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Uttlesford Local Group July 2026 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.

West Wood Family Nature Day June 14th 2026

As part of the Uttlesford Big Green Festival our Local Group Volunteers held a special Open Day at the West Wood Nature Reserve to show visitors what lives here at the peak of the summer season. The following images show some of the things that were available on the day.



EWT supporting Uttlesford Big Green Festival West Wood Family Nature Day, 14 June 26



Well done everyone!
Too many to mention.



The Nature Quiz
- plus skulls!



Dens
building.
A great hit
with
children
of all
ages!

Montessori School kids' activity area
was wonderful and 'snowed under'



'Did I do
that?'



Nature Safari was a great hit –
especially when 'pooh' was involved



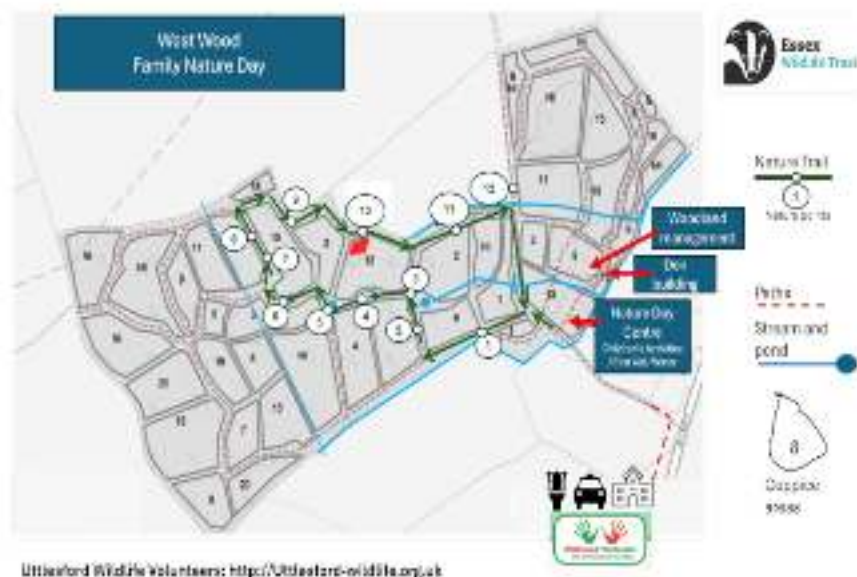
Alison takes control –
our roving
reporter



...and quiz expert

Still time for tea
- and of course
biscuits!





The day was made possible by working in partnership with the Westwood Montessori Nursery, who we thank for their expertise and time, and also our team of wildlife volunteers who are shown in this photo, and special thanks go to John Lockton for organising the day and the events..



Crab Spider and Prey

Spiders are usually associated with cobwebs, some of which are very elaborate but there are many examples of spiders that make no webs at all. These include Crab Spiders that operate as ambush predators, hiding in flowers and foliage to await the arrival of suitable prey. The photograph shows a typical example which is a female Crab Spider *Misumena vatia* that has caught a Greenbottle by hiding in a flower of the rose *Rosa rugosa* in a local garden, against which it is superbly camouflaged. These spiders are seen typically in the months of May, June and July.

Story and Photo; Chris Swan
Warden, Rushy Mead



Fortunate butterfly surveys

We carry out weekly butterfly surveys from April till end of September in a couple of our woods in Uttlesford. We walk the same route each time making a note of the species and numbers in each section. The results range from a handful of early butterflies in April to hundreds of them in early July when Ringlets, Meadow browns and Gatekeepers are out in numbers. It's always a pleasure to walk the woods for an hour or so and we don't have to get up at dawn as we do for the bird surveys.

On June 25th during one of the heatwaves, we conducted the survey in one of the woods and came across a White-letter Hairstreak, the first we had personally seen in that wood. Very pleased to have seen that, we carried on to a clearing where we saw a Purple Emperor just sitting on a leaf and were able to watch it and get close enough for photos before it flew off. This was the first seen during a survey in the wood and a very rare sighting. Just around the corner, on the next section, a couple of Purple Hairstreaks turned up, another rare sighting! All 3 of these species spend almost all their time in the treetops so to see all of them on one visit is remarkable.

I returned the next day, which was the hottest June day on record. I was amazed to see over a hundred Purple Hairstreaks down from the treetops all around the wood at eye level and below. They were just sitting on leaves with their wings closed and quite docile. Possibly the extreme heat had got too much for them in the treetops and they'd come down for some respite. We usually only see a handful of these each year across both the woods so to see so many was unprecedented. Two days that won't be forgotten in a hurry.

Story and Photos; Dave McLellan

Left photo ; Purple Hairstreak

Right Photo: Purple Emperor



Stoat

In a previous newsletter an article reported the specially designed nest boxes that had been made and installed by our volunteers for the benefit of the Marsh Tit, a small bird of ancient woodland which is present in two of our local nature reserves. To monitor how they were used, trail cameras were installed to keep a watch on things, looking at both the special Marsh Tit nestboxes and also at nestboxes for Dormice, which have the entrance hole on the side up against the tree.



It turned out that the Marsh Tits preferred the Dormouse nest boxes, but the Blue Tits were happy to use the special Marsh Tit boxes. Then to our amazement the camera recorded this Stoat trying to get inside a 'Dormouse' box to catch the Marsh Tit

nestlings. Happily it could not gain entrance and the chicks later fledged successfully. You can see the whole video on this YouTube link <https://youtu.be/x30kNoRSYa4>.

Summer Wildflowers

Our part of Essex is still quite fortunate in having some rare wildflower species surviving in small numbers in our nature reserves, on roadside verges, or out-of-the-way places. This summer while out cycling or walking around the district the following species were seen and photographed. From left to right Crested Cow-wheat, Bee Orchid (top photo), Common Broomrape growing parasitically on Bird's-foot Trefoil, (bottom photo), and Sulphur Clover.

Story and Photos; Tony Morton



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