

# BEXLEY WILDLIFE BULLETIN

## No.1 SEPTEMBER 2013

Edited by Chris Rose  
for Bexley Natural Environment Forum

### RECORDING FOR CONSERVATION

#### REVIEW OF 'SITES OF IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION'

What approximates to a ten-yearly review of Bexley's sites is drawing to a close. This will inform the Council's evolving local planning policies, within which such sites are granted a fair degree of protection from development. London Wildlife Trust is doing the professional survey work, which was scheduled to finish in late August, to a contract containing a significant input from BNEF regarding site prioritisation, taxon prioritisation and suggested new sites. The review will also draw upon thousands of wildlife records submitted over the years by amateur naturalists. Anyone with any particularly important records from SINC's or candidate sites should submit them to GiGL (the London Biodiversity Records Centre) immediately.

<http://www.gigl.org.uk/submit-records/>

There should be further consultation with local wildlife experts before final determinations are made, and BNEF will be involved in any such process.

#### BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

BNEF is leading on a number of aspects of Bexley Council's Biodiversity Action Plan, including the following:

**WATER VOLE SURVEY.** A London Wildlife Trust survey (report published October 2005) found Water Voles from By-way 105 upstream as far as Hall Place. BNEF's survey work, supported by Thames21 through its provision of a boat and facilitation of wader-clad access to otherwise inaccessible parts of the river, has established that Voles are currently

present all the way up to Foots Cray Meadows and the Seven Stars Public House. In recent weeks, in-river survey work has found Water Vole latrines on the By-way 105 stretch, by St Mary's Rec., just below Old Bexley High Street and by Kelsey's Farm. Water Voles are also present at Thames Road Wetland and on the River Wansunt between there and Maiden Lane. There has been one sighting and two probable latrines on the Shuttle, where the Friends of the Shuttle team have done detailed digital mapping of the river as a whole. Water Voles continue to do well at Crossness.

**BEXLEY ALLOTMENT SITES REPTILE AND AMPHIBIAN SURVEY.** This work is 'sub-contracted' to members of the London and Kent Amphibian and Reptile Groups.

Data has been gathered through a combination of questionnaires, site visits and conversations with plot-holders. We have records from 33 of 36 sites and have visited 27 of the sites so far. We are recording the presence and nature of ponds and evidence of breeding, if any. Common Frog is present at 27 of 33 sites for which we have data, Common Toad at 15 or 16, Smooth Newt at 17 or 18, Palmate Newt at 1, Slow Worm at 15, Common Lizard at 6 and Grass Snake at 3. We only have a report of Toads breeding at 1 site (unconfirmed). Grass Snake is itinerant and has been recorded mainly by sites adjacent to the River Cray. Slow Worm and Common Lizard are presumed to be breeding everywhere they occur, particularly the latter which are often 'island' populations', being surrounded by unsuitable garden habitat and roads, and for which allotment sites are an important subset of the total number of sites for this species in the Borough .

We are grateful to the Bexley Federation of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners, individual Allotment Site Representatives and staff at Bexley Council's Allotments Department for their support with this continuing project.

Progress on the complete set of Bexley BAP projects is recorded here:  
<http://ukbars.defra.gov.uk/>

Contact Chris Rose [chrisrose@gn.apc.org](mailto:chrisrose@gn.apc.org)  
ffi on all the above matters.

## OTHER PROJECTS

### GET SWIFTS (AND HOUSE MARTINS) COVERED

Last year BNEF, with the support of Sidcup Natural History Society, persuaded the Council to put Swift nest boxes on the refurbished Woolwich building in Bexleyheath, which will soon serve as the new Council offices.

More needs to be done to provide nest sites for these iconic, but declining summer migrants

<http://swift-conservation.org/>

which are being shut out by modern building and refurbishment techniques and appear to have had a bad year in 2013, leaving early.

BNEF members have been recording aggregations of Swifts and House Martins and their existing nesting sites in the Borough, in order to identify opportunities to help these species. Contact Jonathan Rooks of the 'Greener Bexley' charity ffi/to help <[jonathanrooks@virginmedia.com](mailto:jonathanrooks@virginmedia.com)>

### BNEF IS NOW A GiGL PARTNER

BNEF has signed up as a partner with Greenspace Information for Greater London, the London Biodiversity Records Centre, in order to have ready access to the full suite of its biodiversity and open spaces data, and mapping services. This will give us an overview of what recording work has been done in the Borough and where the gaps are, as well as providing information to inform our comments on planning and other conservation issues in the Borough.

BNEF encourages all its affiliated groups, members and others recording wildlife in the Borough to submit their records to GiGL. This makes them available to Bexley Council and other interested parties, so as to inform site management and other decision-making as well as the production of up-to-date distribution atlases.

## PLANNING

### BEXLEY DETAILED POLICIES AND SITES LOCAL PLAN

The Council is producing a detailed policies and sites local plan. This document will sit alongside the Bexley Core Strategy, and set out further local planning policies and criteria against which planning applications will be judged, along with other policies of the development plan.

Further to a consultation held at the beginning of the year on the scope of this local plan, the Council is now consulting on the preferred approaches to the matters to be contained in this document, which can be viewed on the Council's website at <http://www.bexley.gov.uk/dpas>, the Contact Centre, Bexleyheath, and all borough libraries.

#### What does this have to do with biodiversity? Quite a lot actually .....

Well, the SINC's review outcome will be dealt with within it, and this is also the part of the process to push for things like green/brown roofs, rain/grey-water harvesting, car-free developments, higher energy standards in buildings, where housing /industry should or shouldn't go and use of native / wildlife-friendly plantings in new developments and to comment on any proposed changes to Metropolitan Open Land/Green Belt boundaries, and so forth.

BNEF will be making a group submission, but additional conservation-minded input from other groups and individuals will be advantageous.

The consultation commenced on Monday 19 August and runs until 5pm on Monday 30 September 2013.

### MILL MEADOW, OLD BEXLEY

A planning application for dwellings on a previously developed site, behind the Old Mill in Bexley village, raises conservation concerns because of proposed pathways too near the riverbank and the possibility of light pollution if adequate conditions and follow-up monitoring are not imposed.

Water Vole and Bat usage could be compromised, whilst a scheme for new playing fields could reduce net biodiversity and habitat linkage. All this within a SINC of Metropolitan (London-wide) importance. BNEF has submitted detailed comments and proposals on these matters. For background and a copy of the submission see:

<http://greenerbexley.org/mill-meadow-bexley/>

## INVASIVE SPECIES

**Spanish/Hybrid Bluebells in Bursted Woods.** With a helper from North West Kent Countryside Partnership, a start was made this spring on attempting to eradicate non-native Bluebells, which are concentrated at each end of the wood. We wish to protect the large core area of daintier, deeper blue native Bluebells from being lost to ongoing hybridisation.

**Himalayan Balsam in Danson Park.** A modest colony has somehow been allowed to develop on the south margin of the lake. A couple of sessions of pulling have seen a few hundred plants removed before they could set seed. With seed-bank longevity of 2 years, there looks to be a realistic chance of eradicating the plant by benign means IF it is tackled effectively over the next few years. It is to be hoped that the Friends of Danson Park will step up to take on this task from next year. If allowed to proliferate further, extirpation could become very difficult. In addition, seeds getting into the lake outflow would reinforce the population below Bexley Woods on the river Shuttle, where Thames21/Friends of the Shuttle are also trying to remove it.

**Australian Swamp Stonecrop (*Crassula helmsii*).** The Council has been reminded that it needs to take action on this plant which occurs in ponds at Hall Place. It could easily be transferred into the Cray by waterfowl and become a menace in the slow-flowing stretches below Crayford. It has also been found in ponds on allotment sites in the Borough. As of April 2014 the sale of this plant will be banned in the UK.

## SITE NEWS

### CRAYFORD MARSHES

Various illegal and anti-social behaviour is discouraging people from recording wildlife in this otherwise fabulous area. BNEF is attempting to organise a meeting of interested parties to address these issues. A London Natural History Society meeting for the London Flora update project, led by Natural History Museum expert Dr. Mark Spencer, recently recorded the continuing presence of a number of plants rare in the capital on the site, including Sea Purslane and Annual Sea Blite. We were also pleased to see a Clouded Yellow butterfly.

### CROSSNESS

Best known for its superb bird list, on 20<sup>th</sup> July, Nature Reserve Manager Karen Sutton hosted a LNHS visit to study the smaller invertebrates of the site. It was one of the largest we found early on – the impressive locust-sized Great Green Bush Cricket (*Tettigonia viridissima*). A 'bug hotel' was accommodating a number of parasitic bees and wasps along with their hosts. An initial list of 144 species has been produced, including a number of Red Data Book and other nationally scarce species. Further specimens await expert verification as to their identity.

Noted botanist and Flora of the London Area (1983) author Rodney Burton found the rare Yellow Vetchling near the Waste Incinerator, a species thought to have been lost to development in the Belvedere area. It also occurs at Crayford Rough, Braeburn Park and by the footpath from there to Churchfield Wood on the west side of the A2.

To join Friends of Crossness (which also grants access to the palisade-fenced part of the reserve - life membership just £10) and to download past newsletters go to:

<http://www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/6245.htm>

The winter programme of talks and hands-on management tasks will be out shortly.

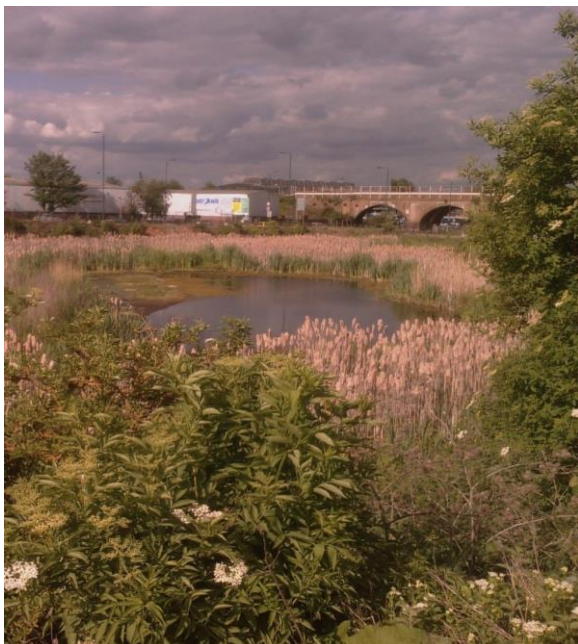
## SLADE GREEN REC UP IN SMOKE

Not for the first time in recent years a substantial portion of this site, next to the railway station, was burnt off in the dry summer. It is to be hoped that the colony of Common Lizards here – for which the area is designated a Borough Grade 2 SINC - has again managed to survive an inferno.

## THAMES ROAD WETLAND

Noted for the number of nationally and regionally rare plants, on what is only a small area (2.4h/6acres), it has also been a very good year for birds here. 'Site firsts' have been a Bittern (the only site in Bexley to record one in winter 2012/13), an over-flying Buzzard and Hobby, 2 Lesser Redpoll early in the year and a Cetti's Warbler calling from shrubs in the summer. A pair of Reed Bunting was seen going to a nest, when only a male has been seen (all too briefly) here in the past, and a possible juvenile Sedge Warbler was noted in late August. At least one Water Rail has stayed on site all year (a maximum of 3 have been seen together in the winter months). On the down side, Little Grebe failed to breed for the second year running and Coot look not to have bred either. The possibility of pollutants causing algal mats on the lake needs investigating.

A male Common Blue Damselfly has taken the Odonata roster to 12 confirmed species.



To see a slide presentation about this Bexley Council-owned, Thames21-managed site go here:

<https://app.box.com/s/sjr0go4ibbbou7yo5655>

To help with habitat management work contact Site Manager Chris Rose [chrisrose@gn.apc.org](mailto:chrisrose@gn.apc.org) or Michael Heath [michael.heath@thames21.org.uk](mailto:michael.heath@thames21.org.uk)

## GREEN SPACES AND BIODIVERSITY VALUE – VIEWS SOUGHT

The London Assembly's Environment Committee is investigating London's green spaces and their value for biodiversity. They want to hear views on urban green spaces in the capital. These can include public parks and private gardens, woodland, wetland, rivers, allotments, cemeteries, green roofs and walls or some brownfield sites. Although London is one of the largest urban areas in Europe, almost two thirds is made up of green space and wetlands.

Ffi: [www.london.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.london.gov.uk/biodiversity)

The Committee asked for responses by 4<sup>th</sup> September, ahead of a committee meeting, but will accept responses during all of September.

## SOME RECENT BEXLEY SPECIES RECORDS

### BEXLEY'S BIRDS

Ralph Todd's invaluable and highly detailed six-monthly round-ups of notable bird sightings in the Borough, previously to be found only in the Bexley RSPB newsletter, can now be accessed here:

<http://greenerbexley.org/birds-in-bexley/>

Back-numbers to 2009 are available for download.

## PLANTS, DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES

On 25<sup>th</sup> June Chris Rose established that the Hairy Dragonfly has now spread west in London as far as Crossness, having been at Thames Road Wetland for at least 3 years. In the the 2009 Kent Dragonfly atlas it was still some way to the east of the Darent.

A plant of Hop Sedge (*Carex psuedocyperus*), rare in London, was found at Danson Park in August. 12 species of Odonata have been recorded here in the last few months. In particular, it has been discovered that the Small Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma viridulum*), which has greatly expanded its range in the UK in recent years, has joined the Red-eyed Damselfly (*E. najas*) in holding territories on those mats of algae on the lake that the Council is keen to get rid of .....

London rarity Changing Forget-me-not (*Myosotis discolor*) was found in May at Erith Cemetery (both sides, but mainly the east one) and appears to be the first record of it in the Borough.

A plant of the increasingly rare Hoary Cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*) was noted in the rockery at Hall Place earlier in the year, but appears to have been weeded out.

In August a small patch of flowering Harebell, in the middle of a swathe of closely mown grass at Hall Place North, made this the fourth site in the Borough for what is now a very rare plant in the capital.

### WEASEL WORDS

T21 volunteer Brian Riches saw a Weasel swim across the river at Foots Cray Meadows in February or March this year. Issue 25 of the Crossness Newsletter reports 1 animal seen there between January and March. Chris Rose was extremely surprised to come across one (dragging a dead Rat) in Bursted Woods on 19<sup>th</sup> April, and believes it probably got there via the adjacent 'wildlife corridor' more commonly known as the Bexleyheath railway line . Are there any other recent records from around the Borough?

## THE BIGGER PICTURE

### 'STATE OF NATURE' REPORT

This was published by a consortium of key wildlife NGOs back in May, and makes for grim but essential reading.

60% of the 3,148 UK species assessed have declined over the last 50 years and 31% have declined strongly.

Of more than 6,000 species that have been assessed using modern Red List criteria, more than one in 10 are thought to be under threat of extinction in the UK.

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/science/stateofnature/index.aspx>

No sign of a credible response from HM Government, which had committed to halting biodiversity loss by 2010.

### AICHI TARGETS

It is not widely known that in order to halt biodiversity loss by 2020, the Government is now signed up to the Aichi biodiversity targets:

<http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

including ....

'By 2020, at the latest, Governments, business and stakeholders at all levels have taken steps to achieve or have implemented plans for sustainable production and consumption and have kept the impacts of use of natural resources well within safe ecological limits.'

This is plain dishonest since the core economic policy of both the Government and opposition is to get the economy 'growing' again, despite the fact that it is already consuming at the rate of three planet's worth of resources.

**LOCAL ACTION:  
CONSERVATION EVENTS  
IN BEXLEY**

Bexley has great wildlife, but there is much that can be done to make the Borough even better for our fellow inhabitants.

Do get involved – there is far more to do right now than people to do it, and no shortage of ideas for new projects that will only get off the ground with more active support!

For a ‘one-stop-shop’ for many of the events in the Borough check out

<http://greenerbexley.org/conservation-events/>

Send details of your events to Jonathan Rooks of the ‘Greener Bexley’ charity

<[jonathanrooks@virginmedia.com](mailto:jonathanrooks@virginmedia.com)>

to improve the comprehensiveness of this list, and hopefully attract a greater number of people to your talks, walks and to help with your habitat management projects.

**HELP REQUIRED**

Another edition permitting, this box will list some key Bexley wildlife projects needing support in 2014.

If you have any you wish to see included, please send to [chrisrose@gn.apc.org](mailto:chrisrose@gn.apc.org) by mid December.

**BEXLEY NATURAL  
ENVIRONMENT FORUM**

is the umbrella body for Friends of Parks and Open Spaces groups, local wildlife experts and conservationists and sustainability campaigners in the Borough. We work to protect, restore and enhance habitats and biodiversity across Bexley.

**WE MEET EVERY TWO MONTHS  
AT THE MARRIOTT HOTEL IN  
BEXLEYHEATH BROADWAY**

Contact Chris Rose , Vice Chair,  
[chrisrose@gn.apc.org](mailto:chrisrose@gn.apc.org)  
for details.



Bursted Woods Open Space, Barnehurst

**ABOUT BEXLEY WILDLIFE  
BULLETIN:**

This is a rather basic ‘test’ edition for what might conceivably become a better-designed quarterly publication. The publication of future editions will depend on available time and support. If you would like to help or contribute copy please contact Chris Rose at [chrisrose@gn.apc.org](mailto:chrisrose@gn.apc.org)

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