

THE ESSEX FIELD CLUB

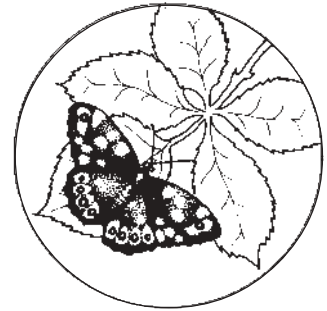
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DEPARTMENT OF LIFE SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

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NEWSLETTER NO. 29

May 1999

PRESIDENT'S PAGE

I was very pleased to see the size of the turn out for the AGM, the hall at Chelmsford was filled. I would like to thank Council for its achievements over the last year and am sorry to lose David Bloomfield and Chris Romer, whose terms of office ended. I am very pleased to welcome Annette Ford, Mark Hanson and Martin Heywood onto Council. Ted Benton's talk on bumblebees in Essex was particularly well received as was made clear by the many questions that followed.

In the coming year I would like to highlight the many activities going on within the Field Club. We have a very full programme, with about 50 meetings, for the coming year. I thank Tony and Judith for so successfully chasing up leaders and co-ordinating the programme. There is also much activity in other areas. We have good relationships with other natural history societies both within Essex and in adjacent counties and many of our meetings are held jointly with them. This I would like to see continuing and developing. The Field Club is also represented on several county and national bodies such as EBAP, BSBI and RIGS. I am not sure that the nature and value of this work is being fully transmitted to you as members. I hope to highlight these matters in coming Newsletters. EBAP was explained in the last Newsletter and RIGS elsewhere in this issue. I hope also to keep you informed about the activities and achievements of these bodies.

I am also looking forward to developments with our publications. I anticipate that you will receive fuller Newsletters and an expanded Naturalist. I am particularly indebted to Peter Harvey, Jes Dagle, Ken Adams and Chris Gibson who have been promoting ideas that you will appreciate as the Newsletters and Naturalist come out. The Field Club will be associated with two other publications during the year, John Dobson's book on The Mammals of Essex and Ted Benton's on The Bumblebees of Essex.

Obviously the Field Club has much vitality and I hope you will find at least some of its activities during the coming year suit you.

Peter Allen

RIGS - Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites

Yet another acronym. RIG sites are intended to complement the geological and geomorphological SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) already established. The sites are regarded as sufficiently important to warrant protection, but are not as important as SSSIs. In practice, it will be difficult if not impossible to have any further geological or geomorphological (landform) SSSIs designated, so new sites, however important, are likely to be designated at the RIGS level. The reporting of sites and the work leading up to their designation will largely be in the hands of local experts and interested parties, working together as a local RIGS group, with a large degree of support from English Nature. One aim is to make planners, developers and landowners aware of the importance and value of the sites and afford them protection.

The RIGS group in Essex became defunct a few years ago but now is being revived. The group is anxious to publicise its presence and activities and to attract new members. It should be stressed that scientific knowledge is not essential and that the RIGS group would welcome people interested to learn more.

It will comprise (a) a central steering group and (b) a wider network of interested members. The steering group is to oversee and direct the group's priorities, the selection of RIGS, publicity and so on. Members of the steering group are people with a particular interest or expertise to offer or are representatives of relevant organisations, such as the Field Club. Peter Allen represents the Field Club but several other members of the Club are in the steering group, wearing other hats, such as Graham Ward and Gerald Lucy (Essex Rock and Mineral Society) and David Turner (Essex Geologists' Association). Members of the Field Club who feel they have a contribution to make as a member of the steering group or who wish to be kept informed of developments and activities as an interested member should contact:

Jenny Bowen or Chris Gibson
English Nature, Harbour House, Hythe Quay, Colchester CO2 8JF

The group has had one meeting so far (15 January 1999) and is in the process of defining its aims. These have not been finalised but are likely to cover matters such as :

- Identifying geological and geomorphological sites for RIGS designation
- Recording the sites and informing planners of their presence for protection
- Influencing the management of sites
- Raising the awareness and interest of geology and geomorphology in Essex.

We would also welcome information from members who do not want to be involved in the RIGS group but who feel there is an outcrop in a coastal section, quarry, stream bank or wherever or an interesting landform suitable for our attention. In some cases, the integrity of an important floral or faunal site may depend on its geology or landform position. There may be a case for designating the site because of the inter-relationship. A RIGS designation may help protect the natural history.

Peter Allen

BIODIVERSITY EVENTS: Launch of the Essex Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Essex Biodiversity Action Plan has been officially launched. On 9th March an event was held at the Essex Showground, Great Leighs hosted by the The Association of Essex Councils. The main speaker was David Goode, Director of London Ecology Unit, who is heavily involved in the national biodiversity planning and in London's Biodiversity

Action Plan. There was a short presentation by Dr Ken Adams, a member of Council, on the Black Poplar survey and the needs for funds to help propagate and conserve this remarkable native tree.

However this launch is not the end of it. Come the summer there will be a whole week of local events in Essex Biodiversity Week from **3rd to 10th July**. It will be a chance to celebrate the special natural features and species of this county and try to win support from as wide a section of the community as possible for their conservation. Look out for events being organised in your area.

A week earlier Epping Forest's popular Forest Festival will be held and this will include the theme of biodiversity. Essex Field Club will have a stall, promoting our involvement in the Essex Biodiversity Plan, alongside many other wildlife and local history groups. The event takes place on **Sunday 27th June** running between **noon and 4pm**. It is designed as a fun day for families to celebrate the Forest's cultural and management history. Events planned include heavy horse demonstrations, chainsaw work, saxon villlage crafts, including basket weaving, birds of prey, archery and many stalls. All of these events are staged in the historic setting of the Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge at Chingford.

AWARD FOR A LIFETIME'S SERVICE TO THE STUDY AND CONSERVATION OF BUTTERFLIES AND MOTHS

A. Maitland Emmet MBE, TD, MA, FLS, Hon FRES, an Honorary Member of the Essex Field Club, was recently presented with the first ever Butterfly Conservation Marsh Award at the AGM of Butterfly Conservation. The award was for a lifetime of service to the study and conservation of butterflies and moths.

The Field Club will include a profile on Maitland in the next issue of the Naturalist and Dr David Corke has written an extensive article for Butterfly Conservation. The following notes are a very brief extract from David's article.

Maitland is recognised as the leading expert on microlepidoptera. At the age of 90 he works 7-days a week at his home in Saffron Walden as senior editor and major contributor to the most detailed series of books on British butterflies and moths ever published, the eleven volume series called The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland.

After his retirement Maitland moved to Essex where he soon was actively involved in studies of the county fauna. His "Smaller Moths of Essex" was the first book for any county to contain distribution maps for all the "micros".

A bachelor all his working life, Maitland married Katie in 1972. Katie loved plants and was enrolled by Maitland to search the Essex countryside for wild plants which were host to rare moths. They made several visits to all the ten-km squares in Essex, searching plants for leaf mines and also using their newly acquired moth trap.

The 23 years of "mothing" and life with Katie (she died in 1995) Maitland describes as by far the happiest time of his life. Today he continues to work full-time on moths and on fine nights he runs the moth trap in his garden. He has so far identified 992 species of butterfly and moth from this small garden since he came to live there in 1962. One of his remaining ambitions is to get this total up to 1000: he thinks there is a good chance of doing this before the new millenium if the weather is good this spring and summer.

THE LONDON LADYBIRD SURVEY 1999-2000



The London Natural History Society (whose recording area covers parts of western Essex) is organising a survey of Ladybirds for this year and the next. We would welcome the participation of members of the Essex Field Club in appropriate areas. The 'London area' lies south-west of an arc from Roydon/Little Parndon through Chipping Ongar, past Brentwood to Stifford and Grays Thurrock.

It is hoped to gather data from experienced entomologists but also to involve inexperienced people, including children, who would not otherwise venture into entomological recording. Ladybirds are easily recognised, regarded with affection by the public and can, in most cases, be accurately identified by previously unskilled recorders.

We have produced a simplified key and also a reporting form which will allow the patterns of beetles which do not fit the key to be coloured in for 'remote' identification. The idea has already been taken up by several schools and other groups.

The key and recording form are included at the end of this Newsletter. Anyone wishing to participate should contact Paul Mabbott (tel: 0114 201 4504, e-mail PRMabbott@aol.com).

LADYBIRD LOOK-OUT IN THE REST OF ESSEX

Field Club members who live outside the London NHS recording area can also record valuable information about ladybirds in the rest of Essex. We should like to join the LNHS in recording ladybirds, extending the area to the rest of Essex.

Please send all records and any dubious specimens or reporting forms outside the LNHS area to either the Newsletter Editor Mr. P.R. Harvey 32 Lodge Lane, Grays, Essex RM16 2YP or the General Secretary Dr Jeremy Dagley, 82 Whitehall gardens, Chingford, E4 6EJ who will collate the data.

Try to include with all records the essential data of recorder, location, date, habitat, grid reference (at least 4 figure) and any other notes e.g.:
7-spot, P.R.Harvey, 32 Lodge Lane, 20th April 1999, garden, TQ625793, on rose bush.

We hope to report the results of the two year survey in the Essex Naturalist.

NATURAL REMEDIES

We stood last Autumn admiring a large bush of *Rhamnus catharticus* covered in black berries and wondered if the reputation of the Purging Buckthorn was really justified. One member of the family (who shall be nameless) suffers from this problem so we thought it might be worth putting to the test. We took a pocketful of the berries home and put them in the freezer in a polythene bag. Two berries taken at night before bed was quite effective, and cheaper than pills, but after a week or two the dose had to be increased to three, and then four. After that we gave up - either the body had become used to them or the berries were losing their strength in the freezer - a pity because there were enough berries on that bush to cure most of the constipation in Essex.

Another remedy we have tried is the plant *Chelidonium majus* (Greater Celandine) which is said to remove warts. It grows commonly around villages in Essex. When a stem or leaf is broken it exudes a bright yellow sap which is applied to the wart. We know of two people who can verify that this really does work.

Now it is said that in times gone by the pill woodlouse was carried by people and swallowed as a cure for indigestion. Fortunately we never suffer from this, and so are unable to test it. Should anyone try it we would be interested to learn the result. In fact any useful natural tips would be welcome - a cheap substitute for VIAGRA would be most useful.

Shirley Watson

EDUCATION?

Reading the latest Essex Wildlife Trust magazine I noticed that the Trust had taught 28,000 children. A wonderful effort and hopefully those youngsters will in future make a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the county's wildlife.

Several events have recently caused me to wonder if the Trust ought to target some of that education at another section of the community - the Local Authorities. Large trees in towns and villages, some of them 'veterans', are being felled simply because a so-called tree expert says that some of the wood is rotten. Guess who will be paid for doing the job? Some of these old trees would have stood for another 100 years - a valuable wildlife habitat. Perhaps the Councils are worried that someone could be injured by a falling branch. Surely insurance would cover this slight risk. However, if it's old, down it comes by the chainsaw.

My other concern is roadside verges. Councils obviously feel a desperate urge to do something to improve the environment and promote wildlife, and their answer is to plant trees - lots of them. On every available wide verge you can see this, sometimes in thousands and always planted far too close together anyway. Guess who makes money by recommending close planting in case of losses?

The results of this planting is the almost total loss of the existing ground flora and fauna of that particular verge. A recent example of to be seen north of Newport at the junction of the B1383 and the B1052. A wide verge here supports up to 100 species of wild flowers including the Wild Liquorice (*Astragalus glycyphyllos*) which is a fairly scarce plant of Eastern England, although not uncommon in W. Essex. Unless the trees are removed the flowers are doomed.

One wonders if any check is made by the Authority before deciding where to plant their trees. I know of the Essex Protected Verge Scheme and also know that this verge is not on the "Protected List", so the Council probably thought that the verge was of no wildlife value. However there are hundreds of good verges in Essex which are not safeguarded by the Protected Verges Scheme and which are therefore all at risk.

I know the Essex Wildlife Trust checks planning applications for any wildlife impact, and wonder if arrangements could be made to vet Council planting schemes before the trees are planted. At present good wild flower verges are being destroyed simply because they are not considered 'special'. Presumably, if I should pull up one of the newly planted trees I would be considered a vandal, but if the Authority kills off wild plants by its actions then that is a pity, but has to be accepted. If Councils are really keen to do something for the environment they should make more effort to safeguard or even enhance the one major resource for which they are responsible - namely the verges. Their record in Essex is not impressive.

Going back to those 28,000 children, I hope the Trust can teach them that planting trees everywhere is not always good for wildlife. I also hope that should they grow up to be Councillors, or work in Local Government, then they will do better than the present generation in authority.

Charles Watson

WATCH OUT FOR

After reading an article in Farmers Weekly 19.2.99 which mentions a resurgence of Shepherd's needle *Scandix pecten-veneris* in Suffolk on chalky boulder clay, I felt an article was called for to explain the situation and its possible follow-on in Essex.

Until the late 1940s Shepherd's needle was a common weed on chalk and chalky boulder clay, but the coming of the hormone weedkillers controlled it efficiently together with all the other broad-leaved weeds in cereal crops. Most of the other crops were still hand hoed, to keep weed competition down and stop seeding. The population of seed in the soil decreased and the plant quickly became very unusual, more so in Essex.

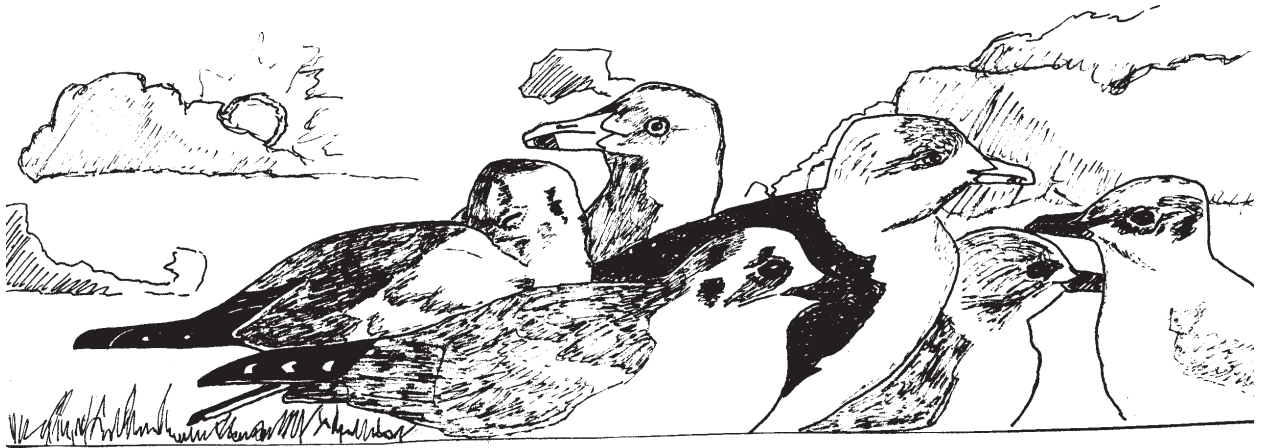
For many different reasons the hormone weedkillers became used much less, to the point that they are hardly used at all now. Using a hormone weedkiller necessarily late in the season does hit the crop and reduce the yield of cereals. Other products are more tolerant of weather conditions and soil types and can be used much earlier in the season as well as having some persistence, and cereal weed control is quite effective.

However the broad-leaved crops cannot be sprayed with the same products and a niche exists similar to that used by poppies and cut-leaved geraniums in winter oilseed rape and all crops which are drilled in the autumn. Shepherd's needle germinates over a very long period starting in the autumn but ceasing by the spring and spring-sown crops will not be very much affected.

So the crops to watch for it are the autumn drilled broad-leaved break crops, not cereals. It will be in drifts, sometimes quite thick, but beware of mistaking it for Fool's parsley *Aethusa cyanapium* until the needles appear.

David Bloomfield

PENGY MILL RUBBISH TIP



Pengy Mill rubbish tip lies to the south-western side of Chignal St. James. The tip was once part of the redland aggregates complex of gravel pits which dominates much of the landscape in the area.

The rubbish tip during the winter months attracts hundreds of gulls who gorge themselves within the rubbish. All year round, hundreds of Rook and Jackdaw feed on the rubbish along with a large flock of Starlings.

The gulls I have recorded so far at this pit during the winter months include hundreds of Black-headed Gull, hundreds of Common Gull, double-figure counts of Lesser Black-backed Gull and dozens of Great Black-backed Gull. Glaucous Gull has been recorded along with the odd Mediterranean Gull.

Between the lorry loads of rubbish dumper trucks, the gulls 'loaf' on the surrounding fields or bath in the local water-filled gravel pit.

Geoffrey Wilkinson (16)

A REMARKABLE EXAMPLE OF BIODIVERSITY: aculeate Hymenoptera in the East Thames Corridor

There is little doubt that the remarkably rich and nationally important fauna found in south Essex and north Kent within about ten km of the river in the East Thames Corridor constitutes a unique resource of biodiversity in this country. A total of 318 species of aculeate Hymenoptera are now recorded from the East Thames Corridor in south Essex. This is 95% of the Essex fauna and 53% of the national fauna and includes numerous Red Data Book and Nationally Scarce species. In Thurrock alone more than 295 species of bees, wasps and ants have been recorded in the Essex part of the two grid squares TQ57 and TQ67. This is 88% of the county fauna and 49% of the total British aculeate fauna, a very remarkable total indeed all contained within a total area of about one 10km square! Recent evidence suggests a similar biodiversity survives in the Colchester area around the Colne estuary and the Medway valley in north Kent. The Blackwater, Crouch and Stour river valleys in Essex also have important sites albeit to a lesser degree.

The rich biodiversity seems to be due to a unique combination of climatic, physical and ecological factors. South and east Essex has the lowest rainfall and is one of the warmest parts of the country. Average winter temperatures are several degrees colder than those of

south western England, resulting in a greater range of temperature and more continental climate than the rest of Britain (Jermyn 1974). The climatic influence of the Thames Estuary is also clearly important.

The Essex side of the Thames has a series of south-facing escarpments between Purfleet in the west and Southend to the east, with various exposures of chalk, Thanet sands, Thames terrace gravels and London clay. The Purfleet-Grays area has a long history of chalk extraction, with old leases dating back to the sixteenth century and modern times have seen much more extensive extraction of chalk and sand resulting in many abandoned exposures of different ages. These areas have provided Hymenoptera with a complex of nesting sites and flower-rich foraging sites; the survival of pockets of old and unimproved habitats within this 'post-industrial' landscape has almost certainly provided the nucleus from which species have been able to spread, to take advantage of the new habitats. However some species seem less able to move into these new habitats and the older habitats such as those found in the ancient Thames Terrace gravel sites at Broom Hill, Hall Hill and the western edges of Orsett Golf Course (Mucking Heath) are therefore extremely important. The Hymenoptera fauna may well represent an important surviving component of a biodiversity closely associated with the various Thames Terrace sand and gravel deposits extending south from N.E. Essex to the present-day course of the Thames.

South Essex and around Colchester are both areas of large conurbation with an associated history of mineral extraction and abandonment of large scale farming. This has resulted both in the survival of a complex of unimproved habitats and relatively undisturbed disused mineral extraction and post-industrial sites, which represent some of the best flower-rich and diverse habitats remaining in Essex today. It is worth remembering the rich fauna recorded around Colchester by the Harwoods around the end of the last century, when various exposures of sand and gravel must already have been extant, and when the surrounding countryside was vastly more flower-rich than today.

The best habitats for aculeate Hymenoptera include various 'brown field' sites such as old sand pits, brick pits, silt lagoons and PFA lagoons, especially where these are associated with adjacent areas of unimproved or remnant old habitats. The importance of old silt and PFA (pulverised fly ash) lagoons for invertebrates is becoming increasingly apparent. Silt lagoons at East Tilbury and Rainham Marshes develop saltmarsh communities that gradually become replaced by sand-dune and flower-rich ruderal communities as the lagoons dry out. Both have developed important invertebrate and aculeate Hymenoptera faunas, with numerous Nationally Rare and Scarce species. At West Thurrock and Barking there are areas of old pulverised fly ash (PFA) lagoons over former grazing marsh with interesting plant communities and important invertebrate faunas. There are remnant grazing marsh dykes, marshy areas of Phragmites and sedge, banks of sparsely vegetated PFA, areas of ruderal flower-rich vegetation and scrub.

Recent work (see Newsletter No. 26: 14) has reinforced the identification of Barking PFA lagoons as an exceptional invertebrate site including at least 6 RDB species, 17 Nationally Scarce and 52 Nationally Local species. The Invertebrate Index and Species Quality Index for the species of aculeate Hymenoptera, Diptera and Arachnida recorded from the PFA lagoon area totals at least 2380 and 12.9 respectively, very high figures which compare favorably with some of the best sites in the East Thames Corridor. Virtually none of the sites has any statutory protection and nearly all are under imminent development threat from the 'Thames Gateway' thrust to develop the East Thames region, especially those seen as 'brown field' sites. 'Brown field' sites are also under threat of inappropriate management or restoration schemes which involve the creation of amenity grassland and the planting of tree for the Thames Chase Community Forest.

The best site of all by far, Mill Wood Pit in the Chafford Hundred development near 'Lakeside' Thurrock, is now essentially destroyed for housing and other important sites are or will be developed in the near future. The whole Barking PFA site will soon be cleared and developed for a massive housing complex, planning permissions having been in place since the 1980s and the Barking Levels to the east of the power station have already been developed. In Thurrock Ferry Fields is shortly to be developed by the Port of Tilbury despite the presence there of populations of two Priority Biodiversity Action Plan species *Bombus sylvarum* and *Asilus crabroniformis* and an invertebrate fauna comparable to that of SSSIs in the region. Together with two other nearby sites these are apparently the only surviving *Asilus* populations in eastern England, yet one of these at Goshems Farm, containing the largest population and quite evidently a key site, has just received planning consent for 'restoration' by capping with spoil, except for a small 'conservation area'.

This is despite the **Essex Biodiversity Action Plans** for both species proposing that all sites are notified as County Wildlife Sites and the Action Plan for *Asilus* proposing that all key sites are designated as SSSI and that all designated sites are protected against adverse planning decisions. **English Nature** is the Lead Partner for both these Biodiversity Action Plans but made no objection to the Goshems Farm planning application. The Chief Executive of Thurrock Council gave the opening address at the Corporate launch of the Essex Biodiversity Action Plan and presumably supports both the process and the individual plans.

I have to wonder what is the point of Biodiversity Action Plans when they clearly make no difference at all to planning decisions or the stance taken by government bodies such as English Nature. There is an *urgent need for action* to conserve the core sites and the habitat complex in the region to ensure the survival of its remarkable invertebrate biodiversity. I wonder whether there is any point in continuing my own efforts.

Peter Harvey

Provisional distribution maps for aculeate Hymenoptera in Essex and the East Thames Corridor

I have recently produced two sets of updated provisional distribution maps for aculeate Hymenoptera covering Essex and the East Thames Corridor in south Essex and north Kent. The Essex maps are based on over 12,500 modern records and include provisional Essex Red Data status categories. The maps for the East Thames region are based on approximately 15,000 records and include about 2700 from north Kent in Gerald Dicker's collection, for which I am very grateful to Liverpool Museum.

The Essex volume runs to 25 pages and the East Thames Corridor to 28 pages and both are spiral bound. Copies are available on receipt of £3.00 per volume to help towards the cost of production and postage.

I would welcome any further records for this region, which is under enormous threat from the 'Thames Gateway' and other development pressures. Without urgent and effective action by government bodies such as English Nature and the local authorities involved, the astonishing biodiversity and nationally important populations of aculeate Hymenoptera and other invertebrates present in the region will soon be lost forever.

Peter Harvey, 32 Lodge Lane, Grays, Essex RM16 2YP

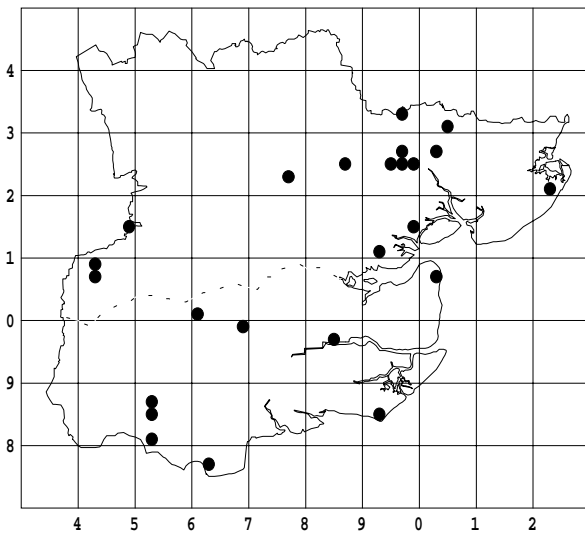
AN APPEAL FOR RECORDS OR SPECIMENS OF HOUSE SPIDERS

The Essex Spider Group have spent the last 13 years or more recording spiders in Essex. There are now nearly 422 species known from the county, about two thirds of the British fauna although eighteen of these species have no recent records and loss of habitat means that most of these must be considered extinct in Essex.

For most species the level of coverage is good and with over 40,000 records a publication is now planned on the 'The Spiders of Essex'. We plan to complete active fieldwork for this purpose during the 1999 season to fill in as many un-recorded county tetrads as possible. However spiders associated with houses and gardens are still very under-recorded because we do not generally hold field meetings in other people's houses!

I am therefore making a special appeal to Field Club members to send me records or specimens from their houses and gardens.

Tegenaria domestica



The well known 'house spiders' are various species in the genus *Tegenaria*. The commonest seems to be *T. gigantea* rather than the "proper" house spider *T. domestica* which appears to be rather rare in the county. Much less common still is the large "Cardinal House Spider" *T. parietina* and the species *T. agrestis*, although usually found outdoors, can also venture into houses. I would need to see specimens of any of these to confirm identification.

Under the eaves, around window frames and fences the cribellate spider *Amaurobius similis*, the orb-web spiders *Nuctenea umbratica* and *Zygiella x-notata* and the comb-footed spider *Theridion melanurum*

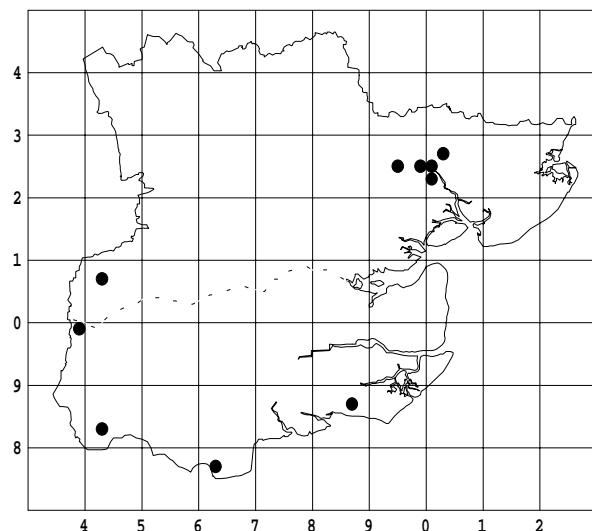
are very common and probably present on the outside of just about every house in the county. The related species *T. blackwalli* and *T. familiare* which are apparently very rare but may simply be overlooked.

Other species closely associated with habitation include the Gum-Squirting spider *Scytodes thoracica* and the Daddy-Long-Legs spider *Pholcus phalangioides*, both very characteristic in appearance

The zebra spider *Salticus scenicus* is probably present on every house and in every garden. The six-eyed spider *Dysdera crocata* is a woodlice specialist, definitely the gardener's friend and very easy to recognise with its enormous jaws and orange-red colour. It is often found under stones, rubble and bricks in the garden and greenhouses. The Garden spider *Araneus diadematus* is probably found in every

Gum-Squirting spider

Scytodes thoracica

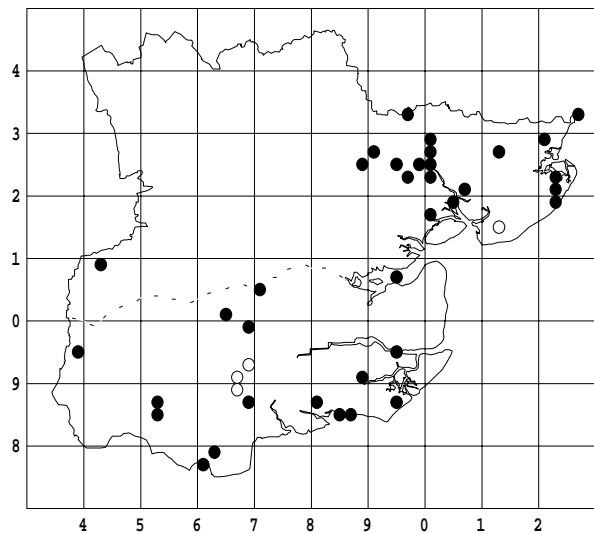


garden in the autumn, and is far more common in this situation than in the countryside. All these species are under-recorded.

The small green cribellate spider *Nigma walckenaeri* is widespread in gardens and parks along the East Thames region in south Essex but has also turned up in Colchester, Harlow, Chelmsford and along the Crouch. It may well have been overlooked elsewhere in the county. Look for it in the late summer and autumn on leaves like lilac and holly where it makes its web across the top surface of the leaf and sits between the web and the leaf surface.

Daddy-Long-Legs spider

Pholcus phalangioides



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

The comb-footed spider *Achaearanea tepidariorum* was rediscovered in the county at Shoebury near Southend by J. Keeliker in 1994 and has since been found at Great Wakering by Roger Payne. *Segestria florentina* and *Steatoda nobilis* are both established in the Southend area, with a healthy population of the *Steatoda* at Roger's house and the *Segestria* having bit two members of the public. Both these species are known to be able to inflict a bite on humans, which although not dangerous can be disconcerting!

House spiders are tough (that is why they can survive in houses) and are quite safe alive in the post if sent in a small container like an old film capsule. I am also quite happy to receive pickled specimens (in 60-70% alcohol - gin or vodka will do). I am happy to refund postage and let you know what you have in your house so what have you got to lose?

PLEASE SEND ME YOUR SPIDERS!

Peter Harvey, 32 Lodge Lane, Grays, Essex RM16 2YP

WHATS ON: ESSEX FIELD CLUB

The new programme card for 1999/2000 is included with this Newsletter.

Please try to support as many meetings as possible. All members and visitors are welcome and the meetings provide for a very wide range of interest and expertise.

There is no better way of meeting other members, learning more about our wildlife and making valuable contributions to our knowledge of the plants, animals and geology of Essex.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE ARGIOPE SPIDER *Argiope bruennichi*

Argiope bruennichi is a very distinctive spider, about the size of a large garden spider. *Argiope* has always been a very rare spider in Britain, confined to within a few miles of the south coast of England in Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, with older records for East Sussex and East Kent. However it now seems to be undergoing a dramatic expansion in its range and the spider has now turned up in Surrey, north Kent, both the south and north of Essex and Derbyshire (see Essex Field Club Newsletter 27: 6-7 November 1998).



You can help track its spread in Essex by looking out for the spider in the late summer - early autumn period.

Although very distinctive, with the transverse yellow abdominal stripes and the zig-zag 'stabilimentum' or thick band of silk on its web, the spider is still easy to miss amongst the tall vegetation. Unmanaged grassland areas, rough grassland still uncut into late autumn, tall grassland at the edges of hedges, uncut seawalls or areas behind sea walls and even some roadside verges may be worth investigating. In Hastings the spider has been found on some allotments so these again may be worth investigation in Essex.

You can also help with investigations into its ecology:

for example,

- When do the eggs hatch and what do the spiderlings and juveniles feed on?
- What range of prey is used by the adults?
- How variable are the webs in size and position in the habitat?
- Marking individuals could be used to investigate how often juveniles and adults rebuild and relocate their webs.
- How exactly does the spider use its web to catch prey e.g. John Lamoureux in Essex has noticed the spider ties back the tall grass stems so that its web is situated in an open space within the tall grass.
- Is there any association between the presence of a stabilimentum or how obvious it is and the habitat or aspect of the web. Is there evidence that the stabilimentum is to prevent birds destroying the web?
- What other spider species occur in the same habitat. Is there competition between species for web sites and prey?

Please send any records, observations or reports to Peter Harvey, 32 Lodge Lane, Grays, Essex RM16 2YP

A SECOND SEA TURTLE IN THE THAMES

January 1997 saw the arrival of a Green Turtle on Foulness, the first definite record for England this century. In October 1998 a huge turtle of a different species was discovered swimming in the Thames off Gravesend by staff from the Port of London Authority. Although apparently alive and well, the turtle was swimming in a major shipping lane. Unfortunately it was later found mortally wounded outside Tilbury Docks with a huge gash caused by a ship's propeller.

The Leathery Turtle

The unfortunate turtle was identified as a Leathery Turtle, and, as far as I know, it is the first record of this species in the Thames. A few days after being seen at Tilbury on 22nd November it was washed up on the shore at Denton, Gravesend, where it was photographed by a reporter for the 'Kent Messenger'.

On 27th November, it finally came to rest on a mudbank at Aveley Marshes where it was examined by experts and transported to the Institute of Zoology for an autopsy. The turtle was male and measured over 2 metres from nose to tail with a weight of at least 250 kg (blood loss had been considerable).

The Last of it's Race

Leathery Turtles are by far the largest of the sea turtles, differing in appearance from other species, not only by their enormous size, but also by their shell or carapace which is covered by a leathery skin and not fused to the ribs and back bone. They are the last survivors of an ancient race which have roamed the seas since the time of the dinosaurs, over 140 million years ago. In this time they have remained virtually unchanged. Only in recent years has their survival been threatened by the activities of Mankind.

The Leathery Turtle is normally a creature of warm tropical seas including the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans, but adults in the Caribbean frequently follow the Gulf Stream northwards during the summer months, feeding on their preferred food, jellyfish. As turtles are rarely seen at sea, this migration was once thought to be unusual, but there is increasing evidence that Leathery Turtles regularly feed off British coasts, especially western shores. They have even been recorded off Iceland and Norway. In 1988 no less than 24 Leathery Turtles were seen around British coasts and 9 were found stranded dead. Among them was the world's largest and heaviest turtle which measured 219 cm and weighed 916 kg. It is preserved in Cardiff Museum.

Roger Payne

A CELEBRATION OF MOTHS The Essex Moth Group's second annual meeting

The Essex Moth Group goes from strength to strength. Its second annual meeting at Horsley Cross hosted by Tendring Hundred Water Services was a day brimming over with interest and enthusiasm, with a series of interesting talks and wide-ranging discussions, attended by 54 people including the most prominent lepidopterists in the county. Amongst these were Lt. Col. Maitland Emmet, Ben Fisher (discoverer of Fisher's Estuarine Moth), Bob Dewick, Don Down and Peter Smith. Visiting county recorders included Colin Plant (also recent President of the Field Club), Tony Prichard, Jon Nichols and John Dawson

and also present were representatives of the Suffolk Moth Group, making this an important event for strengthening links between groups.

The day's events were opened by a welcoming speech from Joe Firmin, Chairman of the Moth Group. The first speaker was the main guest Colin Hart of the British Entomological Society, a contributor to the multi-volume *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* and author of a forthcoming book on Plume Moths. His talk was on the plume moths and their fascinating life histories. They are a relatively overlooked group because many do not fly to light traps and their larvae tend to be small and cryptic.

Colin used his beautifully illustrated talk to exhort us all to be more active in the field and to be more observant. How many of us, when out enjoying the first flowers of spring, have examined closely the flowerheads of that common wayside plant Coltsfoot to find the Plume Moth that lives on them? Is the moth as common as the plant? And has anyone noticed the tell-tale "windows" in Burdock leaves created by another interesting but little known species? As Colin said we can't just wait for the moths to come to us, we must go out and search if we are to understand more about their ecology and distribution. This may be a truism but it is often not heeded in this world of demarcated nature reserves and televisual virtuosity.

Identification books often create the enthusiasm in people for such fieldwork and Colin Hart's book on plume moths can't come too soon for many of us; it's due, he told us, in 2000 he hopes.

The next speaker, Chris Gibson, then gave an update on a project that provides a good example of observation and patient fieldwork. The conservation of the Fisher's Estaurine Moth, an Essex speciality, and its scarce foodplant, Sea Hog's Fennel, has been the subject of a joint project between English Nature, the Environment Agency, the Essex Wildlife Trust and the Essex Moth Group (representing CNHS and Essex Field Club). It was launched in 1997 to examine the effects of different cutting regimes on an 800 metre section of sea-wall near Landermere. As many aspects of the wildlife of the grassland on the wall are being studied to see how they respond to the mowing, including butterflies, grasshoppers, and mammals. So far it is too early to point to any clear effects. We await developments with great interest as this project has implications for the management of all 500 km of Essex's sea-walls.

Following the talks came the the chance for networking and wide ranging discussions. It was helped by the spacious expanse provided by Tendring Hundred Water Services and above all by the superb buffet lunch. There was a chance to look at the exhibits, including the publications of the Amateur Entomologist's Society and the equipment displayed by Anglian Lepidopterist Supplies.

Brian Goodey, the main organiser of the event, began the afternoon session by reviewing the moth records of 1998. Many of these have been published in the Moth Group's Newsletter and highlights have been or will be included in the moth report in the Essex Naturalist.

Following on from this was an informal session of slides starting with Ian Rose's truly stunning photographs. The slides on show stimulated some interesting discussions and the whole session worked extremely well, encouraging wide participation without anyone holding the floor for too long.

There was also a very informative demonstration of collecting equipment was provided

by Jon Clifton of Anglian Lepidopterist Supplies, allowing useful feedback from those carrying out the fieldwork to those designing and supplying materials.

This stimulating meeting was a great success, well-organised and friendly. It provided an outstanding example of what can be achieved when interested people work collectively. The events organisers, in particular Brian Goodey (Essex Moth Group) and Bob Gooding and the caterers deserve praise and thanks for the success of the day. The excellent venue provided by the Tendring Hundred Water Services company

PROPOSED NEW INVERTEBRATE GROUP

A new group has been suggested by Nigel Cumings and Jerry Bowdrey, which would take as its model the Moth Group (see account of its annual meeting elsewhere this edition), but would bring together all people interested in recording the many other invertebrates, from spiders to hoverflies, woodlice to galls. The proposal is for the group to be affiliated to both the Colchester Natural History Society and the Field Club, as is the current Moth Group. This proposal is yet to be fully considered by the councils of both clubs but it is hoped that it will win their backing as it fulfills many of the needs identified by both clubs.

It is hoped the group would act as an umbrella group, encouraging networking amongst recorders, allowing the exchange of information and data and providing the basis for coordinated surveys of target sites, such as nature reserves where management plans are up for review. It is hoped that if the idea receives widespread support that an inaugural autumn/winter meeting could be held to launch the group, review the 1999 field season and plan for coordinated surveys.

If you are interested in this proposal could you let Jeremy Dagley (address on Programme card) or Jerry Bowdrey (01206 282936 - Colchester Museum) know of your thoughts and ideas.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER

Please send contributions for the next Newsletter, due out in August, to the Editor, Mr Peter Harvey, 32 Lodge Lane, Grays, RM16 2YP by the end of July at the latest.

If text has already been typed on a standalone PC computer then a disk with the file would be very helpful but typed or handwritten notes are welcome.

Deadline dates for the Newsletter each year

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|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| January/February Newsletter: | deadline - end of December |
| April/May Newsletter: | deadline - end of March |
| August/September Newsletter: | deadline - end of July |
| October/November Newsletter: | deadline - end of September |

Readers are advised that publication of material in the Newsletter does not imply, unless indicated to the contrary, that the views and opinions expressed therein are shared by the editor or by the Council of the Essex Field Club.

ESSEX FIELD CLUB PUBLICATIONS

The following publications are available, from Tony Boniface, 40 Pentland Avenue, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 4AZ. All titles are available to individuals on a cash with order basis. Please add 50p towards postage and packing irrespective of the size of the order.

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

THE ESSEX NATURALIST SERIES

- No. 1. **Deer of Essex** by Dr Donald Chapman.
A 50 page paperback describing the distribution and history of deer in Essex. Photographs, maps, etc. ISBN 0 905637 06 2 (published 1977) PRICE £2.00
- No. 3. **Tiptree Heath - its history and natural history** by Laurie Forsyth.
19 page booklet describing the most important heathland habitat in Essex. ISBN 0 905637 08 9 (published 1978) PRICE 60p.
- No. 5. **The Essex Field Club - the first 100 years** by L. S. Harley.
21 page booklet describing the history of the Club on the occasion of its centenary. Photographs. ISBN 0 905637 10 0 (published 1980) PRICE £1.00
- No. 6. **The Smaller Moths of Essex** by A. M. Emmet.
The most detailed account of the smaller moths ever published for any British county. Distribution maps and details of over 1000 species. Illustrations of representative moths in each major group. ISBN 0 905637 11 9 (published 1981) PRICE £5.00 (reduced from £7.00).
- No. 7. **Lords Bushes** by M. W. Hanson.
The history and ecology of an Epping Forest woodland. 69 page paperback with 8 pages of photographs and additional line drawings. ISBN 0 905637 12 7 (published 1983) PRICE £3.00
- No. 8. **The Larger Moths and Butterflies of Essex** by A. M. Emmet and G. A. Pyman.
The companion volume to No. 6. Distribution maps for every species and a complete analysis of the changing butterfly and moth fauna of Essex. ISBN 0 905637 13 5 (published 1985) PRICE £6.00 (reduced from £9.00).
Volume 6 and Volume 8 are available together for £9.00 post free.
- No. 9. **The Dragonflies of Essex** by Dr Edward Benton.
A very comprehensive and readable account of the county dragonfly fauna. It includes the results of a recent county-wide survey and much historical information. ISBN 0 905637 14 3 (published 1988) PRICE £5.95
- No. 10. **Essex Elm** by M. W. Hanson.
Elms were devastated by Dutch Elm disease. In this booklet Mark Hanson examines the role of elms in the landscape and their uses, and also gives an up-to-date account of their status in Essex today. 87 pages, 19 photographs, maps and illustrations. ISBN 0 905637 15 1 (published 1990) PRICE £3.95
- No. 11. **Epping Forest - through the eye of the naturalist** edited by M. W. Hanson.
A book chronicling the complex land-use history of Essex's most famous Forest with modern accounts of its flora and fauna. ISBN 0 905637 16 X (published 1992) PRICE £10
- No. 12. **Essex Naturalist No 12 (New series) - Journal** edited by M. W. Hanson.
ISSN 0071-1489, ISBN 0 905637-17-8 (published 1995) PRICE £5
- No. 13. **Essex Naturalist No 13 (New series) -Journal** edited by P.R.Harvey & C.W. Plant. ISSN 0071-1489 (published 1996) PRICE £5
- No. 14. **Essex Naturalist No 14 (New series) -Journal** edited by C.W. Plant. ISSN 0071-1489 (published 1997) PRICE £5
- No. 15. **Essex Naturalist No 15 (New series) -Journal** edited by C.W. Plant. ISSN 0071-1489 (published 1998) PRICE £5
- The Clay Tobacco-pipe in Britain** by L.S.Harley. 51page paperback covering the history and identification of these pipes. Special attention is given to pipes made in Essex and East Anglia. ISBN 0 905637 00 3 (second edition 1976) PRICE £2.50.