liaison with groups such as the Lower Mole Project and the Oxshott Conservators is important, as is supervision of contractors.

Humouring the public is part of the rangers' job, sometimes difficult, especially when dealing with the more cantankerous dog-walkers. But the estate cannot be seen as solely for the benefit of wildlife, and even the most awkward of council-taxpayers has to be handled with tact.



*Silver-studded blue butterflies mating: the species is thriving at Fairmile Common in Esher. Photograph ©David Page.)*

Much stir was caused by the recent programme of tree-felling on the Esher commons, but now 22.5 hectares have been completed, and people can start to judge the results. The process was messy, using gigantic equipment such as a ‘snipper’ and a ‘spinner’ that nipped whole trees off at the base and bore them off. The trees were chipped and transported to Slough Power Station to make green electricity, then the stumps were mulched to ground level - this

material was then scraped up and spread in nearby woodland, leaving the original heathland soil exposed for regeneration. By public demand, stumps were ground down, but this will actually make the mowing of heather much easier. Grazing was never an option here, and the regenerating heather will need years of intensive maintenance until it is established.

Another recent project has also been controversial: the cleaning out of Black Pond. David saw this as a necessary evil, as its condition was declining considerably. Some 900 lb of fish was removed during the operation, including many common carp, and some monster mirror carp, and there were a good number of rudd, a few gudgeon, and even a 3.5 lb perch. The carp would have been a serious menace to invertebrates. The excavation was carried out as sensitively as possible, and areas left where emerald dragonflies were thought to breed. If they have been lost, it is hoped that they will transfer naturally from Middle Pond. The banks were built up around the pond to deter dogs from jumping into the pond and causing havoc. A new area of wetland has been created below the rebuilt dam, where the old swimming huts have been buried under a mound.

At Littleworth Common, a new pond has been created, and 45 species of plant have already been recorded there. This area was once known as ‘Ditton Marsh’. In the near future there will be changes at Cowey Sale, when the new Walton Bridge is built. The council expects to gain an area of wildlife interest as a result. Nearby, Desborough Island is in line for improvements, maybe cleaning up its public image.

David took us on a photo tour of his sites, starting with the ponds. All are of interest for their flora or invertebrates - Halfpenny Pond for the starfruit, Chequers Pond for toads and dragonflies, Ash Pond for visiting purple emperor butterflies, Downside Common Pond and the little A3 Pond for great crested newts. The Esher commons have their special attractions; inevitably David mentioned the 3,000 species of fungus, but the commercial fungus-gatherers are still around in droves. It was recently discovered that the old wartime water tanks on Esher Common are a historical rarity, maybe needing conservation! The Ledges is an area of ancient woodland; unfortunately the River Mole is prone to flooding, and the boardwalk gets submerged.

It may need to be rebuilt higher up the bank. Molesey Heath is developing an interesting flora, and it is essential that it is kept open and free from excessive scrub. At Fairmile Common, the tarmac area known as the Flying Circle has been removed, and the silver-studded blue butterflies are thriving in the surrounding heather; the best-ever daily total, 215 butterflies, was recorded here last year. Despite this colony's isolation, it seems that inbreeding is not currently a problem. David will be leading a walk here for ENHS on Sunday 19 June, when we will get a chance to marvel at the silver-studded blues!

DICK ALDER

### Hedgehogs, 9 March 2011

The presenter of this talk, Dr Nigel Reeve, is currently Head of Ecology for The Royal Parks in London, but has a long-held interest in hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*) since studying them for his PhD at the Royal Holloway, University of London and during his tenure as a lecturer at the University of Roehampton. Research into their ecology is certainly needed since, although the hedgehog is regarded with affection in this and many other countries, recent data such as those from the Tracking Mammals Partnership suggest that the UK population, sadly, is in decline. As a result it was added to the BAP priority list in 2007.

European hedgehogs are native throughout northern and western Europe, and have been introduced to New Zealand where they are considered a pest species. They are variable in colour – blond animals are found on Alderney apparently! – but all of course feature a coat of spines, which are some 2.5 cm long, bulbous at the body end and very sharp at the other. As a result they are not successfully preyed upon by many animals, although badgers can and do eat them, as well as competing with them for food – this is principally beetles, caterpillars and earthworms but hedgehogs take a wide range of invertebrates including slugs, snails and fly larvae. They will also exploit other food sources offered, such as catfood put out by helpful householders – but bread and milk is not recommended.

Another threat to hedgehogs is accidental disturbance or even destruction while in the nest, especially during hibernation which takes place approximately November to February, in a nest of leaves (oak and beech being ideal) constructed in a confined



space under vegetation or man-made structures such as sheds. Rescue centre records show that 47% of hedgehog admissions and 38% of deaths are human-related, with hazards including pits and steep-sided ponds, trapping in sheds, garden netting and litter, strimmers, traffic, garden tools, bonfires and pesticides.

*Female hedgehog: recent research shows that females can have multiple mates, resulting in litters with mixed paternity.*

Hedgehog courtship and mating – which can take several hours – takes place in the spring, and the young are born mainly between July and September after a gestation period of 33 days. Recent studies show evidence of polyandry, i.e. multiple paternity within the same litter. At birth, the young hedgehogs' skin is inflated with fluid to protect the female against their spines, which at this stage are white, with new, brown adult spines starting to come through after 7 days. The young begin to forage on their own after 4 weeks and are weaned at around 40 days old.

Nigel's research in the late 70s and early 80s, which was carried out at the Ashford Manor Golf Club in Surrey, entailed tracking individual hedgehogs in order to monitor their behaviour, using a variety of techniques including radio-tracking. He found that individuals' home ranges, once established, remained fairly constant, which could pose problems for animals if habitats they use habitually are removed or changed. Males range three times as widely as females, covering about 40 hectares, especially in the breeding season. Edge habitats such as hedgerows are preferred, followed by grassland, with other habitat types less favoured: maintaining borders of invertebrate-rich long grass and scrub along hedgerows, and ensuring connectivity between suitable habitat areas, are therefore important for hedgehog conservation. While suburban areas with gardens can be good for hedgehogs therefore – provided there are not too many badgers or busy roads – maintaining connections between gardens is essential. Some aspects of hedgehogs' behaviour are not well understood, such as the use of each others' summer nests, and the habit of self-anointing the spines with frothy saliva, the purpose of which is unclear.

Further information on these endearing – if not exactly cuddly! – mammals, including measures householders can take to help conserve them, can be found on the British Hedgehog Preservation Society website: [www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk](http://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk).

LYNN WHITFIELD