



## ELMBRIDGE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

*(formerly Weybridge Natural History and Aquarist Society)*

**BULLETIN**  
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### **WINTER 2012-SPRING 2013 PROGRAMME**

- Wed 12 Dec* 'La Brenne, Butterflies, Moths and Other Delights' by Peter Hambrook and Ray Wilson. Some nice slides from their recent trip to France, PLUS mince pies and seasonal jollity!
- Sun 20 Jan* New Year bird walk around the Wey Meadows, led by Chris Brading. Meet at Weybridge Station car park, south side, off Brooklands Road (OS grid ref. TQ075636), at 10.00am.
- Wed 9 Jan* 'Nathusius' Pipistrelle' by Ross Baker. A talk on this rare UK bat species and the search for its roosts in Elmbridge.
- Wed 13 Feb* Members' Evening. Contributions welcome; please contact Dick Alder if you would like to give a short talk.
- Wed 13 Mar* 'Winkworth Arboretum', by Peter Herring.
- Wed 10 Apr* AGM

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.

The sale of natural history-related books and products will continue to be a feature of indoor meetings, so please bring anything you feel might be of interest to someone else, and which could help keep the society's bank balance healthy!

## ENHS MEETING NOTES

### The Life of a Ranger, 12 September 2012

Speaker James Herd is currently the Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT) Ranger for Barossa & Poors Allotment, a large area of heathland and woodland to the north of Camberley, extending into Berkshire. It is mostly Army land, with some management contracted out to SWT. James is also a member of the Trust's Grazing Team, so gets to travel all around Surrey, to anywhere within the 2700 hectares that their cattle are in action. A busy life, with long hours in all weather and no prospect of getting rich, but nevertheless a job that James clearly loves. How does one get into such a job? These days not without with a degree (in James' case in ecology), but ideally with other skills acquired at such places as Merrist Wood, plus some time spent as a conservation volunteer. There is certainly no shortage of applicants!

The Grazing Team is now responsible for 278 cattle (mostly Belted Galloways), 49 goats and 68 red deer. Grazing takes place not only on SWT property, but on Surrey County Council, MoD, Natural England, and local council properties. The cattle are also a familiar sight whilst at their winter quarters on various fields in and around Wisley. They are used mainly to control purple moor grass (*Molinia caerulea*), which they prevent from stifling the heather and building up litter on heathland. The goats and deer have a tougher diet of young pine and birch, mostly on MoD land. The results of grazing have so far been mostly positive, benefits outweighing disadvantages (such as losing the odd nibbled orchid).

Problems have been fewer than one might expect. The Galloways are very hardy beasts, outside all year and not bothered by ice and snow. They are seldom sick, and of 158 calves born only two have given trouble. Vets' bills are not, therefore, a great headache. Sometimes cattle get loose, usually when a fence has been damaged, maybe by a falling tree; but they are usually easily lured back by the rattling of a bucket of 'nuts'. James' toughest assignment was to retrieve a cow that was swimming merrily down the Wey towards a weir; it was eventually dragged out with ropes. He has also had a problem with children throwing stones at the cattle on Barossa, which led to the suspension of grazing there, and correspondence with the local MP (one Michael Gove). The deer are altogether tougher to deal with; James has great respect for the stags' immense strength, and it takes several strong men to handle them.

As a site ranger, he has a need to organise wildlife surveys in order to formulate management plans. In the two years that he has been at Barossa & Poors, much has been done. This includes an excellent invertebrate survey by Scotty Dodd, with additional moth recording by a team of volunteers, and Surrey Amphibian and Reptile Group has collected records from the site.

Public walks have given James the chance to explain to his 'neighbours' what he is trying to achieve. He is constantly surprised at how little many of them know of what is on their doorstep. A new venture for SWT this year was a 'bioblitz', in which as many recorders as possible make as many records as possible within a 24-hour period



*Belted Galloway cattle grazing on Barossa & Poors Allotment.*

on one site. The public were invited to take part, and the hope was that more people would take to the idea of wildlife recording. This year's exercise at Norbury Park was considered a success, and another site will probably host one next year .

Finally, James showed us photographs of the biggest incident in the Grazing Team's year. This was when a tractor, towing a trailer loaded with a dozen Galloways, caught fire on the A3 at Ripley. Roast beef? No, but only thanks to some nifty work by the rangers! Quite a show stopper, both on the A3 and during the meeting! Thanks to James for a most entertaining talk.

DICK ALDER

### **AVIAN POX LATEST**

Scientists at the Institute of Zoology, Edward Grey Institute, BTO and RSPB have recently reported on new research into the emergence of avian pox in British tits, charting the spread of this disease from southeast England in 2006 into other parts of the country. The disease, which has been reported most often in great tits, causes large tumour-like growths and can result in death. More information is available at <http://bto-eneews.org/NXK-12BH6-3JRKUO-EXPHX-1/c.aspx>, and a free avian pox factsheet can be downloaded from <http://bto-eneews.org/NXK-12BH6-3JRKUO-EXPHY-1/c.aspx>.

## BIRDS ON MOLESEY HEATH

A brief list of interesting birds seen on Molesey Heath this year by one of our members, Ben West, who lives close to the Heath.

Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)

Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

Grasshopper warbler (*Locustella naevia*)

Peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*)

Water rail (*Rallus aquaticus*)

Garden warbler (*Sylvia borin*)

Sedge warbler (*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*)

Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)

Lesser whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*)

One other interesting (non-avian) observation was a turtle of some description that was resident in a stretch of the River Mole on Molesey heath for a period last summer. Did anyone else see this during the year?

BEN WEST