



Uttlesford Local Group

March 2025 Newsletter

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. If you would like to join us please register with Essex Wildlife Trust at volunteering@essexwt.org.uk

Signs of Spring

Working in the woods all winter has been difficult this year, often very cold, and also very muddy underfoot, so while working in West Wood we were very pleased to see this Scarlet Elf Cup fungus, Scientific name; *Sarcoscypha coccinea*. It grows on dead sticks or buried rotting wood.



Mushrooms and fungi of all kinds are usually thought of as being an Autumn sight, but there are a few kinds that fruit in Spring, and this is one of them. It does not form a classic shaped cap, but has a thin rubbery texture, a red surface to the cup, and a pale pink dense matted layer of hairs on the underside.

The ‘real’ Daffodil

Another classic sign of spring is the Daffodil, though most of the ones that we see are 'artificial' cultivars, bred for the garden, but often planted in the countryside. The Wild Daffodil, *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, and also known as the Lent Lily, has narrow, grey-green leaves and a familiar daffodil flower, but with pale yellow petals surrounding a darker yellow trumpet; this two-tone look is one way to tell them apart from their garden relatives. The wild daffodil is also relatively short and forms clumps, carpeting the ground.



They are mostly thought of as a species of western Britain, in areas like Gloucestershire and Wales, but there is one wood locally where it can be found growing, though it is not an Essex Wildlife Trust reserve and there is no public access unfortunately.

It is possible to find this species in cultivation, and they can be bought and planted in autumn instead of the garden cultivars.

Story and photo by : Tony Morton

Pollarding at Rushy Mead

Pollarding is an ancient method of tree management. Unlike coppicing, where trees such as Hazel are cut just above ground level to produce a lot of slender branches for use as poles, pollarding involves cutting a tree trunk at head height. This produces fewer stronger branches which can be allowed to grow bigger. Traditionally, this enabled these branches to be cut after several years and then shaped with axes to produce timber for uses such as roof beams. In March 2014 we were asked by Essex Wildlife Trust to plant two dozen new Willow pollards by driving suitably sized cut branches into the ground. This was a great success and these new pollards were first cut in 2020. They continued to grow rapidly and we cut them again in January 2025, producing a group of pollards, mainly around the scrape, and making up for the loss of some of the very old Willow pollards that had begun to decay and fall apart. You can see how quickly these pollards have grown from the original planted branch about 2 inches in diameter, to substantial trunks over a foot in diameter.

Story by : Chris Swan ; Photo by : John Lockton



Marsh Tit

The first of this year's surveys have begun, as we've been to our woodland reserves looking for Marsh Tits. These small birds are increasingly scarce in Essex but seem to have a stronghold here in our north-west corner of the county.

Image from Wikimedia Commons
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
File:Sumpfmeise1.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sumpfmeise1.jpg)



Despite their name, they are woodland birds and at this time of year are at their most active protecting their territories. They are small birds, about the size of a blue tit, yet each pair need around 15-20 acres of territory. In Shadwell Wood which is only 17 acres there is likely to only be one pair, while 60 acre West Wood could sustain 3 or 4 territories.

In the second year of conducting these surveys we observed 2 birds at Shadwell Wood in a pair and at West Wood we found 6 birds as one pair and 4 individuals. That compares to 2 at Shadwell Wood and 4 at West Wood in 2024. We will return for a further survey at the end of the month.

We can only speculate on where any offspring go if the woods already sustain as many pairs as the large territories allow.

The British Trust for Ornithology have a very detailed web page about Marsh Tit here -
<https://www.bto.org/understanding-birds/birdfacts/marsh-tit>

Story by ; Dave McLellan

Coming Up

Another task on our list is to prune the Apple trees at the Sweetings Meadow reserve.

This miniature orchard is mainly managed as a nature reserve for its summer wildflowers, but the fruit trees include some old heritage varieties which are appreciated in the autumn. We will try to get some photos for the next newsletter.



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