



Essex
Wildlife Trust

Uttlesford Local Group Newsletter

January 2025

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.

Badgers by Night

We have a trail camera that we use in the nature reserves from time to time to see what is going on when we are not there. They can be surprisingly busy, with 57 short videos captured in just a few days from a single spot recently. A recent screen star was this wet Badger, and it's shy friend in the background, on a rainy night in Shadwell Wood. It subsequently used its sensitive nose to give the camera a good hard poke to see what it was.



Photo and story ; Tony Morton

Turners' Spring

Winter is the ideal time of year for hedge work - before the sap starts rising and the birds start nesting - and the boundary hedge along one side of the meadow at our Turner's Spring nature reserve in Burton End was due some attention. Our team of volunteers spent two mornings at the reserve earlier this month making a start.

The hedge is mainly a mix of hazel and field maple, and some thorn and elder, along with a beautiful hornbeam pollard. It has been more than 20 years since the hedge was last worked on, and it was decided to coppice most of the trees, and see if we could 'lay' some of the smaller hazel poles. Both of these techniques should help to thicken up the hedge, which will make it a better habitat for a variety of species, and also a more effective barrier.

Here is a hazel that we used hedge-laying techniques on, making a cut in one side of the stems and gently bending them over:



We coppiced the larger limbs of the hedge trees, as shown in the photo here, before using the cut growth to build a 'dead hedge' to protect the regrowth from browsing by deer.



We will be keeping a close eye on the regrowth this year, and will return to work further along the hedge next winter.

Thanks to all of the volunteers who came along to help!

Photos and story ; Alice Whitaker

Coppice Products

The reason for coppicing woods in previous times was to produce useful things that could be sold, in effect they were managed for industry not wildlife, but it just so happened that the small scale and low impact methods of working were also good for creating wildlife habitat. We would now call this a sustainable industry. In the days before plastics and easily available metals, many things were made of wood, ranging from furniture, plates and spoons, all kinds of fencing and even the houses that people lived in. Firewood for bread ovens and cooking was also important.

Now of course we are primarily managing the woods for wildlife, but we still try to make use of the coppice poles where we can, and this year we have been able to produce sticks for morris dancers, and hazel bean rods for Audley End Gardens, as shown in the photos. The left hand photo beneath shows poles we have set aside for processing, and the right hand photo shows the finished bundle.



Morris sticks are quite time-consuming to produce, first searching for poles that are

straight enough and the right thickness, when most are twisted and too thick or too thin. Then they have to be prepared, and in the case of the morris sticks this means peeling the bark off of every one, a job for indoors on a cold day. These will be seeing use this summer with Greenwich Morris, Northwood Morris and Winchester Morris.



Photos and story ; Tony Morton

Hazel sticks from Essex appearing with Greenwich Morris in London,
Photo ; Colin Endean



Our Annual General Meeting

The Uttlesford Local Group
Annual General Meeting
Wednesday 12 March 2025 at 20:00

The venue will be
Saffron Community Link, Market Street, Saffron Walden
1b Market Street, Saffron Walden, Essex, CB10 1HX

The AGM of the Uttlesford Local Group, is held to to elect officers to the committee and to review the activity of the group in the past year and to make plans for the year ahead.

The Community Link building will be open about 15 minutes before the start of the meeting, car parking in the Market Square and surroundings.



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