

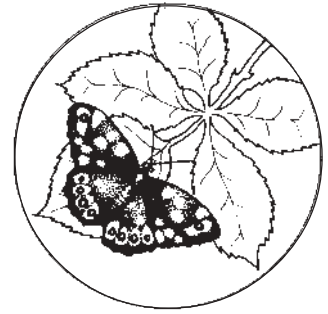
THE ESSEX FIELD CLUB

DEPARTMENT OF LIFE SCIENCE

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

ROMFORD ROAD, STRATFORD,

LONDON, E15 4LZ



NEWSLETTER NO. 16

February 1996

FROM THE PRESIDENT

How would you describe the aims and activities of the present day Essex Field Club? When the Club first came into being it might not have been that inappropriate to regard its activities as encompassing 'hunting, shooting and fishing', the collection of dead voucher specimens of everything living in Essex being one of the Club's primary objectives. Today however, our members would regard themselves as anything but, members of an organization that might be misconstrued as indulging in 'field sports'. Our Club is surely primarily a natural history society, with a present-day emphasis on recording, conservation and natural history education. Your Council had a special meeting on the 31 January to look at the present and potential future role of the EFC in Essex, debating just how we could give the Club a new attractive image that would give us a steadily increasing membership, and how best we might interrelate to such organisations as the Essex Wildlife Trust, English Nature, the National Biological Records Centre and the local county natural history societies. Particularly in view of our proposed partnership in a new museum on Epping Forest.

As a result of this meeting Council will be proposing at the next AGM that the Club should change its name to the ESSEX NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY, and redefine its objectives, and rules, in line with its modern image. We propose titling the new name with 'formerly the Essex Field Club' for a few years, and retention of our 'speckled wood on blackberry leaf logo', to give us continuity. The proposed objective of the 'phoenix' arising from the ashes of the EFC has been drafted as: 'The Objective of the Society shall be to promote the study and conservation of all aspects of the flora, fauna, geology and related matters in Essex.' The first stab at redrafting the rules by Colin Plant will be on display for your comment at the AGM. As for some years Essex archaeology has been the province of the Archaeology section of Essex County Council, and Newham Archaeological Unit, Council propose dropping this subject area from our remit. To coincide with our proposed new image, we should shortly be in a position to sign a legal agreement with the Corporation of London in relation to the Club's role in the new museum, and to participate in removal of the natural history (including geology) collections to a more suitable venue until the new museum is built. At the AGM I shall be asking for your approval of the assurances about the new museum, and the long term future of the collections, that we expect to be given to us in writing by the Corporation of London in time for the meeting.

Finally, having been at the helm for two years, I shall, with your approval, be handing over to Roger Payne at the AGM. For me it has been a very busy and at times frenetic two years, but hopefully with the new museum and Field Club headquarters seemingly now well on track, and again with your approval, a rebirth of the Club under a more appropriate name and with redefined objectives, - it will also have been a doubly historic two years - and I would like to express my gratitude for all the support and encouragement that both Council and members have given me during my term of office.

Ken Adams

DRAGONFLY NEWS

In the dragonfly world, the most significant event of 1995 was an 'invasion' of migratory 'darter' dragonflies of the genus *Sympetrum*. So far reports for the UK suggest landings of considerable numbers of the Yellow-winged Darter (*Sympetrum flaveolum*) at Great Yarmouth, Dungeness, and numerous other sites along the East coast up to N. Yorkshire. The landings were first noted on the 1st of August, with as many as 600 being reported from a cemetery in Yarmouth on the 3rd. With these were other migratory species, including *S. danae*, *S. striolatum*, and *S. sanguinum*, which are also resident species in Britain. Two other very uncommon migratory species were also present in small numbers: *S. fonscolombeii* (Red-veined Darter) and *S. vulgatum* (Vagrant Darter).

I have been trying to collate records from Essex, and from information gathered so far, it seems that there were also landing-points on the Essex coast. For *S. flaveolum*, the earliest record is from Woodham Fen (TQ 7997) on July 23rd. (J. Hurley). Since this is more than 20km. inland, it supports the suggestion by Jill Silsby, of the British Dragonfly Society, that there was an earlier 'mini' invasion, prior to the early August arrivals. Small numbers (2-4) of *S. flaveolum* were next noted at Old Hall Marshes on August 4th, 5th, and 6th (I. Hawkins). Meanwhile approximately 18 were seen at Colne Point (TM1012) on August 6th (N. Harvey), and 4-5 seen at the same site on the 9th. August (N. Cuming). Further inland, three (all males) were seen at the Backwarden reserve, on Danbury Ridge, (TL7803) on August 6th (P. and K. Gash), and 2 at the same site on 9th August. Another was seen by B. Watts on 6th. August at Willowfield Farm irrigation reservoir, Tiptree (TL983148). There are several further records from the Danbury complex: Pheasantwood Wood and Poors Piece in mid August (P. Palmer), Hitchcock's Meadow, also in mid-August (J. Howchin), and Little Baddow Heath on 16th August (G. Pyman). Another was seen at Fingrinhoe Wick (TM0419) on 12th of August (B. Watts). In late August, there was a sighting of *S. flaveolum* at Epping, and also *S. danae* was seen at Speakman's Pool in the forest (A. McGeeney). The latest sighting so far reported was 3rd September, at the Backwarden (P. and K. Gash).

So far there is only one fully confirmed sighting of *S. vulgatum* in Essex this year. This was at Colne Point on 9th. August, and was a female (N. Cuming). These records are consistent with a small 'invasion' of *S. flaveolum* in early or mid July, followed by a larger-scale arrival at the beginning of August and subsequent dispersal inland. The apparent persistence of individuals at the Backwarden, and possibly at the other sites on the Danbury Ridge gives rise to speculation that they may have found conducive habitat there. Even though only males were recorded, it is possible that females were also present and unrecorded. It will be interesting to look out for the species at these and other sites next season, just in case successful breeding may have occurred. I would be most interested to hear of other records of the migratory species in Essex, and of any evidence of breeding behaviour.

Among our resident breeding species, there is relatively little evidence of major changes of status since The Dragonflies of Essex (1988). However, one exception is the Hairy Dragonfly, *Brachytron pratense*. In the late 1980s this was known from only one breeding site - Langenhoe Marsh (TM0316), though there were early records from the Epping Forest area and also from the Chelmer/Blackwater in mid Essex. On 13th June, 1989 a female of the species was observed at Bradwell (TM 9905) by R. Dewick and G. Pyman. This was followed by another sighting on the Dengie peninsula, this time of at least 4-5 individuals at Twizzlefoot Bridge (TQ9797), near Burnham-on-Crouch, on 21/5/92 (B. O'Dowd). During this period systematic searches were made of possible sites in N.E. Essex, but without success. However, in 1994 up to 10 individuals of the species were recorded by Ian Hawkins on Old Hall Marshes between 31st May and 17th June. These

sightings were of territorial males, and also included an ovipositing female, confirming the marsh as a new breeding site for the species. In 1995, *B. pratense* was observed at several locations on the reserve (TL9513, TL9612, TL9512, TL9612, TL9812, and TL9911), from as early as May 1st through to June 21st, when Ian Hawkins and myself counted 9 individuals, and I was able to photograph a pair mating. The species has also been reported from the nearby Tollesbury Wick nature reserve of the Essex Wildlife Trust (TL9709) by B. Watts, who noted 7 specimens in 1994, and 1 in 1995. As yet it seems unclear whether *pratense* is established as a breeding species at this site. Also, S. Dewick reports the presence of *pratense* in both 1994 and 1995 at the Bradwell site. Meanwhile, J Hurley reports seeing at least 2 males of the species behaving territorially along the Cornmill Stream, in the West of the county on the 26th May 1995, and another on the 8th of May at a site near Bushy Hill. B.D.S. president, Andrew McGeeney confirms that the species has been observed at several sites in the Lea valley, and is probably re-established there as a breeding species. This encouraging picture is added to by other as yet unconfirmed reports from the Southend area and the Chelmer/Blackwater. The evidence is that following a long period of decline since the 1940s, the Hairy Dragonfly has regained something close to its former distribution in Essex, and may be even extending its range beyond its previous strongholds.

Other good news is evidence of some increase in the local damselflies *P. pennipes* and *E. najas*. Both have strong colonies on the River Stour, on the boundary with Suffolk, and the latter was noticed on the River Colne in Colchester for the first time this year.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to I. Hawkins, G. Pyman, S. Dewick, J. Firmin, D. Bridges and EWT, N. Cuming, B. Watts, J.M. Hurley, and A. McGeeney for sending records.

References:

- E. Benton The Dragonflies of Essex EFC 1988
 J. Silsby 'The 1995 Darter Invasion' BDS Newsletter 28 Autumn 1995, pp.11-13
 J. Silsby 'Wildlife Reports: Dragonflies' British Wildlife 7:1 Oct.1995, pp.48-50

Ted Benton

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEXT NEWSLETTER

Please send contributions for the next Newsletter, due out at the end of May, to the Editor, Mr Peter Harvey, 9 Kent Road, Grays, RM17 6DE by the first week of May.

Remember that the production of the Newsletter depends on contributions from members. I am sure that many members must have news, observations or the results of fieldwork that would be of interest to others. If text has been typed on a PC computer then a disk with the file would be very helpful.

SOME BIRD OF PREY SIGHTINGS

I live on a housing estate towards the edge of Maldon and often sit out in my garden hoping to see something good fly over.

From February to September last year just by chance I had 18 sightings of Birds of Prey, 11 were of Sparrowhawks (2 of which were displaying, 2 had prey in their feet), 5 were of Hobbys (while I was watching the Camberwell Beauty butterfly in my garden on August 5th I saw a Hobby overhead which caught a House Martin, you could see the feathers floating down), one was a Marsh Harrier and one was a Buzzard.

I was amazed to see the Buzzard and rang Abberton N.R. as it was heading that way. In the Birdwatch magazine October issue in the August bird report it stated that one was seen at Abberton N.R. from 24th-30th August. I saw my one on the 22nd August so maybe it was the same one.



S.S. Patience 1988

Buzzard



Hobby with
house martin

The Maldon E.W.T. Group have a coach trip to the Bird Watching Fair at Rutland Waters, Leicestershire on Sunday 18th August. The coach will start at Chelmsford, pick up at Maldon and then through to Colchester to pick up there. So that people have a choice of what they want to do, we will be dropping people off at the Lyndon N.R. at Rutland Waters (which has hides, walks and a Visitor Centre) and then taking the rest of the people on to the Bird Fair. Details from Maureen Patient on 01621 859202.

Simon Patient
Young Ornithologist of the Year 1994

THE QUATERNARY OF THE LOWER REACHES OF THE THAMES

Report of an important field meeting organised by the Quaternary Research Association

Thanks to the work of David Bridgland and others considerably more is known about the ice age (the Quaternary era) in Essex than only a few years ago. We are now beginning to unravel the complex sequence of cold and warm stages that are represented in Essex by gravels, sands and clays that have been laid down over the last 600,000 years. In particular, valuable work has recently been done on the evolution of the River Thames as it migrated south through Essex to its present position. It was against this background that the Quaternary Research Association (QRA) organised an important field meeting from 13th to 16th October last year to sites in Essex and north Kent which was also open to non members. Despite some frustrating but often amusing mishaps the excursions were a success and they provided the participants with a unique opportunity to visit some of the most important ice age sites in Britain.

Day one started with a visit to a railway cutting at Hornchurch, nationally famous for providing evidence of the most southerly extent of the great Anglian ice sheet some 500,000 years ago. Railtrack charges the QRA several hundred pounds for permission to visit (and the loan of fluorescent jackets) and insisted that only a small number could view the section at any one time. As over 50 people had turned up the visit took up most of the morning. The afternoon was spent south of the river at sites in the Thames terraces including Swanscombe, internationally famous for the discovery of the fragmentary skull of an early stone age woman, some 400,000 years old.

Day two started at Purfleet, where a remarkably complete section through a Thames terrace could be seen in two adjacent quarries. The party then proceeded to Aveley where permission had been obtained to excavate a new section through the fossiliferous Aveley deposits, famous for the discovery of two elephant skeletons in the mid-1960s. Unfortunately it didn't quite turn out that way as the land owner, apparently suspicious that it was something to do with the channel tunnel rail link, refused to allow access. The JCB excavator that had, at some expense, been hired for the occasion (complete with operator) was therefore of no use whatsoever. Undaunted, the party moved on to the next site, Lion Pit, West Thurrock, where a Palaeolithic (old stone age) 'working floor' could be seen. Then across Essex to Great Wakering which has excellent exposures of loess (brickearth) in Star Lane pit. With the prior permission of the MoD the party then moved on to Foulness where fine 'chenier' shell ridges could be observed in the gathering darkness. Some members arrived after dark and missed them altogether but consolation was available in a Foulness pub with an enjoyable few hours of talks and slides.

Day three began at South Woodham Ferrers where a Mesolithic (middle stone age) land surface is visible on the river bank. The rest of the day was spent at East Mersea with its remarkable channel deposits at Cudmore Grove Country Park. It is difficult to imagine a time when hippopotamus were wallowing in a river that flowed through here some 125,000 years ago, but the proof was in an interglacial bone bed that has been described as one of the richest in England. Also at Cudmore Grove are sediments laid down by the River Thames when it flowed through here some 400,000 years ago. In these have been found the bones of monkey, beaver and bear. As an example of the organisation that went into this event we arrived at the hippopotamus site to find a 9 foot deep trench already cut into the beach, at the bottom of which was the Natural History Museum's curator of fossil mammals ready to explain the stratigraphy. This scene attracted much curiosity from nearby holidaymakers at this popular spot.

Day four's itinerary was split with one group visiting Holocene (less than 10,000 years old) sites of the estuary and the other visiting quarries at Bradwell and Ardleigh which provide evidence of the route of the River Thames through north east Essex both before and after it had been diverted by the Anglian ice sheet into its modern river valley. The second group finished the day with an all too short visit to Walton-on-the-Naze, a site which reveals sands from the very beginning of the ice age, some two million years ago.

The field meeting was grant aided by English Nature and organised by Peter Allen of London Guildhall University. A magnificent 316 page draft excursion 'handout' was produced and the list of contributors and excursion leaders ran to 42 names, many of whom were leading authorities in their particular field of Quaternary science. This document will be published in its final form next month and it will no doubt prove to be the definitive guide to ice age geology in Essex. For information about the guide please contact Peter Allen at London Guildhall University (0171 320 1019).

Gerald Lucy

THE FOULNESS WHALE

On 28th October a huge Fin Whale or Common Rorqual was washed up on the mudflats east of Foulness Island. This is an extremely rare occurrence as this Whale normally migrates southwards from its arctic feeding grounds along the western side of the British Isles. Between 1940 and 1978 there were only 9 strandings of Fin Whale on British shores, mostly in North Scotland. If you want to see living Fin Whales, then the best places are western Scotland and West Ireland.

FIN WHALES

The Fin Whale is almost the largest animal in the world, exceeded only by the Blue Whale. Females can reach 25 metres (84 feet) in length from head to tail and weigh 80 tonnes. Like the Blue Whale, the Fin Whale is a Rorqual and related to the smaller Minke, Sei and Bryde's Whale. The Fin Whale has a worldwide distribution, though individuals tend to live in small groups each with traditional migratory routes. Like other baleen whales they filter small food such as shrimps and fish through fibrous baleen plates. They have no teeth. In the Autumn Fin Whales head south to temperate or tropical waters where cows give birth to young, usually in May or June.

The Foulness Fin Whale was a massive 67ft from head to tail. It was already dead when it came to rest on the mud, belly upwards. The pleats on the throat are a distinctive feature of the Rorquals and allow for expansion when gulping great quantities of water which contain their food. This water is then expelled through the baleen plates using a huge muscular tongue.

PREVIOUS STRANDINGS

Only a month previously, in September, a 55ft male Fin Whale was stranded off the Isle of Sheppey on the other side of the Thames. One can speculate whether this one and the Foulness whale were travelling together.

R. G. Payne

THE FIRST ESSEX RECORD OF THE TAWNY COCKROACH (*Ectobius pallidus*)

Cockroaches are a mainly tropical group of insects allied to the grasshoppers and crickets. The most familiar species are those such as the Oriental and German Cockroaches, which are associated with human habitation. Much less well known are the 3 species of small native cockroaches. On the whole, these are secretive creatures and much smaller than their larger, notorious cousins. Even the largest, the Dusky Cockroach (*Ectobius lapponicus*), is a mere 11 mm in length. According to distribution maps, (Marshall, J A and Haes, E C M, 1988), there is an old (pre 1961) record of the Dusky Coackroach from S Essex and pre 1961 records from both vice counties for the Lesser Cockroach (*Ectobius panzeri*). In The Victoria County History (1903), the Lesser Cockroach is stated as not uncommon in several places on our coastal sands. The species has now been recorded again during 1991 at Colne Point in North Essex by P.R. Harvey.

The Tawny Cockroach has to my knowledge never been recorded from Essex, in fact there has been no records of our native cockroaches from Essex for many decades. Out of the 3 native species the Tawny Cockroach is the least choosy in its choice of habitat. It can be found in woodland rides and clearings, on chalk downland, heathland and on coastal sands. It is found in a wide band across southern England, but only 2 colonies, one in the Gower, Glamorganshire and another recently discovered in Suffolk are north of the Thames.

THE DISCOVERY

On the 25th October, Adrian Knowles (EWT) telephoned me to say that he had found what he thought to be a colony of native Cockroaches whilst working near to a badger sett adjacent to Southend Sewage works. This is situated off Eastern Avenue, Prittlewell, now in the heart of urban Southend. The several nymphs collected appeared to be Tawny Cockroaches and this was confirmed by E C M Haes (Orthoptera Recording Scheme).

All the nymphs of what must be a colony of this insect were found beneath partly buried paving stones at the top of a bank partially shaded by trees. Nearby were more open steep slopes, some sandy in nature.

On a map of 1875 the area is an open field with hedges, but in the 1870's a sand pit was excavated. The unevenness of the ground with steep sandy slopes probably dates back to this period. Around 1911 the buildings now used as a Council Depot were built adjacent to Sewage filter beds. Later, new filter beds were built on the bottom of the sand pit. This is still the situation today. Possibly, the Tawny Cockroach colony has existed since those days when the area was part of a sand pit or perhaps it was introduced from outside the area with dumped soil or rubbish.

THE FUTURE

The future is bleak. The whole area adjacent to the sewage works is to be bulldozed and flattened for building within the next few years. During 1996 I hope to assess the colony's extent and investigate the possibility of founding a new colony. Furthermore, one wonders what other interesting insects remain to be discovered. For instance, in 1871 specimens of the Mediterranean Oil Beetle (*Meloe mediterraneus*) were collected in Prittlewell. It has never been recorded in Britain since, so who knows what may turn up?

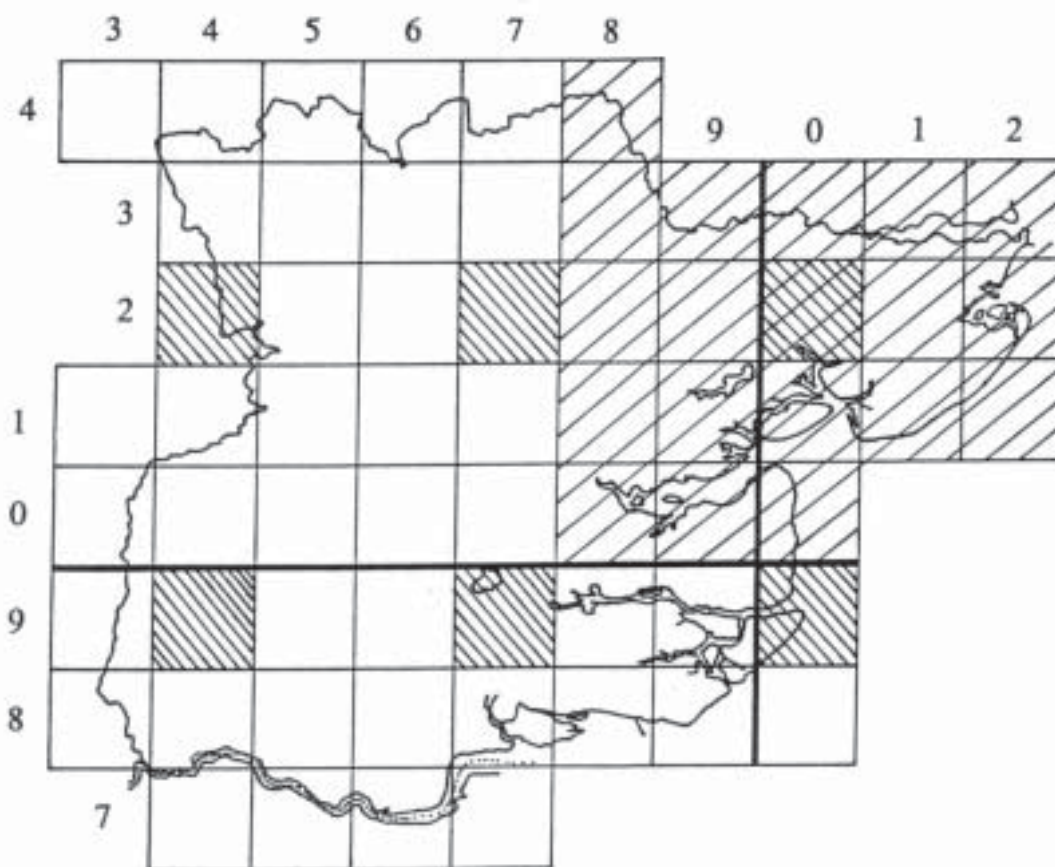
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Roger Payne

BSBI ATLAS 2000

As announced in Newsletter No: 13 the Botany Group will be participating in the BSBI's Atlas 2000 project to remap the national distribution of all our vascular plants on a 10km square basis. The records in the new atlas will have a different symbol for pre- and post-1987. This means that for us in Essex any plant lists made between 1962 (the date of the first and last national atlas) and 1987 will need to be chased up and compiled for each square, as well as a separate set of post-1987 records. Terri Tarpey is organising the recording for the CNHS area (squares with coarse hatching on map below). Fortunately, many of the records collected for the Flora of North East Essex are post-1987 anyway, and the six squares (close hatching) recorded for the BSBI Monitoring Scheme 1987/88 will only need any extras which we may be able to add by chasing up from a desiderata list. This still leaves us with 33 squares with sizable chunks of Essex inside them that we shall need to largely re-record from scratch.



To complete the task of re-recording these 33 'pristine' squares we need as many volunteers as possible to take on either a whole square or part of a square. An initial allocation of squares will take place at the AGM on the 16 March, so do have a look at the map and see which square you would like to get involved in. Finally, to mop up any vacant squares the Botany Group will be meeting (open to any Essex botanist) on 23 March at Tony & Judith Boniface's house (40 Pentland Avenue, Chelmsford) at 3.00pm.

Ken Adams

Queen of Spain Fritillary (*Argynnis lathonia*) at Bradwell-on-Sea

By the end of July 1995 most of Britain was enjoying (or enduring - depending on your point of view) a prolonged period of hot, dry weather which began in the third week of June and was to continue unbroken until the end of August. The various anticyclones which were responsible for this heat wave arrived both from the east and the west and the winds circulating around them were more often than not cool northwesterlies or easterlies. There was no real push of southerly air from the Mediterranean and this was reflected by the dearth of common migrant butterflies such as Red Admirals and Painted Ladies in the weeks following the onset of the hot weather. Moth migration had also been poor, the two Oak Processionary (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) recorded at nearby Curry Farm N.R. (the first County record of this exceptionally rare migrant from central and southern Europe) being unaccompanied by more regular wanderers from the Continent apart from a few Dark Sword Grass (*Agrotis ipsilon*), Small Mottled Willow (*Spodoptera exigua*) and Rush Veneer (*Nomophila noctuella*).

Thus it came as something of a surprise when, on the morning of July 23rd, a Queen of Spain Fritillary appeared on one of the Buddleia bushes growing outside the Bird Observatory. Indeed, it sent the teacups flying as, blythely unaware of the consternation it was causing, it sipped nectar alongside a wide variety of resident species including Large, Small and Essex Skippers; Large, Small and Green-veined Whites, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Holly Blue plus at least four Red Admirals and a single Painted Lady. The distinctive pattern of large silvery spots on the underside of the hind wing make this one of the easiest fritillaries to identify and, fortunately, it is a butterfly that I am familiar with following recent visits to the Pindhos Mountains, Greece and Taurus Mountains, Turkey.

After watching it for about three minutes I made an error of judgement by deciding to try and catch it. The reason was that several other visitors to the Observatory were out walking and I was afraid that the fritillary would disappear before they returned. Although showing no signs of wear, the tips of the wings in particular looked transparent and in my anxiety not to damage it I allowed to escape from the net. It almost immediately returned to the Buddleia but was obviously unsettled and after a few seconds it departed, never to be seen again.

This appears to have been the first recorded sighting in Essex for nearly eighty years, the last occurrence being of two at Colchester in 1918 (Firmin, Pyman et al, 1975). It has now been accepted as such by the Lepidoptera panel of the E.F.C. Subsequently, there were a number of other sightings in East Anglia. Their appearance coincided with the arrival of several thousand Yellow-winged Darter dragonflies (*Sympetrum flaveolum*) along the south and east coasts of England, of which Bradwell's share was just two, on August 5th/6th. These also had a southern origin whilst the Camberwell Beauty (*Nymphalis antiopa*) - including one that was eventually seen by many people in a garden at Maldon - and Great Brocade (*Eurois occulta*) - among which were two at Curry Farm N.R. - which arrived around the same time, came from Scandinavia, reflecting the variable winds during July and August. Subsequently, both Red Admirals and Painted Ladies became much more numerous in the area, with up to forty of the latter at Curry Farm.

Graham Smith

Chenopodium urbicum (Upright Goosefoot) at Langdon Hills, 1995

Those of you whose principal encounter with the Chenopoiaceae consists of an ongoing battle in the garden with Fat Hen (*C. album*) will doubtless look with incredulity upon the excitement raised by the discovery of *Chenopodium urbicum* on Langdon Hills in October 1995 (can one get excited about a Goosefoot?). Surely one goosefoot looks much like another, and all qualify as scruffy weeds of the disturbed wayside, unworthy of much more than a casual glance.

However, cognoscenti will appreciate that *Chenopodium urbicum* is now a decidedly rare species nationally. It is one of those species that prospered better in the past, courtesy of traditional systems of agriculture that have since given way to modern farming techniques. During the nineteenth century it was not uncommon, and many of the herbarium specimens in Britain date from that time, or from the first half of the twentieth century. By mid-century it had become decidedly scarce and localised, with records few and far between.

Langdon Hills has already yielded up several other non-scarce species that were apparently more numerous under earlier systems of farm management. Most come within the category of arable weeds and make their appearance when major soil disturbance causes long-dormant seed to germinate. Over the past few years such species as Corn Buttercup (*Ranunculus arvensis*), Broad-leaved Spurge (*Euphorbia platyphyllos*), Larkspur (*Consolida ajacis*), Field Gromwell (*Lithospermum arvense*), Wild Pansy (*Viola tricolor*), Rye Brome (*Bromus secalinus*), Nitgrass (*Gastridium ventricosum*) and Winter Wild-oat (*Avena sterilis* ssp. *ludoviciana*) have all made their appearance under such circumstances. Similarly Mousetail (*Myosurus minimus*) has grown quite plentifully in some years on one particular farm. This all points to a quite remarkable legacy from earlier years, preserved in an area where intensive systems of modern agriculture have made only limited inroads into some parts of the Langdon Hills ridge.

Chenopodium urbicum can be seen as part of that legacy. The clearance of the long-established secondary woodland, much of it hawthorn, over the past two years was the prelude to its appearance. The site had once been an area of unimproved pasture, and the appearance of a considerable number of *C. urbicum* plants within some thirty or so metres suggests that livestock may once have congregated in what was probably an attractive south-facing and sheltered hollow, giving rise to relatively nitrate-rich conditions underfoot.

The plants germinated during the winter of 1994-5, and they appear to have been spurned by the rabbits that nibbled down many of the other species that grew up in the suddenly exposed site (Trailing St. John's Wort - *Hypericum humifusum* - was another species avoided by the rabbits). They also managed to survive the stresses of the August drought, despite being in a decidedly exposed and warm location. Their identity, of course, could only be established once the plants had flowered and set seed, and the chance to collect a piece for this purpose came on 1st October when I was out on a chestnutting walk and raid with the rest of my family. Lengthy deliberation there and then would have strained the patience of said folk to an ill-advised degree: this was clearly a situation that called for the gathering of a representative fragment of a plant,

to be checked out later on. I was not expecting this to be a particularly scarce species.

However, recourse later on to the necessary floras and keys had me strongly suspecting that this was *C. urbicum*. It seemed an unlikely species, if only in view of its rarity, and there was the obvious fear of claiming to have found a rarity only subsequently to be humbled by wiser souls who might all too easily point out that this was merely some mighty common species after all. I passed the specimen on to Arthur Copping, seeking a second opinion and not divulging my own suspicions. He too was inclined to suspect *C. urbicum*, but again with reservations. Therefore I gathered a better specimen and sent it to Mike Mullin, the BSBI referee for Chenopodiaceae. An initial silence was followed by confirmation by telephone, with the news that the discovery had generated a great deal of interest at the British Museum (Natural History) identification meeting, and that the Museum wished to keep the specimen. The abundance of seeds that came from the specimen was to be shared with the national seed bank.

I had not appreciated just how rare this species has become. Mike Mullin was of the opinion that it had not been found in the British Isles since the late 1950's or early 1960's. It was certainly his first encounter with fresh material from this country, in some twenty years or so of familiarity with the Chenopodiaceae. Jermyn, in his Flora of Essex (1974), describes it as very rare, referring to nine localities cited by Gibson (1862) and going on to give five instances in our own century, three of them attributable to Jermyn himself. The most recent date given was 1965 (Lodge Farm, Romford, recorded by A.J. Silverside, but Rodney Burton (Flora of the London Area) casts doubt upon the identification of this plant). Tarpey and Heath (Wild Flowers of North East Essex, 1990) indicate that there have been no records in that area during the twentieth century.

Beyond Essex, the Flora of Cambridgeshire (Perring, Sell, Walters and Whitehouse, 1964) cites only two instances, both of them dating from the eighteenth century. Lousley (1976) makes no mention of *C. urbicum* in Surrey at all. Eric Philp, the BSBI recorder for the two Kent vice-counties, states that there have been no records for Kent since before 1930. The Flora of the London Area (Burton) cites a record for Brondesbury (1965) and an unverified record for Putney Heath (1966). Dony, in the Flora of Hertfordshire (1967) has no records subsequent to 1843. In the circumstances the appearance of this species on Langdon Hills in 1995 becomes a remarkable event. There were quite a few plants, over a fairly wide area; this is likely to be a transient species, generating a substantial amount of seed prior to disappearing as the conditions cease to be conducive to its growth. In view of the great amount of seed that was generated in 1995 it is a little puzzling that it should be such a rare species: clearly, much must depend on the conditions in which the seeds find themselves.

As ever, the known distribution of plants tells us almost as much about the recorders as it does about the recorded. It is worth paying more attention to the Chenopodiaceae in Essex during the coming season, particularly given Tim Pyner's reference to suspected Nettle-leaved Goosefoot (*Chenopodium murale*) at an Essex site in 1995: this is another unusual member of the family, although not so rare as *C. urbicum*. Perhaps there is a case for an Essex Field Club Goosefoot Safari in 1996!

R.L. Cole

FUNGI AT GALLEYWOOD COMMON

The Essex Fungi Group began a survey of Galleywood Common on the 22nd October 1995. This autumn was too dry and cold at times for a major crop of fungi but the woodland areas produced more specimens than the open grassland. Several species of *Boletus*, *Russula* and *Amanita* were conspicuous, but the best find of the day was *Lenzites betulina* on fallen birch. This is an unusual bracket fungus with gills instead of pores. We were pleased to find *Tricholoma fulvum* which is a mycorrhizal partner of birch, and *Merulius tremellosus* on dead hard wood, with a jelly-like consistency and its characteristic undersurface of net-like pores very unlike a polypore. The fungi were identified by Tony Boniface and Martin Gregory using macroscopic and microscopic characters. The survey will continue this year with a foray on Sunday 27th October. Details from Tony Boniface 01245 266316.

BASIDIOMYCETES

<i>Lycoperdon perlatum</i>	Common Puffball
<i>Scleroderma verrucosum</i>	Scaly Earthball
<i>Boletus badius</i>	Bay Boletus
<i>Boletus chrysenteron</i>	Red-cracked Boletus
<i>Boletus erythropus</i>	Dotted stem Boletus
<i>Boletus subtomentosus</i>	
<i>Paxillus involutus</i>	Brown Roll-rim
<i>Tricholoma fulvum</i>	Yellow-brown Tricholoma
<i>Clitocybe gibba</i>	Common Funnel Cap
<i>Clitocybe nebularis</i>	Clouded Clitocybe
<i>Collybia butyracea</i>	Greasy Tough Shank
<i>Flammulina velutipes</i>	Velvet Shank
<i>Rickenella fibula</i>	Orange Moss Agaric
<i>Marasmius oreades</i>	Fairy Ring Champignon
<i>Lepista saeva</i>	Blewit
<i>Gymnopilus junonius</i>	Big Laughing Gymnopilus
<i>Hypholoma fasciculare</i>	Sulphur Tuft
<i>Coprinus disseminatus</i>	Trooping Crumble Caps
<i>Macrolepiota rhacodes</i> var. <i>hortensis</i>	Shaggy Parasol
<i>Pluteus cervinus</i>	Fawn Pluteus
<i>Amanita citrina</i>	False Death Cap
<i>Amanita muscaria</i>	Fly Agaric
<i>Amanita rubescens</i>	The Blusher
<i>Russula aeruginea</i>	
<i>Russula ochroleuca</i>	Common Yellow Russula
<i>Russula atropurpurea</i>	Blackish Purple Russula
<i>Russula nigricans</i>	Blackening Russula
<i>Russula grisea</i>	
<i>Lactarius turpis</i>	Ugly Milk-cap
<i>Lactarius quietus</i>	Oak Milk-cap
<i>Ganoderma adspersum</i>	
<i>Piptoporus betulinus</i>	Razor-strop Fungus

<i>Lenzites betulina</i>	Birch Lenzites
<i>Daedaleopsis confragosa</i>	Blood-stained Bracket
<i>Merulius tremellosus</i>	Jelly Rot Fungus
<i>Chondrosterium purpureum</i>	Silver Leaf Fungus

ASCOMYCETES

<i>Apiocrea chrysosperma</i>	
<i>Hypoxylon multifforme</i>	Birch Cushion
<i>Leptosphaeria acuta</i>	

MYXOMYCETES (SLIME MOULDS)

<i>Didymium difforme</i>
<i>Didymium squamulosum</i>

Tony Boniface

AN ELUSIVE SCENT

For many years I have been aware of a sweet and pleasant smell in late winter and early spring. Initially it seemed to be in or close to woodland. The weather obviously is never hot nor is it ever freezing cold, the wind absent or gentle. The soil London Clay or Bagshot Sand. The scent, which is a better description, is never strong and usually intermittent and I have never been able to get anyone else to be aware of it.

I have ruled out any of the flowers of the higher plants. The only likely common factor seems to be Creeping soft grass (*Holcus mollis*) which is common in or on the edge of woodland although I am aware of other non-woodland sites, but I am usually able to find the grass or expect its presence. Bearing in mind the time of year I suspected it was connected to the resurgence of growth, not necessarily above ground and possibly a fungus or lower organism in association with the host.

This December I became aware of the scent just downwind of a small piece of grass which no doubt contains Creeping soft grass. This was immediately after the last snow had melted. The autumn having been mild there was quite a lot of lush growth, which, under the snow, had fallen to the ground and was decomposing.

I am wondering if the scent is connected to the decomposition of this grass rather than its spring growth, as late December in the snow is not very likely for spring growth.

David Bloomfield

ESSEX FIELD CLUB NOTELETS

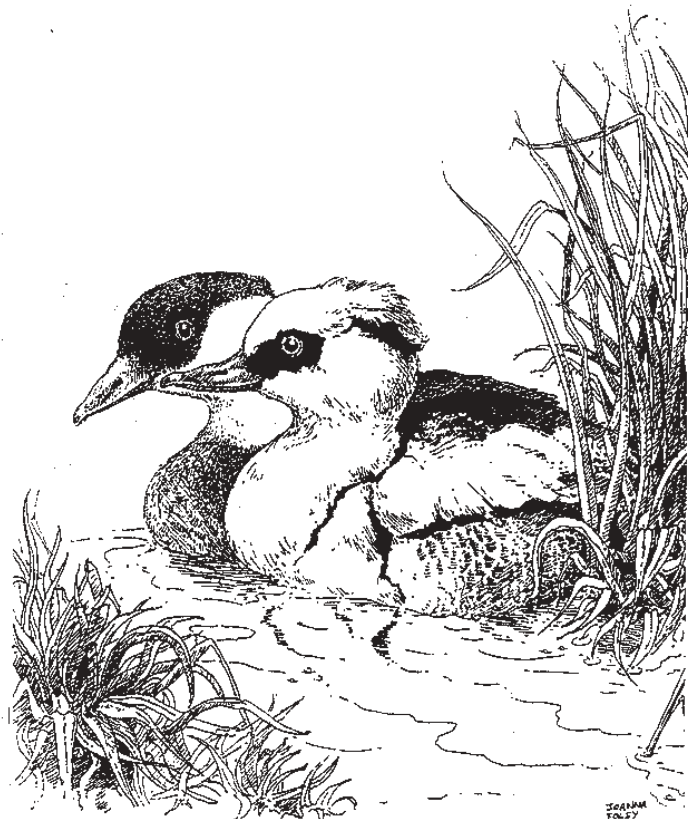
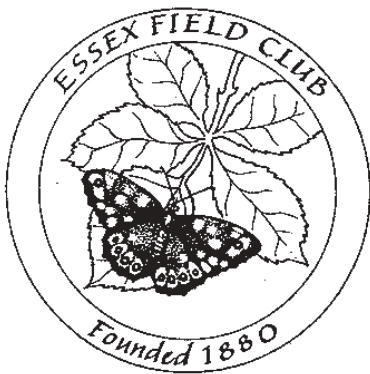
Many of you will remember the beautiful cover designs for the old Field Club Bulletin. These were original drawings by Dr Joanna Foley and she has agreed to their use as notelets being sold to raise funds to help finance our publications.

The notelets illustrated are marketed in packets of ten, two of each design, together with envelopes. They will be on sale at Field Club Meetings at £1.00 per packet or by post for £1 + 75p to cover postage and packing.

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Tony Boniface





ITEMS FOR SALE

Professional Biologist with many items surplus to requirements to be sold cheap. I am disposing of laboratory glassware, specimen bottles, books, microscopy equipment, some chemicals that would suit O, A, and undergraduate students. Lists on application to the address below:

Dr L.H.R. Hamblin, 16 Shaftesbury Road, Romford, Essex, RM1 2QH
Tel. 01708 753362

WHATS ON: ESSEX FIELD CLUB

MARCH

- Sunday 10th **Botany Group.** Mistletoe mapping in Hatfield Forest. Meet main car park (bush end) at 11.00 am TL 547202.
- Saturday 16th **Annual General Meeting 116.** Red Cross Hall, London Road, Chelmsford (car park entrance in Writtle Road) at 3.00 pm followed by address by vice-president Roger Payne, "The Natural History of the Tilbury Area".
- Sunday 17th **Bird Group.** Dagenham Chase. Meet at 10.30 am outside "The Farmhouse Tavern" P.H. TQ 508861. Leader John Bath. Phone: (01277) 651890.

SELECTED MEETINGS FROM NEW PROGRAMME.

(full programme will be distributed before the end of March)

APRIL

- Saturday 27th **General Meeting 1403.** 50 Years On - commemorating the 860th meeting of the Field Club along the same route looking for birds and plants. Meet 9.45 -10am at Baldwins Hill TQ427976. Park along Baldwins Hill or walk from Goldings Hill. Lift from Loughton or Chingford Stations if requested. Leader Jeremy Dagley. Phone: (0181) 5082266.

MAY

- Saturday 11th **Botany Group.** Oxlips and general botany. Rowney Woods, Debden. Meet Debden Church TL551332 at 11am. Leader Tim Pyner. Phone: (01702) 332425.
- Sunday 12th **Bird Group and Essex Bird Watching Society.** Landguard Point, Suffolk. Meet 9am in car park off Manor Road, Felixstowe. Tour of observatory and adjacent reserve.
- Friday 31st **Bird Group.** Kingfisher search along the River Wid at Mountnessing followed by Bird Group Annual Meeting. Meet TQ623974 at entrance of track at 7pm. Leaders Judith and Tony Boniface. Phone: (01245) 266316.