

Wild Thaxted Bioblitz
August 2016

Chalky Meadow behind Guelphslane and The
Mead.



Report compiled by Helen Payne.

Acknowledgements.

Thank you to Andy Mcgeeny, whose inspiration and support enabled the project to happen. Richard Corby and Jo Roberts from the Wilderness Foundation for support, equipment and expertise, Thank you Simon Payne for all of your help.

About the Author.

Helen Payne is a lay person. She has lived for most of her life in Thaxted. Helen started a 'Wild Thaxted' facebook page to promote the protection of wild spaces within and around Thaxted.
(<https://www.facebook.com/wildthaxted/>)

This report intends to be a first step to facilitating protective action rather than expert analysis. We hope that by sharing this report with the people who were involved with the project and other professionals and experts we will be able to confirm the richness of the site, and next best steps to develop the potential of the meadow becoming a valuable site for both wildlife and the local community.

Executive Summary.

By completing a bioblitz on 'Chalky Meadow' we had hoped to establish just how much wildlife there was on the site. Many of us locally have felt that it is a 'valuable' site; rich in wildflowers, birds, insects and reptiles. The site has been left to its own devices for about twenty five years. We have seen the number species there grow through the years. We therefore hoped that the bioblitz would raise awareness and support for the site, as well inform us of what wildlife really does live there. This is with the end view that if the site proves to be 'diverse and valuable' enough we can work to protect it.

Of course the bioblitz is just a 'small window'. Whilst the event confirmed to us that the meadow is a rich and diverse habitat; it is also the observations and records of local residents through the seasons that can add to our record of wild life on the meadow. This report therefore shows the findings of the bioblitz of August 2016 but also notes additional sightings through the year.

One of the most exciting findings is the strength of the lizard colony we have, ***"This whole site in my opinion represents the largest colony of Common Lizards that I have ever come across..."*** (Steve Latford, August 2016, Essex Reptile and Amphibian Club.)

We have recorded up to 22 types of butterflies, numerous plants, with some such as White Bryony being indicator species for established and diverse British hedgerow growth.

Community engagement is an important aspect of the bioblitz too. One of our aims was to raise awareness of the site. We had a good level of support and attendance on the day. We were particularly pleased to see lots of children – some of whom stayed for the whole day. The event had been advertised across the town with posters, we created a Facebook presence and Essex Wildlife Trust, including the Uttlesford Local Group and the Essex Biodiversity Team passed the posters and event details about.

We had parents and children, Barn Babies (nursery group) and Girl Guides; local residents, volunteers of Essex Wildlife Trust, independent 'experts', staff from Essex Wildlife Trust and staff from Wilderness Foundation UK.

On the back of this report we hope to engage further professional / expert advice to better protect, develop and share this community asset.



1.0 Introduction

This report sets out to show:

- The findings of the bioblitz
- Examples of records and observations contributed by local residents over the last year
- Proposals to better protect the wildlife and habitat on the meadow.

1.1 Why a Bioblitz?

A BioBlitz can happen in most any geography—urban, rural, or suburban—in as large an area as a national park or small as a schoolyard. Biologists often measure the population of particular species or study an environment’s biodiversity, but a BioBlitz brings together the expertise of multiple scientists and naturalists with the power of citizens, including students, willing to take a snapshot of an area’s biodiversity in about 24 hours. <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/projects/bioblitz/education/>

We really wanted to establish what wildlife lived in this small wild and natural meadow.

One of the best qualities of a bioblitz is that it facilitates ‘experts’ and lay people to work side by side. It is an inclusive event that welcomes anyone who would like to be involved.

1.2 Who was involved.

The event was organised by Helen Payne, Richard Corby (Wilderness Foundation) and Simon Payne.

Our ‘experts’ included:

- Andy Mcgeeny – Naturalist with expertise in insects and butterflies
- Tony Morton – Chair, Local Uttlesford Group, Essex Wildlife Trust
- Dr Lorna Shaw MCIEEM, Biological Records Officer, Essex Wildlife Trust
- Steve Latford – Essex Reptile and Amphibian Club
- Emma England – Essex Bat Group

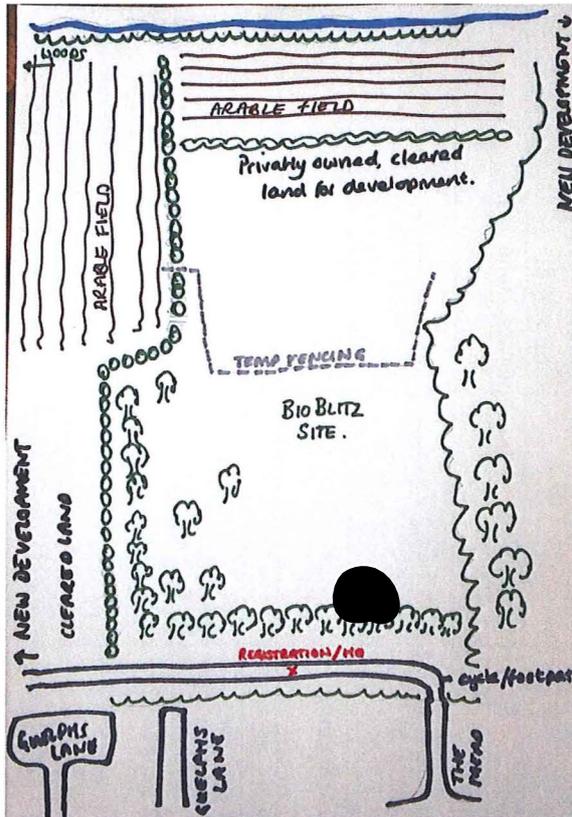
We were also very lucky to have experienced volunteers from Essex Wildlife Trust whose knowledge and support were invaluable.

In addition to our expert and just as importantly were the residents of Thaxted young and old who came along and got involved. We had tiny tots through to grandparents, Girl Guides, nursery groups, retirees, family groups and other interested individuals.

Equipment was provided by Wilderness Foundation (www.wildernessfoundation.org.uk), Ruth Ship, Thaxted Girl Guides and Helen Payne.

1.3 Where is the meadow?

The meadow is tucked away. It is located behind Guelphslane and The Mead.



This hand drawn map shows the location (but not to scale!)

We had our headquarters on the path. Equipment, drinks, identification guides and 'expert' help were all available here.



2.0 What we found.

Invertebrates	Butterflies & moths	Flowers	Trees & shrubs	Other	Mammals	Birds
Long winged conehead grasshopper	Large white butterfly	Cow parsley	Field maple	Monacha Cantina – snail	Muntjac	Goldfinch
Roesel's bush-cricket	Grass moth	Sow thistle	Bramble	Grove snail	Signs of badger activity	Wood pigeon
Horse fly	Peacock	Hogweed	Hawthorn	Cepaea remoralis - snail	Deer poo	Robin
Garden orb weaver	Cinnabar moth caterpillar	Rosebay willow	Elder	Pendulous sedge - grass	Common Pipistrelle – bat	Coal tit
Black ants	Red admiral	Horsetail	Purging buckthorn		Soprano Pipistrelle – bat	Buzzard
Red tail bumble bee	Ringlet	Ragwort	Ash	Reptiles	Noctule - bat	Sparrow hawk
Meadow grasshopper	Meadow brown	Goldenrod	Buddleia	Common lizards (est pop >1000)		
Flesh fly	Small white	Red clover	Walnut	Grass snake		
Green copsid	Comma	Agrimony	Oak			
Common copsid	Common blue	Scarlett pimpernel	Dogwood			
Common green grasshopper	Brown argus	Great willow herb	Apple			
22 spot yellow ladybird	Hedge brown gatekeeper	Perforate St Johns Wort				
Shield bug	Small skipper	Bristly oxtounge				
Picture Wing fly	Brimstone	Creeping thistle				
Hawker dragonfly	Orange tip	Hedge roundwort				
Earwig	Green veined white	Upright hedge parsley				
Honey bee	Small tortoise shell	Tufted vetch				
Harvestman	Silver Y moth	Hoary Ragwort				

Invertebrates	Butterflies & moths	Flowers	Trees & shrubs	Other	Mammals	Birds
Rove beetle		Common poppy				
Redmite		Fool's parsley				
Yellow meadow ant		Smooth hawksbeard				
		Purple toadflax				
		White bryony				
		Fox and cubs hawkweed				
		Hop trefoil				
		Spear thistle				
		Old man's beard				
		Common spotted orchid				
		Field bindweed				
		Field scabious				
		Common vetch				
		Meadow cranes bill				
		Cocksfoot				
		Wild carrot				
		Chalk knapweed				
		Pyramidal orchid				
		Timothy				
Sightings since the bioblitz – through the year (that haven't already been recorded)						
	Marbled white	Bee orchid			Brown hare	Chaffinch
	Small skipper					Greenfinch
	Essex skipper					Goldfinch
	Red Admiral					Red kite
	Speckled Wood					Linnets
	Clouded yellow					Yellohammers
	Holly Blue					House sparrow

Invertebrates	Butterflies & moths	Flowers	Trees & shrubs	Other	Mammals	Birds
	Small heath					Dunnocks
						Blackbird
						Song thrush
						Wren
						Blue tit
						Long tailed tit
						Collard dove
						Magpie
						Rook
						Carrion crow
						Swallow
						Swift
						House martin
						Great spotted woodpecker
						Green woodpecker
						Chiff chaff
						Willow warbler
						Black cap
						Goldcrest
						Pheasant
						Pied wagtail
						Yellow wagtail
						Field fare
						Redwing

An additional report by Steve Latford of Essex Reptile and Amphibians Club is an appendix.

Conclusion.

These cursory findings show that the meadow is currently supporting a wide variety of wildlife; in particular lizards, butterflies, wild flowers and birds. The general opinion amongst the experts that attended the day was that the site was a good one with the potential to become a valuable and bio diverse site and is worth protecting. There was also discussion that due to the recent development that has happened surrounding the meadow it is likely that the site has become the last refuge for any wildlife that was living on the developed sites; in particular the lizards.

Next steps.

The author will circulate this report. This will then be followed with a call to the community, Essex County Council (landowner) and professionals to establish a working group to identify clear aims and actions that will protect and enhance the site for both wildlife and community engagement.

