



ELMBRIDGE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

(formerly Weybridge Natural History and Aquarist Society)

BULLETIN
ISSN 0268-389X

No. 292, February 2012

SPRING 2012 PROGRAMME

Wed 8 Feb "Ladybirds". Talk by Andrew Halstead, Principal Entomologist, RHS, Wisley.

Wed 14 Mar "From Pits to Paradise". Talk by Simon Elson, Surrey County Council, on transforming sand and gravel pits to enhance their natural history.

Wed 11 Apr AGM: see next page for details.

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 Summer 2012 programme will be published in the next issue of the *Bulletin*.

Claremont Community Day, 20 May 2012

Elmbridge Natural History Society has been invited to take part in this event, to be held at Claremont Landscape Garden in Esher. The National Trust is planning the event, which will comprise a fun day of family activities and entertainment, including a birds of prey display, archery, chainsaw carving, face painting and story telling. They will also be offering all visitors free entry to the historic garden with its lake, unique grassed amphitheatre and Belvedere Tower. If you would be interested in helping out with an ENHS stall on the day please contact the committee via the newsletter editor (see email addresses on the last page of the Bulletin).

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will take place on **Wednesday 11 April 2012** 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 **10th March 2012**. 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. (As we do not currently have an elected Honorary Secretary, resolutions can be passed to any of the committee members or sent to the newsletter editor for forwarding.)

ENHS MEETING NOTES

Discovering Kew's Hidden Treasures, 14 September 2011

This talk was given by Dr Helen Hartley, who is Project Digitisation Manager in the Herbarium, Library, Art and Archive Department at Kew Gardens with current responsibility for digitisation of the Director's Correspondence Archive. This contains 218 volumes of correspondence received by Kew's Directors, William Jackson Hooker, Joseph Dalton Hooker, William Thiselton-Dyer and David Prain, from 1841 to 1928, as well as correspondence received earlier by William Jackson Hooker, when he was at Edinburgh University. It contains accounts and observations relating to botany, ethnobotany, natural history, history, science and politics. The aim of the project is to preserve and catalogue every item, and to make the records easily identified and accessible through a database.

The sequence in the process is to catalogue and digitally image each item, then to read it through in detail and produce a summary of its contents. Reading is frequently difficult because of poor legibility, and sometimes writing that runs other than simply horizontally across the page. The work is far from complete, but has already produced 50,000 images for storage.

The correspondence came from a range of categories of people - collectors, botanists and natural historians, but in addition government departments, shipping agents, plant nursery owners, and a number of well-known figures. It is not surprising, therefore, that the examples given by Helen should be of scientific, historical and anecdotal interest, and include some unexpected names.

Naturally a number of items relate to possible new plant species, and some are from people with the wide interests more commonly shown in earlier centuries. Samuel Pollock Parish (1822-97) was a missionary in Burma, who sent orchids from there to Kew, and in 1871 provided a collection of flower drawings. Henry Fletcher Hance (1827-1886), who was a diplomat in China and notably had correspondence with Charles Darwin, investigated plants in the country and wrote to Kew regarding them. As an example of export 'trade', Kew supplied around 1860 a number of tropical plant species to the newly instituted Botanical Gardens in Dominica to help start their collection. This was in response to a request from Charles Murray, the first Curator, who had come from the Edinburgh Royal Botanic Gardens.

Some letters are concerned with plant production ventures or proposals. Richard Spruce, a botanical explorer who in 1860 made a seed and plant collection of cinchona (*Cinchona succirubra*) in South America with a view to planting it in India to provide quinine cheaply to the poor, consulted Kew over the project. Roger Moody, a resident of the Falklands Islands where tussock grass (*Paradichloa flabellata*) grew in profusion, tried in extended correspondence to gain the support of Kew for its introduction into Britain: it is good animal feed having high nutritional value, and also can provide good protective cover for other plant species.

More recently, Neville Chamberlain wrote to Kew for advice when working to establish a sisal plantation on Andros Island in the Bahamas, before he embarked on his political career. And from a very different sphere of life, Ranjitsinhji, a renowned cricketer who became Maharaja of Jamnagar in 1909 and was concerned at the prevalence of malaria in the surrounding state of Gujarat, sought advice regarding the planting of eucalyptus to drain the swamplands.

Two other celebrities among the correspondents were Edward Whymper, the mountaineer, and Edward Lear, the poet, who was also an accomplished painter and sent pictures of parrots and of mountain scenery that he had seen in India. Helen's talk was greatly enjoyed and stimulated plenty of questions and discussion.

Anyone wishing to follow up the work of the Digitisation Team will find their blogs, reached via the Kew Gardens website www.kew.org, of interest.

DAVID MORGAN

New Year Bird Walk, West End Common, 8 January 2012

The weather for this year's bird walk was overcast and 8°C, but with only a light breeze it was quite pleasant. Ten members gathered at the West End Lane car park. From the park we recorded a cormorant and many redwings flying over.

Woodpigeons, crows, long-tailed tits were seen and a song thrush was heard singing. We then walked eastwards through the woods towards West End pond. The birds were few but we added robin and chaffinch and saw many redwings in the trees. We diverted to Chequers pond and apart from a few blue tits in the marginal bushes, there was very little bird life.

The pond is a thriving habitat for dragonflies in summer and has some interesting plants. We looked at the vegetation on the muddy edge and David Page pointed out water purslane (*Lythrum portula*), pond water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus peltatus*) or possibly common water-crowfoot (*R. aquatilis*) and New Zealand pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*), an invasive alien species introduced into the UK in the late seventies. It inevitably escaped into ponds and forms blanket cover, smothering native species. Elmbridge has permission to use herbicides to control its spread. We walked over to the West End pond, which was crowded with birds but mostly mallard, Canada geese, black-headed gulls and moorhens.

We walked back past Garson's farm and up to the lookout at the start of the Ledges. It was very quiet but there were many corvids on the distant fields. The path along the river was technically closed due to a section of the boardwalk having been washed away. However we had the Estates Manager with us so we descended the steps to the River Mole and walked back along the bank. There was a pair of mallards on the river, a heron on the bank and a great spotted woodpecker was heard. Along the bank we looked for signs of greater dodder (*Cuscuta europaea*), parasitic on nettles, a relatively rare plant but known to be on the Ledges. We had to make a diversion away from the river to pass the damaged section of the boardwalk, which proved to be a bit strenuous. The walk back to the cars did not produce any additional birds but David pointed out some of the history of the area including evidence of a great fire in 1978, the remains of a WW2 observation post, and the remains of the old Victorian rifle

range.

The list of sightings was rather disappointing but we were probably a bit late in the day and the birds had finished feeding. However it was a very pleasant walk and good to meet up with the group for our first outing of the year.

In all we saw 23 different species:

Black-headed gull	Grey heron	Mute swan
Blackbird	Herring gull	Ring-necked parakeet
Blue tit	Jackdaw	Redwing
Canada goose	Jay	Robin
Carrion crow	Long-tailed tit	Song thrush
Chaffinch	Magpie	Starling
Cormorant	Mallard	Woodpigeon
Great spotted woodpecker	Moorhen	

CHRIS BRADING