

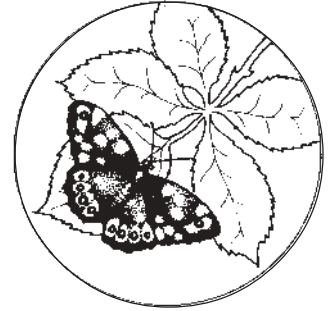
# THE ESSEX FIELD CLUB

HEADQUARTERS:

THE PASSMORE EDWARDS MUSEUM,

ROMFORD ROAD, STRATFORD,

LONDON, E15 4LZ



**NEWSLETTER NO. 4**

November, 1992

## HORNETS IN ESSEX

In recent decades Hornets have been rare insects in Essex and in fact until this year I have never seen one in our county.

However I am informed that the species is making a recovery and spreading back across England from the West Country. I was fortunate enough this year to receive a phone call from Colin Jupp a local birdwatcher drawing attention to fact that numerous Hornets had been seen in Dagnam Park (TQ 5593). I went to the park on 17th October and was lucky enough to see maybe a dozen or so flying about some Ash trees occasionally coming to rest on the foliage. I believe all those seen were in fact queens dispersing from a nearby colony.

Hornets though an impressive size are by no means the fearsome beasts that people imagine and many other wasp species are more quickly aroused than the Hornet.

Hornet colonies are usually founded in hollow trees or stumps often low down and occasionally on the ground in bark, etc.

I have over the years often had reports of Hornets but until now they have always proved to be smaller wasp species. Hornets are very obviously much larger than wasp workers being about 20-22 mm. body length and queens sometimes over 28 mm. They are also brown and yellow rather than black and yellow. I would welcome any reports and/or specimens of sightings from Essex. I would also be interested to hear if anyone has any historic recollections or records of Essex Hornets.

D. A. Smith, 12 Tring Gardens, Harold Hill, Romford, Essex, RM3 9EP.  
Telephone 0708-375555

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## A REQUEST FOR NEWSLETTER ITEMS

Please send in items for the Newsletter, short or long, general or specific. There must be lots of interesting observations or records that Field Club members could share with everyone else. What about articles about interesting wildlife sites, habitat changes, wildlife in your garden, how areas near you are managed for wildlife or historical recollections of Essex.

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## BAT ROOST VISIT, MEETING ON 26TH JUNE 1992

This was a particularly successful meeting held near Maldon at a site that had been visited before - a house supporting one of the largest Pipistrelle roosts in the county. At this time of year female bats are present forming a nursery colony. In 1992 babies were born early as a result of the favourable weather and 810 bats were counted emerging from their roost. The peak count this year was of 921 bats on June 2nd, comparing well with 969 in 1991. It is common at this roost for numbers to decline during June.

After completing the count, the six Field Club members looked into an outbuilding and saw two Brown Long-Eared bats flying amongst rafters. This species emerges later in the day than the Pipistrelles, preferring almost complete darkness before starting to hunt. The highlight of the evening occurred when a female Natterer's bat was found, with baby attached, on the floor of the building. The bat was unable to fly but after cleaning off cobwebs and dust it was placed on the wall to recover. A thorough search the next day failed to relocate it, so presumably it recovered and flew away. All in all, a good meeting resulting in three species of bat being seen.

John Dobson

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## BAT WALK, MEETING ON THE 10TH JULY

July weather was colder and wetter than June and the meeting was held for five members in Baxted Park. The weather was cold and damp and unsuitable for seeing bats. Several Pipistrelles were found feeding over the lake in dark conditions and only poor views could be obtained. At a site where five species (Pipistrelle, Noctule, Daubenton's, Natterer's and Brown Long-Eared) have all been recorded, this was a disappointing result. Better luck next time!

John Dobson

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## MAMMAL TRAPPING, MEETING ON THE 27TH SEPTEMBER

Nine members attended this meeting in the Essex Wildlife Trust Backwarden Reserve at Danbury. As a contingency plan, 15 traps had been set earlier in the week and two Wood Mice and a Bank Vole were held in captivity and shown in the car park. 36 traps had been set the previous evening in deciduous woodland and along the western boundary of the reserve and these produced eight Wood Mice and a Common Shrew.

A further 12 traps were set in a nearby lane along a wooded hedge bordering arable land. Here several people saw Yellow-Necked Mice for the first time - an adult and juvenile, being trapped along the hedge. A ninth Wood Mouse completed a successful meeting.

John Dobson

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## A RARE BEE IN NORTH ESSEX

In July this year I collected a specimen of a large handsome *Andrena* bee with darkened wings from Field Scabious (*Knautia*) flowers. The bee later proved to be the nationally rare (RDB3) *Andrena hattorfiana*, which has a close and possibly obligate association with *Knautia* as a pollen source. A further visit in August showed the bee to occur in some numbers along a short stretch of disused railway track where the *Knautia* also occurs in some quantity. The disused track is adjacent to old (wartime?) sand and gravel workings and arable land. Meadow Saxifrage also occurs on part of the old railway bank and a nearby area of lichen heath so the land was probably formerly old grassland.

The English Nature publication "A review of the scarce and threatened bees, wasps and ants of Great Britain" (1991) states that although recorded widely in southern England the bee has declined substantially during this century and there are post-1970 records for only about 15 sites. The decline is probably due to the intensification of agriculture in lowland England and the effects of myxomatosis on rabbit populations.

This is the first record in Essex of *Andrena hattorfiana* for a long time but could it still occur elsewhere in the county? The Field Scabious is not a common plant in Essex nowadays but there might be similar refuges, perhaps other sheltered stretches of disused railway track. I would be grateful to hear suggestions of possible suitable areas that might still exist in the county.

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

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## FURTHER HORNET RECORDS FOR ESSEX

A Hornet nest was found this year during an Essex Spider Group meeting to Halstead on the 10th October. The nest was by the side of the River Colne in an old Alder trunk about 8-10 feet above the ground. The nest was very active despite the rather cold damp weather, with a constant stream of workers entering and leaving the nest.

This is the first nest that I have come across in Essex, but I have also found overwintering queens under logs in woodland, one at Birchanger Wood, Bishops Stortford last year and one at Hylands Park near Chelmsford in 1989. I have also seen individual workers this year at Glemsford Pits, North Essex and in several places in the northwest of the county.

David Carr reports three individuals together on ivy at Great Myles, near Ongar on the 27th September this year and Colin Plant reports that the species is now quite common in the Bishops Stortford area where he has taken it in moth traps at Hatfield Forest and its satellite woods, Eastend Wood, Sawbridgeworth Marsh and just over the border in Hertfordshire at Stocking Wood and several other places.

Peter Harvey

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## SOCIAL WASPS IN ESSEX

There are now seven species of social wasp found in Essex. Two other species on the British list remain unrecorded. These are *Vespula austriaca* (Cuckoo Wasp) which is very rare and mainly found in south-western Britain, the west and the north and *Dolichovespula saxonica* which has only recently reached Britain. The first British record of *D. saxonica* was a male collected on 31st July 1987 near Dorking, Surrey. Since then it has slowly been spreading and 2 nests were found as far west as Hampshire in 1992. It will no doubt not be long before it turns up in Essex. However, its close similarity to *Dolichovespula norvegica* (Norwegian wasp) means that it can easily be overlooked.

The rarest wasp in Essex appears to be *Dolichovespula norvegica*. There are old records from Lexden (1893), St Osyth (1903), Colchester (1896) and Woodford (1884 and 1888), the only recent record I know of, is a nest found in a fruit tree in Eastwood, Southend on Sea 28th July 1988.

The Tree Wasp, *Dolichovespula sylvestris* seems to be generally uncommon, but well distributed. Nests can be underground, but they are often in trees, shrubs or ivy. It frequently visits Water Figwort flowers for nectar.

*Dolichovespula media*, like *D. saxonica* is a recent colonist, first recorded in Britain, at Friston Forest, East Sussex in 1982. Since then it has spread westwards and northwards, reaching east Dorset, North Norfolk and Worcestershire. Most nests have been found in bushes, often in gardens. The first Essex record was in 1990 and it is still spreading.

*Vespula rufa* (Red Wasp) does not appear to be common in Essex and all records come from wooded areas in the countryside.

Our two most common wasps are *Paravespula vulgaris* (Common Wasp) and *Paravespula germanica* (German Wasp). Both species seem to be well distributed in the county, including towns and gardens.

## Identifying Social Wasps

Unfortunately, the identification of wasps is not easy. A fairly straightforward key to all British species of social wasp is available from Dr M E Archer, College of Ripon and York St John, York YO3 7EX. Ask for the BWARS Starter Pack with the key to British Social Wasps.

The social wasps are classified into 4 genera:

<i>Vespa</i>	1 species, <i>Vespa crabro</i> , the Hornet
<i>Dolichovespula</i>	4 species, <i>D. sylvestris</i> , <i>D. media</i> , <i>D. norvegica</i> and <i>D. saxonica</i>
<i>Vespula</i>	2 species, <i>V. rufa</i> and <i>V. austriaca</i>
<i>Paravespula</i>	2 species, <i>P. vulgaris</i> and <i>P. germanica</i>

*Vespa crabro*, the hornet is the largest British wasp. Queens may be more than 3 cms in body length. Hornets are predominantly brown and yellow and can be distinguished from large *Dolichovespula* by their swollen head (extended vertex) behind the eyes.

D. media queens are comparable in size to worker hornets and are also brown and yellow, however their heads are not swollen behind the eyes and there is a dark mark on the frons.

Dolichovespula species are distinguished from Vespula and Paravespula species by having longer cheeks below the eyes (see figure In Dolichovespula they are much longer than the diameter of first antennal segment (scape) at its terminal end.

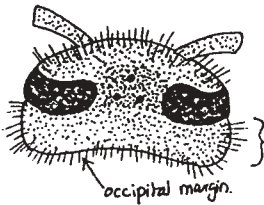
Vespula rufa can easily be distinguished from Paravespula species by having black hairs on the top of the first abdominal segment and not white hairs.

Social Wasps. A rough guide to identification.

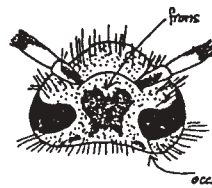
Is it very large and mainly brown and yellow?



Most likely to be a hornet (Vespa crabo). They are 2.5-3.0cms long.  
Can be confused with queen Dolichovespula media. Hornets are very swollen behind the eyes - see below.

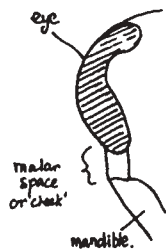


Vespa crabo worker, comparable in size to D. media queen. Head very swollen behind eyes and posterior ocelli 3-6x distance from occipital margin as from eyes. Colour brown-yellow as for D. media but no black markings on frons or 1st antennal segment.



Dolichovespula media queen. head not swollen behind eyes. ocelli equidistant from eyes and occipital margin. Black markings on frons and 1st antennal segment.

Except for D. media queens, all other wasps are black and yellow. Dolichovespula spp. are long-cheeked wasps. All others are short-cheeked. See below.

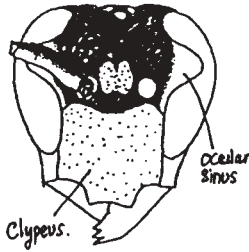


Dolichovespula species.



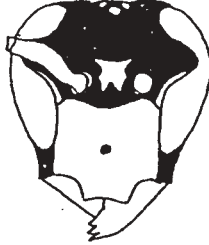
Vespula and Paravespula species.

Distinguishing Dolichorespula species :



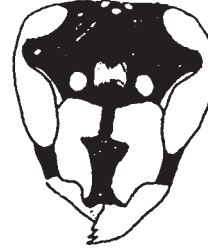
D. media

Ocular sinus completely yellow.  
Colour more orangy-yellow.  
Clypeus with no markings or  
single central dot.



D. sylvestris

Ocular sinus partly  
black. Clypeus has  
single dot.



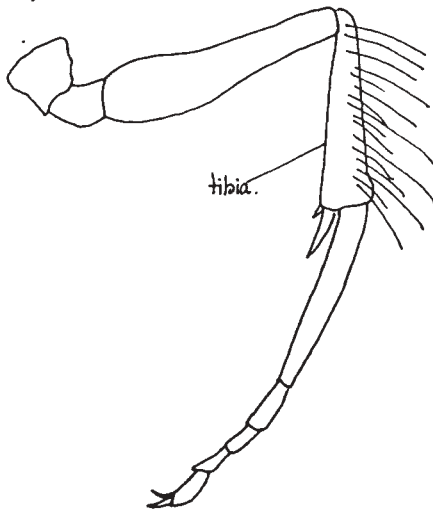
D. norvegica

Ocular sinus partly  
black. Clypeus has  
a vertical black streak.  
Hairs on side of thorax black  
or at least with some black hairs.

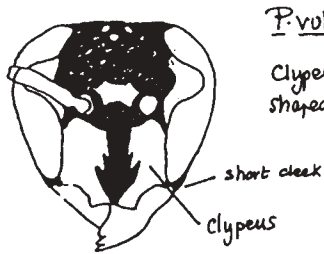
D. saxonica v. like above but  
hairs on side of thorax light brown.

Distinguishing Vespula species and Paravespula species.

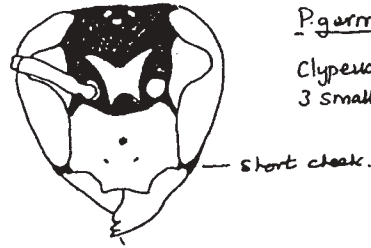
Vespula species ie. Vespula rufa and V. austriaca have long black hairs on the upper surface of the first abdominal segment. Both Paravespula species have pale hairs. V. austriaca has no worker caste and can be distinguished by having long black hairs on the hind tibiae (see below).



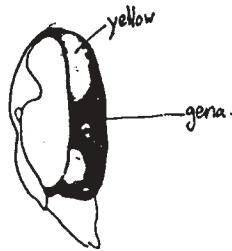
Distinguishing *Paravespula vulgaris* (Common Wasp) from *P. germanica* (German Wasp).



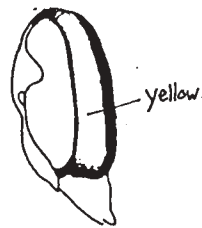
*P. vulgaris*.  
Clypeus has a broad anchor-shaped vertical streak.



*P. germanica*  
Clypeus usually has 3 small dots.

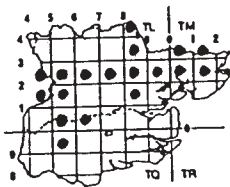


on the side of the head, gena has yellow stripe interrupted half way

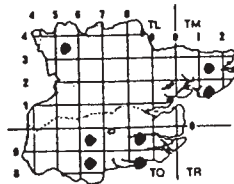


on the side of the head gena has non-interrupted yellow stripe.

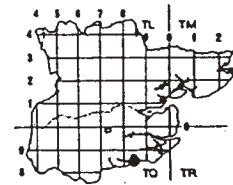
Provisional Maps of Social Wasps in Essex (post 1980)



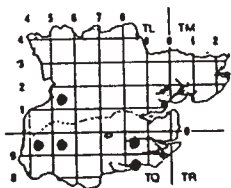
*Vespa crabro* L.



*Dolichovespula media* (Retz.)



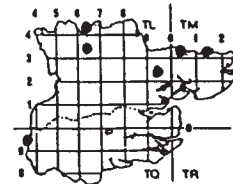
*Dolichovespula norvegica* (Fab)



*Dolichovespula sylvestris* (Scop.)

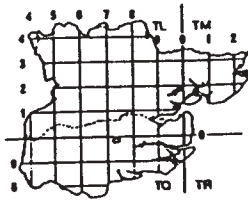


*Dolichovespula saxonica* (F.)

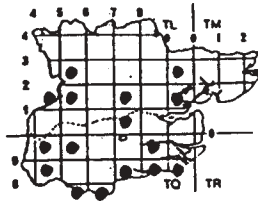


*Vespula rufa* (L.)

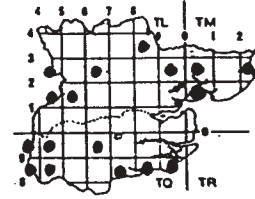




*Vespa austriaca* (Panz.)



*Paravespula germanica* (Fab.)



*Paravespula vulgaris* (L.)

Roger Payne

### A FURTHER REQUEST FOR HOUSE SPIDERS

Thank you to the Field Club members who responded to my request for house spiders and the green spider *Nigma walckenaeri*. This has resulted in new records for both the *Nigma* and the house spider *Tegenaria gigantea*.

Although now probably too late for *Nigma* to still be found this year, I would again ask for help regarding house spiders. The different *Tegenaria* species will still be adult, and there are also other spiders commonly associated with houses that are very under-recorded e.g. *Amaurobius similis*, *Zygiella x-notata* and *Nuctenea umbratica* all found under the eaves or in cracks in walls and fences, and the three jumping spiders *Salticus scenicus* the zebra spider and *Euophrys lanigera* both found inside or outside the house on walls, near window sills or on fences and outbuildings and *Sitticus pubescens*, which seems to be found particularly on old walls.

The Gum-Squirting spider *Scytodes thoracica* and the Daddy-Long-Legs spider *Pholcus phalangioides* are both very characteristic in appearance and could be in any house. The small Theridiid spider *Theridion melanurum* is very common inside or on the outside of houses and the related species *T. blackwalli* and *T. familiare*, although apparently very rare are possibly simply overlooked.

In 1990 Ray Ruffell found a house spider new to Britain in his own house. *Scotophaeus scutulatus* looks very like the widespread but under-recorded Mouse spider *S. blackwalli* and could well have been overlooked before. It is widely distributed in Europe and there seems no real reason why it should not also occur widely in Britain.

So once again please send me your spiders! House spiders are tough (that is why they can survive in houses) and are quite safe in the post if sent in a small container like a matchbox or old film capsule. I am happy to refund postage and let you know what you have in your house so what have you got to lose?

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



## THE ROBBER FLY *Asilus crabroniformis*

This large and impressive nationally notable robber fly was presumed to be extinct in the county until it was found by Roger Payne last year at Broom Hill, Chadwell.

I saw at least 5 individuals at this site on the 6th August this year resting on horse dung. It was also reported from Rainham Marshes during one of the surveys conducted there in recent years but this record was apparently treated with some skepticism.

However now Colin Plant has received a report of some numbers of the robber fly hunting all over the foreshore at Crayford Marshes on the 28th August this year, just across the river from Rainham Marshes. Colin suggests that the fly may migrate from one locality to another in the Thames Estuary region.

According to the English Nature publication "A review of the scarce and threatened flies of Great Britain" the fly is recorded widely in southern England with about 40 known post 1960 sites mainly within Hampshire and the south-west but greatly declined away from these areas. Typically the fly is found on dry heathland, chalk downland and rough unimproved pastureland. Adults are found around cow and horse dung but they are said to lay their eggs in cow dung. At Broom Hill only horses are present and there is no cattle grazing in the vicinity so it is probable that eggs are also laid in horse dung. It seems reasonable to suppose that the fly may have to move at least small distances each year as suitable grazing conditions change. The adults are large and presumably strong fliers but are alert and difficult to approach. I have only seen them fly short distances before they alight again, usually on another patch of dung.

The occurrence of the fly on the Thames grazing marshes again emphasises the national importance of these areas. A look at a pre-war Ordnance Survey map shows the staggering amount of Thames marsh that has been lost to industrial and housing development. With the additional conversion of grasslands to arable, there are now only sizeable areas of Thames grazing marsh left in Essex at Rainham, Fobbing, Canvey and Kersey (Benfleet). These areas nearly all are or have been or will be under serious threat from developments such as the Rainham Marsh MCA/Havering saga, there have been proposals for a huge housing development at Canvey and there are various road "improvement" schemes that continue to appear. The situation is little better in Kent where the North Kent Marshes are under increasing pressure from development proposals and for the siting of silt lagoons. Proposals to develop the "forgotten" East Thames Corridor are presumably only waiting for an upturn in the economy to become a reality.

Peter Harvey

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The London Natural History Society is planning to publish this book early in 1993 and there will be a pre-publication offer which will be open to Field Club members.

698 species will be included, with distribution maps for approximately 600 of these. The text on each species will include the first and last year that it has been recorded, its current status, the number of broods per year, the flight periods and the recorded food plants for the London area. There will be geology map of the London area which extends in Essex to Tilbury, Thorndon Park, Ongar and Harlow, the south west of the county.

Since the London Natural History Society recording area includes such a large part of the county, the book will no doubt be of considerable interest to Essex naturalists.

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**"WOOD REPLANTED - BY LAW"**  
(from the Essex County Council "Essex '92 magazine")

A team from Essex County Council went onto private land to replant nearly 400 trees on part of a woodland in Ingatestone that was unlawfully cleared by the landowner.

Essex County Council won the case against the landowner at Chelmsford Crown Court in May 1990 when he was fined £10,000 for grubbing out trees that were covered by a Tree Preservation Order. He was told that by law he had to replant them. He did not comply - so the team of six tree planters went onto the land and successfully replanted 393 oaks, sweet chestnuts, field maples and hornbeams.

The County Council sent the bill for the planting to the landowner. Principal Assistant in the Countryside section, Stephen Westover said: "We hope that this will show everybody that we will carry things through where woodlands have been unlawfully cleared. Any members of the public who are concerned about woodlands close to them should come to us."

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**"NEW PARK IS ON THE RIGHT TRACK"**  
(from the Essex County Council "Essex '92 magazine")

Essex County Council took over the management of an unusual new country park during the year - the former Braintree to Bishops Stortford railway line.

Now renamed the Flich Way Country Park, it is run by the County's Ranger Service as a green recreational site where people can walk or ride. It also provides a great refuge for wildlife and plants.

Because of the length of the new country park, the ranger Jenny Schofield uses a mountain bike to go on patrol.

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## ROADSIDE VERGES, A USEFUL HABITAT FOR INVERTEBRATES?

As part of efforts to obtain a reasonable coverage for distribution maps of spiders in Essex, Ray Ruffell has looked at a number of roadside verge sites, in parts of the county where there is little remaining natural grassland. Results suggest that roadside verges can be surprisingly interesting, with the presence of a number of local species including the interesting harvestman *Anelasmacephalus cambridgei*, a species usually associated with chalk habitats but here found in the north east of the county at a number of locations, the local spider *Cicurina cicur*, normally found in woodland under logs and dry grassland habitats, and the nationally notable money spider *Centromerus incilium* mainly associated with chalk grassland habitats and sandy grassland in the Breck but seemingly widespread in Essex.

The most interesting verges are likely to be those that represent remnants of former natural habitats, and unsympathetic management could easily destroy these valuable areas e.g. at Heydon, in modern Cambridgeshire but included in the Watsonian county of Essex there is a length of roadside verge and bank rich in calcicole plants and with an abundance of cowslips in the spring. Last year a significant length of this had been destroyed by the apparently pointless removal of the turf and topsoil from a long section of bank. The widespread use of weedkillers on verges in past decades has greatly reduced their floral and probably faunal interest and they are vulnerable to other types of inappropriate management. The overwhelming importance of the motor car means the constant loss of old verges and habitat to road widening schemes, by-passes, etc. and pollution from the constant stream of traffic. As some compensation of course we have the motorway verges which must now represent the largest areas of rough grassland in the county.

It would be most interesting to know more about the development and value of roadside verge flora and fauna in the county. A worthwhile study - any offers?

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## WHATS ON

### ESSEX FIELD CLUB

Sun. 22nd Nov. **Bird Group.** Minsmere, Dunwich Common and Westleton Heath. Meet

TM 450692 at 10.00 am for a full day's birdwatching. Phone 0277 651890 for details to arrange car sharing. If interested in a full weekend (staying in the area Saturday night) phone well in advance.

Sat. 12th Dec.

**Botany Group.** How to collect and identify your Dandelions. Jerry Heath. Epping Forest Conservation Centre at 2.30 pm.

Sun. 13th Dec.

**Bird Group.** An Epping Forest Safari. Meet at Conservation Centre TQ412981 at 10.30 am Phone 081-989 2783 for details.

Thurs. 26th Dec.

**Boxing Day Ramble.** "Two Churches of Willingale". 4½ miles. Meet opposite Bell Public House TQ 597072 at 10.30 am. Morning only. Leaders Maureen and John Tollfree. Phone 0708 42206.

## ESSEX WILDLIFE TRUST

- Frid. 6th Nov. 7.30 pm **Badgers** - an illustrated talk by Don Hunford, Chairman of Essex Wildlife Trust - starring the badgers featured on TV and Radio! Danbury Recreation Centre, near Eves Corner.
- Thurs. 12th Nov. 8 pm **The Coming Flood** - Illustrated talk on the "greenhouse effect" and its impact on Essex Wildlife by Dr. Chris Miles, Conservation Officer of the Essex Wildlife Trust. Braintree Town Hall Centre.
- Thurs. 12th Nov. 8 pm **Birds of Arctic Canada** Some superb photography from Alan Williams, Oakwood Centre off Furnbridge Road, Maldon.
- Tues. 24th Nov. **Warley Place - Then and Now.** John Court the expert on this superb reserve shares his knowledge with Trust members and the Maldon & Heybridge Horticultural Society. Meet Friary Hall off Furnbridge Road, Maldon.
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**BATS  
NEED  
FRIENDS!**

**I BATS**

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BAT PACK !!**

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**£2.50 from: PATTY BRIGGS, VWT  
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