



Report for the Annual Parish Meeting Waldringfield April 2016

The group's membership has increased from last year, bringing membership up to 53. There is good attendance at our business meetings and the group's bi-monthly talks have continued to be well attended. The group's talks, excursions and projects are widely publicised to encourage as wide participation as possible. Along with other village community groups, a website called 'Greener Waldringfield' has been founded. A more prominent focus on environmental and wildlife themes has also been promoted in the form of a centre page spread in the parish magazine identified by the Greener Waldringfield logo.

The WWG is coordinated by a small team of three officers: Linda Wilkins, Coordinator; Angela Mace, Secretary and Anthony Mason, Treasurer, who was nominated at the last AGM when Alexis Smith decided to stand down after four years. Members who take a lead for the group on specific activities are: Sally Redfern and Peter Maddison are licensed Barn Owl Monitors for The Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project monitoring the nine Waldringfield Barn Owl boxes. Linda and Jon Wilkins recently completed the Barn Owl monitoring training this year and will also be licensed to monitor our barn owl boxes as directed by SCBO project. Sally reports on the Swift sightings in the village to the Suffolk Wildlife Trust 'Save Our Swift Project' and is the group contact for the Woodbridge Swift project. Christine Fisher Kay and Betsy Reid collaborate and carefully consider efforts to encourage wildlife friendly habitat in our village public spaces through planting of bulbs and wildflower seeds in the village verges. This project began in 2008 during which time over 12,000 bulbs have been planted by group volunteers. Our thanks to the parish council and donations from anonymous patrons who have helped fund this project. Pam Crawley keeps an account of Hedgehog sightings in the village and Peter Maddison produces a seasonal quarterly report, 'What's About?' of bird and wildlife sightings in and around the village. We all look forward to reading Peter's articles. Peter could not produce these reports, however, without the observations and sightings from members and village residents so please make sure to report what you see as it is important to know the wildlife we have in the village.

Talks by Wildlife Experts in 2015/16 included:

2015 programme focused on the marine wildlife off the East Anglian coast. Rob Spray deep sea diver/photographer and Norfolk's Marine Recorder gave a stunning and visually colourful account of the marine life of the ancient chalk reef on the North Norfolk Coast. Rob reminded us that despite this important biodiversity hotspot the North Sea is not what it was because of overfishing and that we should all campaign for more Marine Conservation Zones as we need these for healthy seas.

Our local resident Peter Maddison brightened up our April day with his account of **The Diversity of the Wildlife of Costa Rica** and in May guided a group of twelve members on an early (and wet) morning **Nightingale Walk in Newbourne Springs**. Despite the downpour we heard three nightingales in three different locations and more besides and later enjoyed an alfresco breakfast in the adjoining car park. Members are signed up to another of these walks for spring 2016.

Our June talk 'Wildlife Gardening and Hedgehogs' by Suffolk Wildlife Sites Advisor Leonie Washington gave some hedgehog friendly gardening tips and practical suggestions on how to attract wildlife to our gardens through the creation of micro habitats. She also updated us on the Suffolk Hedgehog Survey which our group has supported since the launch of the Trust's campaign. Hedgehogs are a cause for deep concern as the numbers of hedgehogs have reduced by a third in the last ten years. More than 8000 hedgehog sightings were logged onto the Suffolk Wildlife Trusts website showing that urban centres in Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds and Felixstowe hold important populations. In rural areas gardens have become particularly important as modern farming practices do not suit hedgehogs. Leonie promoted the hedgehog friendly gardening tips which we have encouraged residents to use in the village and in our own gardens over the past two/three years. Although at the time of Leonie's talk there had been 8 sightings reported from Waldringfield, this last season just one live hedgehog sighting was made by Betsy Reid early on followed by two more sightings in close vicinity. The placing of the two footprint tunnels during spring and summer in different gardens and sites in the village has not resulted in any further indicators of hedgehog activity.

Betsy Reid highlighted the threats to wildlife habitat in her presentation of the most up to date research on, **DO WE NEED BEES AND WHAT ABOUT BEES' NEEDS ?** Bumble bees and honey bees need suitable homes and food and an environment which is stable and non-poisonous. We need bumble bees and honey bees for pollination of 85% of our crops (be warned by the experience of the Chinese who have found that after their campaigns to decimate 'undesirable' birds and insects, they now have to hand-pollinate their pear trees, a laborious procedure which takes 60 man-hours per hectare).

Bumble bees certainly don't need us, as our modern methods of agriculture and our tidy gardens have deprived them of suitable sites for homes and contributed to a drastic decline in their numbers.

Honey bees in this country have some need of us, as feral colonies tend not to survive and our bee-keepers provide houses and food-banks for them and help to protect them from some fatal diseases. We also benefit from the honey, beeswax and propolis that our honey bees produce.

Over the last ten years the use of powerful pesticides such as neonicotinoids and glyphosates on crops such as oil-seed rape has become a cause for alarm and a big political issue, partly because the research and the publicity connected with the effects of the use of them has been heavily influenced by the agrochemical industry. Pesticide manufacturers, such as Bayer, have been dressing oilseed rape seeds with neonicotinoids and also getting farmers to use sprays containing glyphosates, with the expressed intention of eradicating the oilseed rape flea-beetle but in fact affecting any insect which feeds on the crop. They claim that glyphosates break down in the soil but in fact they persist in the soil and build up if applied annually. They are water-soluble so they don't stay put but percolate about through water-courses and get into un-targeted plants. Pollinators now face repeated exposure to low doses of residues in their food and water sources. While these low doses won't kill them outright, they can lead to serious adverse effects.

Laboratory tests by Bayer do not cover the effects on foraging bees. Field studies have shown that the navigation and communication skills of bees have been adversely affected and that bees with neonicotinoids in their system bring back less pollen and produce fewer queens. An argument sometimes put forward for the use of these pesticides is that farmers need to produce more food to feed the world's population. But this is based on the western diet which involves a lot of waste. In fact, the world's farmers produce enough food; the problem is more with the maldistribution of food throughout the world.

The 2015 programme concluded with a talk by Steve Abbott, from the British Trust for Ornithology, on, ' **WHAT IS THE RINGING SCHEME & HOW ARE BIRDS TRAPPED FOR RINGING ?** Steve Abbott is the chairman of the Suffolk Ornithological Committee, the body which adjudicates rarity records in the county. Over recent decades ringing has revolutionised our understanding of bird migration to and from the UK, revealing that in addition to the well-known North/South migrations, hundreds of thousands of birds arrive here in September and October each year from the continent, including meadow pipits, robins, blackbirds, thrushes, and greenfinches. Even the short-lived and tiny goldcrest manages to cross the North Sea to us and the yellow-browed warbler makes its way here from the foothills of the Himalayas.

We have continued to promote and encourage more wildlife friendly areas in our gardens and open spaces in addition to our support of **The Suffolk Wildlife Trust Hedgehog Survey**. For a third year group members made some space in their garden to sow seeds of nectar and pollen rich flowers, native and non- native varieties to improve the habitat for pollinators such as birds, bees and butterflies. Double the amount of seeds have been distributed for sowing in March 2016 amongst group members and in addition primary school children are sowing wild flower seeds at the cleared space in the triangle by the village hall and in Village Way alongside the fruit trees.

With the guidance of Christine Fisher Kay a further 2,100 bulbs were planted in the **village verges** in the Autumn 2014 including more of the native Tenby daffodil , Narcissus, Pheasant Eye, Star of Bethlehem and Scilla Sibiricca and in Autumn 2015, a further 2800 bulbs were planted including Daffodil Lobularis, Alliums, Fritiallaria ,Gladiolus Byzantinum , Leocojum, Muscari Armeniacum, and Muscari Venus. The more recent ones are an attempt to add later nectar and pollen sources. The species crocuses provide early pollen. The daffodils mark the areas where grass will be left long discouraging cutting. Narcissus Pheasants Eye are later flowering prolonging the display.

Sally Redfern, who with Peter Maddison collaborates with the **Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project**, has reported on the monitoring of seven of the nine barn owl nest boxes in Waldringfield for 2015. Despite finding five eggs in one box and three chicks subsequently hatching two of the chicks did not survive and as there was no sign of the third chick it is possible that it fledged successfully. The most likely reason given for the failure of the chicks to survive is the lack of sufficient food in that voles have been in short supply this year. Waldringfield experience compared elsewhere in Suffolk suggests that our barn owl records follow the trend. Sally refers to Steve Piotrowski's report on the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project (August 2015) which states that although a fairly large number of barn owl pairs took up residence in Suffolk's boxes in 2015 brood sizes were small. This compares with a disastrous year in 2013 followed by a bumper broods in 2014. The vole population followed a reverse trend, being low in 2013, very high in 2014 and low again in 2015. In 2014 nearly 1000 barn owl chicks were ringed. Estimations by Steve for 2015 is that the total number of chicks ringed will not exceed 400.

Sally Redfern also reported 2015 village Swift sightings to a **Woodbridge Swift Survey 2015 – Where have all the Swifts Gone?** Although there are swifts in the village neither of the two nest boxes

installed in the vicinity have reported any swifts nesting there yet. It is considered that the success of swifts nesting in the nest boxes could be increased with the use of a CD of swift calls. One example given was of six nest boxes when the CD was used two boxes were immediately occupied. Another Woodbridge correspondent gave an example of swifts appearing to prospect newly erected swift boxes when the CD was played as if they might have been prospecting for next year's sites.

Spotted Flycatcher Boxes – We had no reported sightings in 2015 of spotted flycatchers making use of the nest boxes some members have installed in their gardens. Alexis Smith reported a pair of Spotted Flycatchers nesting in her garden on the 24th June 2015 and on the 4th July three chicks were observed. A further sighting of a Spotted Flycatcher was made at the yard near Rivers Hall. We need to establish whether the national trend remains in decline and monitor the nest boxes we have installed as they can be useful for other birds too.

The group's wildlife outings in 2015 were well attended by members and local residents including a return trip to **Priors Oak Gardens** to observe the butterflies and other wildlife Trudy attracts to her special and unique garden and a guided **bird watching tour on M/V Jahan**. Thank you once again to Peter Maddison who gave his time and shared his knowledge on what has become a popular wildlife event for our members. Peter reports that the trip went well but not as many birds were seen as last year which Peter says is due to the weather not being sufficiently cold and without winds from the north or east few winter birds have so far arrived. Nevertheless Peter recorded 25 species of birds and a common seal.

Christine Fisher Kay organised the **summer picnic in Church Fields** and twelve members attended and from all accounts this went well and the rain held off and the day brightened fortunately.

Finally, I should also acknowledge the work of the **WFDG and the DFM Trustees in the transformation of Dairy Farm Marsh**: the strengthening of the river wall upstream of Waldringfield; the retention and improvements to the footpath; the creation of a freshwater reserve for wildlife and latterly restoration works to the saltmarsh. This project has and will transform the habitat for wildlife; the combination and availability of fresh water and saline habitat, and hopefully improved saltmarsh and intertidal habitats will provide greater bio-diversity and important roosting sites for birds and water fowl at High Tide. I would especially like to thank, on behalf of the WWG, Jon Wilkins, Chair of the WFDG and a member of the WWG whose vision for this project and whose determination to achieve the working partnership with the Trustees of DFM has made this transformation a reality. I would like to thank both Jon and wildlife member, Janette Brown Mace for keeping the WWG informed of the progress of this very important development and Janette Brown Mace for all her contributions in monitoring and recording the wildlife already appearing on DFM.

For the third year we have held an **extra business meeting** following the AGM. The purpose of this additional meeting is to provide an opportunity for members to contribute their suggestions for the following year's agenda of wildlife themes and activities; to raise suggestions as to how the group's management and organisation can be improved and to overview the group's aspirations and objections. From these discussions the programme for 2016 and 2017 talks have been organised, and a focus on how the group's activities can continue to support the conservation of our wildlife which is increasingly under threat as a result of loss of habitat through residential development and agricultural practices as well as the impacts of climate change.

The group's 2016 programme started with a return visit by our popular River Deben resident, Dr David Healey who demonstrated his love and knowledge of the river in his talk titled Shore Birds of

the River Deben which was very well attended and enjoyed by all. The 2016 programme will conclude with a presentation on the ecological and the potential economic benefits of ‘ **Suffolk Saltmarshes**’ by Karen Thomas, project manager with the Internal Drainage Board. This will include an account of the progress of the WFDG saltmarsh project.

Details of the 2016 programme are available on the www.greenerwaldringfield.org website.

Linda Wilkins

Coordinator of Waldringfield Wildlife Group.

October 2015