



Waldringfield Wildlife Group. Report for the Annual Parish Council Meeting 18th April 2023

Members were very keen to resume our programme of talks and events after Covid restrictions were lifted and I am pleased to say that the WWG is back up and running with our second programme of events. We maintain a good sized enthusiastic membership of about 65 members and our programme attracts attendance from visitors outside of Waldringfield.

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.

Programme of Talks : Since last year we have presented diverse range of topics such as Bats, Peregrines, Ponds, Bird Tracking and Migration, Swifts, Solitary Bees and Wasps and importantly 'How we can get the most for Wildlife in our Gardens and Public Spaces' to encourage us to use the spaces we have available to us for wildlife habitat. Our talks and activities provide interest and enjoyment, helping to keep us in touch with Nature and its diversity of wildlife.

They serve also as a painful reminder of the threats to Nature's Biodiversity but they also help to keep us motivated to take personal action to do what we can to conserve what we have before it's too late. Hopefully, our local governments, central governments and world leaders will make the necessary decisions to lead the way to halt the continued destruction and degradation of the earth's natural resources and to begin to make effective decisions to restore it. On this subject, Professor Peter Hobson of Writtle College gave an informed talk on Climate Change Challenges and Nature Recovery to illustrate how both biodiversity loss and climate change are both driven by human activities and mutually reinforce each other. Inter-parish Green Infrastructure workshops are now being coordinated as an outcome to Peter's local involvement and funding has been found and a date agreed to begin to explore with community stakeholders a framework to address some of the local changes that are needed.

Field Trips:

Our programme includes field trips to local conservation areas and protected sites which we are so privileged to have here in East Suffolk. Each year at the beginning of spring we take early guided Nightingale walks through Newbourne Springs followed by an alfresco breakfast and we now feature

several guided riverside walks led by local residents along the Deben River walls during spring and autumn to identify the many species of countryside birds and wildfowl that we have here. Other activities include using a moth trap in our gardens and sharing the content early the following day with refreshments, butterfly identification in Church Field, bat detecting, swift nest spotting and recording and looking out for stag beetles emerging at dusk.

**The programme can be accessed via the Greener Waldringfield website:
www.greenerwaldringfield.org.**

What's Up Now: 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. 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.

Projects:

WWG have instigated a number of parish projects.

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.

Barn Owl Project: Sally Redfern who holds a license along with Peter Maddison to monitor the barn owl boxes installed around the village as part of the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project reports the following in 2022. Monitoring hasn't yet taken place this year.

'After hatching 32 barn owl chicks successfully between 2009 and 2019 our luck has changed. We could not monitor the nest boxes in 2020 because of the Covid pandemic and none of them were occupied by barn owls in 2021 and 2022. We fear that something must have happened to our dependable adult pair. Barn owls tend to be faithful to their nest sites so we assume we have been ringing the chicks of the same pair each year, though we cannot confirm this.' After an absence of any barn owl sightings over the DFM reserve there has been sightings again this year so we are hoping to find barn owl chicks this year.

'The boxes have been occupied by something else though. Since 2009 mainly stock doves or jackdaws have taken up residence, but also great tit, squirrel, tawny owl and hornets' and wasps' nests.'

Waldringfield Swifts: Swifts are an endangered species. Over the last two years or so 60 swift boxes were installed in all parts of the village most with call sound systems and an additional 10 swift boxes with call sound system were installed on the row of Hemley Cottages in Hemley which brings our total number of swift boxes to approx. 70 between the two villages. This year Waldringfield along with other East/ South Suffolk towns and villages were allocated SOS Flags by SOS funded by Greendprint Forum . We were very privileged to be allocated one given that Waldringfield is probably the smallest parish to be allocated one. We now have to find a place to fly the flag from May to August to herald the return of swifts after their migration from Africa.

On June 24th 2022 we organised 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.

Our efforts appear to have successfully increased the numbers of swifts seen flying around the village especially over lower Waldringfield and at least two of the mounted swift boxes were occupied by breeding swifts in addition to the natural nest sites under the roof eaves that we know of in the village.

Apart from installing nest boxes swifts rely on aerial plankton and insects 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.

Which brings me onto?

Hedgehogs:

Christine Fisher Kay coordinates keeping the village informed about hedgehog and monitoring and recording hedgehog sightings. Christine says to watch out for more from WWG as Hedgehog Awareness Week comes along during the first week in May. Night camera footage in Christine and Ian's garden shows that hedgehogs are already about. They will be hungry after hibernation so if you would like to help them they would welcome dishes of water, hedgehog food or kitten/puppy food and safe places to hide up in the daytime such as leaf piles. Check your fences to allow hedgehogs to roam by leaving small gaps about 13cms in fenced boundaries as male hedgehogs are known to travel more than 1 kilometre rummaging for food at night.

Martlesham Wilds. Suffolk Wildlife Trust new Reserve- WWG has got behind supporting this amazing new reserve on our doorstep. Members and village residents have made very generous donation to the Trust's fundraising appeal and WWG have raised more funds by selling-T towels with printed illustrations of Birds of the River Deben designed by resident Simon Couchman supported by his wife Cathy who has helped to make them available to residents.

Lastly, 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, for providing and serving refreshments at our meetings.

Linda Wilkins. Coordinator of Waldringfield Wildlife Group . April 2023