



Waldringfield Wildlife Group. Report for the Annual Parish Meeting 9th April 2022

WWG held its AGM in Driftwood Garden in September 2021 after almost a two year interruption of its programme of activities due to Covid restrictions. Members were very keen to resume our programme of talks and events so it was decided to go ahead even though the future was uncertain at that time and its 2022 programme was circulated by December 2021. The group has retained its formula of holding five illustrated talks about aspects of wildlife which are preceded by a members' business/ planning meeting. They are held on a bi monthly basis on the second Saturday in the month with a break during the summer holidays. The AGM is held in October. In addition, several seasonal field trips and guided tours of wildlife reserves are interspersed throughout the year. This includes the Nightingale Walk at Newbourne Springs led by resident Peter Maddison. An early start is required but members are usually rewarded by the enchanting songs of at least three Nightingales followed by a shared alfresco breakfast which is great fun. The one change we have made is to move from The Kennedy Room to the larger Deben Hall to allow for spreading out which has worked very well as it is less crowded than the Kennedy Room.

The first meeting and illustrated talk in February 2022 were both well attended and it was gratifying to see that despite the long interruption we have retained an enthusiastic following and gained new members. Currently we have 63 members. The programme has been circulated on Waldringfielders and advertised twice in the parish newsletter. It is also circulated by Transition Woodbridge, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and the Greenprint Forum so it is not uncommon to have attendance from people who live outside Waldringfield. The programme can be accessed via the Greener Waldringfield website- www.greenerwaldringfield.org.

The next talk is on June 11th when we see the return of the truly inspired Hawk Honey who will present his talk 'Wasps : – Malicious or Misunderstood?' Up and coming events in addition to the Nightingale Walk on May 4th include evening riverside walks to identify and listen to the Nightingales along the northern stretch of the River Wall and on the 1st June resident Chris Baldry will be leading another guided bird sighting walk starting at 10.30am. We look forward to a repeat visit to Staverton Park and Staverton Thicks, Wantisden with forester Gary Battell. Staverton is a truly amazing place to visit to see over 400 ancient oak pollards at least four hundred years old and the largest hollies, rowans, birches in the land. It is a Nature Conservation Review Site and a Special Area of Conservation. Olivr Rackham described it as: **'a famous and awesome place of Tolkienesque wonder and beauty' and 'one of the best preserved un- compartmented medieval parks.'**

During the Covid restrictions the one activity that kept us united and enthralled with the wildlife on our doorstep was the transformation of 'What's About' to 'What's Up Now?' During lockdown members and residents alike had more time to tune into the wildlife around them on their daily exercise walks and in their gardens. Sightings and photographs were sent to Peter Maddison detailing what was seen, when and where who then circulated to those who had signed up to the sharing of this information via emails. Some of these photographs are available for you to see tonight on a digital loop revealing the diversity of wildlife and the talented photographers we have in our community. These sightings reveal the changing wildlife around us as the climate is warming and the reintroduction of species that are making their way to Suffolk. Recently, along the shores and hinterland of the River Deben there have been sightings of Red Kite, Osprey, Great Egrets, Common Cranes, and Spoonbills in addition to the huge variety of water fowl and bird species that the River Deben is renowned for.

Even though the talks and activities programme was discontinued members continued to develop its key projects to help conserve and protect wildlife. These include:

The Verges Project guided by Christine Fisher Kay was started in 2005 when the Wildlife Group was set up. This was in response to the continuing grim news about the dramatic loss of wildlife throughout Britain and the group looked at ways to help wildlife locally. The Verges project looked at verges along School Rd and Cliff Rd with the two aims of:

- Improving their quality as a wildlife resource;
- And to make the verges look more attractive and interesting.

Flower power is increased by planting bulbs and plant plugs for a succession of flowers through Summer and the verges are allowed to grow longer to provide food and shelter for the creatures who form the bottom of the food chain, the caterpillars, tiny moths, small spiders, beetles and hoverflies as well as the more showy butterflies, larger moths and bees.

The Verges Project links in well with East Suffolk District Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019 and its expressed intention to increase the amount of wild spaces in the district where a more conservation based approach to verge cutting could promote biodiversity. Its policy of reduced mowing to promote wildflower growth and to encourage biodiversity was expanded to a total of 100 such conservation areas where grasses and wildflowers could be left to grow to help wildlife thrive.. Such areas are marked with 'Pardon the Weeds. We're feeding the Bees' Logo to make residents and visitors aware. Returning for its third year 'Pardon the Weeds' campaign is back with town and parish councils being encouraged to create wild spaces on their own land – marked by the special 'green pardon the weeds sign' if they wish.

Barn Owl Project:

Unfortunately, Covid restrictions meant that the Barn Owl monitors Peter Maddison and Sally Redfern, on behalf of the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project were unable to monitor the Barn Owl boxes in June 2020 which means there are no specific records of whether there were any fledglings for that year. Sally Redfern reported in 2021 when the boxes could be monitored that none of the 7 nest boxes revealed a brood, which is believed could have been due to the cold spell of weather in spring and, possibly, difficulty in hunting for food due to a poor vole population. Sadly, there has

been a dearth of the usual barn owl sightings over Dairy Farm Marsh since and it could be as a result of these factors. Residents are encouraged to report any barn owl sightings in this vicinity to Peter Maddison.

Waldringfield Swifts:

Swifts are an endangered species. Last year over 50 swift boxes were installed in all parts of the village and additional sets are currently being installed along with the swift call sound. This year AONB have given support to SOS providing free swift boxes and call sound systems which has resulted in a huge wave of support for the swift population with boxes going up in most Suffolk towns and villages in the AONB districts.

On June 24th there will be an evening swift scouting walk with SOS Eddie Bathgate around the village logging where the swifts are nesting, searching for screaming parties of juveniles and checking out where the bird boxes are located. Additionally SOS set up a Whats' App group which provides an informative source for learning and sharing. Website WWW.swift-conservation.org provides lots of information and from where the swift mapper app can be downloaded to record sightings and location of nest sites and nest boxes.

Apart from installing nest boxes swifts rely on aerial plankton to feed on. We can all help to boost insect life which is in free-fall by making your garden and our community more wildlife friendly.

Big Garden Bird Watch RSPB: This is a yearly activity organised locally by Jill Winter who collates the results and compares with the national records. Top of the Flocks include House Sparrow, Blue Tits, Starlings, Woodpigeon, Blackbirds, Robins, Goldfinches, Great Tits and Chaffinches.

Night Vision Camera: Co-ordinated by Jill Winter residents have delighted in filming the night time wildlife in our gardens – in my case mostly badgers, hedgehogs and rabbits .

Wildlife Friendly Gardening Plea – providing food and habitat for our wildlife. We know that many of our residents have parts or all of their gardens dedicated to wildlife and it doesn't mean that we have to leave them to grow into a jungle. Our plea to you is to do some simple things that will make all the difference. These can include having areas of uncut grass- start by supporting No Mow May; plant nectar rich plants in your borders for bees and butterflies; plant a tree or retain those you have and provide native hedges for roosting and nesting sites; ponds and water features, however small provide a habitat for a variety of life and woodpiles/leaf piles can be incredible places for animals to live, feed and hibernate. If you have a fence make sure wildlife corridors are kept open by making 5 cm holes in the fence.

My thanks go to our members for all their support and encouragement; to Jill Winter, Secretary and Alexis Smith Treasurer for the group; to Peter Maddison for collating and feeding back the 'What's Up Now' sightings, Christine Fisher Kay for her commitment to the Verges Project and to Sally Redfern and Peter Maddison who have monitored the Barn Owl Boxes since the inception of the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project. And a final thankyou to those members, who also always put r up their hands to serve the refreshments at our meetings.

Linda Wilkins – Coordinator of Waldringfield Wildlife Group – April 11th 2022

