

September 2005

ASYLUM SEEKERS MOVE IN TO UPPER HOUSES

Parish Council land in the village is being used to build refuges to take up to 50 asylum seekers. At present about 15 individuals have been moved onto the site near Upper Houses and if needed, another 30 will be allowed here, in due course. These immigrants are being forced out of their present homes because officials have commandeered the land where they have lived for generations.

There will be no extra cost to council taxpayers as the building work has all been carried out with volunteer labour, using donated materials. These refugees come from just over the border in Suffolk. Our new residents are in fact reptiles, Common Lizards and Slow-worms. They come from two building sites, the old Priors football ground in Sudbury and the Bakers Mill site in Gt. Cornard. As they are both endangered species, planning conditions insist that they are cleared from these sites before new building can begin.

Our conservation site, Little Dean Spinney, was selected as being an ideal release site for the little reptiles. This was agreed once the consultants had visited the site and confirmed that neither of the species were already living there.



So far 11 lizards and 4 slow-worms have been released onto the site.

Three log piles were built to provide basking spots for the lizards and small sheets of tin, laid flat, make good places for the slow-worms to hide. We already have grass snakes living up there.

Hopefully many of you will visit Little Dean Spinney, it's a nice peaceful spot, with great views and even seats to relax on. This summer there have been good numbers of butterflies there, including Small Tortoiseshell, Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Large & Small Skipper. I would be interested to hear from anyone who sees lizards or slow-worms, or indeed anything else of interest up there.

Update 2.9.05

George Millins, who is responsible for catching the reptiles from the endangered sites and releasing them on to Little Dean Spinney, reports: - So far, 45 Common Lizards and 23 Slow-worms have been released, including many pregnant females. On his last visit to the site, George reported seeing 9 juvenile lizards, which had obviously been born on the site. These will hopefully remain to establish a resident colony. With luck the Slow-worms should do the same.

December 2005

FIRST ASYLUM SEEKERS, NOW A MUGGING!

After my report in the last "What's On" on the asylum seekers at Upper Houses, I wondered if things could get any worse. It seems that they can. The other day we

witnessed a mugging, in broad daylight, near Brakey Hill. Two black ruffians attacked one of our local residents robbing her of a hard earned dinner, fortunately, she was carrying no valuables. It was only the arrival of another walker on the footpath that put an end to the affair. I must admit to being a little disappointed that this little drama was broken up, it was getting interesting!

The "victim" was a hen sparrow-hawk, she had struck down a woodpigeon and was about to enjoy her meal, out in the field, when she was attacked by two carrion crows. One on either side of her, she shielded her catch with her wings whilst repelling the thrusts of the crows' beaks. Being disturbed by the arrival of the other human, the sparrow-hawk took flight, shortly followed by the crows. Had she picked a smaller prey, the hawk would no doubt have taken it with her, but a full grown pigeon was just too much for her to lift off with. It's not often that sparrow-hawks will tackle anything as large as a woodpigeon, perhaps this one learnt a useful lesson!

Needless to say, when we passed the spot about half an hour later, the crows were enjoying their ill-gotten gains.

Actually I have noticed an alarming increase in the numbers of carrion crows over the last few years, which is not good news for the local songbird population. They, like magpies, are all too efficient at seeking out nests and taking the eggs or young. I have always assumed that if you see more than about ten large black birds in a flock, they will be rooks. I was horrified the other day when a flock of about twenty "large black birds" in the distance turned out to be carrion crows when viewed through the telescope, not a good omen.



For several years, I have regularly kept a nature diary. Like all diaries it's useful to look back in, but as it goes through the highlights of the natural year, it is also a great source for predicting what to look out for in the months ahead. So what can we look forward to in the next couple of months?

The earliest truly wild flower we can expect to see (snowdrops are only escapes into the wild in our area) is dogs mercury, an insignificant woodland plant, with a small green flower. More noticeable is the celandine, with bright yellow petals, the odd one peeping through the roadside verges as early as January. By early March, there will be shining carpets of them.

In the garden, those of us that feed the birds, will be rewarded with a steady stream of the smaller birds, including occasionally, coal tits, long-tailed tits, gold finches and even siskins. In a hard spell you may also get fieldfares and redwings visiting, especially if you throw out some old apples. These last two are winter visitors to Britain, returning to Scandinavia to nest in the spring. They are members of the thrush family.