



Essex
Wildlife Trust

Uttlesford Local Group

Newsletter September 2024

The Uttlesford Local Group runs weekday work parties on Tuesday and Thursday mornings between 9:30 and 12 noon at the nine nature reserves in our district, moving around them as the seasonal work requires. Broadly speaking in the winter months this involves woodland coppicing, in summer meadow management and in the autumn hay cutting and raking. Additional meetings are held at Shadwell Wood on the second and fourth Sunday mornings from September to April to carry out the winter coppicing. These events are a great way of learning how habitats work and seeing wildlife, and are sociable and great fun.

You can join us by registering with volunteering@essexwt.org.uk .

Our programme of events is shown on our website, uttlesford-wildlife.org.uk

Turners Spring



As the seasons turn to Autumn, our thoughts turn to mowing! The first nature reserve on our list this year was Turner's Spring in Burton End, near Stansted.

This reserve has a wet meadow, quite unusual for the region, with a sedge bed running across it. The meadow is cut once a year in early autumn, an essential task to maintain its biodiversity. This is a big job requiring a lot of effort from the team, not least because the site is not suitable for heavy machinery - in part because this could damage the soil structure, but also because there is no road access.

We use a scythe mower, which tackles the thick growth with ease, but doesn't collect the cuttings. It's important to remove these, because they would add too much nutrient to the meadow if left to decay, reducing plant diversity. So that means grabbing our pitchforks and rakes to move everything to the edges of the meadow. As you might imagine, this is heavy work!

This year we are experimenting for the first time with leaving approximately one sixth of the meadow unmown, to provide habitat for overwintering animals and invertebrates. The plan is to rotate this area each year and take note of how this impacts the growth and the species we see. It also has the benefit of slightly reducing our workload...

We saw plenty of invertebrates while we worked, including numerous dragonflies over the meadow, although there were noticeably fewer wasps than last year. The star find, however, was a harvest mouse nest. These have been found at the meadow before, and it was great to know that these beautiful mammals are still making a home here.

The team worked brilliantly together and we managed to complete the task in just three sessions - a big thank you to everyone involved, with special mention to John W, John L, Mike and Will for their work with the mower.

Alice Whitaker, Warden at Turners Spring



Recycling

Autumn has another aspect that reveals a hidden kingdom to us; the world of fungi appears. They are there all year round in reality, working away underground as thin threads to gather up nutrients and pass them on to trees and other plants in exchange for sugars, but at this time of year they produce a range of fungal caps and brackets to distribute their spores. They are the recycling team that breaks down biological matter into small molecules that can be used again by other organisms.

Here is a photo taken in the Turners Spring reserve, showing the brackets of the Dryad's Saddle fungus on a nearly dead Horse Chestnut tree. This species of tree is prone to fungal infection when it reaches about 150 years old and suddenly begins to fall apart, though some veterans are thought to be as much as 300 years old.

Tony Morton, Chair Uttlesford Local Group



Aubrey Buxton nature reserve



Our volunteer work party has begun the programme of mowing the grasslands in all of the Uttlesford nature reserves, and at the time of writing is working at the Aubrey Buxton reserve at Stansted Mountfitchet. Some cutting back of overhanging trees around the top pond was also required, revealing this view along the pond, showing one of the trees still to be removed from the water. The new fence is also visible on the right of the picture, installed to reduce bank erosion at that point. There is always plenty of work to do in a nature reserve.

Tony Morton, Chair Uttlesford Local Group



Copyright (C) 2024 Uttlesford Local Group. All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe](#)

