



October 2016 Newsletter

Welcome to the latest newsletter from Castle Point Wildlife Group.

So another summer has passed by and following the wet spring and early summer we have had a very dry late summer and the ponds in both woods are nearly dried up!

It is pleasing that our membership has increased again this year, and we want to say thank you to all of those who have come along and helped on our work sessions and projects in both woods. It is great to see local residents supporting us and giving positive feedback on everything we are doing.

It seems to have been a mixed year in the woods for wildlife. We have seen fewer butterflies than in other years but we did record a sighting of a Heath Fritillary just outside the butterfly area in the area we completed coppicing this spring. This sighting has been reported to Butterfly Conservation and they have also visited Westwood this year on a couple of occasions and have been very impressed with the growth of cow wheat.

There have been no particular rare birds sighted but we do have evidence of Owls in Westwood with their calls having been heard plus one of our members found a feather from a Tawny Owl in Westwood.

During the summer we have continued with our works in both woods and have managed to create a path right through Westwood which will now give year round access. In addition we have carried on cutting the glades in both woods and some fence repair works.

We have also held our first Bat Walks. Those who came on the first one will remember it for the torrential rain and lack of bats! Luckily the second one was more successful with a number of bats being detected. We will do more next year and will extend these to North Benfleet Hall Wood.

We have also had several local groups who have asked for walks around both woods and we have completed 4 of these this year. We are hopefully going to be able to extend these next year when we are looking to hold another Bluebell Walk and also an open woods day.

Once again we have provided logs from our coppice works in the woods to local residents and this has been a key source of funding for our works. Thanks must go to those members who have assisted in the log processing work!!

As we move in to Autumn we are now starting our winter work plan covering both woods. Full details have been circulated and are also shown on the events page of our website www.castlepointwildlifegroup.co.uk We hope as many as possible will come and join us on the work parties. We have applied for a felling licence for another compartment in Westwood as detailed in the management plan. The Forestry Commission have also visited Westwood as they want to undertake a survey for Acute Oak Decline. This survey will involve then digging pits about 1 meter square and 1 meter deep at the base of Oaks with the disease to take soil samples. We will be interested in the findings, but interestingly a survey of the woods with them a few weeks ago found little evidence of the disease.

We are also undertaking a project in Westwood to look at restoring an area of heathland at the top of the wood. Soil samples have shown the soil is ideal for heather, and there are many people who can remember the heathers being present. The project will clear an area about 15 meters square of trees, bracken and other plants (and bramble!!). The area will then be scraped back and then left to see if any regeneration takes place. We have expert help on this project from a heath restoration expert and he advises it can up to 5 years for any regrowth to show through. During this time we will manage the area to keep other plant growth down. Work is well underway on this project.

We are not forgetting North Benfleet Hall Wood and have various sessions planned here to ensure the woods stay in good condition. This wood again was part of the Green Flag award that was presented for the 3rd year in a row. Works at NBHW will consist of path maintenance, bridge maintenance and the annual glade cutting. In addition we have some work to do on the trees involving removing some dead limbs and cutting back some growth to let light in.

During the year we came aware of a proposal by Essex County Council to build a bund (raised embankment) across the brook in Westwood. This bund is part of an overall flood protection scheme. We have had several meetings on

this and have made representations about the risk of flooding to the woods in particular the butterfly area . We fully understand the need for ensuring flood risk is minimised and are putting forward our thoughts and other options for considering. The proposal means lots of soil being imported in to the woods by lorry and we are discussing the whole project with Essex County Council and with Castle Point Borough Council and will do all we can to ensure the woods are protected as far as possible.

We have previously updated on the project we were involved in with the Science Museum where we supplied an Oak Tree for them to set up inside the museum. This tree is now located in the museum and will soon be part of an educational experience for children visiting the museum. We are very pleased to have been able to support this project.

If anyone requires further information on any of our projects or wish to join us please do contact us. We hope as many as possible will come and help so we can ensure Local Woods for Local People.

Neal Warren

Secretary - October 2016