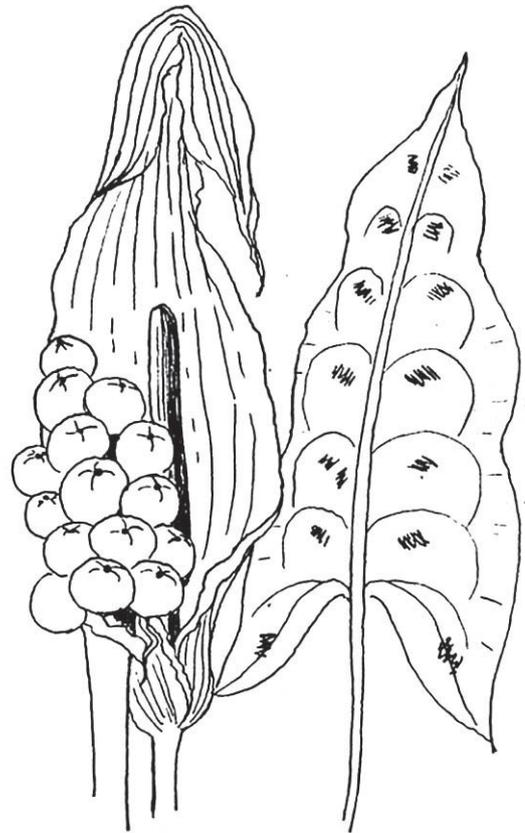


**Issue 83**

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**COPY DATE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE**  
**Friday 4<sup>th</sup> August 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.

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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.

Lords-and-ladies (*Arum maculatum*) - a common plant found on our woodland walks, but one which can provide an interesting surprise, as we discovered on a walk in King's Wood, High Wycombe. (See page 68)

## Chairman's Chat

For the last few years, Wycombe Wildlife Group's Executive Committee has been concerned about the long term future of the Group and its ability to withstand the impact of any reductions in the small number of members who currently undertake its administrative roles.

Last year, one member volunteered to join the Executive Committee at the AGM and was elected. The non-executive members on the Group's Programme Planning Committee are doing a great job in coming up with ideas for talks, walks and other activities, and there appears to be a gradual upward trend in the number of attendees at our meetings and on our walks. The interaction between members at our meetings has also become very noticeable.

We have now come to the conclusion that there is very little else we can do to safeguard the longer term future of the Group, other than continue to encourage members to help in any way they can.

The Executive Committee has also considered the financial issues raised with members at the 2016 AGM. As a result, we have ceased to be over-concerned about our relatively small year on year deficits, on the basis that our expenditure is providing member benefit and helping to meet our charitable aims, and we have sufficient reserve funds to meet any likely additional unforeseen expenditure requirements. A financial reserves policy incorporating a monitoring procedure to trigger action should the Group's funds drop below a predetermined limit has been drawn up and agreed.

I hope you all enjoy this issue, and if you have any suggestions for improvement or would like to write an article or a report on one of our events, please let me know.

Roger Wilding

**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.

## New members

We welcome the following new members:- Brenda Mobbs, Dr Paul Walker, Vanessa Rickett, Sue Longman and Julie Plummer.

## Newsletter and events programme schedule

Although we have tried to produce and issue our newsletters and events programmes together to minimise the hand delivery task and keep postal costs to a minimum, this has not always proved possible. We still intend to produce these documents three times a year, the newsletters continuing to be dated January, May and September and completed, whenever possible, by the end of each of those months. We will also continue to issue our events programme three times a year, but will consider changing the period covered to give more notice of the earliest events in the new programmes. We will circulate the newsletters and events programmes to those who receive them by email, and post copies on the WWG website as soon as they are finalised and then undertake the hand delivery and postal tasks as soon as possible after the printed copies are available.

## Swan Upping comes to Wycombe

Whilst I would guess there are very few people who have never heard of Swan Upping, I am sure there are many who do not know why it takes place, and probably many more who have never seen the event. The fact that this traditional event only takes place during one week each year, and that the action can take place anywhere where family groups of swans are seen during the Swan Uppers' journey up the Thames from Sunbury to Abingdon, makes it extremely difficult for the public to see what happens, unless they are following the Swan Uppers by boat.

The opportunity to learn more about Swan Upping arose after a member of Wycombe Wildlife Group heard that Mr David Barber MVO, the Queen's Swan Marker, gives a limited number of talks on Swan Upping in return for a reasonable donation to a swan rescue charity. As we needed to guarantee a large audience for this talk, the possibility of a joint meeting with The High Wycombe Society was raised and welcomed by both organisations. Around 90 persons attended the resulting talk on 16<sup>th</sup> January, and enjoyed both it and the interesting swan heritage and swan displays created for the occasion by The High Wycombe Society and Wycombe Wildlife Group respectively.

Mr Barber told us he has been the Queen's Swan Marker for the last 20 years and loves his job. Apart from the annual Swan Upping task, he undertakes an educational role, mainly with primary school children, to promote the wellbeing of swans. We saw photos of children handling cygnets and helping to weigh them. We also saw some unpleasant images illustrating how some swans are seriously injured by fishing tackle, dog attacks and even air-rifle pellets. We heard that although a pen (female swan) will lay 6 to 8 eggs, an average of only 2.6 young per family survive the egg and cygnet stage, due to predation by birds of prey, mink, pike, foxes and dogs.

Apart from swans owned by Royal prerogative by the Worshipful Companies of Vintners and Dyers and by Abbotsbury Swannery in Dorset, all of the wild Mute Swans in the UK are owned by the Queen: giving permission for others to own swans dates back to Edgar, the Saxon king who gave permission for monks in Lincolnshire to own swans in A.D.966. Several abbeys were later given similar permission, and wild swans had their beaks marked to identify ownership. Beak marking was also used by the Vintners and Dyers to distinguish their swans, but the current Queen's Swan Marker managed to get this practice changed so that they are now marked with a numbered tag instead. The cygnets identified as belonging to the Queen are left unmarked, as all wild

swans not identified as belonging to the Vintners or Dyers belong to her.

The Swan Upping ceremony is quite a colourful event, with those taking part being dressed in distinctive uniforms and using skiffs displaying flags to show who they represent. When a family group of swans is spotted, the cry "All up" results in the boats moving in and boxing the family in, so that they can be caught and moved on to the bank for examination.

It became clear from the talk that the purpose of Swan Upping extends far beyond merely keeping a tradition alive. The event provides an opportunity to check the health of the swans and cygnets within their family groups, identifying and marking the cygnets which are owned by either the Vintners or Dyers (which is done by looking at the marking, if there is one, on the cob (male swan)). The cygnets are then released, ensuring they are facing one of their parents to avoid them joining the wrong family group. The Swan Upping event also provides statistical information relating to the Mute Swan population, their health and longevity. Unfortunately, there is a downward trend in the number of cygnets at present, so let us hope that the educational work that is being done by the Queen's Swan Marker, and others, will pay off so that the Mute Swan continues to thrive and contribute to our enjoyment of riverside walks.



Our thanks go to Mr Barber for his talk and to all those who attended the event and helped make it such a success. The joint meeting went so well that I wondered afterwards whether there might be other opportunities in the future to arrange such a meeting where the subject of the talk is likely to appeal to both organisations.

Roger Wilding

## The Chiltern Way

The talk by Roger Wilding at the members' meeting held at Holtspur on 10 February was based on his experience of walking the Chiltern Way and was illustrated by photographs of views, fauna and flora, heritage and land usage, taken during his walks.

The original Chiltern Way was created in the year 2000 by the Chiltern Society as its Millennium Project. A northern extension and a southern extension were added in 2003 and, to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Chiltern Way, the Berkshire Loop was added in 2010. The resulting 200 mile circular walk, running through five counties, provides the walker with an opportunity to get a good overview of the Chiltern Hills and their varied scenery, heritage and wildlife habitats, which include many woodlands, miles of hedgerows, flora-rich grasslands, arable fields and pastures, chalk streams and quarries. Being a circular walk, The Chiltern Way can be started anywhere around its route and can be walked continuously stopping at overnight accommodation on the way or can be done as a series of one day walks. Roger chose the latter option and used public transport to get as close as possible to the starting point and back from the finishing point of each walk: this required some pre-planning and a need to meet pre-determined timescales, where bus services were infrequent. He started and finished the walks covering the Chiltern Way and its extensions at Hambleden, and then walked the Berkshire Loop from Penn to Harpsden Bottom.

From Hambleden, Roger chose to walk The Chiltern Way anti-clockwise which took him over the Hamble Brook (the first of seven chalk streams crossed on the walks), north of Marlow, through Flackwell Heath, over the Wye, through Penn, over the Misbourne and into Chalfont St Giles. After passing the cottage where the poet Milton wrote Paradise Lost, the walk crossed the Chess (which Roger considered to be the most attractive of the Chiltern chalk streams).



The Chess

The walk continued over the Grand Union Canal and the Bulbourne to Great Gaddesden, crossing the Gade and the Lea before reaching the section of the Chilterns between Luton and Hitchin. The latter area has escaped the urban sprawl of Luton and remains an attractive area containing some of the best scenery in the Chilterns, especially in the Barton Hills National Nature Reserve. Iron Age hill forts add to the interest of Sharpenhoe Clappers near Barton-le-Clay and at the north end of Dunstable Downs. Some of the former chalk quarries near Sundon are currently a bit of an eyesore, but we were shown some nearby examples of how well nature can recolonise such areas after a relatively short period of time.

Crossing back over the Grand Union Canal, the trail returns through the Hampdens, Lacey Green, through Yoesden Nature Reserve at Radnage, and Stokenchurch before heading for Ewelme with views towards the Wittenham Clumps. Reaching Goring, the Chiltern Way turns eastwards passing Hartslock Nature Reserve, Mapledurham House, Grey's Court, Cobstone Mill at Turville, Stonor Park and Fingest before returning to the starting point of Roger's Chiltern Way walk at Hambleden.

The final part of the talk covered The Berkshire Loop which leaves the original Chiltern Way near Penn and runs through Holtspur, Wooburn and Hedsor, crossing the Thames at Cookham. After going up Winter Hill, with views of Cliveden and Spade Oak Lake Nature Reserve, the walk goes through Pinkneys Green and passes close to a former Cold War bunker at Warren Row, an unusual house at Crazies Hill which incorporates the original Henley Town Hall, and through fields on the Culham Estate containing large numbers of pure white Fallow Deer, before crossing the Thames again at Henley and finishing where The Berkshire Loop joins the Chiltern Way Southern Extension at Harpsden Bottom.



White Fallow Deer on the Culham Estate

Throughout the talk, photos illustrating the walk were interspersed with others showing some of the most interesting flora and fauna seen on the walks. The species illustrated included a Yellowhammer, Cormorant, Silver-washed Fritillary, Few-flowered Garlic, Common Hemp-nettle, Ploughman's-spikenard, Common Centaury, and Blue Water-speedwell.



Yellowhammer

Photographs of some unusual farm animals such as Long-horned Cattle, Water Buffalo, Llamas and Alpacas were shown, along with some non-native mammals seen when passing by Whipsnade Zoo. Roger also showed photographs of some off-putting notices he came across on the walk such as "Beware of the Ram", "Bull in Field" and "Beware of the Cat".

James Donald

**Footnote:**

A book describing The Chiltern Way, its Extensions and the Berkshire Loop, and a map providing an overview of the complete route, are available from The Chiltern Society.

## Why Angus likes grasses

At the members' meeting on 20th March, we had a talk by Angus Idle entitled "Why I like grasses", Angus is a Wycombe Wildlife Group trustee and one of the four remaining founder members of the Group, which was formed in 1989. We have had previous talks by Angus on a range of topics including astronomy, Charles Darwin, and cells, and, on one occasion Angus gave us a talk called "A Tale of Polypropylene", the significance of which only became clear towards the end of his talk. Most of that talk was on his experiences in Tanzania where he had been sent by the Grassland Research Institute to give advice on ways of increasing yields of the grass species grown there to manufacture rope. By the time he had finished his work there, however, the use of polypropylene for rope making had reduced the requirement for grasses for rope making.

Wycombe Wildlife Group has benefitted over the years from Angus' expertise on plants in general, and in particular his expertise in grasses, but we had not had a talk from him specifically on that subject until now. Angus started his grasses talk by telling us about the advice he had been given by his college tutor during his botanical studies to choose one difficult group of plants on which to develop expertise. Angus followed this advice, choosing grasses, which led to a job with The Grassland Research Institute. Angus described some of the techniques used by the Institute to survey and record the species found and to assess their importance in relation to farming and other land use.

Angus went on to discuss various habitats and the different grasses they support, particular mention being made of the coastal species found on the Isle of Sheppey where he has a property, which he visits quite frequently.

Our thanks go to Angus for all he has done and is still doing to pass on some of his knowledge on plants and especially grasses, to others.

Roger Wilding

**Footnote:**

Grass identification is not easy, and over the years the knowledge Angus has passed on during walks and grass identification sessions has helped others to gain some basic knowledge of the subject. The problem most people have is trying to remember all this information, especially those of us who wish to gain a wide general knowledge of wildlife rather than specialise in one particular group of species.

The May to August 2017 Wycombe Wildlife Group events programme includes three evening grass identification sessions which will take place near to where Angus lives in Hughenden. I can highly recommend these training sessions and advise those attending one or more of them to make notes and keep the information for future use. These grass identification walks will be held in an area of chalk grassland where there will also be plenty of wildflowers, so those with wider floral interests will also enjoy the walks.

## Wildlife gardening talk

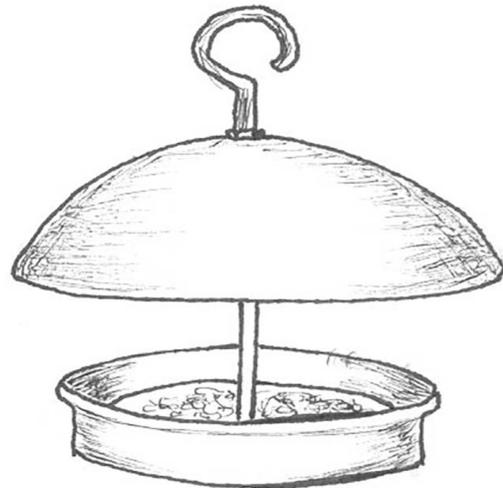
We were delighted to have a talk by Becca Flintham on wildlife gardening at our April meeting. For some, it brought back happy memories of past Wycombe Wildlife Group activities aimed at promoting wildlife gardening, and the talk made it clear that there are still many issues today that make gardening for wildlife perhaps even more important than ever before.

Becca started her talk by pointing out that wildlife is in trouble, with some species, including Hedgehogs and some butterflies experiencing massive declines in numbers, and predictions that a large number of species face extinction. There are many reasons for these problems, some are caused by natural changes, but many result from habitat losses caused by changes in land usage. Climate change is having a very serious adverse impact on the world's fauna and flora. Wildlife has also been affected by changing agricultural practices, people pressure, the introduction of alien fauna and flora, and a general disconnection with nature, many school children having little or no knowledge about wildlife.

Although big gardens are not as common as they were, there are over 15 million gardens in the UK, occupying some 270,000 hectares of land. Gardens, whatever their size, provide a valuable habitat for Hedgehogs, Frogs and Song Thrushes, which tend to do better in gardens than in the wild. A good wildlife garden will have trees and hedges, where possible, or shrubs. A range of flowering plants, including annual, biennial and perennial species will increase biodiversity, but some cultivated plants have little nectar and pollen: avoid F1 hybrids and double flowered varieties as these are of little benefit to wildlife. A plant does not have to be a native species, however, to be of use to wildlife. Coneflower (*Echinacea*), Phacelia (*Phacelia*) and Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum*) are all excellent for attracting beneficial invertebrates into the garden. When choosing plants, make sure you choose ones that are suitable for the conditions. Consider whether the plant needs to be in a sunny or shady location, whether it needs a dry, damp or wet soil and if it requires an acidic, alkaline or neutral soil. Whilst many garden plants thrive in a nutrient-rich soil, most wildlife plants grow best in a nutrient-poor soil.

Birds need somewhere suitable to nest, and hedges, trees and shrubs, as well as nest boxes will meet the needs of many of our garden birds. Bird boxes are sometimes not used if placed too near bird-feeding stations. Dense prickly shrubs, such as Berberis,

will give a great deal of protection against predators for birds such as the Long-tailed Tit. Ivy and dense ground cover provide somewhere safe for birds when they are fledging. Having a simple bird table or more elaborate bird feeding stations will encourage birds to visit your garden, especially if food is put out at regular intervals. As well as the common species that will visit most days, you may be rewarded by the occasional visit of species such as the Great-spotted Woodpecker and even a Ring-necked Parakeet. Predation of garden birds by cats was mentioned and it was suggested that cat owners should be encouraged to fit a collar with a small bell on their pet to warn birds of their presence and give them a better chance of avoiding being caught. Squirrels are also regarded as a nuisance to wildlife gardeners, but there is little one can do to prevent these highly intelligent mammals from overcoming devices designed to prevent them from taking food from bird-feeding stations.



Using window feeders are good for small birds, as predators are less likely to be a problem, and they provide us with an opportunity to watch the birds at close range. As well as having a range of bird boxes to meet the needs of different species, a number of homes can be made or purchased which will provide suitable places for mammals and invertebrates to find shelter and possibly breed.

Elaborate structures, referred to by Becca as minibeast hotels, cater for the needs of a wide range of invertebrate species and are becoming popular with wildlife gardeners. Bat boxes may be used to provide overnight shelter or for raising young. Log piles will provide shelter or a home for hedgehogs and other creatures, including beetles. Dead leaves can be used to furnish these homes, or a supply of leaves can be left nearby. We were advised not to provide hay or straw for this purpose. We were shown illustrations of hedgehog homes, some of which could be incorporated into a wood pile to create a dry cosy home inside the pile. Compost heaps may also be used as a home for wildlife.



Creating a hibernaculum for use by amphibians or reptiles was mentioned, and using corrugated iron sheets for the purpose was considered to be one possibility for gardens. A pond is one of the most valuable features in a wildlife garden and will attract creatures that will use it for their home. We were told not to worry too much when a pond dries up as this is a common occurrence in the wild. Creating a bog garden can be a useful addition to a pond. Mention was made of problem species such as New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) and Water Fern (*Azolla filiculoides*) and pond owners were advised to be very careful swapping pond plants, as this can result in unwanted alien species being introduced: it was suggested that any such plants should be thoroughly rinsed under running water before being planted. Relocating surplus frog spawn should also be avoided as it can result in the spread of not only

alien plant species but as diseases which may affect the frogs. Care should also be taken when it comes to pest control, avoiding the use of slug pellets and harmful chemicals in favour of natural control methods. Finally, the sustainability of water supplies was mentioned and we were encouraged to collect and store rainwater. Apparently we use more water in this country than anywhere in Europe.

Our thanks go to Becca Flintham for her detailed and informative talk on a subject that is closely connected with past activities of WWG. I hope that our members will be able to take up some of the many ideas put forward during the talk and help to reverse some of the worrying species declines.

Roger Wilding

#### Footnote

Wycombe Wildlife Group began promoting wildlife gardening soon after it was formed 28 years ago. The late Pat Morris was the driving force behind the various activities undertaken at that time, starting with advice in the Group's newsletter on ways of attracting wildlife into gardens and creating ponds for wildlife. This developed into giving advice to schools for creating wildlife areas, and a lot of practical help was given by the late Maurice Young who was the Group's Educational Officer. We used to sell wildlife-friendly plants on our stands at Wycombe Show and other events. Later the group created a wonderful wildlife garden at a garden centre in West Wycombe and this was maintained by a team of our members until the garden centre changed hands. We had occasional displays in the garden centre at Booker and, more recently, created and maintained for ten years a wildflower garden at Hughenden Manor. We organised wildlife garden and school wildlife area competitions, produced a series of wildlife gardening advisory leaflets, and a few members opened their wildlife gardens. All these activities were successful because we had sufficient manpower resources within the Group to undertake them. Over time, our involvement in wildlife gardening activities has gradually reduced and currently we do very little as a Group to promote the subject, although individual members are doing what they can in their own gardens.

## Wildflower walk in King's Wood

If you went down in the wood this day, you were in for a big surprise.

The walk around King's Wood on 26<sup>th</sup> April was very well supported, there was plenty to see and it was enjoyed by those attending. The unexpected closure of the Kingswood Cemetery car park for resurfacing work caused a bit of confusion, but everyone found somewhere nearby to park.

We entered King's Wood via the path from Cock Lane just north of the cemetery car park and found a good number of spring flowers in the young woodland near the road. We moved on around the gravel-surfaced "all-ability" path and looked at the view over the Micklefield Valley with its surrounding woods, towards Flackwell Heath and beyond into Berkshire. This view was opened up when some of the mature trees were felled a few years ago. We then moved on along the main path on the north side of the wood and had a look at the Bastard Service-tree (*Sorbus x thuringiaca*) which grows in this wood: it is a naturally-occurring hybrid between



a Rowan and a Whitebeam, but is very rare in Buckinghamshire.

Soon after this, Inge Beck noticed a Lords-and-ladies (*Arum maculatum*) plant which had very large spots on its leaves, and which, on further examination, was found to have blisters on the underside of the leaf, which I thought was almost certainly a gall. I took some photographs and took one of the leaves home for further investigation. The conclusion I reached was this was indeed a gall named *Melanustilospora ari* (syn. *Melanotaenium ari*) caused by a smut fungus: this is a very rare or perhaps an under-recorded species with only 47 records on the national fungus recording database, including a single Buckinghamshire record in 1913 under an earlier name. The most recent record on the national database is one from Surrey in 1999.



Our sighting has been notified to Bucks Fungus Group for relevant further action. I have in the meantime confirmed with one of the county wildlife recorders for plants that the blisters on the underside of the leaves could not have been a natural occurrence on *Arum maculatum*, and have shown the specimen to a number of people who are very knowledgeable on galls and none of them had ever come across a galled Lords-and-ladies.

This gall has also been found this year in Bedfordshire where it is being recorded as the first record for that county both as a fungus and as a gall.

I guess this find puts King's Wood on the map for another rare species, at least until everyone starts looking for it, when it might prove to be not quite as rare after all.

After this interesting find, the walk continued past the car park at the foot of Kingsmead Road and then uphill past a small glade to the wood exit next to the Dolphin PH at Totteridge where there is a large colony of Alexanders (*Smyrniium olusatrum*) on which a host-specific rust (*Puccinia smyrnii*) is often found. Although this species is very common in other parts of the country, especially south-west coastal areas, it is uncommon in the Chilterns. Being at the edge of the wood near to housing, it may have migrated from nearby gardens: it is an edible umbellifer species. The area around the Alexanders supports a number of early spring flowers including Wood-sorrel, but many had already finished flowering, possibly a result of the recent dry weather.

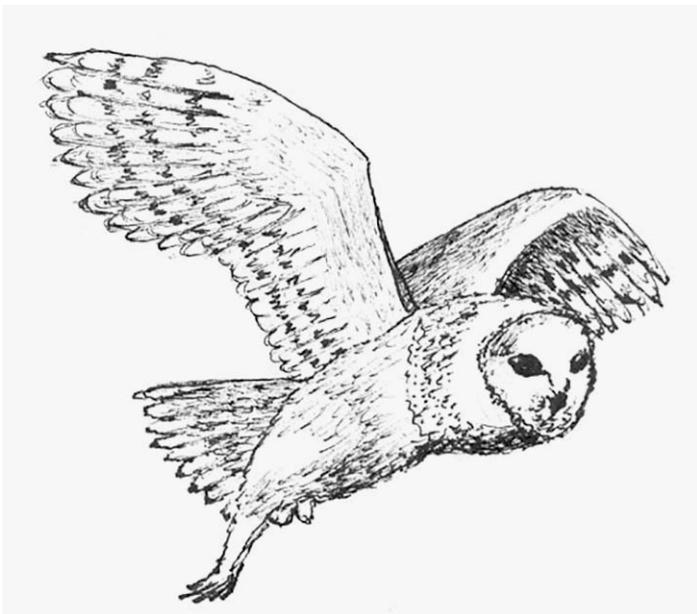
We then walked down to the central valley which runs from Kingswood Road to the top end of the Micklefield Valley and made our way along the south

side of the wood to where there is a bank marking the boundary between land owned by Chepping Wycombe Parish Council and land owned by Wycombe District Council. We followed the path outside the wood as this is the most interesting for wildflowers and we saw a number of chalk grassland species that will provide floral interest later in the year. We followed the path alongside a coppiced area and entered Kingswood Cemetery passing through an area which is managed by Wycombe Wildlife Group admiring the Cowslips and other flowers there before finishing the walk in the cemetery car park.

A total of just over 80 plant species were recorded during the walk, but all of them had been recorded on earlier Wycombe Wildlife Group walks in the wood.

Roger Wilding

## Barn Owl Sighting - third time lucky



Apart from brief glimpses when driving around, Karen and I had never seen a Barn Owl. A few years ago one of the local farmers used to write about the local wildlife in the Flackwell Heath newsletter "The Grapevine". He wrote about a certain piece of "set aside" in a field close to Sheepridge Lane, Flackwell Heath where a Barn Owl may be seen on spring evenings hunting to feed its young. We made an effort and spent a few hours on a hillside overlooking what we thought could be the appropriate site. It was pitch black before we gave up in our quest.

Earlier this year there was a report of a Barn Owl sighting on the Bucks. Bird Club website from a field close to the Dropmore Road just north of Burnham. Again Karen and I set off in hope. It was dusk on a

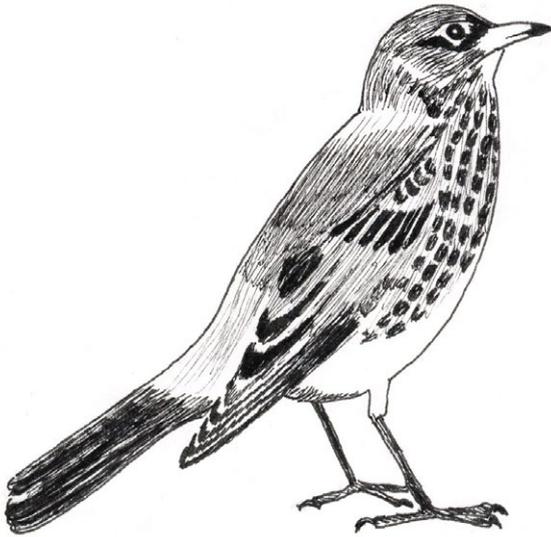
cold January evening and we had to walk along an extremely muddy footpath to the field where I thought the owl had been seen. We didn't stay long, we were cold and wet and unsuccessful again.

At Wycombe Wildlife Group's February meeting we were talking to Caroline Kay and she mentioned that she had seen a Barn Owl in a field behind her back garden in Wooburn Green. She offered to inform us when she saw it again. Within a week of our conversation we had a phone call from Caroline informing us that the owl was flying and to call at her house. We were there in five minutes and we stood in Caroline's back garden waiting. We didn't wait long as the owl emerged from the gathering gloom of the winter's evening. It showed well for us swooping quite close to Caroline's back garden before disappearing over the hill. We thought we had seen all there was to see but the owl returned. This time it criss-crossed the field searching before landing on a gate post quite close to Whitepit Lane. I thought it was an elegant and powerful flyer and understood how myths and legends have grown up about this beautiful creature.

Thanks to Caroline who provided us with the viewing point. At the March meeting of the Wycombe Wildlife Group Caroline informed us that she has seen two owls hunting together so the Barn Owls may be around in Wooburn Green for another few years.

Paul Bowyer

## Garden Tweets



**Fieldfare**



**Redwing**

In the particularly cold spell after Christmas, I threw Bramley apples onto the lawn for the Blackbirds, and, for a week or so, Fieldfares and Redwings were joining them. I found they were quarrelling over a few whole apples so I decided to quarter the apples and throw them in all directions. Did this work? No. The Blackbirds wanted whatever the Fieldfares and Redwings wanted. Whilst the Fieldfares stood their ground and defended their quarter apples, the Redwings, being much more timid, dragged their quarters under shrubs out of sight. That behaviour continued for quite a while.

Goldcrests are very thorough in their quest for insects. One individual worked all over a young Birch tree until it had searched each twig in turn, before flying to the next tree.

All our Robins had paired up by the end of January - 2 pairs in the back garden and 1 pair in the front. Interestingly, there has been no fighting between them. This has been noticeable for several years. I wonder if our milder winters help, as well as plenty of feed being put out. There have been a few 'stand offs' between the pairs, but that has been all. There does not seem in our eyes to be any clearly defined boundaries, but the middle of the back lawn seems to be the 'no go' area for both the Robins and the Blackbirds.

There have been a few 'life or death' struggles between the nesting Collared Doves and a Magpie which will not leave them alone. The Collared Doves are extremely feisty, which is surprising, given their mild appearance.

The Robins are nesting in the Robin box on the back of our house under our Wisteria. A pair of Blue Tits also have been taking nesting material into the Blue Tit box right next door. I was not expecting them both to be occupied at the same time, and sometimes they want the same perch simultaneously! It is interesting seeing successively larger worms going in each day.

There have been seven species of bird queuing up for our porridge leftovers - Robins, House Sparrows, Starlings, Blackbirds, a Song Thrush, a hen Chaffinch and a Magpie.

As I write this article (at the end of April) the baby Robins have fledged, leaving the Blue Tits in peace, and three baby Robins are on our back door mat looking in the window for some mealworms!

A Chiffchaff has, for the last few days when the nights have been cold, been fluttering around in the grass, bathing in the dew - a very pretty sight.

I hope there will be more garden tweets in the next newsletter.

Frances Wilding

# Wildlife observations - January to April 2017

## January 2017

20 <sup>th</sup>	Redwings under trees by BNU college, Suffield Road.	SU865928
	Redwings in All Saints churchyard, High Wycombe.	SU865931
	Kingfisher by road bridge alongside WDC offices.	SU866927
	Banded Demoiselle larva in stream at Desborough Recreation Ground.	SU849937
24 <sup>th</sup>	2 Fieldfares chasing off Blackbirds on lawn in Deeds Grove garden.	HP12 3PA
26 <sup>th</sup>	12 Mistle Thrushes quarrelling over berries on the Rye.	SU870925
28 <sup>th</sup>	Grey Heron in Deeds Grove garden.	HP12 3PA

## February 2017

20 <sup>th</sup>	Brimstone butterfly on Ivy in Deeds Grove garden.	HP12 3PA
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## March 2017

1 <sup>st</sup>	Tree Creeper near Pens Place, Marlow.	SU844855
4 <sup>th</sup>	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker near footpath at Marlow.	SU846857
11 <sup>th</sup>	Red Kite building nest near footpath at Marlow.	SU845857
17 <sup>th</sup>	Lapwing display near Pens Place at Marlow.	SU843853
24 <sup>th</sup>	First Chiffchaff singing along lane at Marlow.	SU846857
27 <sup>th</sup>	First Pipistrelle bat in Deeds Grove garden.	HP12 3PA

## April 2017

No sightings reported

## Review of 'Wildlife Observations'

Listing members' wildlife sightings has been a feature of our newsletter since Issue 2 in April 1990. It has always been based on sightings reported by a small number of members and, perhaps not surprisingly, often by those with some responsibility for the production of the newsletter and its content.

In the early days of the newsletter, some of the interesting sightings on the Group's walks were included in the list, and at one stage the emphasis was changed to concentrate on sightings within members' gardens. Perhaps the time has come to review the purpose of 'Wildlife Observations', decide whether or not it should continue and, if so, what should be included.

We would very much welcome members' views on this, perhaps in the form of responses to the following questions:-

1. Do you usually read this newsletter item?
2. Do you find it of any interest?
3. Do you consider it should be restricted to unusual sightings?
4. Do you consider the sightings should be limited to those in member's gardens?
5. Do you consider we should include unusual species seen on WWG walks (even if referred to elsewhere in the newsletter?)

