



## Wednesday 7 June 2023 – guided tour of Martlesham Wilds

15 of us attended this evening guided tour of Martlesham Wilds led by Charlie Zakss of Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

The land that comprises Martlesham Wilds has been an organic farm for around 15 years, and this history of sympathetic land management gives hope for the recovery of nature here when farming on the site comes to an end in autumn 2023 – indeed it is already home to an abundance of wildlife. In large part the Trust will follow an ethos of letting nature lead its own recovery on the reserve, keeping active interventions to a minimum, and waiting to see what nature will surprise us with as the reserve develops and matures.



One of our first stops after setting off was to view the meadow, which has been left unfertilised and unaccessed by the farmer for many years to encourage wildflowers. The hope is that this meadow will constitute a vital seedbank that will help propagate naturally other parts of the reserve.



Since starting two months ago, the new warden for the reserve has been kept busy surveying the reserve to document the current levels of biodiversity. It will be important to secure this baseline so that future data can help demonstrate the impacts of interventions and support the engagement work of the Trust as they share the lessons learnt with other landowners to help them understand what works (and just as importantly, what doesn't work) and help inform and direct their own nature recovery efforts. Bat surveys have already revealed the presence of Daubenton's bats and barbastelles, indicators of a healthy ecosystem.

As we entered the Avenue of Ancient Oak, Charlie invited us to listen and use our senses, as we enjoyed hearing and seeing the many birds, and their fledglings, enjoying the tranquil evening.

The Trust has a vision of using cattle to help graze some of the land, so one of the challenges the Trust will face will be balancing the needs of dog walkers with the welfare of the livestock, so we can expect the Trust to erect fences to prevent contact between dogs and grazing animals.

The cabling for the major windfarm offshore, East Anglia ONE, runs under the reserve. Nature is now recovering since its installation a few years ago, but vegetation over the course of the cable must continue to be kept short.



There is currently just the sole bench, situated opposite a bird feeding station in the little glade of young trees, on the entire reserve, and the Trust intends to provide more seating including memorial benches in the near future. The Trust is conscious that, at present, much of the routes through the reserve are largely inaccessible to users of wheelchairs and mobility scooters, and that enabling access for all will be one of the major challenges it faces here. Introducing permissive footpaths, with shorter 'walking loops' is one way they are hoping to improve this.



Whilst the trees that make up this little glade were planted by the farmer, the Trust does not intend to plant any trees on the reserve and will rather wait to leave to grow, what will grow naturally. The expectation is that brambles will grow on some of the fields, and that these will in turn provide natural "tree nurseries" where saplings can grow in safety from rabbits and other grazers, whilst also being great cover for nightingales and other small animals.

As we walked alongside a reedbed dividing two fields, we heard Cetti's warblers and skylarks, and spotted amongst the reeds some peculiar galls which we learnt were called "reed cigar galls", which are created by the frit fly *Lipara lucens*. The fly lays its eggs on the reed, and when the larva hatches, its saliva disrupts the chemical balance of hormones of the reed, causing the gall to form in which the single larva of the fly will incubate and eventually pupate.



Skylarks breed around the grazing marshes on the reserve, and good numbers of otters and water voles are also present. As we continued along the path alongside the creek, we saw wading birds including



oystercatchers, shelducks, and little egrets. The Trust plans to dig shallow fresh water scrapes to benefit other birds too.

The whole reserve covers 117 hectares, so we were only able to see a small part of it as we walked round. Martlesham Wilds is a new nature reserve for Suffolk, having been acquired by the Trust with the aid of a substantial legacy gift, with the purchase of the land completed by a loan of £1 million, for which the Trust now need to raise the funds for. If you can help, donations can be made by visiting: [Please help us create Martlesham Wilds | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#)

