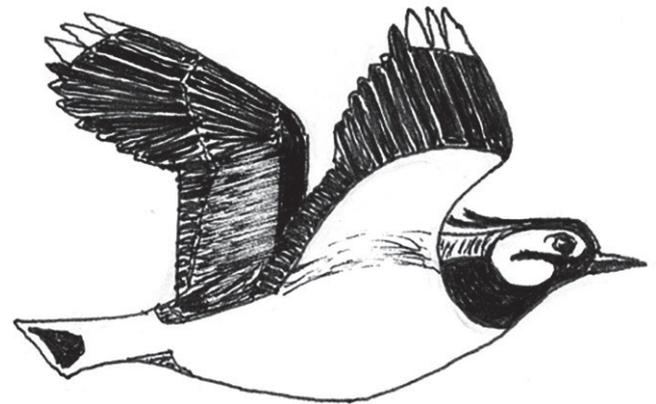


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**Lapwing** - referred to in the reports on the Upper Ray Living Landscape Project (page 53) and on the bird watching event at Spade Oak Lake (page 54).

**Sharp-flowered Rush** - one of the species found on the Upper Ray reserves (see page 53).

**COPY DATE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE**

**Friday 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017**

Wycombe Wildlife News is published 3 times a year to promote the Group and wildlife issues, and inform members and the public of its activities.

Produced by: Roger Wilding  
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Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Group. For the purposes of management of the Group, membership information is held on computer.



**Wycombe Wildlife Group is a registered charity with the following objects:**

To conserve the environment, mainly using volunteers, for the benefit of the public.

To educate the public in the principles and practice of conservation.

**Within and around Wycombe District the Group:**

Surveys wildlife habitats and their associated flora and fauna, giving those taking part plenty of opportunities to increase their knowledge and identification skills.

Helps manage local wildlife sites, undertaking practical conservation work on local nature reserves.

Provides advice to schools, other bodies and individuals on all aspects of wildlife.

Stimulates public interest in wildlife and its conservation, organising walks, talks and other activities covering a wide range of wildlife topics.

Provides advice on and encourages wildlife gardening.

Co-operates with other groups with similar aims.

Another year in the life of Wycombe Wildlife Group has come to an end and, looking at our recent events programmes, I think we provided plenty of opportunities for members to enjoy a range of interesting talks and walks. When a group such as ours has existed for nearly 28 years, it is difficult to come up with new topics for talks, and when we do, there is still the problem of finding an affordable speaker. It is amazing, therefore, that nearly all our recent talks have been on new topics, many stemming from ideas generated by the Group's Programme Planning Committee. A suggestion was made at the last AGM that we should consider asking members to give a few of our talks: we have included two talks in our January to April 2017 programme which will be delivered by members, and we have had an offer from another member to give a talk at a later date. Comments from members on our events programme, as well as suggestions or recommendations for speakers will always be welcome.

The Executive Committee is still concerned that some of our members may not be attending our events due to reasons which we might be able to overcome. If anyone has any thoughts on this, Karen Roberts, our Membership Secretary would very much like to hear from you. She can be contacted by telephone on 01628 526225, or by email at [karen.gwenkaz@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:karen.gwenkaz@yahoo.co.uk).

Roger Wilding

## New members

We welcome the following new member:- Dr Jim Wills from Gerrards Cross.

## Obituaries

We regret to inform members of the deaths of :-

**Roy Morris OBE** (widower of Pat Morris - one of our founder members and former newsletter editor and chairman, who remained a WWG trustee until she and Roy moved away from High Wycombe). Roy provided valuable support to WWG behind the scenes by typing newsletter material and dealing with all of Pat's email correspondence.

**Wendy Jane Willson**, a long-standing member who died in October following an unoperable terminal illness. As well as a regular supporter of our meetings and walks, Wendy will be remembered for her successes when she entered her delightful urban riverside garden in the four annual wildlife garden competitions organised by WWG between 1993 and 1996.

## Getting the timing right

Last year we made some changes to the timing of the issue of the January newsletter, circulating it in January rather than in mid December, and we delayed the circulation of the May newsletter until after the AGM, which is held during that month. These changes proved helpful and the revised newsletter production timetable has been amended accordingly. The changes do mean that some members may receive their January to April and May to August events programmes after any early January and/or early May events have taken place, but where possible we will continue to give advance notice of such events at the end of the previous programme. The new programmes are posted on the WWG website as soon as they are finalised and copies are circulated to members for whom we have email addresses, whereas posted copies are circulated with the newsletter.

# Nature's ploughs

(At least that's what Darwin called them!)

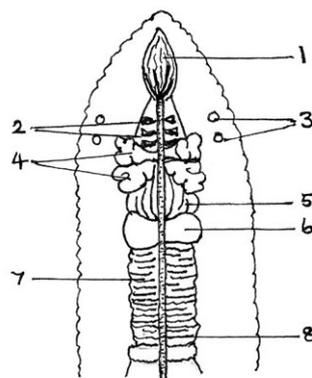
I'll be the first to admit that, until I saw it in the WWG programme, I didn't know that there was an Earthworm Society of Britain. Not being a keen gardener either, I have rarely spent any time looking at earthworms or contemplating how they spend their lives, so I wasn't sure how a speaker on the subject would be able to hold my interest. I need not have worried, as Dr Dan Carpenter, who gave the talk at the members' meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> September, spoke with authority and infectious enthusiasm as he made his case for earthworms being the most important, but much under-studied, species on the planet.

Did you know that there are nearly 30 different species of earthworm (the Oligochaetes group of invertebrates within the taxonomic phylum Annelida) in the UK (excluding alien species recorded in glasshouses etc.), and around 3,000 species worldwide? Or that the species of earthworms attracted to living in your compost bins are quite different from the ones you will find in the rest of your back garden? When their food supply dwindles, a whole group (there is no universally accepted collective noun yet) of worms will migrate from one area to another, but no-one quite knows how the group decides on their next destination. It's one of many puzzles begging to be researched.

Earthworms are separated into four ecotypes, based on their differing habitats and behaviour. Compost earthworms, usually found in compost or very rich rotting vegetation, are often bright red or reddish brown. Epigeic earthworms live in the damp leaf litter on the surface of the soil in woodland, hedgerows, heaths and mires: they are often also bright red or reddish brown. Endogeic earthworms are found in gardens and arable fields and margins, and feed on the soil. They create horizontal burrows to move around, although they can burrow very deeply. Their colour is extremely variable, but always pale. Finally there are the Anecic earthworms which are found in grassland, including garden lawns. They create vertical burrows into which they drag leaves, and from which they deposit removed soil on the surface in the form of casts. Most of these worms are dark at the head end and pale at the tail end.

Outlining the typical earthworm's anatomy, Dan drew attention to the different features of the head and tail sections, quickly dispelling the widely held myth that if you cut a worm in two you can get two viable worms. Turning to the digestive tract, he explained that, like birds, worms have a crop and gizzard for grinding. They also have a clearly visible 'saddle' which plays a pivotal role in their reproduction. In

case you were wondering, yes, earthworms are hermaphrodites, but they still mate, exchanging sperm in the process. The saddle produces a mucous tube which moves forward along the body collecting the earthworm's own eggs and the sperm from its partner. After fertilisation, the tube is shed and it dries in the soil to become an egg capsule. Oh, and yes, earthworms do have hearts, up to five pairs of them in a single individual, and their blood even carries haemoglobin.



**Earthworm anatomy (from head to saddle)**

1. Brain and pharynx
2. Hearts
3. Where sperm from another worm is stored
4. Where the worm's own sperm is located
5. Crop
6. Gizzard
7. Digestive tract
8. Blood vessels

So, why are earthworms so important? Their burrowing activities have earned them the title of "Ecosystem Engineers". They create the pores through which water and oxygen enter the soil and carbon dioxide leaves it. They also play a vital role in the natural process of decomposition. Our speaker invited us to consider the volume of leaves falling to the ground in a wooded area and how it typically disappears during winter and spring. Earthworms eating organic material break it down into smaller pieces and distribute it throughout the soil, encouraging bacteria and fungi which in turn release nutrients needed by plants.

Given their vital ecological role, it was surprising to learn just how few research papers feature them. This means there is a huge opportunity for volunteers to add to the knowledge base. Joining the Earthworm Society of Britain costs a mere £5 p.a. There are opportunities for all to contribute observations, and the Society also offers relevant training in identification of species for those wishing to pursue their interest: the current list of courses includes a local one in March 2017 at the Amersham Field Centre at Mop End. Details can be found on the Society's website [www.earthwormsoc.org.uk](http://www.earthwormsoc.org.uk).

A lively question and answer session ensued which demonstrated how well the speaker had engaged the audience.

Jackie Kay

## Upper Ray Living Landscape Project

Our speaker at the October 2016 meeting at Holtspur was Christopher Williams, BBOWT's Conservation and Education Officer for Bucks. During the first half of his talk, Chris gave us a summary of the history of the creation of nature reserves to preserve the most important UK wildlife habitats. He explained how BBOWT with its 90 reserves, 300 plus staff, 1,400 active volunteers and 25,000 members fits into The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts: the latter being the umbrella organisation of the individual 47 Wildlife Trusts covering the UK, with a total of some 800 thousand members. The Wildlife Trusts stemmed from a vision of Charles Rothschild, a banker and expert naturalist, who set out to list and protect the best places in the UK for wildlife. His list of 284 sites was completed by 1915 and they became known as the "Rothschild Reserves". The first of the listed sites to become a nature reserve was Woodwalton Fen in Cambridgeshire, opened in 1919. The first nature reserve to be opened by an individual wildlife trust was Cley Marshes, opened by Norfolk Wildlife Trust in 1926. Although some of the sites have been lost, most of the Rothschild Reserves are still safeguarded as SSSIs and/or designated nature reserves.

The UK's first major reserve was Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire, opened by the National Trust in 1899. The RSPB, the other major player in creating and maintaining nature reserves, had its origins in 1889 and opened its first reserve in 1930 at Romney Marsh in Kent. Since those early days, protection of important wildlife sites has increased as a result

of the creation of National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and various designations including Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Area (SAC), together with various bodies to oversee the related legislative policies and issues.

Despite all these actions, 60% of species are in decline in the UK. Some of the losses are a result of climate change, but a major factor is the isolation of some species, protected in small isolated sites but lacking opportunities to extend their range. There is now a recognition that there is a need for large functionally-connected ecological networks to overcome this problem. The Wildlife Trusts' contribution to this need is the creation of Living Landscape Projects which aim to provide wildlife corridors linking nature reserves by areas of land, often in private ownership, in a manner sympathetic to wildlife needs. Similar projects such as the RSPB's Futurescapes, and actions by Local Nature Partnerships to address opportunities arising within areas identified as Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) are also contributing to the aims of the Living Landscapes Project. Gomm Valley in High Wycombe was mentioned as an example of a location where land containing a SSSI, ancient woodland and hedgerows would remain undeveloped following the completion of planned new housing on the site: it is hoped that this land will be managed by BBOWT, and that new rights of way will be created linking the site with other adjoining sites of wildlife interest and providing improved public access. Chris summarised the first half of his talk with four key words - "more", "bigger", "better", and "joined".

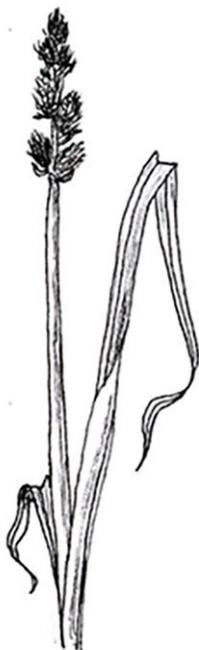


This comprehensive coverage of the history of nature reserves and the protection of wildlife in the UK provided an excellent introduction to the rest of the talk, which covered the Upper Ray Living Landscape Area. This joint BBOWT and RSPB project covers an area containing six reserves managed by BBOWT and the RSPB's Otmoor reserve. The Cow Leys, Leaches Farm, Long Herdon and Grange Meadows reserves are open all year, but access to Dorothy Bolton Meadows, Meadow Farm, and Gallows Bridge Farm is limited, and there is no access to Leaches Meadow or Three Points Meadow. The River Ray, often only visible when in flood, is a tributary of the Cherwell which flows into the Thames.

© Corrine Welch

Much of the farmland owned by BBOWT contains internationally rare floodplain meadow grassland, and Meadow Farm has remained untouched by modern farming practices. The grassland is managed by traditional hay cutting and aftermath grazing by cattle or sheep. Some of the plants to look for in the Upper Ray reserves include Great Burnet, Meadow Foxtail, Ladies Bedstraw, Cuckooflower, True Fox Sedge, Sharp-flowered Rush, Tubular Water-dropwort, Pepper-saxifrage, Yellow Rattle and Ragged-Robin.

True Fox Sedge



Working with other local landowners, the practice of green hay spreading has been adopted. This involves spreading the freshly cut hay from each acre of reserve grassland over three acres of land where it is hoped to extend the floral interest. We were advised that the best time to visit the reserves is in June before the hay cut takes place. The floodplain meadows are important breeding sites for Curlew and Lapwing and many other bird species including Golden Plover, Jack Snipe, Yellowhammer and Skylark can be seen.

Jack Snipe



Our thanks go to BBOWT for agreeing to provide a speaker for this talk and to Chris Williams for coming along to deliver his interesting and informative account of the history of nature reserves, and tell us about one of BBOWT's Living Landscape Area projects.

Roger Wilding

## Migration Mysteries

**B**ird migration had been a subject on our target list for a talk for some time, so when I obtained a list of talks given by Chris Ward and found that one of his talks was "Migration Mysteries", I booked him for our November 2016 meeting.

As soon as Chris started his talk, it became clear that it was going to be a very interesting one, and that it would cover not only bird migration but also the migration of mammals and invertebrates. We learnt that, although much more is known about migration now than was the case only a few years ago, there are still many related unresolved mysteries requiring more research. The availability and use of modern technology has provided answers to many matters that had remained mysteries for years, and we now know that migration is much more complex than anyone could have imagined in the past.

At one time, people seeing birds flying into reed beds late in the year and not appearing again until the

next year thought that birds hibernated. Although we now know better than that, not everyone is aware of all the complex bird migration patterns into and out of the UK, with some birds (including some of the same species) coming in from colder regions in the north or east whilst others are going south to warmer climates for the winter. There are many different reasons for bird migration, including the availability of suitable food supplies, avoidance of predators, parasites and diseases, and longer hours of daylight for feeding young. Insects can be more common in northern countries, and there tend to be more predators in warmer climates. In Africa, there are more birds competing for available food, and there are also more parasites and diseases there. Whilst many birds migrate southwards in the autumn and return in summer to breed, there are others, especially swans, geese, ducks and waders, that arrive in the UK from northern countries and spend the winter feeding around our estuaries before returning home to breed.

Migration is not just for birds. In countries where food and water supplies become scarce due to droughts, many mammal species need to travel large distances to survive. Invertebrates also migrate over long distances: the Monarch butterfly is well known for this, migrating up to 3,000 miles from the USA to Mexico in order to breed before returning home again. In some years, huge numbers of Painted Lady butterflies migrate to the UK. Because those seen were always flying north, and there were no sightings of the species flying south at the end of the summer, it was thought that they died here. It was then discovered that they did migrate south again, but at a very high altitude. It was also found that the number flying back was much higher than the number arriving, showing that the generation emerging here migrated southwards to breed. It is thought that butterflies have some form of internal compass built into their antennae which they use to guide them on their migration routes.

We were intrigued to hear about the complexities of bird anatomy which assist them to migrate. Birds are thought to have an inbuilt instinct that, together with changes in daylight times, probably triggers the decision to migrate. They remember and use landmarks such as coastal cliffs, as well as the sun to help them navigate. In cloudy conditions, they can even detect where the sun would be if it was visible. It is thought that flycatchers and warblers, that fly by night, make use of star formations to guide them. Where birds migrate in family groups, the navigation knowledge would be passed on to the young by their parents. Research has also shown that birds have magnets in their retinas and/or beaks which can detect the Earth's magnetic fields, assisting direction finding. Some birds fly in short stages and only by day, whereas other species may fly day and night.

## Bird watching at Spade Oak Lake Nature Reserve

The weather was perfect for the Spade Oak walk on 9<sup>th</sup> December. We went around the north side of the lake first, hoping to see bird species in the trees, scrub and open areas on that side. Other than on the lake, however, there was little birdlife to see or hear on that part of the walk, apart from a Wren, Blackbird, Goldfinch, a few Long-tailed Tits, some Fieldfares and the now common Ring-necked Parakeets. Looking towards the trees on the other side of the lake, however, we saw Pochard, Wigeon, Great Crested Grebes, Herons, Cormorants and Little Egrets.

The highlight of the walk was overlooking the spit on the west side of the lake, which, as usual, was occupied by huge numbers of birds. On the morning we visited, the sun was shining and, with the light behind us, the conditions were perfect for observing the birds through binoculars or one of the telescopes

The migration routes of some mammal and bird species can be enormous. The Humpback Whale has long been regarded as the mammal that migrates the longest distance, up to 10,000 miles from its breeding grounds near the equator to the food-rich waters of the Arctic or Antarctic and back. It has recently been established, however, that the Grey Whale migrates up to 12,000 miles between its winter feeding waters in Mexico and its summer breeding grounds in Arctic Russia. We were told about an amazing recent epic journey made by an Arctic Tern fitted with a tracking device in the Farne Islands. The bird left the Farnes in July 2015 and arrived in Antarctica in November of that year. The bird left Antarctica for the return journey in March 2016 and arrived back in the Farne Islands in May 2016, clocking up a total of 59,650 miles on this round trip.

Arctic Tern



There are many risks attached to migration, whether the journeys are long or short, but all the species that migrate have little choice, as this instinctive behaviour is necessary for the survival of those species.

Our thanks go to Chris Ward for this brilliant talk.

Roger Wilding

brought along by Paul and John. Here we saw Lapwing, Teal, Gadwall, Shoveller and Common and Lesser Black-backed Gulls and many other species, including a Kingfisher flying past. We also saw a Red Kite and Buzzard flying over. After spending quite a while at that particular location, watching the ever-changing bird spectacular, we returned to the car park around the south side of the lake, seeing a flock of Redwings on the way. We all enjoyed our bird walk and Paul later produced a list of 45 bird species seen or heard on it.

Our thanks go to Paul for leading the walk, and to both him and John Hoar for bringing their telescopes, pointing out the species of greatest interest.

Roger Wilding

## An introduction to Windsor Great Park

Our speaker at December's meeting in Holtspur was Andy Fielder, who has spent most of his life living and working in Windsor Great Park and has written a guide book on it. Andy started by telling us about the history of the Great Park, which has a circumference of 26 miles and is about 19 miles across. It is one of the oldest woodlands in the UK, first becoming a park in 1240, solely for hunting use by the King: it was stocked with Red Deer brought in from Europe. Responsibility for managing the park, where the rights of the deer took precedence over any rights that the local people had, rested with the Park Ranger who occupied Binfield House, later extended to become Cumberland Lodge. Organised deer poaching became a major problem in the early 18th Century, but the 'Black Act' in 1723, which resulted in offenders being hung and their corpses left to rot, proved to be an effective deterrent.

Much of the landscaping of the park was undertaken by the Duke of Cumberland. He even created a menagerie at Cumberland House with lots of wild exotic animals, including lions, tigers, a cheetah and a giraffe. His successor, the Second Duke of Cumberland, had no interest in the park, however, and nature soon began to take over, and even the lake ran dry. Fortunately, on coming to the throne, George the Third decided to rebuild the Park, enlarging the lake and rebuilding the waterfall. He extended the Royal Lodge, and even arranged for some genuine Roman ruins, which had been removed from their original site in North Africa and given to him, to be rebuilt on top of a Roman road running through the estate. George IV decided to follow the Duke of Cumberland's example and create a Royal Zoo: this was situated at Sandpit Gate and stocked with exotic birds and mammals, which were donated by his successor William IV to the newly-opened zoo in Regents Park.

The Copper Horse statue at the south end of the Long Walk was completed in 1831 just after the park was opened to the public. The 100ft totem Pole was erected in 1958 as a gift from British Columbia and is soon to be restored by a team of native Canadian craftsmen. The Smith's Lawn polo field was used as an airfield in the Second World War, and a secret factory was built nearby where the Vickers Armstrong company built 64 Wellington bombers designed specifically for high altitude reconnaissance work. As the planes were completed, they were flown out from the Park at night by women pilots to the bases from which they would operate.

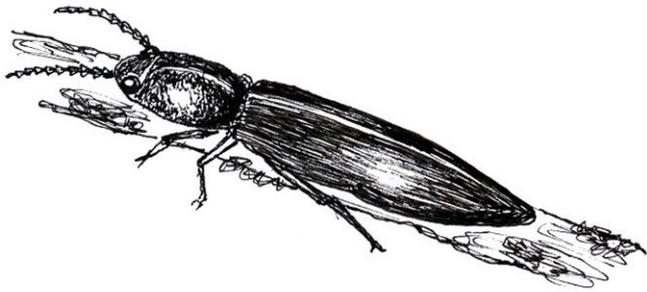
A village in the western side of the Park is home to 180 families, mainly contractors, artisans and craftsmen who work on the estate: it even has its own post office. The Royal School near the centre of the Park is the only one to receive funding from the royal purse. The Royal Lodge is currently the home of Prince Andrew, and the chapel in its grounds is attended by the Royal Family when they are at Windsor Castle. In the second week of April each year, the Royal Family transfer from cars to carriages there during Ascot Week for the final stage of their journey to the racecourse.

Following this very informative account of the Park's history and heritage, Andy went on to talk about the trees and wildlife that can be found there. He explained that, whilst the eastern side of the Park had been landscaped, most of the western side has remained undeveloped. Veteran Oak trees are probably the most important trees to be seen in the Park, some over 1,000 years old, including Offa's Oak which is believed to be at least 1,300 years old. Most of the early woodland in the Park was pollarded. Limes were introduced in the late 17th century, and in the mid 18th century new exotic tree species were first introduced. *Rhododendron ponticum* was introduced by George IV, and action to eradicate it remains an on-going management priority. The Park suffered badly in the storms of 1987 and 1990; half a million trees were lost in the first storm, including 400 veteran trees, and another 1,000 were lost in the second storm.



**Managing the remaining veteran trees is an on-going priority in Windsor Great Park.**

Windsor Great Park is one of only 3 sites in Britain where the Violet Click Beetle (*Limoniscus violaceus*) has been recorded. It is extremely rare because of its habitat requirements, only being found in the undisturbed wood mould at the base of cavities in the heart of decayed ancient Beech and Ash trees.



Hares are found within the Park, and there are occasional sightings of Wild Boar which are believed to be moving in from Hampshire. Grey Partridge are

present in the Park, and there is a small number of breeding pairs of Ravens. Ring-necked Parakeets are commonly seen, especially near Old Windsor.

The Royal Landscape Project, which began in 2004 but is on-going, aims to promote, enhance and protect the natural resources, history and facilities of the Great Park: this includes conservation and preservation of its natural history, flora and fauna.

As a follow-up to Andy's excellent talk, WWG member Inge Beck, who knows Windsor Great Park well, has offered to lead a few walks in the Park early in the new year for any members who would like to visit it. If you would like to take advantage of this offer, Inge's contact details are in our January to April 2017 events programme, so that you can discuss details of what you would like to see, and the distances you would be able to walk.

Roger Wilding

## Ten years of wildlife gardening at Hughenden Manor comes to an end

On 19th May 2006, eight Wycombe Wildlife Group (WWG) members turned up in the Walled Garden at Hughenden Manor to undertake the initial planting for a native wildflower garden being created at the request of the National Trust, to complement the various organic gardening projects being developed there. All of the plants used were provided by WWG, so the garden was created at no cost to the National Trust. Additional planting took place later in 2006, bringing the total number of species introduced to 50. Over time, some species were lost and others were introduced, but in most recent years at least 80 species could be found growing in this relatively small garden.

The on-going maintenance of the wildflower garden was restricted to the minimum necessary, to keep unwanted species such as Horsetails, Ground-elder and Field Bindweed from getting out of control, and to maintain the biodiversity as much as possible. Some of the species introduced in the early days of the garden were lost because the competition from other more robust species was too great, and some disappeared for reasons unknown. Such occurrences will be familiar to readers who have created and managed wildflower habitats in their own gardens.

The walled garden at Hughenden is used by the National Trust for educational use, and school parties remain a regular sight in the garden, where they often dress up as Victorian gardeners and undertake tasks such as pretending to scare away crows, as well as learning about organic vegetable growing.

I had been under the impression that the wildflower garden was considered to be a valuable addition to the walled garden, as its flora attracted beneficial insects which, in turn, did a valuable job of pollinating the fruit grown in the garden. I was very shocked, therefore, when I turned up this Autumn to undertake a final end-of season tidy up of the wildflower garden, to find a completely empty flowerbed. The Gardener in Charge informed me that the National Trust had decided that the wildflower garden did not fit in with its view of the purpose of the walled garden, and the plants had been dug up with the intention of moving them into the woodland garden of the Manor (a completely unsuitable location for most of the species concerned). My initial reaction was that, as the wildflower garden at Hughenden Manor had only been created and managed by WWG at the request of the National Trust, it was appropriate for the latter to decide to discontinue the project whenever it wished. Thinking about the matter since, however, I find it hard to understand how this action could have been taken without any prior notification to WWG or even a thank you to our group for the ten years of voluntary work first creating and then maintaining the garden. The WWG trustees were also critical of the way this matter had been handled, but, as a life member of the National Trust, I will not let this isolated incident affect my overall support for the valuable work undertaken by that charity.

Roger Wilding

## Early November walk at Marlow

The season of Autumn brings its own interest to my regular walks at Marlow. The Common Terns, Swallows and House Martins have gone (the Swifts disappeared long before), but have been replaced by noisy flocks of Black-headed Gulls and Ring-necked Parakeets. The gulls are not black headed any more; they retain only the chocolate-coloured eye spot indicative of the winter plumage. The Ring-necked Parakeets shriek noisily from tree to tree flashing jade green as they fly. The barking of the Egyptian Geese is more frequent now and often comes from high up in the tree canopy. They gather near Bisham Abbey, and the last time I walked there they were barking from the top of the tower of the Abbey itself, announcing their presence to the rest of the flock that were flying by on broad black and white wings.



The water meadows still have colour in them - the Purple-loosestrife that was so beautiful in the summer now is adorned with vibrant autumn foliage. There are still a few yellow Perennial Sow-thistles in bloom, and quite a lot of Yarrows still out. There is a bank of Burnet-saxifrage in full bloom at Temple Lock, where the grass is mown frequently.

Small flocks of Starlings fly back and forth between the island near Temple Lock and the water meadows. There are several Cormorants, some of them hanging their wings out to dry, and also Herons on the riverbank.

Returning along the back path there are one or two Skylarks singing, and a couple of Lapwings. Near Pen's Place, there are still Chiffchaffs making their contact calls, (not their "chiff chaff" song now). Also Coal Tits, Nuthatches, and Robins can be heard. Autumn is a lovely time of year for a walk at Marlow.

Frances Wilding

**Egyptian Geese are now a common sight along the Thames and, as the photograph shows, they are breeding there**

## Recording the changing seasons

I have been filling in Nature's Calendar now for 25 years, for the Woodland Trust and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. It records nature's progression throughout the country each year, such as the arrival of the first Swallows, and budburst and fruiting score for trees. Insects are also included, recording the date ladybirds were first seen mating and the first Red-tailed Bumblebee sighting. As expected, movement of Spring starts in the South West and ends up in the North East several weeks afterwards.

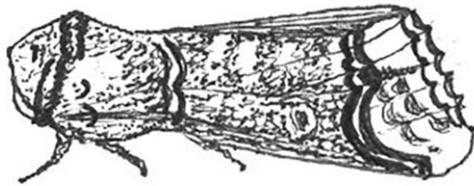
In all the years I have filled in Nature's Calendar, I have never before this year recorded so many tree species holding on to their leaves until December. Is this another sign of Global Warming?

Frances Wilding

## Moth trapping in 2016

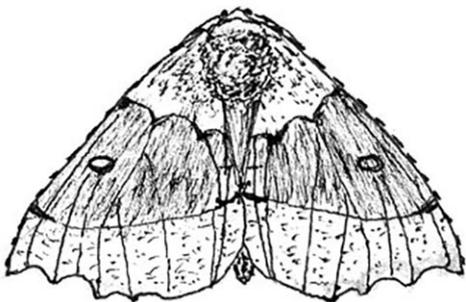
Wycombe Wildlife Group try to arrange a moth trap each month from May to September. Most of these events are in members' gardens, but this year we were also invited by the Loudwater Orchard Group to run a trap.

May's trap was in our back garden in Flackwell Heath. It was a cool night and we only recorded 13 species, but amongst those were some strikingly marked moths. These included Brimstone, Swallow Prominent, White Ermine, Pale Oak Beauty and Buff-tip. The latter is a master of disguise appearing to be a recently pruned twig.



**Buff-tip**

In June the meeting was at the orchard in Loudwater. Thanks must go to Martin Albertini who attended and brought his generator when I had trouble once again getting mine started. It was a warmer night, and we identified 23 species. These included a lot of smaller moths such as Straw Dot, Orange Footman, The Flame, Flame Shoulder, Green Carpet, Broken-barred Carpet and Grass Rivulet. My favourite of the evening was the Scalloped Hazel.



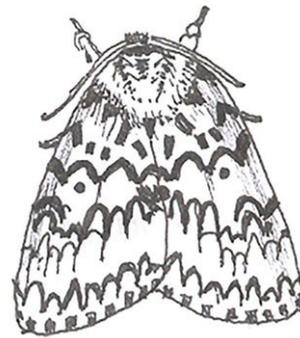
**Scalloped  
Hazel**

We went to John Hoar's garden in Beaconsfield for the July event, a new venue for the group. It was unexpectedly cool, so we only identified 14 species. We did see some attractive moths however, which included Peach Blossom, Peppered Moth, Swallowtailed Moth, Beautiful Hook-tip and Beautiful Golden-Y.

**Swallowtailed Moth**



Over 20 species were seen in Stan Armstrong's garden in August. As well as moths, Stan used his surveillance equipment and bat detector to good effect to view creatures of the night. Amongst the more attractive moths seen were Black Arches, Canary Shouldered Thorn, Old Lady, Scalloped Oak and Mocha.



**Black Arches**

Our last trap in September was in the Dodds' family garden next to the River Wye in High Wycombe. The moth species seen included Angle Shades and Light Emerald, but the highlight for me was the discovery of a hedgehog snuffling around the front garden.

Towards the end of the summer, the group was given a moth trap which may be borrowed by any member. It has already been used by John Hoar, who used it to entertain his young grandsons during the half term holidays. I helped him set up the trap and then aided moth identification by viewing photographs of the specimens sent via email. Two of these species were ones which emerge during the autumn - Green-brindled Crescent and Barred Sallow.

Paul Bowyer

## Wildlife observations - September to December 2016

The following sightings are the only ones that have been submitted for this issue:-

### November 2016

18 <sup>th</sup>	Mistle and Song Trushes singing	Along the south side of The Rye	SU872924
26 <sup>th</sup>	Fieldfares and Redwings	In fields near Pens Place, Marlow	SU845854

### December 2016

3 <sup>rd</sup>	200+ Fieldfares & 150 Canada Geese	In fields near Pens Place, Marlow	SU845854
6 <sup>th</sup>	1 Blackcap (male) eating Callicarpa * berries	Deeds Grove garden	HP12 3PA
7 <sup>th</sup>	2 Blackcaps (male & female) eating Callicarpa berries	Deeds Grove garden	HP12 3PA
8 <sup>th</sup>	3 Blackcaps (2 males and 1 female) eating Callicarpa berries**	Deeds Grove garden	HP12 3PA
8 <sup>th</sup>	Common Newt	Deeds Grove garden	HP12 3NY
23 <sup>rd</sup>	Common Frog	Deeds Grove garden	HP12 3PA
23 <sup>rd</sup>	Great Spotted Woodpecker on peanut feeder	Deeds Grove garden	HP12 3PA

\*Normally the mauve-coloured Callicarpa berries only seem to attract Blackcaps, although one year when the Blackcaps were absent from the garden, a Blackbird ate them instead.

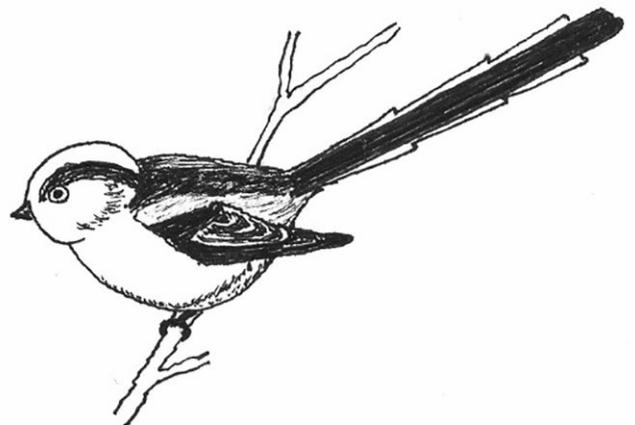
\*\* One of the males quickly drove the other male away from what he considered was his territory.

## Garden tweets

The autumn is a quiet time for birds in the garden. They have separated from their family groups on the whole, but have yet to band together in their winter groups.

The Starlings have grown in numbers again, some youngsters and some adults. They are singing their tweets, warbles, wheezes and clicks from the golden conifers, a sound that is delightfully amusing to hear. We have several bird baths which are often free of birds, until every Starling in the garden suddenly decides to bathe in the same bath at the very same moment! The result is squabbles, an empty birdbath, and a wet window.

We have had 14 Long-tailed Tits together on the fat feeder. I am not sure whether they are still in their family groups, but they are mixing now with other tit species. Wrens and Robins are singing loudly now, and in the last few mild days (mid December) there have been two Blackbirds singing their mellow songs at dusk, and again early in the morning.



Long-tailed Tit

Before I pull the curtains across in the evening, I see a Blue Tit pop into a minute crack in the fascia boards of our porch: this happens most evenings. Intimate moments like these make garden bird watching very special.

Frances Wilding

