



## The Wildlife of the Ouse Valley Presented by Michael Blencowe.

Fri 14<sup>th</sup> October 2016

Michael is a member of the Sussex Wildlife Trust and has, over the years, accumulated a vast amount of knowledge of both plants and animals of all types that inhabit the Ouse Valley. His talk focussed on the lowest part of the river, between Newhaven and Barcombe. The accompanying slides were a real eye opener to the things on our own doorstep that most of us pay scant attention to, possibly seeing just a couple of those mentioned through the course of a year.

Some of the rarer observations related to us include the fact that female glow worms don't fly (just the males in search of a mate); that common seals venture inland as far as Barcombe and that little egret numbers declined drastically in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their feathers were used for plumes in ladies' hats but fortunately their numbers are now recovering, which is not such good news for the frogs that they eat.

The changing appearance of our environment was mentioned too, with the startling fact that 97% of South Downs grassland has disappeared, with the remainder requiring sheep to graze it in order to maintain it. There are chalk reserves at Southerham and Malling Down, where the poor and alkaline soils play host to a species rich environment of over 40 plants per square metre.

Whilst most of the audience had heard about most of the species being shown, I don't think that many had appreciated how much wildlife manages to live in that small section of the county. A variety of facts and figures were intermingled with humorous comments and anecdotes which, together with a couple of cartoon slides, made for a delightful presentation. You can also read articles written by Michael in the local Parish magazines.

Leycester Whewell, EHADPS secretary, 27 October 2016