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**Essex**  
Wildlife Trust

## Uttlesford Local Group

### December 2023

We reach the midwinter period, and while many of the wild plants and animals slow down, hibernate, or migrate to warmer places, our work party is in its busiest season.

Now is the time for coppicing our woodlands, continuing the kind of management which has taken place for centuries, and which has shaped these woods. Before the age of fossil fuels and plastics the woods were the source of useful products, for making fences, tools, furniture and many other domestic items, and for providing fuel to heat homes and to cook food.

So after a period of about 18 years another section of the woodlands in both West Wood and Shadwell Wood is being coppiced, and this will let in the light and allow the oxlips, orchids and other flowering plants their time in the sun. Open sunny areas encourage butterflies. Then as the trees re-grow into the bush stage they will become important for nesting birds. We keep the cycle of life turning.

As well as running our local Work Party meetings to keep the Essex Wildlife Trust nature reserves in good condition, some of our active volunteers also take part in the Trust's River Champions project. Our River Champions are a vital part in helping us monitor, protect and enhance local river habitats, as well as initiate local river restoration projects. Here are a couple of still photos from a video trail camera operated by our local River Champions, both taken on the Chelmer as it passes through Thaxted. The photos are taken in the pitch dark at night, using infra-red light.

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Photos courtesy of Will Cockerell.

The rafts are mink traps that form part of an East Anglian project to eradicate American mink from the UK, of which EWT is an active member. Local groups of Volunteer River Wardens monitor the traps as part of their role in monitoring and improving the river environment. Other activities include sampling for river fly larva and removing another invasive species, Himalayan Balsam.

The otters seem to like the roof of the rafts as places to leave their spraint, as they are elevated above the river and aren't prone to being washed away quite so easily as a log on the bank. The rafts also make handy dining tables to eat the fish that the otters catch.

You can see more on the Wild Thaxted Facebook page including one of the Otter Videos - <https://www.facebook.com/wildthaxted/>

We wish you a very Happy Christmas and a good New Year, and please remember to put out food and a dish of fresh water for the birds.

Tony Morton  
Chair, Uttlesford Local Group, Essex Wildlife Trust

The Uttlesford Local Group runs weekday work parties on Tuesday and Thursday mornings between 9:30 and 12 noon at the nine nature reserves in our district, moving around them as the seasonal work requires. Broadly speaking in the winter months this involves woodland coppicing, in summer meadow management and in the autumn hay cutting and raking. Additional meetings are held at Shadwell Wood on the second and fourth Sunday mornings from September to April to carry out the winter coppicing. These events are a great way of learning how habitats work and seeing wildlife, and are sociable and great fun.

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