

Waldringfield Wildlife Group Annual Parish Meeting April 16th 2025

I am pleased to report that WWG continues to maintain a consistent membership of over 70 members and with the added support of visiting non-members the group's annual programme of illustrated talks and field trips are pleasingly well attended. It's a well-established group now and is well known around the Woodbridge East Suffolk Area.

20th Anniversary of the WWG:

WWG was formed in 2005. Its format and aims has remained much the same with the group members meeting on the second Saturday in the month five times a year from October to June with the Annual General Meeting held in October. Meetings are followed by an expert talk on a wildlife theme which are open to the public. Field trips and excursions to wildlife reserves and places of wildlife interest are organised throughout the year as well as guided events locally such as the annual Nightingale Walk at Newbourne Springs, bat detecting walks using bat detectors or a forage in Church Field to identify butterflies, bugs, insects and the interesting wildflowers and grasses occurring naturally due to the sandy soil and lack of fertiliser. Moth trap opening events in a members garden has become a summer fixture.

WWG Aims to Exist:

To Conserve, enhance and record the local wildlife.

To protect wildlife habitats and encourage biodiversity.

To encourage wildlife friendly management of land, garden and public spaces.

And to encourage a greater interest in the knowledge and love of wildlife.

Illustrated Talks:

Martin Tickler, representing the Suffolk Bird Group, gave the first talk of the 2024 programme in February infecting us all with his enthusiasm and knowledge of House Martins. He illustrated the simple steps we can take in Waldringfield to ensure HM's continue to nest in the village and to reverse their decline in numbers. Lots of muddy puddles for mud (engage the local farmer) to build their nests and the addition, where necessary, of nest cups interspersed between the mud nests. It's important never to knock down old nests as they are reused each year saving them about ten days' work collecting mud to build new nests. Martin's own colony is now 43 years old and with the addition of artificial nests to the mud nests the colony had 36 successful pairs nesting this year. Members of the SBG attended this talk to promote House Martins following the success of the Save Our Swift project which goes from strength to strength. Since martins talk SBG funded by National Landscapes installed 6 artificial nest cups one with a call sound system where there are existing house martin colonies

For more information check out: Housemartinconservation.com and Suffolkwildlifetrust.org.

A popular talk in December 2024 was by Dr Jeremy Mynott a resident of Shingle Street who presented a talk on the community survey of the Flora and Fauna of Shingle Street by

ecologist Toby Abrehart and the community Shingle Marshes Wilding Project. The title of a Shingle Street Publication, 'Know Your Place', which captures the surveyed Flora and Fauna has left a resonance of how much can be gained in getting to know our special landscapes and habitats and the wildlife that it supports.

In 2025 we started the year with a talk 'The Future of Barn Owls' by Dave Pearsons and Sally Nelson representing BOSS: Barn Owl Support Suffolk. Again, hugely attended reflecting the passion to support the Suffolk Barn Owl. BOSS is taking over from the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project and WWG look forward to retaining its ongoing relationship in the monitoring of the nesting and breeding activity of Barn Owls making use of the Barn Owl Boxes installed by WWG in Waldringfield

Looking forward to a talk on Insects titled 'Winged Wonders'. Why Insects are so important and what can we do for them? in June 2025 by Dr Ross Piper, entomologist and zoologist whose work has taken him around the world. Through his writing and TV work he shares his enthusiasm for the remarkable diversity of the other animals we share this planet with. He will have copies of his last book, 'How to read an Insect,' to sell.

Out and About

The Nightingale walks at Newbourne Springs and upstream along the Deben River Wall in May in 2024 were well timed as there were several nightingales about. Peter reports that 5 or perhaps 6 nightingales were heard in Newbourne Springs and also Green Woodpecker, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Wren, Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Cetti's Warbler, Pheasant, Wood - Pigeon, Collared Dove, Crow, Magpie, Jay and Garden Warble. Many thanks to Peter Maddison for guiding the walks and a special thankyou to Anthea Sullivan for hosting the alfresco breakfast in her garden once again. A firm favourite event with members. What's Up Now? recorded the earliest Nightingale heard singing was on the 8th April in the woods next to the scrape, followed by in the wood behind Manor Cottage, by the Oak with the rope swing, the wood at the northern end of the Reserve, from the bramble thicket at the back of the reserve adjacent to the sluice and the old golf course near Low Farm campsite. This year 2025 the first nightingale back heard along the River Wall was again on the 8th April.

Last year we explored the Saltmarsh up and downstream of the River Wall with Simon Read DEP and Jon Wilkins Chair of WFDG (now disbanded) followed by picnic lunch at the Sailing Club where discussions about the saltmarsh continued. We looked at the Polders installed by the WFDG after the 2013 flood to encourage re-silting of the Saltmarsh and discussed their function. Downstream of Waldringfield we looked at the Hemley saltmarsh that is steadily reforming since the breach in the wall many years ago.

The Moth trap opening now in its third year organised by Kit Clarke and this year held in Frank and Agnes Gross' s garden was attended by 20 members despite the wind and the rain. 86 moths were caught and there were 39 different species down on previous years probably due to the stormy weather. This included the Pine Hawk Moth and a Burnished Brass moth both described as stunningly beautiful. Thank-you to Frank and Agnes for hosting the event; to Kit Clarke and Julia Shroud for their brilliant organisation and to Tony and Sandra Fox for setting up their moth traps and agreeing to return next year.

Jill Winter reported that the guided tour of Hollesley Heath with Nick Mason during a very hot day in June revealed 32 of the rare silver studded blue butterflies which is apparently a good count. Wood larks and stone chats were seen and redwings heard and identified by the help of the Merlin Apps. Apparently, council funding for the conservation of the silver studded blue butterfly is not to continue which will slowly see the bracken and silver birch take over more of the heathland.

The WWG Summer picnic on Church Field on the 23rd July was preceded by The Big Butterfly Count led by Peter Maddison.

9 Butterfly species were identified and recorded by Peter including the Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Large White, Small White, Peacock, Painted Lady, Small Skipper, Brown Argus, Small Copper and a Cinnabar Moth. Peter was surprised to see so many species but the abundance was considered to be low this year compared to last year. The Buddleias had almost finished flowering and on that day no Red Admirals were seen.

WWG PROJECTS:

Barn Owl Project:

Barn Owl Project Report September 2024 from Sally Redfern, BO Monitor with Peter Maddison:

‘At last our bad luck has turned. After four barren years with no barn owl broods reported in any of the five nest boxes monitored this year, two of our nest boxes contained broods. One box contained one chick and three chicks occupied the other box. Unfortunately, only two of the four chicks were ringed successfully, the other two managing to fly out of the box before the nest hole could be plugged. All the chicks were well developed and ready to fledge by the time we got to them, suggesting that the vole population was abundant this year. Interestingly, these two broods occupied different boxes than in the past. Given that the adults tend to be site faithful, this suggests that one or more of these 2024 adults were different individuals to those seen in previous years.

The species occupying the other three boxes monitored were stock doves in just one box. The other two boxes were empty when we checked them.

The Barn Owl Coordinator for our area of East Suffolk, Dave Pearsons, told us that 2024 seems to have been a much better year for barn owls in the area than expected. He personally ringed 40 chicks this year compared to 31 in 2023, and knows of an additional 19 that were ringed by others. He hadn’t heard from other ringers in the area so this total will be an underestimate.

Dave also reported that Sally Nelson, the Barn Owl Support Suffolk (BOSS) Co-ordinator has helped with installing new and replacement nest boxes. This is encouraging and bodes well for the barn owl population in Suffolk in the future.’

On behalf of WWG I express my thanks to Sally for her involvement as a Barn Owl monitor over the years. Sally has decided to step down from continuing this role as of this year. John Gladwin has volunteered to take on the role once he has been provided with the required training via BOSS and has a license to monitor. In the interim he has offered to help inspect and maintain the nest boxes. A very welcome and timely offer. Thankyou John.

Sally Nelson and Dave Pearsons attended the WWG June meeting to introduce themselves and to discuss with the group how BOSS will go forward to support Barn Owl Projects such as in Waldringfield which were initially set up by the late Steve Petrowski, under the auspices of the Suffolk Community Barn Owl Project. WWG made an online tribute to Steve this year set up by Kathy, his wife and family following the news of his death after a long illness. A regular speaker at WWG Steve will be very much missed.

Save our Swifts. Waldringfield Swift Project:

The first sightings of swifts reported in Suffolk via SOS were very early this year around the 16th April 2024. The mass of our breeding swifts usually arrives during early May with the younger non-breeding swifts following later.

In Waldringfield, two swifts were seen on the 12th May 2024. All swift box owners were encouraged to play the call sound which most supporters did early morning for three hours and three hours before dusk and where possible in daylight hours.

There were many reports of swift activity in the village this year with several swift box owners reported observing swifts entering and leaving their mounted swift boxes. This included swift boxes which are mounted on two neighbouring properties in School Lane with camera footage of a swift leaving one of the swift boxes; three properties on School Rd; four properties on Cliff Rd and one property on the Quay. New for this year swifts were seen regularly going under the eaves of a building in Lower Cliff Rd on The Quay side which was once reported to be the location of a swift colony until the roof was refurbished and access sealed off. There is one other known natural nest site under the eaves of a house in lower Cliff Rd which has a swift box mounted alongside it to allow extension of the colony. The primary school also reported with excitement that the community swift boxes were being used confirmed by two residents who observed two of the boxes were being used. Some of these new sightings could be due to young swifts who explored the boxes in previous years returning to nest for the first time and others due to exploration of the nest boxes for use next year when the juvenile swifts return to breed in their third or fourth year.

Swifts were observed feeding above the reserve and river wall; flying over Fishpond Rd and Sandy Lane; flying over the school; screaming parties above and around Driftwood., The Quay and Lower Cliff Rd; around and above The Maybush and the Maltings and the concrete cottages. Swifts are also seen in screaming parties near to Hemley Church.

The decline in our Swift population has been primarily the result of the loss of their natural nest sites during renovation or roofing works. SOS was set up to reverse this trend and many residents in Waldringfield have played a big part.

We know that swift colonies can be created and existing ones expanded with nest boxes. Swift conservation does seem to work and is being evidenced through the effort of SOS project.

Playing a brief burst of swift call via a mobile phone swift recording early morning then listening for a response is an effective way to determine where nest sites are. Best done in late May or early June when adults are likely to be sitting on eggs. Contact Linda for a recording of a swift call to use if interested in trying out this method.

Please use the excellent easy to use: [SwiftMapper.org.uk](https://www.swift-mapper.org.uk) phone app to record swift sightings and potential and existing nest sites.

If a downed swift is found advice and phone numbers are here: <https://www.swift-conservation.org/SwiftFirstAid.htm> .

Wildlife Camera:

Jill reports that the night vision wildlife camera continues to be circulated around the village where it has mainly recorded 'badgers digging up gardens.' Jill watched one badger make a circuit of her garden early every morning. It rooted around all the wood piles and dug up the rotting chestnut tree stump where it found a regular supply of stag beetle larvae. It dug quite deep exposing all the tunnels made by the stag beetle larvae. After two weeks of feasting, it left.

Wild for Wildlife Group for Children and Families:

A new initiative in 2024 was through a partnership with Suffolk Wildlife Trust Forest School Team. Organised and funded by WWG, two Wild for Wildlife Events were held in Church Field for Waldringfield primary school aged children and their families who live or who have connections to the village. By reaching out using the school and parents' What's app group, parents and grandparents were asked for their ideas and suggestions on wildlife friendly activities for our children in our parish. Both the events were set up on a weekday morning for 90 minutes during school holidays. The first was held in May and the second after the August Bank holiday. The events were very well supported with 23/24 children attending each event. Children who have additional needs are included and younger and older siblings invited to join in. Grandparents as well as parents came along to supervise and take part in what was happening.

An application was made in March 2025 to The National Landscapes Community and Conservation Fund which was successful. Three Wild for Wildlife events are planned in partnership with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and local children and families, one of which took place on the April 8th 2025. This event was very successful, attended by 30 children and the parents, carers and grandparents, Supported by Church Field Trust 3 Stag Beetle Stags were

built by the children and families to provide much needed habitat for stag beetles which are in decline due to loss of their habitat. John Naylor provided logs chopped to size from healthy wood from broad leaf trees and Marish Ballam brought along some sycamore logs. Two Future events August 28th and October 29th will focus on Homes for Wildlife Theme with the plan to install in various places around the village. The families have set up a Wild for Wildlife Whats App Group coordinated by Sarah Griffiths one of the village parents who is helping to coordinate these events.

The Big Garden Birdwatch:

Coordinated by Jill Winter, since 2018, Jill keeps detailed results of members' garden bird counts. each year. 27 different species were spotted in 2024. Sadly, the average number of birds seen in each garden was 23.6 down in number compared to 278.5 the previous years and all previous years. Contact Jill Winter for the detailed results. RSPB recently announced the decline in numbers of Starlings and Sparrows reflecting the drastic declines in insects for them to feed on. Reminding us to keep the mower in the shed this Spring and Summer and to support 'No Mow May' and longer through to September as varying length of grasses are a vital habitat for insects.

The Verges Project written by Christine Fisher Kay:

The Verges project continues with more bulbs planted into verges during the winter in several places, to add interest to the verges and provide nectar and pollen for early foraging insects.

This year the wild yellow species tulips were increased and also fritillaries which flower well in the playing field along with the daffodils planted there some years ago with help from children from the Waldringfield School.

At Sullivan Place, the cowslips multiply year on year evidently setting seed especially in the south verge. Primroses we planted in the playing field edge have also increased.

In the lay by the cyclamen planted in the last few years are doing well. The white flowers of greater stitchwort are now (mid-April) beginning to open and also now flowering here are the summer snowflake (*Leucojum*.)

Daffodils of the wild type were planted in all these locations and continue to flower every year.

Last year the Waldringfield Gardiners have also got more involved and worked on clearing the lay-by of rampant woody vegetation. They have also been working on the triangle outside the village school which was very colourful last year.

The verge project was begun in 2005. As well as planting bulbs and growing and planting plugs of wildflowers, bulbs have also been given out to residents with a verge facing onto the road and other residents have added to the display so that this Spring the village is looking very floriferous so far this year.

East Suffolk have changed their policy to reduce grass cutting, to help the insects which are in severe decline in numbers, probably largely due to loss of habitat. They have yet to cut any parts of Waldringfield so there are plenty of daisies and dandelions flowering now.

14th April 202

Hedgehog Report:

Report by Christine Fisher Kay: 5th October 2024

Five hedgehog feeding or nesting boxes were obtained by Linda from the AONB. They were all placed in the gardens of people in the village. Initially, they were the gardens of children of families where the children had shown an interest at either The Coronation party last year, where there was a quiz about hedgehogs, or in making hedgehog routes into gardens. Although food put out was eaten regularly in some cases, no one with a box saw a hedgehog or any footprints or droppings of hedgehogs. At the moment the boxes remain in the gardens. Possibly re-siting in a more sheltered position and hiding under a habitat pile might encourage the use of the box for hibernation. However, hedgehogs build their own nests and are good at choosing spots which are well hidden and protected from the rain such as under a shed. Females collect big leaves such as hazel to build the nest.

Otherwise, there have been very few signs reported this year. However sometimes people forget or don't get round to reporting seeing a hedgehog unless asked directly. Two gardens in the village have had a hedgehog in them, one was seen in about June and in one case hedgehog droppings were found. At Hemley a hedgehog was seen near the church on two separate occasions.

Nationally, the decline in hedgehog numbers continues but the PTES report the decline is slightly reversed in urban areas as opposed to rural ones. This is logical given that rural hedgehogs are faced with very large areas of crops sprayed with insecticides, therefore, destroying the hedgehogs' food source. Hedgehogs need to have a good layer of plants growing along the base of the hedge where insects can hide. It looks as if gardens are now the best place for hedgehogs to find what they need - water, insect food, shelter, and other hedgehogs. They are threatened by dogs, cats, foxes and badgers and will avoid these.

We will continue to ask that people try and leave some foraging areas in their garden and examine how they can make their gardens interconnected safely, while removing hazards such as steep sided ponds, loose netting, litter such as opened cans and plastic cups and so on. Also take special care with strimmers in long grass and when lighting bonfires which should always be moved to a clear site. It is best to start from the premise that a hedgehog may enter your garden rather than saying there are too many badgers so there will be no hedgehogs. Think about what is available for a hedgehog if one turns up. Will it include a circuit of your space on its circuit of a kilometre or two which it makes most nights. Is there fresh water at ground level, is there safe foraging space where it might find its natural diet of beetles, earth worms and other suitable food.? Are there hazards such as steep sided pond or loose netting? Would it need to cross wide-open spaces with no cover to get anywhere safe? If danger threatens such as a badger or your dog suddenly appearing, are there places

to hide like a space under a shed or through a gap of about 5 inches too small for the predator to follow?

There is plenty of information on the Hedgehog Street Website and Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Mammal watch-PTES People's Trust for Endangered Species- recording hedgehogs nationwide from trail camera footage project where you can get involved.

What's Up Now?

Our thanks to Peter Maddison for continuing to record and monitor the wildlife sightings reported by WWG members and villages via email. These reports provide an important insight into the wildlife observed over the years. They are also passed on by Peter to the local statistical recorders held by the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service and other conservation agencies.

Wildlife Corridors:

As passionate wildlife supporters we realise the potential of our gardens and public spaces as vital habitat for wildlife. Linking gardens within the village, having areas of long grass, wood piles, hedges and shrubby areas around the edges of gardens provide food and safe hiding places from cats and birds of prey. We hope that members who feel inspired will get involved to encourage villages to create mini -nature reserves in our gardens and make it possible for wildlife, like hedgehogs to move around from garden to garden. Do come forward and speak to Jill, Alexis and I if you have ideas and would like to help organise activities to develop these wildlife friendly ideas.

Lastly, my thanks go to our members for all their support and encouragement, to Jill Winter, Group Secretary and Alexis Smith, Treasurer for the Group, to Simon Couchman for designing the WWG poster from this year, to Kit Clarke for coordinating and providing refreshments at our meetings, and to all the helpers who help set and clear away including John Naylor who supervises the setting up of the projector and sound recording systems.

Linda Wilkins

April 16th 2025