

Castle Point Wildlife Group



People working for a better environment

August 2017 Newsletter

Welcome to the latest newsletter from Castle Point Wildlife Group.

Once again we seem to have had a very mixed year in relation to the weather! It started off very dry then we had a very hot spell but we seem to have missed summer and moved direct to autumn with spells of very heavy rain, wind and low temperatures! This has been confusing for us and even more so for the wildlife.

Despite the weather we have managed to do a range of works in both Westwood and also North Benfleet Hall Wood. This newsletter is to update members and local residents on the various tasks / projects and other activities.

Westwood:

Heath Restoration: Last year we started work on trying to restore what was the original heath in Daws Heath in Westwood. Located at the top end, we cleared a few trees and scraped off the scrub etc. We returned in early summer and cleared the bramble and bracken that had started to grow. Regrettably no sign of any heather as yet, but we have had some common orchids come through which are a bonus. The bracken has grown very strongly again and we will need to clear it again in autumn.

Original Coppice Areas: We have carried out some work to thin the new growth on 2 of the original coppice areas. This will allow the new growth to strengthen and we will return to do more in autumn.

Pathways: We have walked the complete wood and cut back all the undergrowth on all paths.

North Benfleet Hall Wood:

This wood is one where most work is now general maintenance and we have carried out path clearance and also bridge maintenance repairing some of the sections of bridges that were vandalised.

General:

We have now completed our log processing of the coppiced timber. The sale of logs funds our activities as it is our sole income, and without it we would cease to function as we have to fund all our costs such as insurances, fuel tools and equipment etc. We want to reassure everyone we do not sell logs for commercial gain as our main aim is to restore and manage the woods and coppicing is part of this management.

As we have previously reported Essex County Council were proposing a flood protection scheme in Westwood. This project has now started and the main path from Rayleigh Road down to and across the brook is now closed off. We are advised this work will take at least 3 months (possibly longer). The woods are still open and alternate paths are signposted. It will also mean that the bridlepath will be closed for a period. Essex County Council will erect signs on this. As we have advised we are not directly part of this project and we have made our representations about the scheme and we fully support the need to protect homes from flooding. Regrettably the works are seriously restricting our ability to work in the woods and will also affect our main winter work programme. We will attempt to undertake some works but it is likely we will have to play catch up once the project is complete and we have full access back.

While talking about water, we have regrettably had 2 burst water mains in Westwood this year. Both have been repaired but they did cause considerable mess but we have to say the Water Company did a good job in clearing up and they cleared the ditches that had become blocked with slurry.

We have also had to undertake some urgent tree works when a large limb of an Oak snapped and we had to remove it rather quickly. This work did cause some damage to some smaller trees and we will have to return in the winter to finish off the tree cutting.

During the summer we have undertaken some wildlife surveys and we have worked with the Essex Bat Group who have come in and assisted us on a Bat Walk to look at bats within Westwood. We had a great evening and detected some good numbers of bats. We hope to do some walks next year once the flood project is complete and open them up for the public to come along and see these magnificent creatures. The dormouse survey is still ongoing but regrettably we are not finding evidence of these lovely creatures but we will continue with the survey.

We have had further reported sightings of Muntjac Deer and we have seen evidence of their presence by way of stripped bark on some trees at low levels. It has been a mixed year for butterflies. We had some early sightings of A range of species and also some of the summer species but regrettably no sightings of the Heath Fritillary this year. This is disappointing after having had sightings in previous years.

We have once again attended events in Castle Point to promote the group and also the wildlife within Castle Point. This year we have attended the RSPB Wildlife Day held on Canvey in May and also the Daws Heath Fayre in July held in Daws Heath. We had good feedback at both events.

Whilst we are having a break during August, we do have some work sessions planned for September and full details will appear on our website. The dates and details are as below:

Sunday 17th September - Work session at our yard at Woodside to get tools and equipment ready for the winter season. We will be cleaning our storage container, repairing our trailer and generally servicing tools and tidying up. All welcome from 10.30am.

Sunday 24th September - Work session at North Benfleet Hall Wood to cut the glades

Further dates will be finalised when the committee meet on 5th September and these will be published. As mentioned until we have a more definite date for the finish of the flood works in Westwood it will be difficult to develop a full plan.

If anyone wants any further information on any aspect of either North Benfleet Hall Wood or Westwood please do contact us and we will be very happy to try and help.

We are always keen to gain new members and if you wish to join us this can be done via our website or by calling 07425 169476 and a membership form can be sent to you.

Neal Warren

Secretary - August 2017