



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

# Romsey and District U3A

Registered Charity N° 1082501

## THE DORSET COAST AND WILD LIFE - GEOFF MARSH 21 November 2007

After several days of typical November weather Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> was clear and sunny, so it was amazing to see the large audience of Romsey and District U3A members gathering in the Crosfield Hall for their monthly meeting. Some of those present might justifiably have preferred to be outside enjoying the lovely autumn day but their speaker Geoff Marsh soon dispelled these feelings by transporting them to his beloved Dorset coast via slides accompanied by a commentary full of personal anecdotes which revealed his love of his home county.

The Dorset coast is a World Heritage Site and is often referred to as the Jurassic Coast because of the quantity of fossils which can be found there. It has a variety of geological features from salt marshes, dunes and lowland heaths to cliffs of chalk and sandstone.

Geoff began with slides of views across Poole Harbour to the Sandbanks Peninsula and continued along the coast finishing at Lyme Bay. Each stage of the journey was illustrated with views of the flowers and wild life which can be seen, coupled with picturesque scenes of the countryside and coastal features. Brownsea Island is rich in both geographical features and rare species of wildlife ranging from ducks which live underground in disused bird's nests to little egrets and red squirrels. Lapwings nest there along with Brent geese and curlews. Sika deer are to be found in the salt marshes on the south side of Poole Harbour and are known to swim across to Brownsea Island. Studland Bay contains heath-and with bell heather, silver studded blue butterflies and all species of native reptiles, including the rare sand lizard. The dunes are home to rare species of ferns and marram grass. On the chalk down-land with views of Old Harry Rocks wild carrots and orchids grow. Grass hoppers and many varieties of crickets enjoy the warm climate here and they can be seen, as well as heard, by those with the patience to look for them. Rock Lavender is only to be found on Portland Bay and on the 12 mile long Chesil Beach brown hares live alongside the sea kale, yellow horned poppy and sea-pea. Where the sand turns to shingle wide expanses of thrift gladden the eye. Gold Cap is the highest sea cliff on the South Coast and at West Bay the lovely colours of sand stone cliffs are spectacular. The stretch of coast from Lyme Regis is the place to search for fossils and has earned the title of the Jurassic Coast, The migrant clouded yellow butterfly and hummingbird hawk moth are visitors to the area.

Geoff's presentation certainly whetted the appetites of all who heard it to visit, or perhaps re-visit, and explore this wonderful stretch of coast-line.

Pat Morgan

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