

Delightful Dengie

I nearly didn't join Roy when he took the caravan for a pre-hol test run. Just down the road in Dengie didn't sound very exciting and the weather was very iffy.

But, as is a woman's prerogative, I changed my mind and after the Wednesday session of table tennis, headed down to the CL (5 caravan max). Ours was the only van there. Dannemora is a beautifully kept, quiet site, and though it is only half an acre, the accessible field in front is 4 times the size, with open views. Yes there are 16 wind turbines to look at, but they didn't mar the overall panorama too much.

That evening I walked up the lane to the nearby village hall where a brand new village sign has been erected, courtesy of G B Finch, who operate at the gravel workings in Asheldham. It features St James's Church at the top, below a wheat sheaf, indicating the fertile land (hence its being covered in turbines and now solar panels!!); a cow being milked – the 'Wick' in the name of many of the farms on the Dengie, is an old word for farm or settlement – and the last section on the sign is of a barn owl, the farms and marshland being perfect habitat for them.

I returned to the junction and turned left to pass Dengie Manor, tucked away behind a screen of trees, then 14th century St. James's Church with its red tiled roof. On the far side of an attractive converted barn was a large field of wildflowers, poppies highlighting boldly amongst chamomile, mustard and ox eye daisies, the colours intensified in the evening light. Hares darted around, sometimes just the brown tips of their long ears giving their presence away, Skylarks rising and singing. I heard a cuckoo calling near to a large pond, then another calling from the opposite direction but with a cuckoo? – "in June, they change their tune"... A corn bunting gave its jingling call from an electric wire overhead. Further down the lane a small ornamental metal gate led into an almost hidden cemetery, very peaceful amongst the trees.

I made my way back then as I had been out quite some time; as I entered the lawned field in front of our site the sun was setting, leaving an explosion of orange in the mackerel sky.

Sitting in the caravan we watched as the hares chased one another around the field, looking like Joeys with their long back legs.

Next morning, after a peaceful night's sleep, we saw a muntjac deer walk into the field through the hedge, it was spooked by a car so ran off again.

After breakfast I went back to the field with the wildflowers in, taking the footpath alongside it which eventually brought me out on the Southminster road. Heading towards Tillingham, I took a footpath on the right which led into a field of wheat, the next section had a border of tall ox-eye daisies, there were a few blue butterflies collecting nectar from their golden centres (*see photo below*), also a few brown ones (I'm not very good on identifying moths and butterflies). There were chiff chaff singing, a stock dove, more corn buntings, chaffinch and even a yellow hammer – its "a little bit of bread and no cheese" makes it identifiable

even when you can't see it. A track led me back to the road at Keelings. The house on the corner had a magnificent Cornus Kousa hybrid in flower in its yard, its creamy pink bracts at their best.

In 15 minutes I was back at the van and after a coffee it was time for me to leave.

I really hadn't expected to enjoy this brief stay in the Dengie, it was like stepping back in time. The Wildlife and Ruralness were amazing. It's true the saying "you don't know what's in your own backyard". Roy and I will definitely be returning. Hopefully I will get to see/hear some owls next time.

Lynne Leech

(For Jill Taylor, who kindly said she enjoyed the write ups I did in the past.)

