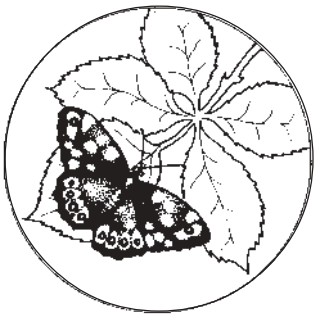
THE ESSEX FIELD CLUB

HEADQUARTERS:

THE PASSMORE EDWARDS MUSEUM,

ROMFORD ROAD, STRATFORD,

LONDON, E15 4LZ



NEWSLETTER NO. 5 January 1993

EDITORS NOTE

Thank you to Del Smith for his work as Editor of the Newsletter. He has handed editorship over to Peter Harvey and items for the Newsletter should therefore now be sent to Peter Harvey at 9 Kent Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6DE.

Thank you also to those members who have responded to requests for items to the Newsletter. I would continue to ask members for contributions. There must be lots of interesting observations and information that would be worth sharing with other Field Club members.

Peter Harvey

PROGRAMME FOR THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF 1993

The programme card will now run from March 31st 1993 to March 31st 1994. The meetings before 31st March are therefore given on page 9 of the Newsletter.

HORNETS IN ESSEX

I was interested to read Del Smith's note in the last Newswletter. I also had not noticed Hornets in Essex prior to 1992 but had been familiar with them in places like the New Forest.

During 1992 a moth trap was operated in Hatfield Forest with the help and cooperation of Martin Atkinson, the deputy warden. In the late summer Hornets began to be caught in the trap until in September there were up to nine taken in a night.

Their size and appearance demands some respect, but in the cool of the morning they are drowsy and docile. Those who work moth traps are sometimes troubled by numbers of wasps being caught in late summer. These are a great nuisance: not only are they a hazard to the person going through the trap, they are also very vicious, attacking the moths and tearing off their wings. By comparison the Hornets are really very good natured.

David Agassiz

A RECENT MAMMAL SURVEY OF WHET MEAD RESERVE AT WITHAM

Whet Mead reserve is owned by the local council. It is a disused rubbish tip, on land that was once a sewage works. It has the river Blackwater to the east, the river Brain to the south and the A12 trunk road to the west. The north edge adjoins farmland planted with willows. A councillor involved with the reserve contacted Chris Miles of the E.W.T. requesting assistance in a mammal survey of the reserve. In a round about way it was to me that the request came.

During late spring I visited the reserve for the first time and had a look at the type of habitat there. Considering the fact that it had been a rubbish tip I was rather surprised how well it was covered with growth of shrubs and tall herbage. There was a lot of rough grass, a long row of hawthorn on the side of a bank beside the river Brain, nettles, umbellifers, burdocks and a marshy area with patches of sedge. There was tall scrub and trees alongside the A12 and two disused lagoons with reeds, willowherb and more sedge. Oh yes I also found Bee orchid growing on one of the banks formed when the site was filled.

After a discussion with a colleague it was decided we would do the trapping during the week beginning 9th November 1992. We would use 50 traps, these were to be placed at random spacings in the various areas of the reserve. On Monday 9th Nov. we met the reserve warden at 2pm just as it started to rain.Nevertheless we put down all 50 traps, having some in each different habitat. By the time we had finished we were glad of our torches to find out way back to the car.

Tuesday morning was chilly but bright and we were very pleased with the catch: 22 Wood mice, 4 Bank voles, 1 Field vole, 2 Common shrews, 1 Pygmy shrew and 2 Harvest mice. A total of 32 animals from 50 traps. We checked the traps again before dark and found we had caught 5 new animals and 2 recaptured individuals.

Overnight there was prolonged heavy rain and the water laid fairly deep on some areas, in the lagoons it had risen halfway up one trap. Fortunately the trap was placed correctly and when we opened up the shrew inside was tucked up inside the hay, warm and bone dry. Another 27 new animals were caught and a further 16 recaptured. It was intended to leave the traps down for a third night, but as so many animals and species had been caught we decided to pick them up Wednesday morning.

The final figures of animals caught were:

Wood mouse	38 + 15 recaptures
Bank vole	12 + 2 recaptures
Common shrew	5
Pygmy shrew	5
Harvest mice	2 + 1 recapture
Short tailed field vole	2

Whet Mead appears to have a good population of small mammals. I had hoped to catch Water shrew, but we may be more fortunate in the future, who knows we could get Yellow neck and House mice to make a full house.

Alf Gudgion
Arthur Hicks, B.N.A.

MUNTJAC OF THE KINGS FOREST

Many members will be aware of the "Muntjac" study being carried out in the "Kings Forest", part of Thetford Forest. Indeed several members have helped with the catches necessary to mark animals for positive identification. The whole project is teamwork, lead by Norma Chapman, Kathie & Mick Claydon, and Stephen Harris. Here is an account of the "Catch" meeting on Saturday 24th October 1992.

The day starts with the collection of all the nets and poles plus the wooden boxes which will hold any animals that are caught while they are transportedto the so called process area. Here they will be checked by a vet and then be given ear tags, a collar or both, sometimes even a radio collar.

At 8.30 am people meet at a point to the south west of the study area. Here they are organised into "netting and poling parties"who will erect the nets and "watchers"who will be positioned to watch over a length of netting that has been erected, just in case an animal gets caught in the net before all is completed. It then remains for the nets to be laid out along the rides around the block of woodland that is selected as the site for that day. This is done similarly to the fishing nets over the rear of a boat, except that a van is used and the nets spill out of their sacks as the van pulls away. The block of wood chosen for this catch was 203A, a deciduous block with lots of Oak and Sweet Chestnut, there is a good crop of tree fruits and so there is a likelyhood of several animals in the block. As we went round laying out the nets a female Muntjac and two Roe does moved out of 203A heading north, a bit of a disappointment but cannot be helped. By the time we had laid all the nets out and reached the corner at which we sstarted, quite a lot of netting had been erected and watchers were in place.

In the meantime our "Controller" had organised "catchers" from helpers who had arrived a little later and these were allocated to a team leader and directed to a given side of the block. I was team leader on side 3, the eastern side, about 200 metres in length and I ahd three additional catchers with me. Two of these catchers had previous experience with Muntjac catching, the others had not and so I positioned myself at the centre of the side, the two experienced people on the ends and the inexperienced inbetween. Once all the netting is up and all catchers are in position and ready, a line of "beaters" lead by Norma Chapman, spread out along one side of the block. They then proceed to beat through the block, flushing out the deer, into the net with luck. The beaters line up along side 1and beat eastwards towards side 3.

All team leaders and Norma have CB radios and we are in contact with the "controller", who has a base set in his car. I heard the controller give Norma the okay to start beating and so I alerted all my team on side 3 and awaited with anticipation. rom side 1 to side 3 is almost 400 metres but within seconds of the start of beating a Muntjac doe ran into net 3 near to one of the inexperienced catchers. Fortunately he reacted quite well and restrained the animal as I had instructed him, allowing me time to get over the animal and for a third catcher to fetch a box which had been strategically placed. We then disentangled the animal from the net and placed it in the box. Quickly as possible the nets were re-erected and the boxed animal placed to one side, ready for the forest ranger with his van to collect and transport it to Stephen and the vet.

When the animal first ran into the net I had radioed for the beating to stop, now the netting had been replaced I called central and reported all was ready again. Norma restarted beating and very shortly there were animals in nets 2 and 4. Stop beating!!
I went into the net on side 2, the north side, very near to the corner with 3. I knew there were two inexperienced catchers at that point and so I ran to assist. This time it was a

Muntjac buck with its antlers well and truly entangled. Get down over the animal and hold it firmly but gently by the shoulders. Cutting the netting is the easiest way to solve that problem and is less stress for the animal.

When all the nets were back in position, I called control for beating to recommence and heard of more animals in other nets. After about ten minutes beating restarted, and soon a young female Muntjac ran into net 3. Again I ran to restrain it and box it and I didn't have time to get back to my radio before a buck ran into our net, getting itself caught by just one antler on a couple of strands of the net. I managed to get over it and restrain it while I removed the net from its antler. Just as the buck was being put into a box another animal ran into the net some 40 metres away. I did a sprint fit for the Olympics and got onto a young doe Muntjac before she could free herself. When this animal was boxed, I called up control for the van to take 3 deer to process. This request caused quite a stir as I had forgotten to inform control of any of the 3 that had hit our net in quick succession. Later a fawn came into net 3 and while the nets were down a marked doe ran out of the block and although she got partly tangled in the net, she was able to get free before anyboby could get to her.

Altogether 17 Muntjac were caught out of 203A. Four more went through and escaped from the nets. Add to these the one Muntjac and two Roe which moved out before the nets were up, a total of 24 deer in the block of about 400m. by 200m. Those sweet chestnuts are a good attraction.

There will be more catches in 1993, anyone who would like to help please contact Norma Chapman, "Larkmead", The Street, Barton Mills, Suffolk.

Stephen Harris and Norma are also seeking information on the spread of Muntjac and would appreciate records of earliest dates they were seen in any area. If you know when you first saw Muntjac in your area please let Norma know.

Alf Gudgion

THE PLANE LEAF-MINER *Phyllonorycter platani* REACHES ESSEX

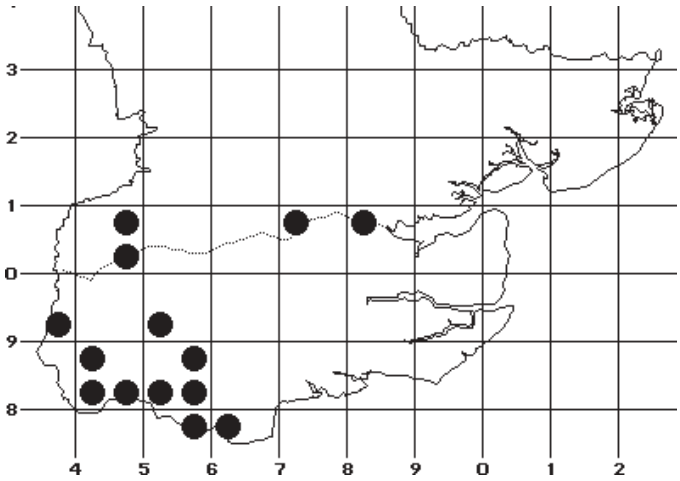
At the end of October 1990 Maitland Emmet discovered signs of this tiny moth in South Kensington. Since then its spread has been monitored, by November 1991 it had spread over much of south west and central London but it had not got into Essex or the east London boroughs.

During 1992 it made remarkable inroads into Essex, presumably assisted by the prevailing winds. By November it was found in good numbers in the east London parks, in Grays and Upminster with a few being detected as far afield as Harlow, Epping, Chelmsford and even Maldon.

The larva lies between the upper and lower surfaces of a leaf of London Plane on a selected tree, making a large pocket in the leaf.There can be over 50 to a leaf when the population builds up. There are three broods a year, larvae overwintering in the fallen leaves.

The moth is succeeding against the odds. Plane trees are not native in Britain so they only occur when planted - usually in streets and town parks.In most such places the leaves are swept up and destroyed. In more rural areas plane trees are few and far between, usually just the odd one planted in a large garden in Victorian times.

Phyllonorycter platani 1992



Essex records from:
v.c. 19 - Epping, Harlow, Chelmsford, Maldon.
v.c. 18 - Woodford, Collier Row, East Ham (CWP), Wanstead Flats, Beckton (CWP), Rainham, Upminster, South Ockendon, Purfleet, Grays.

David Agassiz

IVORY AND ELEPHANTS

The plight of the world's elephants and the lust for ivory are the themes of a new exhibition at the Chelmsford and Essex Museum.

The past and recent history of the ivory trade are explored in some detail. Early links with slavery and exploitation of Africa are examined. The story brings us up to, and examines today's complex political pressures as well as the ecological arguments.

The facts and figures make grim reading and will shock many - the exhibition is clearly designed to wake us up. The 1970's and 1980's have seen the greatest loss of these superb animals - between two and three hundred were being killed each day over a ten year period.

Across much of their range elephants have disappeared and their habitat is fast disppearing too. Today's wars, demand for land and recent droughts are all taking their toll.

The uniqueness of ivory, its versatility, the large range of products made, and past and present alternatives are all looked at in some detail together with objects on display.

The exhibition has been produced by the Area Museums Service for South East England in association with the People's Trust for Endangered Species. It can be seen at the Chelmsford and Essex Museum from the 9th January to the 7th February. The museum is open from 10.00 am to 5.00 pm, Monday to Saturday and from 2.00 to 5.00 pm on Sunday.

For further information contact Dr Tony Walentowicz, Keeper of Natural Sciences on 0245 281660.

ANTS IN ESSEX

Like many other invertebrates ants are an overlooked and very under-recorded group, not only in Essex but in the country as a whole. Yet everybody is familiar with the common black ant *Lasius niger* and the mound building Meadow ant *L. flavus*. Although the Meadow ant is widespread and common, even in many gardens, the old grasslands and meadows with their large numbers of ant hills are sadly a rare sight today.

Ants form a small group of about 47 native species in this country. Despite this there can be difficulties in the identification of some groups of close species. This is especially so if only one or two individual worker ants are available. The lack of good or easily obtainable identification guides or keys has made life difficult in the past.There is one book that I would recommend to anyone seriously interested in the identification of British ants, "The Formicidae (Hymenoptera) of Fennoscandia and Denmark" by C.A. Collingwood, in the Fauna Entomologica Scandinavica series (Volume 8, 1979). It is written in english, easily obtained from specialist natural history booksellers and contains all the British species. The keys are clear and it is well illustrated with diagrams that help clarify identification within difficult genera such as *Myrmica* and some of the species groups in *Lasius*.

There are some changes afoot and new species now recognised. For example, it has recently been discovered that we have two species of *Stenamma* in Britain. It seems that the newly recognised species *S. debilis* is in fact far more common than *S. westwoodi*. The maps for *S. westwoodi* will have to be completely revised.

There is concern over the survival of some species in Britain. For example *Formica pratensis*, one of the "Wood ants", may already be extinct and other species such as *F. exsecta* have undergone a dramatic decline. There is also apparently a worrying decline in the common Wood ant *F. rufa*, particularly in the north of its range. This is an uncommon species in Essex with its stronghold in the woods of south-east Essex. There is an old record for Epping Forest and there are old records for the north-east of the county, the most recent being atWeeleyhall Wood in 1980. The Wood ant requires open heathy areas within the woodland, and regular coppicing is an important factor in providing suitable conditions.

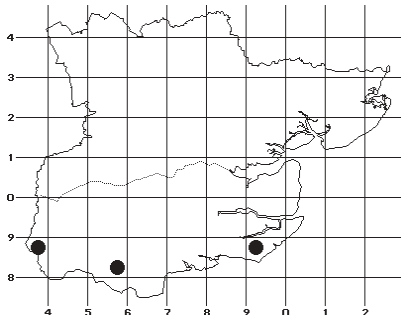
On the other hand some other species have recently been shown to have a more widespread distribution than previously thought. *Myrmica specioides* was originally found in Kent at Sandwich Dunes. It was then discovered in a small number of other coastal localities in south-east Kent and more recently in a wider variety of sites in that county. In the last two years it has been found to occur in Essex and the south east of Suffolk. One theory is that the ant is spreading, perhaps helped by the succession of mild winters and good summers that we have had. However the species is also very close to the common species *M. sabuleti* and *M. scabrinodis* and could well have been be overlooked. It seems to occur in warm situations where the vegetation is short and there is plenty of bare ground. It has been found in sandy areas for example at Colne Point and in short grassland areas, particularly in old grazing marsh grassland and on south facing slopes.

Ants are excellent indicator species for ecological monitoring, they have a fascinating biology but this is often very poorly understood.They really deserve more attention and I would ask members of the Field Club to help if they can. I would welcome records, voucher specimens and observations for ants from anywhere in the county.

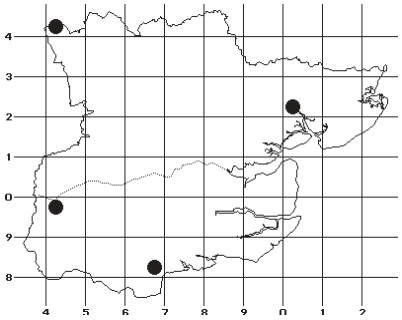
The following provisional distribution maps are based essentially on the recent records of the Essex Spider Group, records made between 1978 and 1986 by the previous County Recorder for spiders Kate Rowland, together with other records held at the Colchester Natural History Museum and records made Colin Plant and the Passmore Edwards Museum survey team in 1984-5. Older records mapped by K.E.J. Barrett in the provisional national atlas produced in 1977 and 1979 by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology are not yet included.

- ● records 1980 on
- o records before 1980

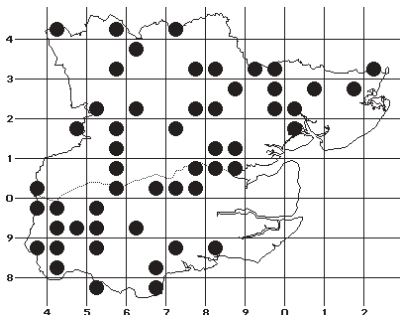
Ponera coarctica (Latreille)



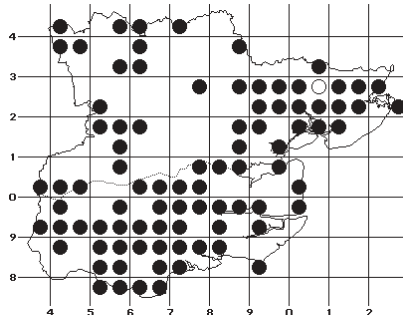
Myrmica lobicornis Nylander



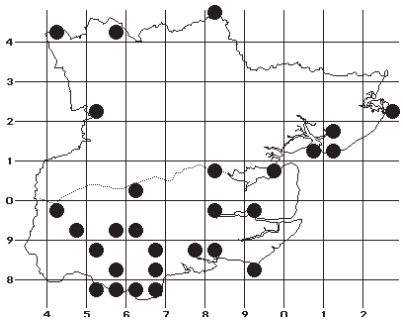
Myrmica rubra (Linnaeus)



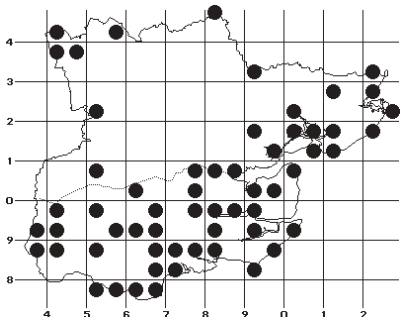
Myrmica ruginodis Nylander



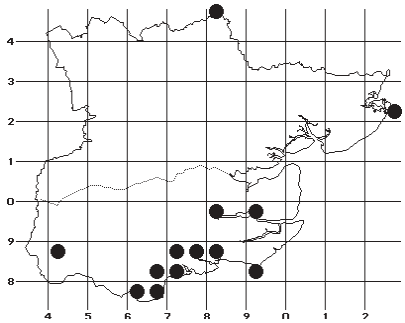
Myrmica sabuleti Meinert



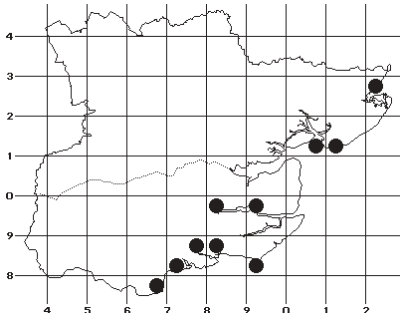
Myrmica scabrinodis Nylander



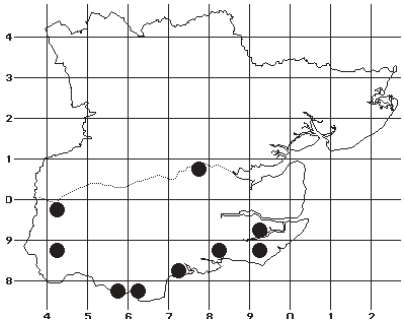
Myrmica schencki Emery



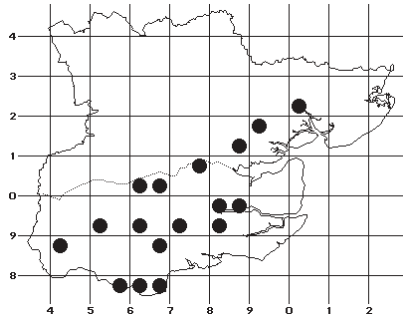
Myrmica specioides Bondroit



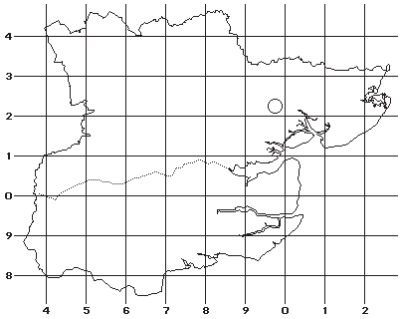
Leptothorax acervorum (Fabricius)



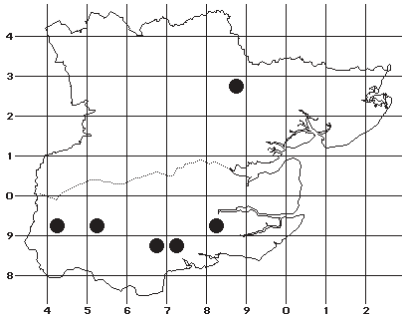
Leptothorax nylanderi (Foerster)



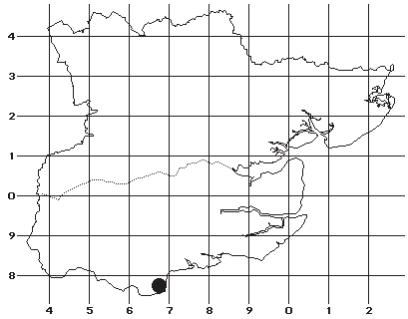
Monomorium pharaonis (Linnaeus)



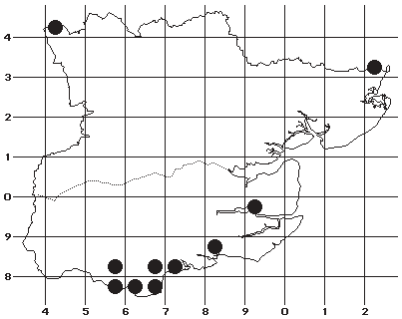
Stenamma westwoodi (sensu latu)



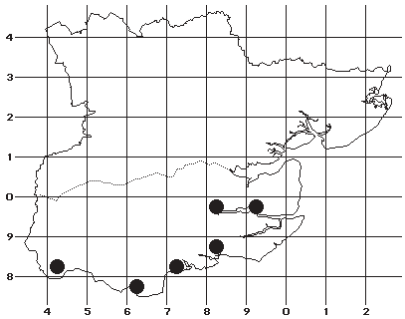
Stenamma westwoodi Westwood



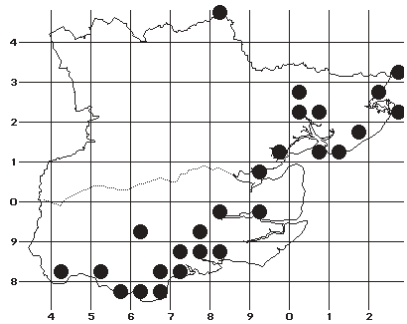
Stenamma debilis Forst.



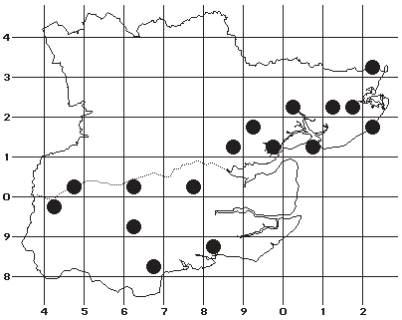
Myrmecina graminicola (Latreille)



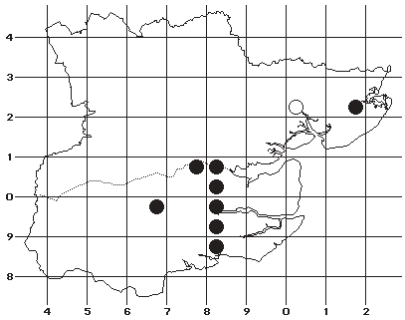
Formica cunicularia Latreille



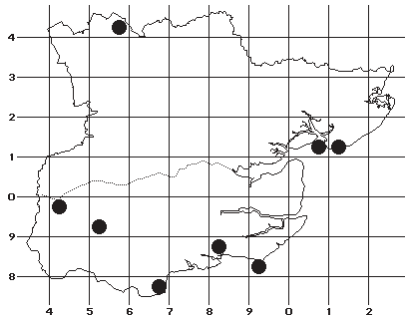
Formica fusca Linnaeus



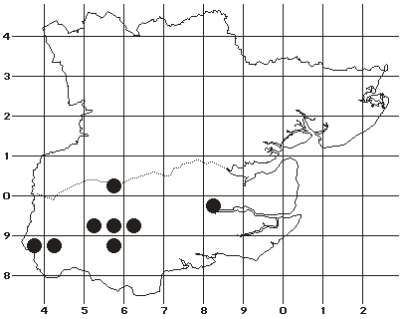
Formica rufa Linnaeus



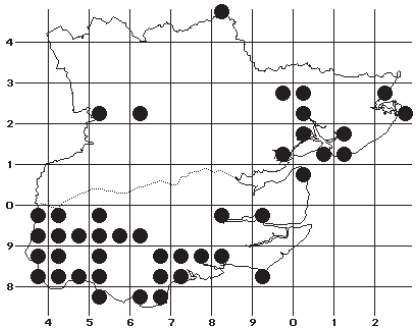
Lasius alienus (Foerster)



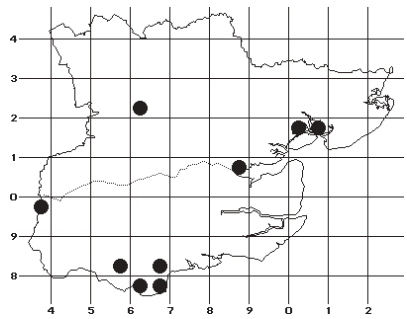
Lasius brunneus (Latreille)



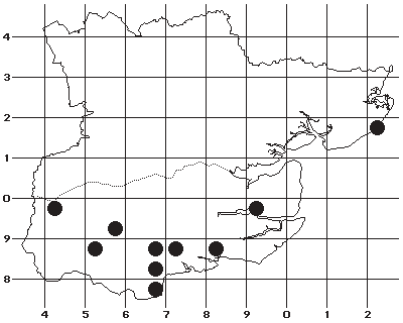
Lasius flavus (Fabricius)



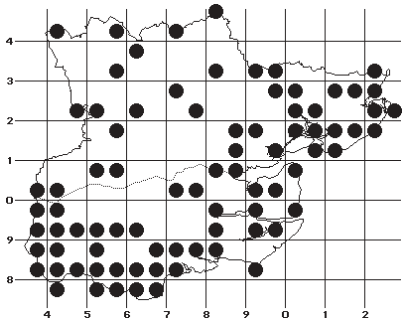
Lasius fuliginosus (Latreille)



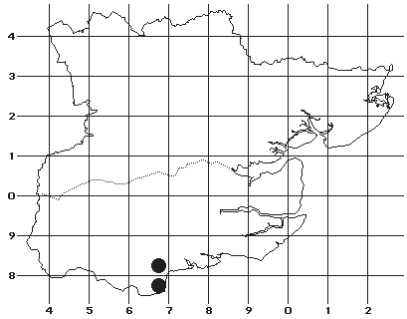
Lasius mixtus (Nylander)



Lasius niger (Linnaeus)



Lasius umbratus (Nylander)



Peter Harvey, 9 Kent Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6DE

WHATS ON

ESSEX FIELD CLUB

JANUARY

Sunday 31st **Bird Group**. Heybridge and Chigborough Lakes for wintering birds. Meet car park TL 871069 at 10.00 am. Phone 0277 651890 for details.

FEBRUARY

Saturday 20th **General Meeting 1372**. "Fungi in Epping Forest". Talk by Geoffrey Kibby at Red Cross Hall, London Road, Chelmsford. Car park entrance in Writtle Road. Time 3.00 pm. Cup of tea and biscuits provided.

MARCH

Saturday 6th **A.G.M.** followed by Presidential Address "Lepidoptera invading Britain". Commencing at 3.00 pm at Red Cross Hall, London Road, Chelmsford. Car Park entrance in Writtle Road. Cup of tea and biscuits provided.

Sunday 14th **Bird Group**. Abberton for early migrants. Meet at Visitor Centre car park TL 963185 at 10.30 am. Phone 0277 651890 for details.

Hope to meet you at our new indoor venue.

Judith and Tony Boniface

CHELMSFORD AND ESSEX MUSEUM

9th Jan-7th Feb. **Ivory and Elephants exhibition** - see page 5 for details.

Friday 19th March 8 pm **Bees** - lecture by Clive de Bruyn which will range over the evolution of bees, their environment, beekeeping, the hive, honey, royal jelly, pollination and botany. There will be examples of honeycomb and produce at the lecture.