

Mid Herts local group

Events programme: April - September 2014

Herts and
Middlesex



Venue for all evening events: Howlands Baptist Church, The Commons, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 4RS adjacent to Commonwood School. Donations: £3 at indoor (including coffee) and outdoor meetings unless otherwise stated. Contact: Neale Holmes-Smith 01707 324313 or Penny Fanthorpe 07761 712245 penny.fanthorpe@ntlworld.com. Families welcome. Please check for pushchair and wheelchair suitability at outdoor events.

Apr

Sunday 6th April. Balls Wood, Hertford Heath to identify Mosses and Lichen. Visit this diverse woodland to identify mosses and lichen with Dr Agneta Burton who brings a wealth of knowledge and understanding of natural habitats. Bring a hand lens if you have one. Meet at 2pm Roundings Road, adjacent to the College Arms in Hertford Heath. Postcode for Sat Navs SG13 7PW (TL 348 106). No booking required.

Tuesday 22nd April. Come and explore Panshanger Park with Tim Hill (HMWT Conservation Manager) and Charlie Bell (Living Rivers Project). A delightful spot to expand your knowledge of chalk stream invertebrates and an ideal opportunity for children to get involved with nature. Meet at 6.30pm. Enter via white gate house entrance on B1000, 400m east of Tewin/Bramfield turn [TL293136]. Places are limited and entry strictly by booking with Vicky 01707 390064 or email victoria.davies206@hotmail.co.uk

Saturday 26th April. Hounslow Heath in search of adders, grass snakes and common lizards with LEHART (London, Essex and Hertfordshire Amphibian and Reptile Trust), we may even witness adder courtship rituals. Start 10.30am at car park in Framptom Way near its junction with A315 Staines Road, Hounslow TW4 5AD (TQ121749). Places are limited so booking essential with Vicky 01707 390064 or email victoria.davies206@hotmail.co.uk

May

Tuesday 20th May. Balls Wood Nature Reserve, Hertford Heath with Susannah O'Riordan, South Herts Woods Living Landscape Officer. Meet 6.30pm in Roundings Road, adjacent to the College Arms in Hertford Heath to see the work of the Woodlands for People and Wildlife Project. Postcode SG13 7PW (TL 348 106). No booking necessary.

Saturday 24 May. Hilfield Park Reservoir, Elstree in search of breeding gulls, terns and black-necked grebes. Meet at the reserve at 10.00am. A1 South to Stirling Corner turn R into Barnet Lane through Elstree, R onto North Western Avenue, ½ mile later R into Hilfield Lane, 1/4 mile on R reserve sign on entrance gates. WD25 8DA (TQ152959). Please park responsibly beyond the gates. No toilet facilities on site. Some rough terrain and steep steps will be encountered. Car share from Campus West car park at 9.15am to be agreed on booking (car park charge). Booking essential with Ian on 07598 758672/ 01920 484373 or iancogger1@gmail.com

Jun

Sunday 8th June. Bird ringing and searching for water voles at Tewinbury Nature Reserve. Meet at 8.00am in the reserve car park. There will be the opportunity to use the bird hide looking for kingfisher and other resident birds and also look for signs of water voles. Take B1000 West of Hertford, 200m past j/w Hens Lane. Turn right at Tewinbury Farm Hotel sign. Park on R in 100m. Booking essential with Penny as numbers strictly limited.

Tuesday 24th June. A guided walk over Harpenden Common with HMWT Conservation Manager Tim Hill to see the results of recent conservation work on this local site of natural scenic beauty. Start 6pm. Contact Penny (as above) to book and for details of meeting place.

Jul

Sunday 13th July. The Commons Nature Reserve, WGC in search of its insect life. We will be looking for the diverse range of insect life that inhabit this reserve. Meet at the Howlands reserve entrance at the bottom of Howlands Hill next to the Queen Elizabeth II Hospital service road at 10.00am. Bring a hand lens if you have one. Please park with consideration to local residents using side roads. For further information contact Dave Laming on 07534 263868

Tuesday 22nd July. Mid Herts Local Group AGM

Meet 7pm at The Cat Survival Trust, The Centre, 46 – 52 Codicote Road, Welwyn, Herts. Everyone is welcome, including non-members, to our annual get together. A short walk and talk viewing snow leopards, jaguar and other wild cats plus an insight into the Trust's conservation initiatives. Our AGM will follow this. Pizza oven available for use, bring own food and utensils. Tea and coffee provided. For further information contact Penny as above.

Sept

Sunday 14th Sept. A guided walk round Heartwood Forest, Sandridge. We will revisit the largest new woodland project in England right on our doorstep to see how work has progressed and savour the ambience of this special place. Meet at 10am at Sandridge Village Hall CPk on the B651 St Albans - Wheathampstead Road. No booking required

Tuesday 23rd Sept. Bali Underwater. Ken Sullivan's exquisite photography will illustrate breathtaking marine life from tiny nudibranchs, blennies and clownfish up to barracuda and octopus. Showing us how they interact within their diverse marine coral forest. Meet 8pm at Howlands Baptist Church.

www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/mhlg



Our outdoor visits proved very diverse.

Ian Dillon, Project Manager, RSPB Grange Farm, Cambs explained how surveying

showed a decline particularly in turtle dove and corn buntings, whilst pigeon, jackdaw and generalist birds have increased. Although managed as an arable farm, 5% of the land is set aside for conservation. Staggered hedge cutting and planting areas with specialised seeds has shown a 160% increase in birds including sky lark and barn owl.

Despite heavy rainfall, our Fungal Foray this year identified 66 species and passed on a lot of interesting knowledge. One of the finds was the spectacular *Phallus Impudicus* - better known as stinkhorn.



Stinkhorn by Les Binns

Our walk in Epping Forest on a perfectly bright day, showed the forest in all its autumnal glory. We had a potted history of the tribal usage and stood on the ramparts of the iron-age fort that they once inhabited. Gravel extraction has left sizeable ponds and there are beeches which had been coppiced and later pollarded known as "coppards". We found a variety of fungi including *Russula* (with pink cap) and the yellow hedgehog fungus. We were lucky enough to see a woodcock pass overhead at the end of the walk.

Our coach trip to Rainham Marshes was well supported. On a blustery day we saw large groups of birds: golden plover, teal, pintail and pochard with smaller numbers of snipe, tufted duck and little grebe. We watched in awe as a marsh harrier glided and hovered in the wind looking for its next meal. Knowledgeable local volunteers made for an exquisite day - two seals on the far bank of the Thames was the icing on the cake.

At our indoor events we welcomed the return of photographers Jeff Harrison and Luke Massey. Jeff brought tales and anecdotes of his own garden wildlife with the usual high standard of photos, something for everyone to relate to. Luke came to us following the TV screening of *The Burrowers* and *The Great British Year* which included some of his shots. Luke has rocketed into the wider world of conservation travelling in search of 'the perfect' shot. With his witty stories he entertained us well.

BTO Director Graham Appleton together with local Herts BTO volunteer Chris Dee explained how they collect their data working closely with other agencies. Graham explained how tracking devices monitor birds such as the cuckoo, to show their migratory patterns and how weather patterns across the continents cause them to



Cuckoo by Amy Lewis

deviate their journey. He also gave an insight into the lives of other Africa migrants such as the nightjar and spotted flycatcher.

Linda Smith also gave us lots of data about species monitoring at Heartwood Forest. There has been a huge increase in the number of birds recorded; skylarks, corn buntings, linnet, stonechat and short eared owls to name a few.

Data is collected from the many survey groups that use the site. Future monitoring will include lichens, soil surveys and fixed point photography providing a detailed overview and 100,000 native deciduous trees are yet to be planted by volunteers over the next ten years. - *Join us here in September for a guided walk.*