



Essex
Wildlife Trust

Uttlesford Local Group

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.

Ash Dieback



This month our Newsletter focuses upon West Wood, where our work party has been meeting for the last few months to carry out winter coppice work, and general maintenance tasks. Although it has gone out of the News, the Ash Dieback disease continues to have an impact, and many of the large Ash trees have had to be felled where they are close to the paths and pose a risk to passers-by. This was done by contractors rather than by our volunteers, because they present a hazard which requires professional work. We have the task of clearing up the felled trees from the paths and grassland areas, as shown in the photo.

Fascines



Our work is mainly creative, providing the wide range of habitat conditions which give the most opportunities to wildlife species. As a change from cutting coppice trees we have been using a time-honoured traditional technique using the cut branches to make 'Fascines'. 'What are They?', I hear you ask. A fascine /fə'si:n/ is a rough bundle of brushwood or other material used for strengthening an earthen structure, or making a path across uneven or wet terrain. Typical uses are protecting the banks of streams from erosion (a fascine mattress), covering marshland, or providing ground improvement in a manner similar to that of modern geotextiles. Here is a photo of the bundles which we have made, and we intend to use them at the Aubrey Buxton Reserve to stabilise the edges of the ponds which have been eroded due to dogs entering and leaving the ponds. They will be secured by stakes to create a new edge to the ponds.

Spring Wildlife



Spring is well advanced, and we have listened to the woodpeckers drumming while we work, accompanied by a chorus of birdsong. Some of our volunteers are doing bird surveys in West Wood and have discovered a small population of Marsh Tit, a notable find of a species which has been in decline in Essex. We still have the right habitat conditions for them here. The Spring flowers have also been visible, with our Oxlips and Early Purple Orchids bringing some colour. Another rarity of old woodlands is Herb Paris, and we discovered a large clump of the plant as shown in the photo. It's Latin name is *Paris quadrifolia*, meaning 4 leaves, but it can also have 3, 5 and 6 leaves, but always only a single flower in the centre of the leaves which eventually makes a single black/purple berry. The whole plant is poisonous so it does not get eaten by the numerous deer in the wood.

Tony Morton, Chair, Uttlesford Local Group, Essex Wildlife Trust

