

Cervus

Newsletter No 102
Autumn/Winter 2025/26



See page 9 to find out what sort of fungus Cladonia ramulosa is

Colchester Natural History Society

**For the Events calendar
see page 21**

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Cervus postal submissions should be sent to 134 Garland Road, Colchester
CO2 7GD. **Copy date for *Cervus 103* is 1st March 2026**

Contacting the society Get in touch with us at info@CNHS.uk. Please e-mail us where possible; if you need to contact the Society by post, please e-mail us for address details.

Committee: Ted Benton, Frank Black, Denise Byrne, Liz Cutting, Carla Davis, Oliver Dhakal, Linda Mahon-Daly, Claire Harrington, Kay Lee, Sarah Manning, Michael Padmore, Roy Read, Darren Tansley, Dougal Urquhart, Sven Wair

Front cover - Lichen, *Cladonia ramulosa* on sandy soil by Sarah Manning

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From the Editor

When my wife, Deb, and I moved into a modern house on the site of the old Cavalry Barracks in Colchester we discovered that the modern version of sash cord windows fitted in our house provided the perfect tubular home for *Steatoda nobilis*. Our windows and those of our neighbours are teeming with the untidy webs of this member of the Theridiidae family of spiders. This spider is beloved by tabloid newspapers who on slow news days like to exaggerate its threat to humans. It is true that the *Steatoda nobilis* is one of a very small number of British spiders which are able to pierce human skin and so can, and does on rare occasions, inject the venom that virtually all spiders produce.

Last week a friend who was talking to Deb noticed a largish spider dangling from the short sleeve of Deb's top and helpfully tried to dislodge it. The spider identified as a female *Steatoda nobilis* dropped to the ground. Half an hour later Deb's arm became swollen and remained inflamed for three or four days. An antihistamine ointment was applied and Deb was reinforced in her belief that she is very unlucky!

The *Steatoda nobilis* was first reported in the UK in the 1870s and is now widespread across southern England. The female has a body length of 8-11mm and has a distinctive pattern on its abdomen.

An excellent recent guide to Britain's spiders is: Bee, L, Oxford, G & Smith, H - **Britain's Spiders: a field guide** published by Princeton University Press in their Wild Guides series. The second edition (ISBN 9780691204741) was published in 2020. The recommended price is £25 but I bought mine from Blackwell's for £20.



Photograph: Frank Black

Steatoda nobilis

Other reading is:

- Bulletin of the British Arachnological Society (1993) 9 (5), 164-167

<https://britishspiders.org.uk/system/files/library/090505.pdf>

- There is also a Factsheet on the website of the British Arachnological Society:

<https://britishspiders.org.uk> - Look under *Information* and then *Factsheets and leaflets*.

Frank Black

Chair's Report for 2025

The Society had another busy summer with sixteen walks on the programme. The weather for wildlife watching has certainly been dry and at times very hot. In late April we held our second successful Nightingale and Social evening at the Whalebone pub and the Fingringhoe Nature Discovery Centre. Nearly thirty members attended and many thanks to Michael Padmore for organising the evening. Other summer walks took place at a dozen venues in the Colchester and surrounding area with attendances varying in numbers. Many thanks to those leaders who shared their knowledge and time and many thanks to the many members that come along for the walks.

Our forthcoming winter programme of indoor talks cover another variety of topics ranging from the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, Bird Aware Essex Coast, Wildwest Scotland, Stour Valley, wildlife enhancements at Moverons Farm and the wildlife of European deserts. It promises to be another winter of entertaining talks. We look forward to seeing members come along and support the evenings.

CNHS continues to be involved in the campaign to save the Middlewick Ranges from development. We continue to support the need for the site to be designated an SSSI to help protect it from development as well as from neglect and mismanagement. The site suffered from a spate of wildfires during the heatwaves. The Society recently sent a letter to CCC in support of its funding bid to refurbish the Colchester Natural History Museum. The Council needs to apply for a second round of funding and assuming that is successful, the society will then have further input into what wildlife should be interpreted.

Planning matters continue to be monitored and commented on by Peter Hewitt and we are grateful for his time in scrutinising plans and responding where needed. Peter has written a summary in this Cervus of the main issues he's been keeping an eye on.

The two proposed CNHS booklets continue to be worked on and we hope these will be completed very soon. These are the Seventy Species booklet and also the Wildlife of Middlewick Ranges booklet.

Lastly many thanks to Frank Black for producing this second copy of Cervus. It wouldn't have been an easy job stepping into Russell's shoes, but Frank's first issue in April has made the change in editor seamless and smooth! It's not an easy job relying on members to send in their contributions but it does all come together eventually! I'm sure you will enjoy flicking through this issue to see how busy the Society has been over the last six months. We look forward to seeing you at our winter events.

Dougal Urquhart, Chair

The Joe Firmin Bursary Award

The Colchester Natural History Society was formed on 9 October 1953, when a number of local naturalists met at St Georges School, Colchester, to establish today's Natural History Society, an earlier one having ended some 70 years previously. Joe Firmin was one of the main movers behind this and this bursary celebrates his considerable contribution in both establishing and developing our Society over very many years. Sadly Joe passed away in 2013.

Joe was well known locally as a very keen all round naturalist, who, through his writings in the press, was able to bring together a range of interested parties of all ages. Joe was always keen to encourage youngsters to take an interest in natural history and over the years a number of his proteges became involved in working in nature conservation and other wildlife related roles, including myself. During the late 1950s and the 1960s the Society had a very active Junior Section - a situation that we are keen to develop once again.

This Bursary, in Joe's name, seeks to encourage the study of all forms of wildlife in North-east Essex, especially by young naturalists - the Application Form and Prospectus show the extent of the Society's recording area and the criteria relating to the Bursary

The Bursary is for an amount of £250 and the Project should normally be completed within 12 months, although agreement might be made for a longer period in some circumstances. Applications are invited from CNHS members and non-members alike. If an application is approved, half of the grant will be awarded at the start of the study and the remainder on completion of the study.

Activities eligible for funding include: travel and subsistence for field work, scientific equipment, identification guide books, an appropriate course or other items relevant to the study. An Application Form and Prospectus is available from the Society's Secretary at secretary@CNHS.uk.

Russell Leavett

CNHS ARCHIVES

A start was made at looking to see what old CNHS files and documents were being kept in storage at both at the EWT's Abbots Hall and at the University of Essex's library. Most of the boxes at both locations appeared to have originally been kept at the Colchester Museum Resource Centre until 2017 when that building was sold off. Twenty-four storage boxes went to Abbots Hall and are currently being kindly stored by EWT in one of their barns. The boxes contain a wealth of wildlife paper-records as well as many survey reports and documents, covering all of north-east

Essex. More time is needed to document what lies in these boxes, as much of the historical wildlife data will still be of great interest in the future. A return visit is being planned for the autumn. Thanks to Darren Tansley for providing access to the barn.



Some of the Society's archives

At the University of Essex, Michael Padmore arranged with the library curator Sarah Demelo, to look at what was in storage there. We found a collection of CNHS documents in the Special Collections and Sarah brought out one black metal box, three banker boxes, two slightly smaller boxes, and a few binders of material. Some of the material dates

from the early 1900s, but the majority is from Joe Firmin. This includes scrapbooks of his newspaper column, pamphlets, newsletters, and photographs. Most of that material dates from the 1950s onwards. This is a fascinating collection of some of the society's activities, as well as detailed wildlife accounts from past decades.



CNHS bird ringing at Distillery Pond, 1956

It would be great if these folders, files and documents could somehow be catalogued and computerised for future reference. We will look into what funds or grants might be available to help us document everything. It's important to make sure we don't lose what's in storage. We might like to consider what current reports, newsletters and journals we put into the archives for future reference, although finding additional storage space might be an issue.

Dougal Urquhart

PLANNING MATTERS January-August 2025

January – Braintree District Local Plan ‘Issues and Options’

CNHS comments on this Local Plan have been sought at various stages of the Plan’s development. On this occasion it was to comment on the ‘Issues and Options’ outlined in the Plan. We made comments on the pressures to build and how increasingly important it will be to protect wildlife and habitats and matters such as green and blue corridors, the need to meet statutory requirement on ‘Local Nature Recovery Strategies’, and issues concerning Biodiversity Net Gain (see General Matters below).

April – Moors Path

The Society understood that there may be plans to ‘upgrade’ the path and add street lighting to the Moors Public Footpath route from East Hill to the Hythe. The Society objected to any invasive work on the path as the Moors has become a natural landscape with mature trees, scrub, grassland, reedbeds and tidal river habitats. As a consequence, it supports a wide variety of birds, invertebrates and plants. It is a valuable area of biodiversity and a designated Local Wildlife Site, Co125. The area is a haven of quietness used by many people for recreation and as a green route. Amidst the continual development of Colchester it is imperative that natural landscapes and habitats are protected and where possible enhanced. This is not only important for biodiversity it is also beneficial to residents’ health and well-being.

July – Fiddlers Wood, Aldham

A planning application had been submitted to develop land that buffers the Local Wildlife Site of Fiddlers Wood, an ancient woodland. An ecological assessment has identified seven bat species and 42 bird species (many on the red or amber list). The application claimed a high level of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) achievement and that further survey work was needed. CNHS suggested that the application decision should be held pending those survey results and objected to the development.

July – Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS)

A partial review of local wildlife sites that may have a proximity with proposed development sites in the draft new Colchester Local Plan, ‘Preferred Options’ sites had been undertaken by Colchester City Council. The Society was pleased to be asked to comment on the review report. Comments were offered on specific sites not included in the review, such as Land South of Berechurch Road close to the Roman River Valley, sites that were designated LoWS but elsewhere are designated Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). Comments were also offered that LoWS should have linking corridors where possible, and there should be buffer zones for

protected woodland. It was also proposed that three new LoWS are registered: Greenstead Slopes, City centre green spaces (Land Lane and Riverside grasslands) and Weir Lane grasslands (to bring connectivity between Middlewick and the Roman River/Donyland.)

August – Colchester Local Plan

The Colchester Local Plan ‘Preferred Options’ lists the sites proposed for development. It was pleasing to note that, for example, Middlewick had been withdrawn from the Plan. However, the Plan remains at draft status as it has failed to be adopted by the relevant committee. It is not expected that there will be further public consultation until later this year. We were pleased therefore to be given the opportunity to comment in advance of that consultation process and this is in progress reiterating our initial concerns registered in December 2024 and updating our views on the preferred options with more recent findings.

General Matters

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) – There are concerns regarding the effectiveness over the application of BNG. In our comments on Fiddlers Wood we made the following statement: “BNG has a dilemma in that to be an effective mitigation tool it needs to be in place and available to affected species before the threatened site is cleared. Once a development site is cleared and built on there is no going back, therefore if habitat is lost that, in this instance bat and/or red list bird species benefit from, then mitigation has to be effective and in place. CNHS suggests that the planned addendum to this Assessment, post further surveys, should clearly define the habitat the proposed BNG will replicate and for which wildlife species”.

Relationship with Colchester City Council – We are pleased that the Council proactively seeks comments from CNHS, such as the recent requests to comment on the LoWS Report and Local Plan sites, and that a request to meet on these items has been agreed.

Pete Hewitt, CNHS Planning Officer

Middlewick Ranges Update

Currently the Wick remains up for sale by the MOD and potentially still threatened by development. The Society is still involved in the campaign to save the Wick. The draft new Local Plan, which included Middlewick without housing allocation, presented to the LP committee in February has still not been accepted, so the current Local Plan with housing on Middlewick still stands. Councillors and Planners have said they would reject any application for housing if one came in.

Natural England continue to say they are not considering SSSI designation for the

site and consider the site is safeguarded through Colchester's Local Plan and the management by MOD/Defence Infrastructure Organisation. A meeting between NE, EWT and DIO in May has been the only direct communication this year between the parties about land management. The DIO refuse to engage with local naturalists and the Friends of Middlewick. Late in the season it looks like the promised hay cut in the northern grasslands will not materialise now, despite the promise. Grassland fungi will be harder to find in the long grass – if any do appear this autumn.

There were a number of fires during the early summer heatwaves which highlighted a lack of a fire management plan. Large stands of the highly combustible gorse near the butts took the brunt of the fires, leaving a covering of ash on the sandy soil. Gorse has been spreading in recent years unchecked and needs managing not just for fires but to maintain the site's rich biodiversity.

In early July Colchester Council accepted the *Friends of Middlewick* nomination for Middlewick to be listed as an Asset of Community Value, the accessible area outside the fenced-off range. This designation provides extra protections: if the land is put up for sale, community groups must be given the opportunity to bid for it. While it doesn't prevent development outright, it ensures that community interest is formally recognised and adds further weight to the planning process.

Mike Edward's final invertebrate survey report, commissioned by Colchester Council, was passed to the Council in early August and has been posted onto their website under the Local Plan Evidence Base for public viewing.

The Jane's Walk over Middlewick on 7th May to listen to the nightingales was attended by ninety participants. The Wick continues to be a great place for people to enjoy the wildlife and the wide open space.

Dougal Urquhart

Slime Moulds and Lichen - a new CNHS recorder

It recently occurred to me that despite my always including any slime moulds I see on my fungi walks in the subsequent species list, anyone who wanted to learn more had little avenue to do so through CNHS; we've never had a slime mould recorder and although I get excited about them, I do always stress that they are not fungi. So, to redress this oversight, I am happy to say that I am now the slime mould (or myxomycete) recorder for the society. Furthermore, we are also bereft of a lichen recorder, so I am taking up that mantle too.

Why lichens? Aren't they plants? Well, no – but in a way, yes. They are actually fungi (termed lichenized fungi) belonging to the Ascomycota phylum, like many

of the species we see on my walks, but contain a photobiont partner, in the form of either algae or cyanobacteria. This allows them to photosynthesise like a plant, though the majority of the organism is fungal. This, in turn, allows them to grow in environments that would otherwise be inhospitable to the photobiont, and survive long periods of desiccation. They are the paradigm of symbiosis, and only overlooked on my walks because there's not enough time to include them!



Lichen - *Cladonia ramulosa* on sandy soil

Photograph: Sarah Manning

Despite having their own kingdom, slime moulds are mostly overlooked and subsequently under-recorded. Though they often resemble fungi, and tend to appear in the same damp, cool conditions, they are an entirely different lifeform and a truly extraordinary one at that. In short, they are a single-celled organism that is large enough to be seen by the naked eye, and actually moves through its environment looking for food, often as a yellow or white vascular plasmodium. Once resources are exhausted, the plasmodium gives up all of its energy to produce the spore-bearing structures; sometimes a single, large cushion-shaped body, but most often dozens or even hundreds of tiny sporocarps that are utterly stunning when seen close-up.



Slime mould Myxomycete - *Stemonitis axifera* on a log

Photograph: Sarah Manning

Although many of the species seen on a typical walk are common, a lot of lesser seen and unusual species may slip under the radar, so if anything

catches your eye, proves tricky to identify, or is simply so fascinating that you wish to share it, please don't hesitate to contact me – or any other recorder, as the above applies to all species and kingdoms. We are eager to both share our love for our

respective subjects, and collect as much information on them as possible. Having additional eyes in the field is also invaluable; we simply can't visit everywhere.

As a reminder, there are some guidelines to follow in submitting suitable records (below is particular to fungi, lichen and slime moulds):

- Clear photos showing all aspects (eg upper & lower surfaces, all visible features)
- Photo showing the species in situ
- Photo or note of the substrate (oak stump, decayed post, sandy soil)
- Note of location, site & date (ideally grid ref. or what3words for the former)
- Name and email of spotter
- Anything else of note (eg area recently flooded, known ancient woodland)

If you have any queries on fungi, lichen or slime moulds or the recording of them just email me at fungi@chns.uk

Sarah Manning

Field Trips and Events Report

CNHS Social Event, Fingringhoe - Wednesday 30th April

A successful social evening at Fingringhoe was held on 30th April. There were 29 people who gathered together at the Whalebone pub and a few more joined us for the walk around the nature reserve.

There were plenty of **Nightingales** singing, along with **Garden Warbler**, **Blackcap**, **Robin** and **Song Thrush**. The event was organised by Michael Padmore, and led by Michael and Dougal and

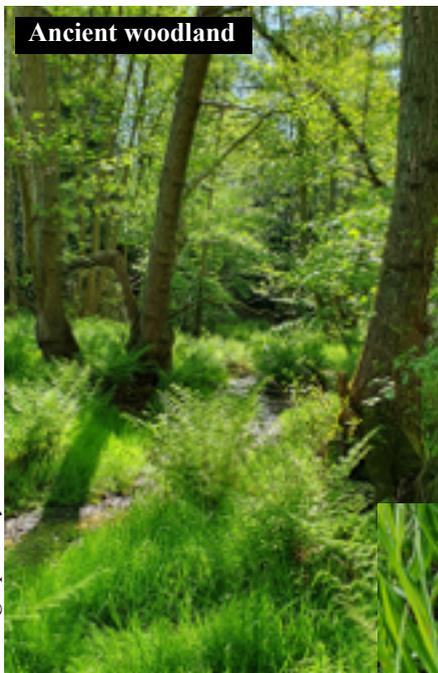


Photograph: Dougal Urquart

after paying the Whalebone, CNHS made £126, out of which a £40 donation was made to EWT.

CNHS Field Trip to Humberlands, Lawford - Saturday 10th May

A small group of members enjoyed a couple of hours, wandering around this lovely site, with its myriad of habitats. We stopped to look and listen wherever anything caught anyone's attention and shared our knowledge. The weather was something of an improvement on the previous couple of years.



Photograph: Kay Lee

wildflower field, with a look at one of the arable fields that is currently in the second year of an agri-environment scheme instead of being cropped. The **Bluebells** were over, but we enjoyed looking at other Spring flora such as **Wood Sorrel**, **Yellow Pimpernel**, **Common Vetch**, **Bird's-foot Trefoil** and **Herb Robert** among many

Before heading into the ancient woodland, we went to look at the newly installed boardwalk on the Essex Way. A very well constructed wood look-a-like recycled plastic boardwalk had very recently been put in by the County Highways contractors to replace a rather rotten wooden one. It looked to have been completed very well.

We ambled round through woodland, sheep fields and the



Photograph: Liz Cutting

Green-winged orchid

others. In the wildflower field we were able to admire the single **Green-winged Orchid** – there only ever seems to be a single plant but it appears most years. In the arable field currently out of production, was an interesting range of plants which included **Phacelia**, **Long-headed Red Clover** and **Vetch** from the sown seed mix, plus lots of **Field Pansies** and some **Poppies** that would probably appear every year if it weren't cultivated. The nice weather meant that we saw or heard a good range of resident and migrant passerines along with **Buzzard** and **Red Kite**. Nothing out of the ordinary but a good variety. We had at least 8 butterfly species, though none in great quantity, and a couple of moths (**Common** and **Green Carpet**) were spotted on our walk.

It was a lovely way to spend a couple of hours and we are grateful to Tim and Jenny Francis for allowing us to visit. Thanks also to Kay Lee for the photograph of part of the ancient woodland.

Liz Cutting

Middlewick Ranges Wildlife Walk Sunday 25th May

Eight members met at the Mersea Road entrance on a warm but cloudy afternoon with a light westerly breeze blowing. We walked the main grass fields beside the fenced off range, admiring the view from the top of the old



Scarce Chaser

Photograph: Dougal Urquhart

butts, as well as looking at the open sandy area nearby. Butterflies seen during the walk included four **Small Coppers**, two **Small Heaths** and two **Holly Blues**. The insect highlight was three **Scarce Chasers** seen resting on the broom and gorse bushes in the Abbot's Road copse by the Mersea Road entrance. They were very obliging as they rested, allowing some close photographs to be taken. These were the first **Scarce Chaser** records for Middlewick. Day-flying moths seen on the walk were two **Mother Shiptons** and a **Cinnabar** moth. One of the characteristic plants of acid grassland – **Mouse-eared Hawkweed**, appeared to be suffering in the dry ground conditions with many of the leaves shrivelling. Birds noted included two **Nightingales** singing near the butts, also **Blackcap**, **Chiffchaff** and four **Skylarks** heard singing. Two **Linnets** were seen by the gorse at the back of

the butts, a **Kestrel** was seen hovering over the grassland, seven **Canada geese** flew over while eight **Swifts** and five **Swallows** hawked for insects. Just prior to the walk starting a **Red Kite** had been seen drifting east and a **Sparrowhawk** flew over.

Dougal Urquhart

Elmstead Market Woods (Woodland Trust) - Saturday 7th June

After several weeks of dry weather, the threat of heavy downpours reduced our party to just four. In the event, the rain was never more than light, and very welcome for the parched vegetation. **Lesser Whitethroat** sang loudly along the thick boundary hedge that runs alongside the Bromley Road, while **Linnets** continued to carry nesting material to the patches of Hawthorn that dot the meadows. The small herd of cattle and watchful bull, which are part of the site's management plan, stayed well-away while we crossed Tenpenny Brook to the ancient semi-natural Mill Wood.

There, large numbers of **Yellow-barred Longhorn moths** (*Nemophora degeerella*) were lekking above the remnants of what had been a fine display of **Bluebells**. There was evidence of ongoing tree work in the woodland as a consequence of Ash die-back. Elsewhere, along the wide rides and scalloped edges of the now well-established new woodland, **Common Bird's-foot Trefoil**, **Hairy Tare** and **Grass Vetchling** were the most notable flowers. **Yellow Rattle**, which thrives in the site's meadows, appeared to have been knocked back by the dry conditions. These days, a **Tortoiseshell butterfly** is a gratifying record, and a **Four-spotted Chaser** was in sparkling condition.

We have Colchester City Council Countryside Ranger, Nick Shimwell, to thank for the undoubted highlight of the walk. Upon hearing a muffled screech, Nick spotted a young **Barn Owl** peeking out of one of the site's nest boxes. In all, there were three well-developed young in the box, which were subsequently ringed under licence by Simon Cox.



Photograph: Pat Cox

Michael Padmore

Cymbeline Meadows Moth Evening - Wednesday 11th June

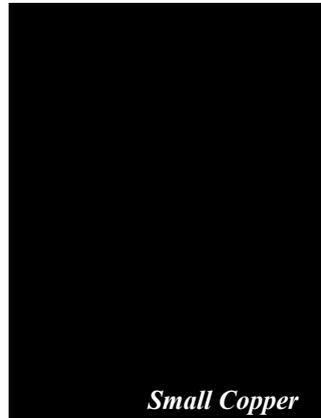
A small group met up with CCC Ranger Nick Shimwell, who provided us access onto the site, allowing us to set our five traps close to the shelter of Charter Wood. The previous year's moth evening was hampered by a very cool night with clear sky, so this year we stayed near the shelter of woodland. The wind soon dropped off and we had a productive night with 125 moth species being recorded. The Strawberry Moon put in an appearance too, rising over the city centre as the moths began arriving. We were surprised by the huge number of micros for the first time this year – especially lots of **Variegated Golden Tortrix**. Moth highlights included **Eyed Hawkmoth**, **Elephant Hawkmoth**, **Poplar Hawkmoth**, **Broken-barred Carpet**, **Blue-bordered Carpet**, **Blotched Emerald**, **Sloe Pug**, **Burnished Brass**, **Small Clouded Brindle**, **Rosy Footman**, **Magpie Moth** and also seven species of Coleophora was a good tally for the evening. A **Stag Beetle** was seen flying slowly above one of the hedgerows near the Charter Wood at dusk and a **Nightingale** called briefly.

Dougal Urquhart

Cymbeline Meadows Wildlife Walk - Sunday 13th July

A dozen of us walked across Cymbeline Meadows on a muggy July afternoon. Parties of **Swallows**, **House Martins** and **Swifts** hunted insects over the set-aside fields, while **Kestrel**, **Sparrowhawk** and **Buzzard** were after more substantial prey. Though offering only distant views, it was pleasing to record at least 10 **Mistle Thrushes** feeding in the large field on the south side of the river. Unfortunately, the **Kingfisher** I saw on my way to meet the group had disappeared further downstream.

Meadow Brown and **Gatekeeper** butterflies were present in large numbers, but we had to search harder for **Small Copper**, **Ringlet** and **Speckled Wood**. A **Jersey Tiger** moth in the riverside willows has become a more regular record this summer, but striking nonetheless. Among the plants, a **Small Teasel** was in bloom, and **Water Mint** and **Marsh Woundwort** were looking good despite the dry conditions in the wet meadow. **Cherry Plums** were prolific in the hedgerows.



Small Copper

Photograph: Michael Padmore

The 74 hectares of Cymbeline Meadows are a vital mosaic of habitats on the edge

of the city, so it is to be hoped that plans to manage the site for even greater biodiversity will be back on the Council's agenda very soon. With thanks to Colchester City Council Countryside Ranger, Nicola Downs for guiding us through this special local wildlife site.

Michael Padmore

City Centre Riverside Walk Saturday 19th July

Our walk was to begin in the narrow greenspace between the Eastern stretch of the Roman wall and Land Lane. It was raining, and the forecast was dire. Some people had already called off, but I attended the advertised meeting place, just in case. The pleasant surprise was that seven of us were prepared to confront the rain – so we set off through Land Lane greenspace towards the river, in cool, overcast conditions, the rain having temporarily stopped. A female **Speckled Bush-cricket** and the impressive **Hornet Hoverfly** (*Volucella zonaria*) were among the sightings here. A long-grass area

Speckled Bush-cricket
Leptophyes punctatissima



Photograph: Tracey Kinns



Photograph: Tracey Kinns

Great Pied Hoverfly
Volucella pellucens

below the north face of the Roman Wall yielded sightings of several

hoverfly species, and **Common Blue** and **Meadow Brown** butterflies – the latter with wings wide open to catch whatever warmth was available. We noted that in this species-poor grassland, abundant flowers of **Yarrow** were an important source of nectar and pollen for many insects.

Hornet Hoverfly ♂
Volucella zonaria



Photograph: Tracey Kinns

Closer to the river was a raised area where we have failed to keep the grass mowers away, but a patch of **Birds-foot Trefoil** had survived long enough to attract some workers of the **Common Carder Bumblebee**. Lime trees that fringe this area had spiky **Lime Nail / Bugle Galls** on their leaves, identified by Tracey as caused by mites (*Eriophyes tiliae*). We then walked downstream along the



Photograph: Tracey Kinns

Bird Cherry Ermine Moth and Tachinid Fly on Common Ragwort

riverside, through what are usually wet meadows – but today very dry, despite the earlier downpour. Among the coarse grasses were stands of **Greater Willowherb** and **Creeping Thistle**. While the flowering of the latter was almost over, several **Spear Thistles** were well in flower, and being visited by queen **Buff-tailed Bumblebees** and, briefly, by a female **Wood-carving Leafcutter Bee** (*Megachile ligniseca*), shuffling pollen onto the pad of hairs under its abdomen.

We then turned and walked up-stream, and passed through the narrow path between the lake and the river. The rich bank-side flora included purple **Loosestrife**, **Hedge Woundwort**, **Dittander** and **Greater Willowherb**. The temperature was just about warm enough for the **Banded Demoiselles** to fly, along with **Common Blue Damselflies**. The grassland butterflies clustered here, and occasionally disturbed into flight – **Meadow Brown**, **Gatekeeper**, and all three of the **Common Whites**. **Green-veined Whites**, especially, were easy to appreciate as the poor weather made them easy to approach. The song of a female **Roesel's Bush Cricket** was heard by way of a bat detector.



Photograph: Tracey Kinns

Meadow Brown ♀

We had advertised the possibility of visiting the new nature reserve, Cowdray Marsh, on the opposite side of the river, but it was already lunchtime, so we agreed to take a break at the putting green café, and for those still wanting to continue, to carry on after lunch. As we walked over the pedestrian bridge it came on to rain – and cagoules were soon out of rucksacks. We walked past Bull Meadow and through the new estate to the marsh. This has a fine notice board but is not safe

underfoot, so not open to the public. Michael (who has been doing excellent management work along with the ranger and conservation volunteers) had a key, and some of us followed him through the tall, wet vegetation, avoiding the stumps of Alder trees as we went. Clearance of the dense stands of Alder has opened up the marsh for a great variety of rushes, reeds and flowering plants. As we made our way through dense stands of **Fleabane**, **Gypsywort** (*Lycopus europaeus*) and **Pendulous Sedge**, we released the delightful scent of the **Water Mint** which is abundant here. Numerous **Wasp Spiders** with their webs were all around, some with their grasshopper prey neatly wrapped up. Long-winged **Conehead Bush-crickets** were abundant, and some of us made out a flying **Emperor Dragonfly** in the distance.

Two of us had to return at this point, but three of us continued along the metalled 'road to nowhere', between Cowdray Avenue and the river, and continued along the footpath to the lower weir, and returned along the south bank of the river. We noticed **Knappweeds** and **Musk Mallow** among the vegetation and recorded another damselfly, the **Blue-tailed** (*Ischnura elegans*), which is surprisingly uncommon along the river. By the lake we met up with Liz, who had missed the start of the walk. She reported hearing **Cetti's warbler** – a common species along the river, but we hadn't noticed it today.

Altogether a very interesting, somewhat tiring, but extremely enjoyable outing.

Ted Benton

Tiptree Heath Moth Evening Wednesday 6th August

The annual joint moth evening at Tiptree Heath involving members of CNHS, Essex Moth Group and Friends of Tiptree Heath took place on Wednesday 6th August. Nearly 25 members of the various groups attended

and nearly ten moth-traps were set up in various locations. Lots of moths of interest were potted up and passed round for folk to admire. This annual event has been running for many years and has always been well attended. Thanks to Joan



Photograph: Dougal Urquhart

Pinch and Nick Moore for hosting us. The night started promising with moths arriving soon after dark, however the clouds cleared, the moon came up and the temperature dropped – and so did the moth activity! However nearly 130 moth species were recorded including those aggregate species, while some species still await genital dissection to confirm their identity. Moth highlights included a **Marbled Clover**, **Rest Harrow** and only the third Essex record of **Rufous Marble** *Celypha rufana* – trapped by Simon Wood. There were several **Jersey Tigers** – two years after the first sighting, also **Gypsy Moth**, **Oak Processionary**, **Poplar Hawkmoth**, **Dark Swordgrass**, **Black Arches**, **Svensson’s Copper Underwing**, **Langmaid’s Yellow Underwing**, a **Red Underwing** seen briefly resting on a tree and the black form of **Peppered Moth**. The only heathland species recorded was **Gorse Knot-horn** *Pempelia genistella*.

Dougal Urquhart

Middlewick Ranges

Wildlife Walk -

Sunday 10th August

A dozen members met up at Middlewick Ranges on a very hot afternoon with the temperature around 26 degrees. Fortunately there was a breeze blowing otherwise we might’ve spent the whole time hiding in the shade of the Abbot’s Road copse! Meeting at the Mersea Road entrance, some of us had admired lots of **Lesser Calamint** in flower.



Photograph: Dougal Urquhart

In the grassland most of the plants had finished, although those of interest we did find included some **Mouse-eared Hawkweed**, also **Field Scabious**, **Bird’s-foot Trefoil** and some **Red Clover**. The main clump of **Common Heather**, or **Ling**, was in full flower and we were pleased to see a second flowering clump inside the fenced off range. There was a profusion of **Knopper Galls** on many of the acorns in the Abbot’s Road copse which caught our eyes with their knobby appearance. Ted brought along his white beating tray and knocked a few oak branches in the copse with his stick and we saw a few **lacewings**, **ladybirds**, **spiders**, a **Forest Shieldbug**, and a few other small insects that went unidentified. As well as seeing

Migrant Hawker and **Common Darter** we were pleased to find three **Willow Emeralds** resting on the oak branches beside a path in the copse. This is the first record of this species on Middlewick. A **Southern Oak Bush-cricketer** was also found, first recorded on the Wick last year. Butterflies spotted during our walk included **Small Copper**, **Small Heath**, **Common Blue**, **Gatekeeper** and **Meadow Brown**. Walking towards the butts, we found a small colony of **Wasp Spiders** in long grass beside the gorse and broom scrub. A few **Green-eyed Flower Bees** were seen going into their burrows on the sandy butts and there was a brief view of what looked like the **Red-banded Sand Wasp** *Ammophila sabulosa* – a species of solitary hunting wasp. We saw the devastation of the summer fires which has left blackened skeletons of once thick gorse scrub. A **Chiffchaff** was following a tit flock in trying to find some food in the charred habitat. A **Mottled Grasshopper** was a notable find on an unburnt patch of open ground behind the butts. Most of the other grasshoppers seen during our walk appeared to be **Field Grasshoppers**. A **Hummingbird Hawkmoth** flashed past here without stopping. In the heat of the day there was little bird activity although a **buzzard** circled high overhead and as well as a handful of **swallows** flying near the entrance six **swifts** were also seen by two members.

Dougal Urquhart

CNHS Polo shirts and sweatshirts

are now available at indoor
meetings or

mail:treasurer@cnhs.uk

Polo shirts are in Small, Medium,
Large or XL sizes and cost £20.
Sweatshirts are in Small, Medium
and Large sizes and are £25.



Events Calendar - Autumn/Winter 2025/6

Indoor meetings

Our talks are free to members and non-members alike but donations are accepted for refreshments. All indoor meetings will be held at the **Cardinal Bourne Hall** in Priory Street, Colchester, CO1 2QB and will start at 7.30pm. The Hall is situated at the East Hill end of Priory Street with Pay & Display parking immediately opposite to the Hall - go right to the East Hill end of the parking area. N.B. for newcomers, Priory Street is one way, enter it from Queen Street!

For the less able there may be a limited number of parking spaces right behind the hall. Turn right down Augustine Mews by the hall, then immediately left into the hall car park. Please park in the Priory Street end of this parking area. If you need assistance to get into the hall do ask, willing helpers will be on hand to help you.

Lifts to Indoor Meetings

It would be great if anyone driving to the venue could provide a lift to those members without transport. If anyone feels they can help or equally if anyone would like a lift, please let Dougal know on 07494 866157.

Car field trips 2025/6 Do come along and join us for an enjoyable part day, or a whole day out, **you don't have to be an expert**. We are a friendly group with varying degrees of knowledge and interests, which we would like to share with you. Everyone is welcome including non-members too. Please bring along a packed lunch if you plan to stay for the day, adequate drinks and suitable clothing and footwear. Check with the leader to find out if wellies will be needed. Sunscreen and a hat are thoroughly recommended at appropriate times of the year.

Health and Safety on Walks

As part of our insurance requirements we do occasionally have to review our procedures at events to ensure that we not only look after our members, but ensure that the Committee and walk leaders are not left open to malicious prosecution for accidents that can occasionally occur. The committee is now required to provide Risk Assessments as part of that insurance. This should not affect anyone coming out with us or attending an event, but you may be asked to listen to a short safety talk before setting off.

First Aiders

Some of us are already trained as first aiders by the organisations for which we work, however it is not a requirement for CNHS to provide a qualified first aider for walks. Despite this, the committee feels it would be sensible to provide a portable first aid kit so all walk leaders will carry one with them. Members are still advised to take sensible precautions to ensure their own safety when attending organised events and this includes wearing clothing appropriate for the prevailing conditions.

A common sense approach to safety is encouraged to avoid the need for more prescriptive health and safety regulations that could affect our ability to do the activities we have enjoyed since the Society was formed in 1953.

Please note that booking is essential for all outdoor events so that we have your contact details in case of cancellation or emergencies. Please let the event leader know if you are unable to attend as places may be limited.

Whilst all the dates and times in our events calendar are correct at the time of going to press, things can easily change so do please check with the event leader or on our website or FaceBook page.

**Monday 8th September - Indoor meeting, Cardinal Bourne Hall 7:30pm
Greater Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy – Simon Lyster, Chair of the
Essex Local Partnership.**

The LNRS is designed to deliver the necessary action to reverse the current path of decline in our biodiversity and to bring about a recovery for nature. The primary purpose is to find locations for the creation of habitat. It aims to identify those most likely to provide the greatest benefit for nature and the wider environment.

**Saturday 11th October - Fungi Foray at High Woods 1.30pm - 3.30pm for
CNHS members Booking is essential for this event.**

Meet at High Woods Country Park Visitor Centre, Turner Road, Colchester (CO4 5JR; TL999270; [///order.liver.enable](http://order.liver.enable)). There is a Pay and Display car park, toilet and refreshment facilities. Join the Society Fungi Recorder, Sarah Manning, for a stroll around the Country Park close to the Visitor Centre. Contact **07702 607898** to book and for further information.

Sunday 12th October - Fungi Foray at Wivenhoe Woods 10am - 12pm

Booking is essential for this event.

Meet at the free car park at the end of Rosabelle Avenue (CO7 9NZ; /// **raft.ages.puff**). For booking and further information contact Sarah on **07702 607898**. This event is weather dependent.

Join fungi expert Sarah Manning on a stroll around this wood which is part of the Colne Local nature Reserve. Note: we will not be picking the fungi. There are no toilet or refreshment facilities available but lots of trees!

Monday 13th October - Indoor meeting, Cardinal Bourne Hall 7:30pm

Bird Aware Essex Coast – Lea Merclova, coastal ranger.

This is an initiative to raise awareness of the birds that feed and breed on the Essex coast, so that people can enjoy the coast and its wildlife without disturbing the birds. The project takes action to prevent disturbance and is funded by developer contributions from house builders.

Saturday 25 October - Fungi Foray at Humberlands, Lawford . 10am

Booking is essential for this event which has been arranged by kind invitation of CNHS members Tim & Jenny Francis.

Meet at Humberlands, Parringtons Farm, Harwich Road, Lawford. Access is a driveway from the A137 approximately 100 metres west of the 40mph speed limit sign at 'Garden City', Lawford. It is signed Parringtons Farm and Public Bridleway. At the bottom of the drive, turn left (signed Humberlands). The grid reference is TM075312. There is a bus stop at Garden City; Humberlands is a short walk down permissive paths and bridleways from there. Please note that SatNav is not very helpful.

Join CNHS fungi expert Sarah Manning for a walk around this most interesting site, which offers a wide variety of habitats. This is a good opportunity to visit a private nature reserve and see what we can find – in previous years we have found so many species that we have walked very little distance! *We may* continue after lunch if the weather is good and Sarah is not exhausted, so if you are interested, please bring your refreshments.

You will need good walking boots (some areas are quite uneven and there are lots of springs, so some spots can be permanently damp/boggy) and appropriate clothing depending on the weather.

Obviously the event is weather dependent. It is essential to book your place by contacting Liz Cutting who is also happy to provide any further information you need. Email lizc@cnhs.uk preferred but those without email facilities are welcome to phone (or, even better, text) **07517 786053** and leave a message and a contact phone number if there is no reply.

Sunday 26th October - Fungi Foray, Hazeleigh Wood 10 - 3pm

Booking is essential for this event.

Meet at Hazeleigh Wood, Hazeleigh Hall Lane, Woodham Mortimer (**CM9 6GT; TL834038**). Sarah Manning will once again lead a walk around this very productive wood for fungi. Bring a packed lunch with you. The owner, Maureen, will provide drinks and biscuits for which a £2 donation is requested. There are toilet facilities on site. Contact Sarah on **07702 607898** to book and for further information, especially regarding footwear and the nature of the site at the time.

Saturday 1st November- Fungi Foray, High Woods (Chanterelle) 1.30 - 3.30

Booking is essential for this event.

Meet at Chanterelle car park, High Woods Country Park, off Eastwood Drive (**CO4 9RY; TM0088270; ///charge.sculpture.divisions**). Free car park but no toilet facilities. Join Society Fungi Recorder, Sarah Manning, on this stroll around the wood in the vicinity of the car park. The Society has been involved in building a database of fungi species for various parts of the Country Park for some years so this visit is a continuation of this. Contact **07702 607898** to book and for further information.

Monday 10th November - Indoor meeting, Cardinal Bourne Hall at 7:30pm Wildwest Scotland – Glyn Evans

Glyn has led many wildlife tours to the west coast of Scotland, centred on the Ardnamurchan peninsula. The fantastic array of wildlife is well captured in his many stunning images of birds, mammals, insects, plants set in the beautiful landscape of the highlands and islands.

Sunday 16th November - Along the River Colne, Wivenhoe 10am

Booking is essential for this event.

Walk along the River Colne, from Wivenhoe to Alresford Creek and back. Meet at 10am by the Colne Barrier for a walk by the side of the Colne estuary, looking for a variety of winter birdlife including waders and wildfowl. Distance 3-4 miles, with the option for shorter or longer routes. There is free parking at the High Street Car park opp. the Greyhound pub. (**CO7 9AZ**) This visit is led by Michael Padmore - please contact him on **07936 325603** to book and for further information.

Monday 8th December - Indoor meeting, Cardinal Bourne Hall at 7:30pm Along the Stour – Liz Cutting.

Liz will be taking us on a journey, by means of her wildlife photos, along the Stour from Harwich (including the Shotley peninsula) upstream to Stratford St Mary. Lots of birds but also a good variety of invertebrates and maybe an occasional mammal.

Monday 12th January - Indoor meeting, Cardinal Bourne Hall at 7:30pm
CNHS Annual AGM - Your chance to hear what members of the Society have been getting up to during the past year, including reports on plants, birds, mammals and a range of insects. The evening will include the presentation of the Bree Trophy for outstanding services to natural history in our area and the Rose Bowl to the winner of the 2025 Photographic Competition. Please don't be put off by the AGM title!

Sunday 18th January - Mid-winter bird walk, Abberton 10am - 1pm
Booking is essential for this event.

Meet at the EWT Visitor Centre, Abberton reservoir (**CO2 0EU**; **///brambles.immunity.ramming**). CNHS and EWT members free, a £3 donation will be requested from non-members of either. Stout footwear will be adequate and warm clothing essential.

Join Dougal Urquhart for a mid-winter visit to Abberton reservoir in search of winter wildfowl such as Smew and Goosander, hopefully some Bewick's Swans too. We plan to visit the hides as well as looking from the causeways. To book or for more details contact Dougal on **07494 866157**.

Saturday 7th February - Wildlife Walk, Heybridge Gravel Pit 10am - 1pm
Booking is essential for this event.

Park at Daisy Meadow car park CM9 4RW and meet at the steps, leading up to the canal. Dug in the 1960s the site has developed, in the intervening decades, into an incredibly diverse location. The pit is directly adjacent to the RAMSAR Blackwater estuary with saline, brackish and freshwater all next to each other. Around 220 bird species have been recorded. We would hope to see many wintering waders and wildfowl.

There are two pubs and a tearoom in Heybridge Basin for refreshments after the walk. Note that there are no public toilets on site or nearby. Car parking charges are in place at Daisy Meadow car park. To book or for further information contact Carla Davis on **07832 286153**.

Monday 9th February - Indoor meeting, Cardinal Bourne Hall at 7:30pm
Habitat enhancements at Moverons Farm, Brightlingsea – Lesley Gunfield.

A look at the environmental work carried out over the last twenty-five years to improve the Gunfield's farm for wildlife.

Sunday 15th February 2026 – Winter Wildlife Walk, Middlewick 2pm
Booking is essential for this event.

Grassland and woodland winter wildlife walk at the Middlewick Ranges Local Wildlife Site led by Dougal Urquhart. Meet at the army post on the Mersea Road (**TM005229**; **///stir.helps.vets**). Park in Queen Elizabeth Way on the opposite side

of the Mersea Road. The location is on a bus route, stout footwear will be adequate and note that no toilets are on site.

Join Dougal on this exploration of this rich grassland site on the south side of Colchester, still owned by the MOD but threatened with development. We'll walk across the Wick to explore the Birch Brook Woodland, passing areas of scrub by the butts. We'll look out for possible wintering birds such as Redwing, Fieldfare, Siskin, Redpoll, Stonechat and maybe even Woodcock. Maybe some Scarlet Waxcaps might be on show in the grassland. Contact Dougal on **07494 866157** to book a place.

Monday 9th March - Indoor meeting, Cardinal Bourne Hall at 7:30pm
The Wildlife of European Deserts – Chris Stone

The talk describes key habitat features, the characteristic species and those sand specialists whose distribution is restricted to these extraordinary parched tracts. Chris has just written a new book called European Deserts: Sandy Wilderness on a Green Continent, which is due to be published in January 2026.

Monday 13th April - Indoor meeting, Cardinal Bourne Hall at 7:30pm
Members' Annual Presentations Evening

You are invited to present a short illustrated presentation on any wildlife subject of your choice - this could be showing a selection of photographs on a particular subject, taken at home or abroad. Or you might wish to update members on a project that you are working on. We can accept digital images, videos or computer presentations, even colour slides!

To enable us to plan the evening it is essential that you book a slot with Dougal on **07494 866157** or chair@CNHS.uk This is an excellent way to wind up our winter indoor programme and spur us on towards our spring and summer recording work and field trips.

Saturday 2nd May - Spring Walk, Hazeleigh Wood. 9am - 1pm
Booking is essential for this event.

Meet Hazeleigh Wood, Hazeleigh Hall Lane, Woodham Mortimer, (CM9 6GT; TL834038). Maureen, one of the owners, will be inviting us on a walk around the wood to see what species can be found. We should find Nightingales in full song plus many other woodland species. We'll also be looking at the spring flora and any other wildlife to be found.

This ancient wood is mentioned in the Domesday Book and is a mixed broadleaved wood with many species recorded. A donation of £2 per person is requested. To book or for further information contact Carla Davis on **07832 286153**.

2025 ROSE BOWL PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

There are again three categories for entries for the Rose Bowl as follows:

1. Essex and Suffolk
2. Rest of the British Isles
3. Rest of the World.

As usual you can enter up to three images in each category.

Format: Slide, print or digital (JPG preferred but most formats catered for)

Subject: Any natural history subjects **taken in 2025** in the above categories.

Please remember:

- 1. There must be no captions or text of any kind added to the image.**
- 2. Each image should have a clear title, which may include subject name to species or other level, location, event or theme.**

There is immense scope for all sorts of subject matter and we look forward to receiving your entries later in the year.

Closing date for entries is **30th November 2025** but entries can be sent in earlier, you do not have to leave it until this date.

If you have any queries about file formats or file sizes then please contact photo@CNHS.uk and this is where entries should be sent.

Winning photos will be published in *Cervus* or on the CNHS website, and on our Facebook page. Last year's winner of the Rose Bowl, Dougal Urquart, will judge the entries. All entries are sent to the judge with no details of the photographer and are thus judged anonymously.

Look at the CNHS website to see a selection of past years' winners' photographs.

Membership

Join online at cnhs.uk or email treasurer@cnhs.uk for information about other means of payment, including cheque and direct debit.

Adult single	£ 20.00
Adult joint (more than one in same household)	£ 24.00
Junior (under 18), Senior Citizen or unwaged	£ 16.00

The CNHS website www.cnhs.uk Don't forget

that we have an interesting website filled with up to date information about what is going on in the natural world around us here in Colchester and North Essex.

The website is updated every month with news, details of all our various publications, online membership renewal and information on sending in your wildlife records. All our events in *Cervus* are up to date at the time of going to press, but things can change so check

our latest events listings on the site too. Just go to the website address or scan the QR code into your smartphone to be taken directly to our site. Happy wildlife watching!



CNHS Facebook Page We also have an excellent Facebook Page which is open to all - do register to keep up to date with what others are submitting.

Other organisations you might be interested in:

The Essex Field Club holds many field trips within Essex covering a wide range of interests. For details go to www.essexfieldclub.org.uk and follow the links to their meetings page.

The Wildflower Society holds a number of meetings in Essex and neighbouring counties. Stephen Clarkson, our own flora recorder, is involved with this. For further details see www.wildflowersociety.com

The Essex Bat Group www.essexbatgroup.org is dedicated to bat conservation in Essex and holds regular meetings in our area.

The Essex Moth Group - via www.essexfieldclub.org.uk is another very active group that holds a number of local field meetings and an annual get-together.

The Essex Botanical Society has a number of local members who regularly record plants in our area. Contact Ken Adams - www.kenadams.org.uk/esb/

EWT Colchester Local Members' Group holds monthly meetings in Colchester. For further details visit www.essexwt.org.uk