

Wild Essex



february nature news

Wild Essex Diary

For more info or to book a place on any walk, please email me at

<u>jmgibson1959@btinternet.com</u> or text 07503240387...

KEEPING IN TOUCH

... or you may like to be a part of the action via our lively Whatsapp group (topics recently ranging from pigeons (see more below) to The Giant Seal of Jupiter (a). Also the way to find out about extra events including a spring social. See us on Facebook too (a) WildEssexBringingNatureToYou.

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EVENTS FOR 2023

FEBRUARY

Wednesday 22nd 10am - 12.30 £10 per person LOOKING FOR SIGNS OF SPRING – COCKAYNES NATURE RESERVE Always something interesting to discover at this special place – part of the proceeds going to Essex Wildlife Trust to support their important work.



MARCH

Sunday 5th 7pm **Free Zoom** presentation by Chris
'GARDENING WITH WILDLIFE IN
MIND' (postponed from Feb when we
had Covid and weren't up to it!).
Join us using this link

https://us05web.zoom.us/j/896516115 65?pwd=MWhYazdBNFRoV0FMVGdq RU13UFdIUT09

Meeting ID: 896 5161 1565

Passcode: 5HqdWK



Firebug (*Pyrrhocoris apterus*) discovered in a churchyard in Dovercourt. Only seen in UK in recent years, but now firmly established in this 'God's Acre'. Let us know if you see one as they are still fairly unusual. Aren't they stunning? Despite the warning coloration, they are totally harmless.

Welcome....

......to our February edition of Nature News.

As always, a warm Hello from us both. Lots to tell you about this month — we are thrilled that so many people have been in touch with their observations and photos.

HELP OUR HEDGEHOGS

As you are no doubt aware, hedgehogs have had a tough time of it. Fortunately, good people look out for them, with food, shelter and monitoring, but one problem is that their highways to food/shelter are often interrupted. Helping them to move from garden to garden is crucial, can you help by creating a gap in your fence to allow free movement?. How to create a hedgehog hole | Essex Wildlife Trust (essexwt.org.uk)



IN THE NEWS

Guess we all already knew... <u>Flying insect numbers plunge 64% since 2004, UK survey finds | Insects | The Guardian</u> Stats like this make us grateful for Buglife and other charities working to educate and improve the situation, and hopefully people are becoming more aware (RHS for example have totally had a rethink on what is a 'pest' and what isn't). <u>Garden pesticides are contributing to British songbird decline, study finds | Birds | The Guardian</u>

A more cheery one for fungi fans...

Biodiversity: Fungi are 'underloved and understudied' - BBC News

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Friday 10th 10.30 – 12.30 £10 per person BIRDS AND ESTUARY WALK – MISTLEY WALLS

See how many species we can spot. And why not join us for a pub lunch afterwards at The Crown, Manningtree? <u>MENU | Mysite 1</u> (thecrownmanningtree.co.uk)

APRIL

Sunday 23rd 10 – 12 noon £10 per person BLUEBELL WALK – WIVENHOE WOODS

Come and see the stunning display of bluebells in our lovely woodlands and learn about their ecology.



ADDITIONAL EVENT

WILDESSEX ON TOUR

Following our very successful group trip away last year to Burnham, we are planning a similar event, this time based in Old Harlow around the Stort Valley Way with visit to Gibberd Garden, local museum plus canal walks. Tues 26th Sept to Thurs 28th Sept. Organise own transport and accommodation. £50 per person for Chris' expertise and no extra charge for me!. JUST A COUPLE OF SPACES LEFT. Please get in touch asap if you would like further info.

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BRIGHTLINGSEA NATURE RECOVERY EVENT

Brightlingsea Library Sat March 18th 10 – 4

Lots going on at this wonderful event – stalls, wildlife garden demo, info on local nature recovery projects and much more. Come and see for yourself!

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WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

Sadly we had to cancel the 'GARDENING WITH WILDLIFE IN MIND' Zoom session, as we both had Covid but now rescheduled for 5th March....see link above to join us.

NATURE NOTES

...which brings me to some of the photos and interesting notes we have been sent this month. Thank you all for your contributions!





Turkey tail fungus plus Yellow Brain fungus (aka Witches Butter or Yellow Trembler) photographed in Wivenhoe

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Spring is springing in Suffolk, thanks to a friend for telling us about his walk 'Simply gorgeous day today, with lovely drifts of snowdrops out, plus winter aconites, and some early celandines & crocus.'

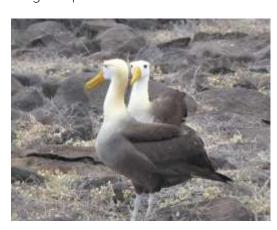






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We love hearing about your holiday adventures and one of our readers has been on a holiday of a lifetime to Ecuador. She sent some superb birdy photos, including these delightful pairs of....





... Waved Albatrosses and Rose-faced Parrots. Loved how they each blended well with their backgrounds

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If you are interested in mosses you may enjoy a programme on IPlayer <u>BBC iPlayer</u> - <u>The Magical World of Moss</u>, these lovely examples from Bavaria may whet your appetite...





BIRD OF THE MONTH

TREE IDENTIFICATION FROM WINTER BARK AND TWIGS

Our group had a fun time trying to ID some of our beautiful Wivenhoe trees from a crib sheet of clues. See here for a blog and ID help. The post-walk pub lunch was most enjoyable too 😊

#WildEssex Walks: Trees in winter buds, bark and more... | Chris Gibson Wildlife



TALKS

Chris has a large repertoire of fully illustrated presentations, all suitable for giving to clubs, groups etc, in person or Talks | Chris Gibson Wildlife by zoom. Do get in touch if you would like more details.

BRINGING NATURE TO YOU

We would be very happy to discuss any ideas you may have for a tailormade nature experience. Perhaps advice on Rewilding Your Garden, a moth trapping evening or bespoke walk with a group of friends. General cost £5 per hour per person, usual minimum group of 3 or £15 per hour.

THIS MONTH: Bird Walk in Burnham with group of nature lovers.

NATURETREK WALKS

Chris has been involved in leading holidays, and day walks with this company for a number of years. You may be interested in some of these? (book directly with Naturetrek)

And more locally, this little Rock Pipit entertained a group of bird lovers in Brightlingsea.



Rock Pipit Anthus petrosus

Grey/brown and speckled seashore bird, with paler breast, brown legs and bill.

In Essex it visits our shorelines, before heading north or east to breed on rocky coasts elsewhere.

It may stand on prominent piles of seaweed where it can snatch flying insects from the air, or turn over seaweed debris for invertebrates.

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We had an interesting question as to why Oak leaves vary so much in size. Chris couldn't answer really - nature is so unpredictable sometimes - but one clue may be that Oaks produce two kinds of leaves each year - once in spring, and again in the summer (lammas leaves, after the first leaves have often been nibbled away). Last year the lammas leaves appeared in the context of drought and would not have got very large. In contrast the spring ones were produced during a wet period, so would have grown well.





Variety of leaves from Quercus robur (English Oak) plus an unusual view of this species

Thanks to Jenny for her WRABNESS NATURE NEWS – JANUARY 2023

Already the increasing day length is having an effect. A Great Spotted Woodpecker is drumming near the old barn, and two Stock Doves are courting on a nest-box, their emerald neck-patches sparkling in the sun. On the river, the Mergansers are also feeling skittish. A grey cloud descends on the shore. It's made of thousands of Knot, who, feeding furiously, barely lift their bills above the water. A pair of neat Stonechats are working their way along the railway fence-line.





Stonechat

Knot

CITIZEN SCIENCE

This year we'll try to keep you up to date with Citizen Science projects that are happening. Citizen science projects | The Wildlife Trusts. It's good to be involved! Surveys - Buglife. Also, on a local level, let us know if you find any **firebugs** (see above). Send us a photo too if poss. (Be warned – other red and black bugs are available).

And gardeners...can you help with tracking the Giant Willow Aphid? Have you seen this bug? Scientists call on Britain's gardeners to track elusive aphid | Insects | The Guardian

The Naze 23 March <u>The Wild Side of Essex:</u>

<u>Exploring The Naze and Walton Backwaters</u>

(Day Trip) - Naturetrek (Full)

Colne Estuary 25 May The Wild Side of Essex: The Colne Estuary (Day Trip) - Naturetrek

Wrabness 11 July <u>The Wild Side of Essex:</u> <u>Summer by the Stour Estuary (Day Trip) -</u> Naturetrek

TRANSITION TOWN

Find out more about what you can do to help the environment locally by contacting Diane at transwiv@gmail.com to receive her regular newsletter.

NEXT MONTH 'SIGNS OF SPRING'

We hope to feature some Springy stuff next month (inspired no doubt by our Cockaynes walk in February). Please send us your photos and observations of what is springing up around you. (3)





AND FINALLY......PIGEONS! which have been a recent topic of discussion on WTLDESSEX Whatsapp. It started with a photo of a lovely white dove in a garden where all kinds of birds enjoy a good feel, and by chance I had listened to 'Natural Histories - Pigeons' on BBC Sounds only the night before, full of interesting stuff — did you know they helped the war-effort and some won medals? BBC Radio 4 - Natural Histories, Pigeon. In response, a talented local author in our group kindly shared her story 'Pigeon Post' https://helenchamberswriter.wordpress.com/2021/08/07/pigeon-post/which tied in nicely with the discussion. These birds aren't everyone's cup of tea I know, but as Chris said 'Let's hear it for the street pigeon! They bring joy, to us and to the Peregrines now moving into our towns/cities — even Colchester (breeding on Jumbo). To the hardcore birders who decry them as feral avian rats, all that needs to be said is that they have almost exactly the same DNA as the Rock Doves they would spend a fortune going to tick off on Orkney....and at least a goodly proportion of the

street birds have identical plumage to 'native Rock Doves' with double black wing bars,

a white rump and beautiful, iridescent teal and mauve feathering on the neck. An



understated beauty'.



Feral Pigeon or Rock Dove? Can you spot the difference?

PLEASE KEEP SENDING US YOUR PHOTOS AND NATURE NOTES!

Special thanks this time to Val Appleyard, Ricky Beesley, Helen Chambers, Jenny Coumbe, David Green, George McKissock, Sue Minta, Jen Poyser, Emily Poyser-Beesley, Caty Robey and Lyn Rodley

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