

## ROUND-UP OF RECENT SOCIETY EVENTS

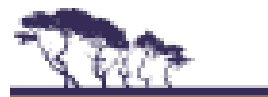
February saw the return of one of our most popular speakers, Dr Tom Williamson of the University of East Anglia. Over 80 people made their way to the Houghton Centre, blizzards on the A47 notwithstanding, to hear Tom speak on the *Great Estates of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Breckland*, at a joint meeting with the Norfolk Historic Buildings Group. The Brecks were once famed for the quality of their vast sporting estates, most of which were built up during periods of agricultural depression when land was cheap and the opportunity to develop sporting interests at its peak. Subsequently of course, some of the more notable examples, such as the Lynford estate, were sold off for forestry. Others are now largely obscured by agricultural land. With his customary flair, Tom gave an entertaining overview of the landscape implications of these super-estates and their legacy.

On March 1<sup>st</sup> a group of members attended a joint meeting in Thetford with the Thetford Society. There was an opportunity to discuss our Vernacular Architecture Project, with which members of the Thetford Society are providing assistance, as well as discuss other areas of common interest.

March 20<sup>th</sup> saw the Society's first event at Lynford Hall Hotel. Over 50 people attended a fascinating illustrated talk by Jenifer Roberts on Yolande Lyne Stephens, the French ballerina wife of the creator of the Hall, Stephens Lyne Stephens. Among the attendees were relatives of one of the estate's gamekeepers, who worked at Lynford up to the 1920s, when the Forestry Commission bought the land and began to plant it up with what became Thetford Forest.

The field trip to Mayday Farm to see woodlarks and goshawks has been postponed to later in the year, details in the next newsletter.

## NEWS FROM THE BRECKS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT



### "Local Guides" Walks in the Brecks, organised by the Brecks Countryside Project

**Thursday 9 June 7 – 9 pm, Eriswell (£2, to include refreshments) (0.5 mile)**  
History and wild flowers with local experts Alan Benton and Yvonne Leonard

**Sunday 10 July 10 am – 2 pm Great Hockham (6 miles)**  
Explore the forest and fields around the village with local historian Geoff Stuart

**Sunday 2 October 10 am – 1pm Honington (3.5 miles)**  
Follow the River Blackbourne on the village circular route with local resident Robin Howe

All walks are free of charge, except as shown, but please book in advance. For further details, or to book a place, please call 01842 765400, or email [brecks.project@et.suffolkcc.gov.uk](mailto:brecks.project@et.suffolkcc.gov.uk)  
Sturdy footwear recommended.

### Brecks Conference

The Brecks Conference will be held on 16 September at Elveden Hall. It is an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of the last ten years, and look forward to the new challenges facing the area, bringing together the diverse interests in wildlife and landscape conservation, the historic environment and today's land managers. Come and learn more about the region and exchange ideas about looking after its special qualities. Speakers will include Tom Williamson (UEA), Richard Mabey (freelance writer), Richard Powell (RSPB regional director) and many local specialists. Further details will be given in the next newsletter.

## WHAT'S ON

### Forthcoming Society events

#### Wednesday 22 June

Evening field trip (6.30pm start) with botanist Yvonne Leonard to Devil's Ditch near Newmarket to see chalkland flora, including the very rare and spectacular lizard orchid. Numbers limited and places must be booked in advance, please; tel. James Parry on 01366 328676.

#### Friday 29 July

Annual summer barbecue at The Maltings, Garboldisham, by kind invitation of Wendy Johnston. £6 to include food (barbecued meats, salad and dessert), please bring your own drink. Tickets in advance only, from Sue Whittlely on 01366 328190.

#### Tuesday 18 October

Evening talk by Robin Page, a joint event with the Friends of Thetford Forest. Robin Page is a founder member of honorary director of The Countryside Restoration Trust, a charity dedicated to the protection and restoration of the countryside for sustainable agriculture and quality food production. He writes and broadcasts on farming and rural issues and hosted the 'One Man and His Dog' series. Santon Downham Village Hall. Details of time and admission price in next newsletter.

#### November

Talk by Edward Martin, Suffolk County Council Archaeologist.  
See next newsletter for details.

#### Saturday 10 December

Christmas Extravaganza at the Houghton Centre! Details in next newsletter.

#### The Breckland Society

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## BRECKS HOTSPOT FOR BIRDSONG FILLS UP FOR SUMMER

*Now is the best time of year to enjoy birdsong. This is a period of frenzied activity for all species of bird, as they endeavour to find a mate, secure territory and prepare for breeding. Some of the most impressive birdsong can be heard at Foulde Common, between Foulde and Oxborough. This is an outstanding area of flower-rich grassland, blackthorn and hawthorn scrub and birch and alder carr (wet woodland).*

As well as an impressive list of resident species, Foulde Common also supports a range of interesting summer migrants. Many of these arrived by mid-April, and have since been joined by later arrivals such as spotted flycatcher and turtle dove. Among the most notable recent arrivals have been large numbers of willow warbler, piling in from their wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa. Up to 20 can be heard singing on the common at the moment, an increase on previous years. Other birds easy to hear include chiff chaff, blackcap, whitethroat and lesser whitethroat, yellowhammer, chaffinch, various tits, song and mistle thrush, blackbird and cuckoo.



*Woodcock can be seen patrolling their territory at dusk, in a display flight known as "roding"*

Foulde Common is noted as a traditional site for nightingale. These summer migrants usually arrive by the middle of April, but in recent years their numbers have declined. This is because the thick scrub which they favour has been seriously depleted by muntjac deer. Efforts to control numbers of muntjac are in hand, but without drastic action it is possible that nightingales may disappear from the common. Meanwhile, the wet area in the centre of the common provides excellent habitat for birds requiring very dense cover, such

as the enigmatic grasshopper warbler. This is one of the most difficult birds to see, as it skulks in the thickest vegetation available, yet it has one of the most distinctive songs: a constant reeling sound, very reminiscent of a fisherman's reel. An evening visit to the common provides the best opportunity to hear this bird, which often sings throughout the night.

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## SOCIETY SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2005 NOW DUE!

April 5th was the renewal date for Society subscriptions. In the two years since the Society's creation, we have held more than 20 events, ranging from lectures on local history and heritage to field trips, drama and concerts.

Membership has continue to grow strongly, and we achieved a very high rate of renewals this time last year. We very much hope to repeat this for 2005, and in anticipation of your continued support we enclose a membership renewal form.

The Society's profile locally continues to grow. A recent article in the Eastern Daily Press referred to "the influential Breckland Society", and there is every indication that our Vernacular Architecture Project will help us to consolidate our reputation for providing an independent and objective voice on matters affecting the Brecks.

The continued success of the Society will depend on the involvement and support of its members. We therefore encourage you to let us know about areas of activity in which you think the Society should become engaged, as well as visits and lectures that you would like to see us organise.

In particular, contributions to the Newsletter are always welcome!

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Other nocturnal visitors include woodcock, a long-billed wading bird which nests in the wet woodland and which can be seen patrolling its territory at dusk, in a display flight known as "roding". Several pairs nest on the common. Four species of owl are also present: barn, long-eared, little and tawny.

The total number of bird species recorded at Foulde Common is approximately 100, making it one of the most important bird sites in the Brecks. It is also a notable location for plants and butterflies, about which more in the next newsletter.

There is open access to Foulde Common, but please stick to the obvious tracks, and be careful not to disturb nesting birds or trample wild flowers. **Dogs must be kept on leads at all times**, particularly at this time of the year, when ground-nesting birds are very vulnerable to disturbance.

*The long-eared owl, one of four species of owl present on Foulde Common*



## ARCHITECTURE PROJECT UPDATE

*The Society's survey of Breckland's vernacular architecture is now well under way, with 55 villages and hamlets being surveyed by 41 well-trained volunteers.*



Two training days were held at Oak Lodge, the Community Education Building at High Lodge Forest Centre, attended by 31 trainee surveyors. Each one was equipped with a clipboard and a folder containing descriptions of architectural styles, hints on dating buildings, and some survey forms. Anne Mason, with the

help of a variety of slides of Breckland houses, explained the contents of the survey packs and gave a helpful talk on how to date buildings and recognise materials and styles. All participants had a chance to test these new skills during the afternoon; one group went to Oxborough with James Parry and the other went to Mundford with Anne, to try out the forms, although the frequent flurries of snow and a bitterly cold wind didn't make for ideal conditions!

Some people have already started their surveys and have reported considerable interest from house owners, including being invited to see inside and view documents.

While the survey finishing date is not until December, the next part of the project, the setting up of a database to record the results, is now beginning. Later this year, the oral history and the workshops will be planned in more detail.

If surveyors need more forms, please contact Sue Whittle, James Parry or Anne Mason. Digital cameras will be provided as and when you need them — please ask.

Finally, a very special 'thank you' to all of you who are carrying out the survey and making the project possible.

## MILDENHALL WARREN LODGE OPEN DAY

If you have not already been to Mildenhall Warren Lodge, or would like to make another visit and bring some friends, then **Spring Bank Holiday Monday, 30th May** is the date to remember!

The lodge will be open from **11am to 4pm**, the only time in the year that you can go inside this medieval building. There will be a display about the history of the warren, where rabbits were farmed for their meat and fur from the fourteenth to the early twentieth century, and also walks across the warren area.

Friends of Thetford Forest restored the lodge with grants from English Heritage, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Forest Heath District Council and secured its removal from the 'Buildings at Risk' Register.

You can combine this with a visit to the **Rex Graham Reserve** for rare plants, nearby, as it is also holding its annual Open Day on 30th May. Please put this date in your diaries and make a visit to this part of Thetford Forest Park.

The warren lodge is situated in Mildenhall Woods to the east of Mildenhall. Grid Reference TL74067556. It is on the minor road which links the A1065 and the A11 north of Barton Mills roundabout. From the A1065, the minor road is signed 'Household Waste Site; Elveden', and from the A11 it is signed as 'Mildenhall'.

Please turn in to the signed car-parking area. It is then about ten minutes walk up the hill to the lodge.

## WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

*Viewpoint is an opportunity for members of the Society to air their views on subjects of interest to other members and/or of relevance to the work of the Society. We welcome members' submissions and comments, but make the point that any opinions expressed are those of the individual(s) concerned and not necessarily of the Society (although of course we always listen to what you have to say!). In this edition, John Crouch writes about wildlife management, in which he has been involved since 1962.*

All forms of wildlife can become a nuisance at times, even protected species such as badgers and otters. Others, including wild rabbits, the American mink and some rodents, can be categorized as outright pests, for various reasons. One accepts that rats, some mouse species and mink should be controlled for various reasons, because they cause damage to the environment, or because they are disease carriers.

However, other creatures can be prevented from causing damage by the judicious use of repellents and exclusion methods. For example, a client sought advice for a problem with wood mice climbing up the legs of her guinea pig hutches and eating the pets' food. The problem was solved by removing the wooden legs and replacing them with smooth tubular steel, which the mice were unable to climb.

Another client had a problem with grey squirrels entering the loft of his house. As he rather liked the squirrels, he requested that the animals be trapped and released elsewhere, rather than be killed. There is a legal consideration in this case, insofar as grey squirrels are subject to the Imported Animals Act 1932 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which make it illegal to kill the squirrels. The answer in this case was to exclude them from entering the roof space. The owner could then happily live with the squirrels in his garden, which was very large with many mature trees.



*After half a century of decline, otters are being recorded again in places where they used to thrive*

Even the common wasp, which can instill fear and in some cases cause life-threatening conditions, need not be destroyed in every case. A nest of wasps can be of great help to the gardener: the workers feed the larvae in the nest on masticated insects, many of which are regarded as pests themselves.

One quite often encounters a lack of understanding amongst the public in relation to wildlife. In an effort to broaden the knowledge and encourage more interaction with wildlife, two email groups have been established. One is for Norfolk wildlife and the other for badgers in Norfolk. These groups are in their



*Badgers are more common in Breckland than you might suppose*

infancy, but perhaps some members of the Breckland Society would be interested in joining the groups and submitting wildlife sightings, photographs, news items etc. Of particular interest are recordings of dead badgers, as the University of Wales requires DNA samples of this species. John collects and submits the samples from dead badgers, eg road casualties.

### The Chairman adds:

I would very much encourage members to take up John Crouch's suggestion of getting more involved in recording local wildlife, particularly species such as the badger. These nocturnal mammals are more widely distributed in the Brecks than hitherto supposed, but sadly the most frequent way of recording them is via roadside casualties, especially on the fast roads through Thetford Forest. Sometimes badgers turn up in quite unlikely situations: I recently saw a roadside corpse alongside the A134 near Crimplysham, in an area of open fields some way from likely badger habitat. There have been cases in the past of badgers killed in illegal baiting being taken from the site of their death and then hurled from cars to make them look like traffic casualties, although there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case at Crimplysham. There is much misinformation surrounding badgers, and we hope to be able to invite John to speak to the Society about badgers and, indeed, wildlife generally, later in the year. Meanwhile, do please send him any records you may have.

The group details are as follows:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NorfolkWildlife>  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/badgersinnorfolk>

John Crouch can be contacted on: 07850 956493 or by email at [johncrouchwarrener@hotmail.com](mailto:johncrouchwarrener@hotmail.com)