

NEW CHAIRMAN FOR THE BRECKLAND SOCIETY!

At the Society's 2014 AGM, held on 6 June in the delightful surroundings of Gooderstone Water Gardens, James Parry stood down as chairman after 11 years at the helm. He has been replaced by Bob Baker, who lives with his wife Jennie in the quintessential Brecks village of Shingham.



New Chairman, Bob Baker (left) with James Parry at the AGM in June

"We have been visiting the Brecks for about 30 years now," says Bob, "and living here for much of that time. Jennie and I joined the Society eight years ago and were very involved in the vernacular architecture project, carrying out survey work in Lakenheath. I was still working then, and Jennie did most of the footwork!"

Bob's professional background is as a chartered engineer working in energy conservation. Back in the 1970s he ran the European Energy Programme for a major chemical company, covering everything from combined heat and power plants to insulation, operator training and heat recovery. He remains a member of the Institute of Energy and his more recent projects have included anaerobic digesters and the building of small power stations on Pacific islands such as Palau in Micronesia—nice work if you can get it!

Rather less glamorously, Bob was also involved with project managing some of the UK privatisation initiatives of recent years. His other voluntary activities have included serving as chairman of the Audit Committee at Nottingham University (where he is still a member of Court), the Cornell Club of London selection committee (which sends UK students to the USA each summer), and two terms as Director of The Roehampton Club in London (where he and Jennie have been members for over 30 years).

"Being a member of the Breckland Society has opened my eyes to what a diverse and fascinating part of the world this is,"

says Bob. Through the Society's events both Jennie and I have learnt so much about the local heritage and wildlife. I now know the difference between a dragonfly and a damselfly, for example!

I see the role of the Society as continuing to further enjoyment and awareness of the area and to foster a sense of pride in the Brecks."

Cont'd on page 2

WHAT'S ON

forthcoming Society events

Sunday 10 August, 11 am

Summer stroll, with Anne Mason and Sue Pennell, at Mildenhall Warren. See page 3 for details.

Friday 12 September, 6.30 pm

Visit to Stone Curlew Roost at Cavenham Heath, with the RSPB. Members free, non-members £5.

Friday 17 October, 7 pm

Hidden Oxburgh: behind the scenes at Oxburgh Hall with the National Trust.

Members £15, non-members £18, to include refreshments
Booking essential.

Friday 12 December, 7-9 pm

A walk and stargazing in Thetford Forest, led by the Forestry Commission and Breckland Astronomical Society, followed by seasonal refreshments

Members £10, non-members £13
Booking essential.

See www.brecsoc.org.uk/news-and-events

For more information about Society events, please email info@brecsoc.org.uk

Cont'd from page 1

Meanwhile outgoing chairman James Parry will remain actively involved with the Society, in particular via Breaking New Ground and through representing the Society on the board of Brandon Country Park. "I've really enjoyed my eleven years as chairman of the Society," says James. "It's incredible to think that what started off as a few scribbles on the back of an envelope and a meeting

around the kitchen table of one of our founding members has led to such a vibrant and important local organisation. The Society punches way above its weight and we are well established as a leading voice in the Brecks and indeed more widely in East Anglia. I know Bob and the Society's committee will carry on building our profile and ensuring that the Society continues to flourish and be listened to."

BRECKLAND BAT PROJECT NEWS

A grant of £750 from the Breckland Society led to the formation earlier this year of the Breckland Bat Project, which was launched in May. The Society's grant made possible the purchase of a bat detection kit, which is available to all members to set up overnight in their garden and learn what bat species may be living there. The purpose of the project is to improve our understanding of the status of bats across the Brecks, which is already known to be one of the bat hotspots in eastern England.

There has been a great take-up so far, with many members trying out the kit and discovering that they have as many as seven or eight bat species using their gardens! Results to date indicate that many Brecks sites have good bat populations and that certain species, previously thought rare or absent, are in fact quite widely distributed and were simply under-recorded before. Especially interesting is the surprising number of records of Barbastelle Bat, previously noted from only a handful of locations in Norfolk and Suffolk but which now appears to have something of a stronghold in the Brecks. One other revelation is the presence in the Brecks of the Nathusius Pipistrelle, a tiny migratory species from Europe with only a toehold in East Anglia. More revelations can be expected as the summer unfolds. The project will run for at least two full seasons (May to September) and all members are encouraged to take part—no previous bat experience is required! Full information on how to get involved can be found on the Society's website at www.brecsoc.org.uk/projects/bat-project

The beauty in the beast : a Barbastelle bat



Photo by Andrew Palmer (Herts & BedsBat Group)

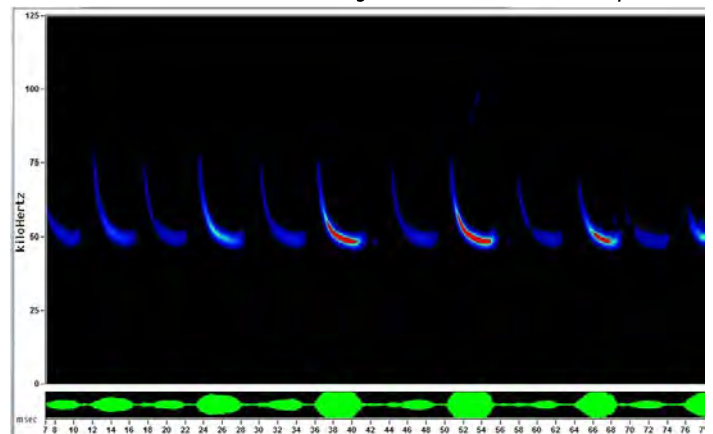


Society member John Davies, setting up the bat detection kit

Meanwhile, the Norfolk Bat Survey, with which the Society is working on the Breckland Bat Project, has recently received an award from the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership. This was given in recognition of the huge number of "Citizen Scientists" that the survey project has inspired to take part in recording bats in their local area since its inception in 2013.

For more details, see www.batsurvey.org

Each bat species has a distinctive echo-location pattern; this sonogram is from a Common Pipistrelle.



THE ROLE OF BRECKLAND IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR: PART II

In her first article about World War One, in the April newsletter, Anne Mason looked at how the devastation of the nation's timber resource led to the setting-up in 1919 of the Forestry Commission. In this second article Anne focuses on the places in Breckland associated with the First World War of 1914-18.

Whilst the Brecks played a relatively limited role in defence compared to the East Coast towns for instance, there were some significant military sites locally. With so many men joining up, training was crucial and something that required large open spaces. In 1912, two years before the First World War began, a series of military manoeuvres were held outside Thetford, mostly on the heathland of the warren, with 30,000 troops taking part. After war between Britain and Germany was declared on 4 August 1914, large numbers of soldiers passed through the area and gathered at Thetford on their way to the front line over the Channel. Many of them received military training at the army camp on Barnham Cross Common.

In 1912, the Royal Flying Corps was established and a grass landing strip made at Worlington, near Mildenhall. A training airfield was later opened on the former Snarehill Warren for squadrons destined for France, and early in 1918 a School of Bombing and Navigation was set up there. A night-flying landing ground was constructed at Lakenheath for the newly-formed Royal Naval Air Service and others followed, on Gooderstone and Methwold Warrens. In 1916, Harling Road (Roudham) became a Home Defence Station operating BE2s against Zeppelins.



Snarehill military camp in 1912, with planes belonging to the newly formed Royal Flying Corps. Courtesy of Norfolk Museums Service.

Sites in the Brecks were used for secret testing of both tanks and aeroplanes. Tanks were trialled at a base near Elveden, watched by the then Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill, and planes were tested at the Snarehill Aerodrome.

The large estates were affected too, not least because they lost owners and heirs and their traditional labour force to the War. In 1920, the Santon Downham Estate was described as a "wilderness... not a single farm let or occupied and no land under cultivation; even the hall itself was untenanted". Only the avenues of limes and "a few quasi-ornamental trees" were left. In fact, nearly all its trees planted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were requisitioned by the Board of Trade Timber Supply.

The present bridge over the Little Ouse at Santon Downham was erected in sections by the Canadian Army for the Home Grown Timber Board and served a logging line two and a half miles long, stretching from High Lodge to sawmills by the river, west of the current railway line. A turntable at School Cottage serviced a branch line to Little Lodge Farm. A Bagnall Locomotive

pulled the timber trucks and was housed in a shed to the east of the shop (the old post office) in Santon Downham. The line was lifted in the 1920s and its exact route has still to be found.

The hall itself was home to the Canadian Forestry Corps and then to German prisoners of war. The Forestry Commission tried to find a buyer prepared to spend money on restoration but when no one showed interest the hall was demolished in 1927 (the lead from the roof was sold and met the cost of demolition). The situation was similar at Didlington, where only the remnants of a few "belts and clumps" remained.

Lynford Hall was occupied by the War Office and became an auxiliary hospital. It very nearly suffered the same fate as Santon Downham Hall, but instead was bought by timber merchant Sir James Calder, who restored it. There was also a hospital at the Thetford Army Camp, with 12 beds in huts. On the edge of the Brecks, Ampton Hall was taken over for use by the Red Cross from October 1914 to January 1919 and during that time treated 6,568 sick or wounded soldiers.

One of the Breckland Society's future projects for the "Breaking New Ground" Landscape Partnership Scheme, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, is "The Military History of the Brecks" and this will provide opportunities to research the impact of the First World War on the landscape and the people of Breckland.

Join us for an informal

summer stroll

On Sunday 10 August, 11 am

and bring a picnic!

Join Anne Mason and Sue Pennell to follow the circular walk across part of the medieval **Mildenhall Warren** and see inside the 600-year-old warren lodge, recently conserved with a new roof of Douglas fir from East Anglia's forest. The walk is about 2 miles and includes a prehistoric site, some of the warren banks, as well as an old pine shelter belt and views to Codson Hill.

Anne, who knows the area well, will describe the importance of rabbit warrening to the history of the Brecks and we may well also discover plants, butterflies and birds associated with this land management and that now practised by the Forestry Commission.

Directions: The walk and the warren lodge are in Mildenhall Woods, north of the Barton Mills roundabout. From the A1065, the minor road (on the left coming south from Brandon and on the right coming north from Barton Mills) is signed 'Household Waste Site and 'Road Ahead Closed'. Ignoring the 'Road Closed' sign, turn here and drive past the Household Waste Site to the Forestry Commission car-parking area, signed 'Mildenhall Warren Lodge'.

Grid Reference: TL735752

Please let us know if you are coming along

email: info@brecsoc.org.uk
or telephone 01366 328452

RECENT EVENT

Dragonfly study day, Saturday 19 July

What a wonderful day! A group of us (including one gallant soul from Felixstowe!) gathered at East Wretham village hall for an introduction by Dr Pam Taylor. Pam has been Norfolk Dragonfly Recorder since the mid-1990s, having helped compile the first Dragonfly Survey and Atlas for Norfolk between 1987 and 1989—she is one of the leading dragonfly experts in Britain.

With the help of photographs, Pam introduced us to the different types of dragonfly (hawkers, chasers, darters and damselflies), and their basic shapes and anatomy. We learned about their life cycle, which consists of a long underwater larval phase that varies from eight weeks to five years, depending on the species, followed by a relatively short adult, winged, phase. They are visual hunters, with impressive vision. Their large compound eyes are composed of up to 30,000 facets. They are able to perceive colour, as well as ultraviolet and polarised light, which allows them to see reflections of light on water. And they



The group, following dragonflies on Thompson Common

have amazing powers of flight—their wings are connected to strong flight muscles, making them extremely agile and manoeuvrable, able to fly forwards, backwards, sideways, to hover and to change direction and speed rapidly.

After a picnic lunch we headed off to Thompson Common for the field trip. The weather forecast had been dreadful, and we had been promised a day of rain, some of it torrential. Not the best outlook for an afternoon looking for dragonflies! But we were lucky ... there was no rain whatever. The day grew sunnier and warmer as it went on and the conditions could not have been better. We found 12 out of the 27 possible varieties, some of them giving great views.

Pam is the best sort of enthusiast, very knowledgeable and good at imparting that knowledge. She catches and handles dragonflies with practised and enviable ease, allowing those with her a fabulous close-up view, before releasing the insects to continue their flight.

And these are what we found:

- Scarce Emerald Damselfly – lots, including a few pairs
- Emerald Damselfly – several
- Blue-tailed Damselfly – several, including different colour-form females and a few pairs
- Common Blue Damselfly – lots
- Azure Damselfly – lots



Emperor Dragonfly

Photo by David Kitching

- Emperor Dragonfly – several, including females egg-laying
- Southern Hawker – one hunting the edge of the trees
- Brown Hawker – several, including two females egg-laying
- Migrant Hawker – one flying over the open meadow
- Four-spotted Chaser – several, including a few females egg-laying
- Common Darter – a few, including one pair
- Ruddy Darter – lots, including several pairs egg-laying

Anyone wishing to find out about dragonflies can visit the British Dragonfly Society website at www.british-dragonflies.org.uk



Pam holding a female Ruddy Darter

If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter, please contact the Editor by email: lizdittner@tiscali.co.uk or tel 01366 727813