

# WYCOMBE WILDLIFE NEWS

NEWSLETTER NO.4

JANUARY 1991

## WILDLIFE GARDENING EDITION

### EDITORIAL COMMENT

Last year's abnormal summer is over, and at the time of writing we are back to the usual winter frosts and snow. When there is a cold snap the importance of our gardens to wildlife is obvious as birds flock in to eat the berries & drink from our ponds & birdbaths.

As the year closes our first wildlife survey also comes to an end. The results and analysis will be reported in April. With the start of another year we are beginning a new survey, appropriately of garden ponds, in collaboration with the **Thames and Chiltern Herpetological Group**,

whose assistance we greatly appreciate. In fact, as interest from the public increases with requests from schools and other bodies for consultation and advice, we are going to have to rely more and more on the help of others, so don't be surprised if we contact you one day.

We thank **Marlow Garden & Leisure Centre** for their sponsorship. For those gardeners who are keen to establish a wildlife area they have a good range of native plants and seeds to get you going.

Special theme for next issue: Pond life.

Copy to be in by 11th. March, please, to Pat Morris, 30 Amersham Hill Drive, H.Wycombe.

### HAVE YOU GOT A GARDEN POND ?

There are few natural ponds on the Chilterns and changes in agriculture and natural succession continue to reduce their numbers. The upsurge in interest in water gardening, however may redress the balance, a change that has not gone unnoticed by our wildlife, for,

in common with other parts of the country most amphibia in Wycombe District are to be found in garden ponds. Not only the amphibians find and inhabit our garden ponds, insects with aquatic larval stages are equally good at seeking out standing water. I have photographed blue damselflies over a pond in Marlow Bottom - there is no natural water in the valley and the Thames is four miles away as the damselfly flies.

Loss & pollution of standing water has made garden ponds increasingly important refuges for aquatic wildlife, just how important we do not know. To find out the answer we need a

survey so the **WyUWG** wildlife survey this year will be of garden ponds and their wildlife. Everyone loves pond dipping so here is a good excuse for you to have a go. If you have a pond do let us know: how big it is and what fish and plants have you got, and which of the amphibians (frogs, toads or newts) and other forms of wildlife has found your pond ?

Maurice Young.



A garden pond is of greater value to wildlife than any other feature in the garden

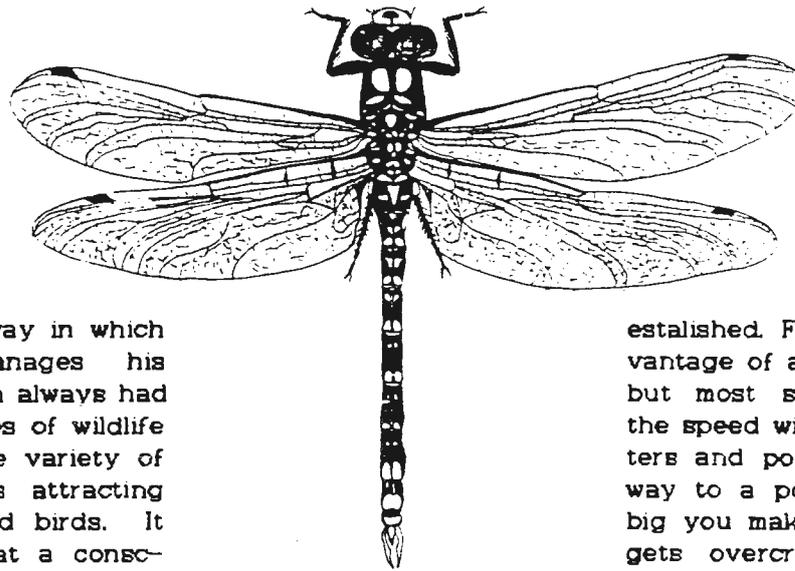
**THIS ISSUE GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY  
MARLOW GARDEN AND LEISURE CENTRE  
Pump Lane South, Marlow, just off the A4155 & A404**

## THE STORY OF ONE WILDLIFE GARDEN

My wife and I have always shared a great interest in gardening. When we were getting married, instead of house hunting we went 'garden hunting' as we both considered that finding the right garden was an important factor influencing our choice of home. Having found a garden we liked we decided to buy the house that went with it. We must have got it right for 20 years later we still spend much of our spare time in the very same garden, although of course, it has changed considerably over the years.

To a certain extent all gardens are "wildlife gardens", some of course attract more wildlife than others, and this is influenced by the way in which the gardener manages his reserve. Our garden always had a number of features of wildlife interest with a wide variety of flowers and shrubs attracting many butterflies and birds. It is only recently that a conscious effort has been made to enhance the wildlife potential of our garden and steps taken are still experimental.

Having hedges on 3 sides of the garden has guaranteed a number of nesting birds every year, although increasing numbers of magpies have caused a few problems, destroying nests and even bird boxes. The latest threat to our garden birds is from sparrowhawks but we don't worry too much about the loss of the occasional sparrow when we experience the thrill of seeing this bird on one of its daily visits to our 'sparrow roost' (a weeping willow-leaved pear tree in the middle of the lawn). In fact I stopped feeling sorry for the sparrows the year they ate most of the dragonflies that hatched from our pond, it was sometime before we realised that the sparrows had discovered a new food supply. Netting the pond stopped the sparrows but caused a few problems for the dragonflies when they were ready to fly.



Southern hawker  
dragonfly

Mentioning ponds reminds me of that other occasional garden visitor, the heron. This bird is often seen in the town and has a habit of patrolling residential roads making a mental note of all the garden ponds which it considers may have some potential as a source of food. There are only 4 fish left in my pond and as there have been no young for several years I can only assume the heron has left us with either all male or all female fish.

The creation of a pond was, perhaps, the most important stage in the development of our particular garden from a wildlife point of view.

It is really amazing how much wildlife suddenly appears when a garden pond becomes established. Frogs soon take advantage of a pond to lay spawn but most surprising of all is the speed with which water skaters and pond snails find their way to a pond. No matter how big you make the pond it soon gets overcrowded with plants and, like us, you may look for other places to put a mini pond and bog garden. No matter how dry the summer frogs can always be found somewhere

- perhaps under the rhubarb leaves, in the strawberry patch or amongst the heathers, anywhere the shade keeps conditions slightly damp. My own particular favourite visitor to our pond is the southern hawker dragonfly. Unlike many other dragonflies this species is almost tame and will fly right up to you as you stand and watch.

Apart from the pond the most important attraction for wildlife in the garden is the buddleja; on a sunny summer's day this bush is covered with peacock and small tortoiseshell butterflies. Speckled woods like the top end of our garden where there is the right amount of shade to suit their needs and holly blues take advantage of the ivy on our fence. If we leave the fallen plums to rot red admirals never fail to appear.

The cultivation of wild plants in the garden is my latest venture. To start with I allowed a number of 'weeds' to develop naturally but in a controlled way. Not having a large amount of space for this purpose I chose the vegetable garden as the experimental wildflower plot. No, I have not given up growing vegetables, I have merely found a secondary use for the paths laid down a few years back to divide it up into 4 ft. wide plots. They are compacted soil covered with stones but because the soil is heavy clay that holds the moisture even in dry weather some surprising plants have appeared & survived including: purple loosestrife, yellow iris, hard rush and even a blue-eyed grass. Allowing a few plants of foxglove, coltsfoot, feverfew, blue fleabane, marjoram, rosebay and greater willowherb and even the occasional thistle to grow has created a quite colourful collection of plants. Dandelions and buttercups are not allowed to grow because they give off secretions harmful to other plants. Vigorous, invasive species need watching closely to ensure they do not spread where they are not wanted.

Having also grown a colourful collection of "cornfield" flowers this year, I will be allowing these plants to spread next year and this will certainly brighten up the vegetable patch. The biggest challenge of all lies in the creation of a wildflower meadow. To turn the main lawn into a meadow would give the wrong impression to visitors so I am restricted to the orchard with its problems of shade. I have planted a few fritillary bulbs in what, I hope, will eventually be a spring flower meadow and I will be buying one or two suitable plants for the summer meadow. Leaving the grass uncut for most of this year has enabled me to identify most the most suitable areas of grass for this purpose as areas dominated by rye grass will certainly be unsuitable for this purpose unless I dig them up and start from scratch.

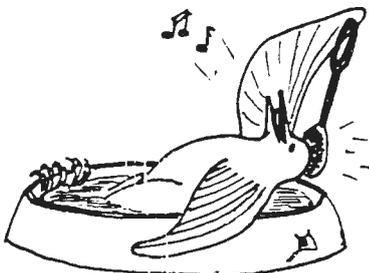
I hope that this account of what I have done and what I have in mind will prompt a few others to follow my example and have a go at changing an existing 'wildlife garden' garden into an improved 'wildlife garden'. Perhaps if there is enough interest the editor can be persuaded to find room for a regular wildlife gardening corner in the newsletter.

Roger Wilding.



Yellow iris (*Iris pseudacorus*)

#### WATER IN THE GARDEN



Water is as important for the wildlife in your garden as food. A pond is the ideal answer but a shallow bowl is a good alternative and has the advantage that it can be placed near the house to bring birds up close so they can be seen clearly from your windows. The bird bath/bowl can be a focal point of interest in a garden. For stability a large OPTIPOT (36PS) flower pot saucer is ideal.

Maurice Young.

## BUTTERFLIES IN THE GARDEN

Mid winter is not really the time of year when people's thoughts turn naturally to butterflies in their gardens. However, most gardeners plan their next season's planting during the winter and so it seems an appropriate time for this piece.

Most local gardens are quite small so I suggest we should concentrate on plants to attract butterflies to feed rather than try to get them to breed. In spring and autumn they need warmth to enable them to become active and a source of nectar and so for the early months a warm sheltered spot should be chosen to plant aubretia, primroses, wall-flowers and forget-me-nots. These should be planted in large groups as this is better than scattered plants dotted around.

In the summer much more of the garden will be warm and other areas can be planted with groups of scabious, dwarf dahlias, candytuft, french & african marigolds. For autumn pride of place should be given in the warmest spot to Sedum spectabile the 'ice plant'. The old fashioned pink variety is preferred by butterflies to the modern dull red cultivar.

Most gardens can support a few shrubs and everybody immediately says "buddleja" & this is a must - in a sunny spot! Shrubs can encourage some unusual species to breed in the garden without using too much space, how about a purging buckthorn in the shrubbery? Not very spectacular in flower or fruit but I guarantee yellow brimstone butterflies will find it out and lay their large yellow eggs singly on the topmost leaves. Holly and ivy for the caterpillars if the lovely holly blue to live on, holly for the spring brood and ivy for the summer insects. Wild grasses left uncut around trees & under hedges may just encourage gatekeepers, meadow browns or speckled woods to take up residence.

I have tried not to make this article just a list of plants but rather to give an idea of how to garden to encourage insects and consequently birds to come onto your patch.

BBCS have produced an illustrated booklet "Gardening for Butterflies" with many more suggestions for plants to use. I will be pleased to supply copies at £1.25 if you give me a ring on 0494 444158 Ron Beaven

Mrs. Barbara North of Cadmore End has kindly sent us an article she wrote for 'Practical Gardening', here are some of her tips:

**DO** grow wild flowers in the garden, butterflies will choose them before cultivated ones

**DO** plant flowers that seed themselves willy nilly in every nook & cranny such as honesty, sweet rocket, forget-me-not, feverfew and valerian - all good nectar plants.



Brimstone

**DO** plant Rudeckia 'Marmalade', its brilliant flowers are a joy throughout summer and it will attract many butterflies.

**DO** leave fallen fruit to rot, it attracts the autumn butterflies like the painted lady.

**DO** take care pruning blackcurrants not to disturb any pupae of the comma which feeds on blackcurrants as well as nettles.

**DO** plant sweet rocket, lady's smock or hedge mustard and you may get orange tips and be able to observe their whole life-cycle (as Barbara does every year).



Comma on fallen apple.

The large and small whites are pests of the cabbage but will feed on other plants - the large white on nasturtiums and small white on arabis or aubretia so grow these and transfer any caterpillars on your cabbages to these alternative food plants.

**Plantlife**, the new conservation group which puts plants first has linked up with five other major conservation organisations in a campaign to save our remaining peatlands. We may not have any peatland in Wycombe but we, you and I, can do a lot to help save these very special habitats. You can:

Give up peat,  
Use a peat alternatives,  
Write to Wycombe D.C. Parks Department  
asking them to give up peat.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could announce in our next issue that they had given it up and publish an article from them giving their initial impressions of the alternatives they have tried.

How about it Parks Department ?



## FOR PEAT'S SAKE !



**BEWARE !** of false propoganda put out by the Peat Producer's Association in their leaflet "Working to preserve our peatland Heritage" Their statement "peat is essential for the growth of plants" floors them immediately, come and have a look at any of the nature reserves around Wycombe, there is no peat on any of them and the plants are growing quite happily - even in last year's gruelling heat !

BUT what can we use instead of peat ? I was at a loss to answer this and as a keen gardener was getting a bit worried as I have come to the end of my last bag of peat based potting compost - what to replace it with ?, **Plantlife**, to the rescue ! their newsletter arrived yesterday in which they recommend Hensby Biotech's "NOVAGROW" a new multipurpose compost made from cereal straw, animal manure and coir. Coir is made from coconut fibre. There is something to be said for the monitory system, create a demand & someone will will come up with something to meet it, I am sure there will be many more to follow and with all the research going into them some of these alternative composts will be superior to the peat based ones we have become accustomed to and we will wonder how ever we did without them. Maurice Young.

p.s. you've guessed it! I am a member of **Plantlife**, if you want any information about this group do contact me on 0628 472000.

Those of you who read the Independent on Sunday may have spotted the article about Alex Muirhead who runs a small organic fertilizer company "Goldengrow" in Monmouth, Alex's substitute for peat as a growing medium for pot plants consists of coir dust, the stuff left over from turning coconut fibre into rope and matings. The dual benefits of using this material are that:  
a/. it is a genuine waste product that would have been thrown away and,  
b/. it isn't peat

Raised peat bogs were once common throughout the Scottish Highlands, South Yorkshire, Lancashire, the Somerset Levels and East Anglia 96% of lowland raised bogs have been destroyed since 1850. In Ireland nearly all bogs of Scientific interest will be gone by 1994 unless drastic action is taken.

Bogs provide important habitat to many rare notable species such as the beautiful bog rosemary, insects such as giant raft spiders dragonflies and damselflies, and birds like dunlin, golden plover, and hen harrier. In addition they act as reservoirs, absorbing water in the wet seasons and regulating its controlled release into the streams and rivers.

Perhaps even more important today, peat bogs lock away carbon dioxide for the living moss takes up CO<sub>2</sub> as it photosynthesises. This is then permanently locked away for the acidity of the peat it forms prevents decay which would return it to the atmosphere. This mechanism could act as an important brake on global warming!

Commercial peat cutting for horticulture began in the 1960s and now represents the most significant threat to raised bogs in the U.K. Although many bogs were designated SSSIs, planning permission for peat cutting often predates this notification and thus no protection is offered.

A simple alternative to peat is garden compost but many other materials could be used. Do try them and any other alternative composts available. Lyn Jack, (F.O.E.)  
If your supplier does not stock them:

## FOR PEAT'S SAKE ASK

**THE IMPORTANCE OF GARDENS TO BIRDLIFE.**

There is without a doubt a greater need for wildlife gardening than ever before.

Man's gradual "erosion" of the countryside around us has pushed our wildlife on to our doorsteps. In the last 40 years we have destroyed as much woodland as in the previous 400 years, but it is not all bad news for there are over a million acres of gardens in Britain waiting for our wild birds and animals.

Birds need 3 things: food, water and a site in which to breed. We can easily provide the water and with a little thought we can provide the others.

Taking a breeding site first, spotted flycatchers tend to breed in ivy and clematis covered walls and blackbirds & song thrushes like to nest in fir trees. Dunnocks and wrens require thick, impenetrable scrub to keep out unwanted predators and of course you can put up a nest box for your blue tits, if you have a tree to put it on.



Redwing with hawthorn berries

Food is easy to provide for our birds. Apart from unnatural foods like peanuts you can plant fruit bearing trees: apple, rowan and cotoneaster are a few. Redwings and all thrushes readily come to fallen apples, particularly in a hard winter (split them in half with a spade). Teasels are good for finches and honeysuckle & lichen on trees can hold insects for wrens, goldcrests and tree creepers.

Don't forget if you do create a feeding station for your birds to look out for a marauding sparrowhawk, who may find these gatherings easy pickings. Mike Wallen.

(Editors note) A tip Mike gave during his talk:

Drill holes in a log, fill it with a mix of fat, nuts and seed and suspend it in a tree. The birds will love it!

**DID YOU SEE ? (1990)**

**Birds:**

Little grebe: (15)	Wycombe Rye,	December
Tufted duck: (14)	Wycombe Rye,	December
Stonechat: several	Marlow ski pit,	December
Siskin: female,	Amersham Hill,	December
Redpoll: male,	Amersham Hill,	December
Red throated diver:	Little Marlow,	December
Red necked grebe:	Little Marlow,	December
Waxwing:	Amersham Hill,	December



Tufted duck.

**Insects:**

Brown argus:	Sands Band,	August
Chalkhill blue:	Sands Bank,	August

**Plants:**

Stone parsley,	Sands bank,	August
Round-leaved Fluellen,	field at Sands,	August
Galingale, Bottom pond,	Grange Farm,	
	Widmer End,	October

Some wildlife gardening books with chapters on making birds welcome in your garden: Available from Wycombe Book Shop, Castle St.

- "Discovering Birds" by Tony Soper, 1983. published: BBC £3-95
- "How to make a wildlife garden", Chris Baines 1985. Elm Tree Books £7-95
- "The Joy of Wildlife Gardening" Geoffrey Smith 1989. R.S.P.B. £14-95



The editor has asked - for alternatives to peat Here are some available locally:

- Mulch & Mix: (1,2 & 4); Composted Bark: (2); Cocoa Compost: (2); Cocoa Shell (3), Palm Pear Substitute: (3).

1. Beaconsfield Garden Centre, London Road.
2. Booker Garden Centre, Clay Lane.
3. Bourne End Nurseries, Hedsor Road.
4. Marlow Garden & Leisure Centre, our sponsors will stock it later in the year.

West Wycombe Garden Centre awaits an answer to an enquiry re Salmonella before stocking alternatives.

**DO NOT FORGET - ASK**

# WyUWG RECENT ACTIVITIES - REPORT

## TRIP TO HUGHENDEN MANOR

Although half way through October, it was yet another glorious sunny afternoon when 10 members of WyUWG set off under the leadership of Louise Niekirk for a fungus foray in Hughenden. In spite of the dry summer, over the course of the walk 11 different species were identified. A not very welcome, although attractive looking, sight was honey fungus spreading over a tree stump. Other finds included sulphur tuft and the edible shaggy ink-cap.



Shaggy  
ink-caps  
or Lawyer's Wigs  
(*Coprinus comatus*)

During the walk a muntjac was spotted among the trees, long-tails tits searched the tree canopy over head & hairy nail galls were seen on some beech leaves.

Louise explained the farming practices of surrounding lease holders and pointed out newly planted hedgerows. Maybe a week later, after rain, we would have seen more fungi, but it was a most enjoyable walk, thanks to Louise and her hospitality as warden at Hughenden and everyone's enthusiastic use of reference books, not to mention the splendid weather!

## LOCAL YOUTHS JOIN IN

Two local lads became so interested in scrub clearance being carried out at Chairborough Rd. public open space that they actually asked if they could help! They enjoyed it so much that they wish to be contacted next time there is work to do - hopefully they will bring along some of their friends!

The next session at Chairborough Road is on the 16th & 17th. February, 1991.

## RUBBISH DUMP ON TOP OF THE HILL !

Proposals to dump rubbish on the top of the hill above Bloom Wood submitted for approval in October drew the Group's attention to a unique and fascinating site in the District, Unique because, although the hills here are of chalk, they are capped with clays and gravels which have produced an acid soil that retains water. The area has been considerably disturbed in the recent past but has recovered to produce birch woodland and acid grassland dominated by soft rush. At the time of our first recce there were glorious shows of shaggy ink-caps and fly agarics. If suitably managed it could develop into heathland, in fact I wonder if it was outlier of the heath at Flackwell in previous centuries.

Maurice.

The Group's concern over the threat to this site is on the basis of its unique nature & value to wildlife of the area. However, we should question the wisdom of siting a rubbish dump on the top of the hill. The area has been extensively "worked over" in a way which may have disrupted the clay stratum so that, although it still holds water, there may be slow leakage into the chalk beneath and, if toxic chemicals are dumped, it could lead to pollution of the water table and drinking water supplies in the future.

## SHEEPRIDGE NATURE RESERVE

This is our first reserve site and we lease it from Little Marlow Parish Council. In the last six months we have produced a management plan and have secured grants from Wycombe District Council and the Shell Better Britain campaign for its management.

Sheepridge Nature Reserve is located off Sheepridge Lane, Bourne End on land adjacent to Little Marlow Cemetery (SU 884 886). The reserve can be entered via one of two gates on the west side of Sheepridge Lane about 100m up the Lane from the A 4155 Marlow - Bourne End Road. There is parking for 2 cars on the roadside verge but cars can be taken in during work party sessions. It is a brilliant project - do come and help us.

Matthew.

## GIRL GUIDES LEND A HAND

The first working party at our new nature reserve at Sheepridge Lane was held on the 9th December, 1990 with 10 people, including 2 girl guides, braving exceptionally wintry weather to carry out a variety of tasks. We were all pleased with what was achieved including scrub clearance, creation of some footpaths and a start on the construction of a pond. Regular work parties are planned for the coming year - so please come along and help us. You will find it rewarding work in a delightful location - it's free and fun. The next work party is on January 20th 1991, see programme of events.

## PASSING STRANGER

We had just come back from a walk, and there she was. With her mottled brown plumage and soft terra-cotta breast feathers she blended perfectly with the blackened watermint and dried bents around the pool. She had a small head with dab of highlight behind the eyes and a neat little beak with which she picked delicately at the grass seed. As she stepped out of the undergrowth, we caught sight of



Flo-Jo

her long sturdy legs. The other birds were as impressed as we were, she was bigger than any of them. Sparrows watched respect fully from side bushes, the collard dove peered down in astonishment from the bird-house roof, the magpies crackled incredulously from the safety of the apple tree, but not one flew down to join her as she systematically devoured their food. Only when I opened the back door did she career like Flo-Jo in the 100 metres, for the bottom of the garden.

The following morning, soon after the day's bird food had been put out her brown, athletic body reappeared from the bottom of the garden and she came racing up. This time the sparrows joined her as she tucked in, like a mother hen surrounded by her chicks. Having Tried all the artificial food she went round the wildflower seeds: self-heal, wild carrot, even carnation seed heads.

Half-way through she stopped, sipped water from the bird-bath, and went up on a bough over the pond to adjust her make-up. Satisfied she came down again, continued round the garden to finish her itinerary. With a few pecks at a fallen apple for a final preen this time on our garden table she at last decided to leave for the night. After all, it was now 3.30 pm. and growing dark, This time she headed towards the front garden.



We thought we had acquired another quest for the whole of the winter. Who could resist such a well stocked wildlife garden ? But we were wrong, we never saw our hen pheasant again. With the fickleness of woman, having had what she wanted, she went her way. Whether she just continued her safari through suburbia until she reached Sands Middle School (I hear a hen pheasant has turned up there, attracted by their new pond) or fell prey to cat, fox or motorcar we shall never know. She could have even graced someone's Christmas table, for the guns were blazing in the distant woods the next day. She has passed on one way or the other.

Sussie Siskin

If you have seen anything unusual in your garden why not write about it for our next newsletter ?

## MORE THOUGHTS ON ALTERNATIVES TO PEAT.

Peat is mainly used to increase the organic content of our garden soils & growing media but there are plenty of other materials to improve our soil available from local sources. You can play your part by adopting old, proven gardening methods, eg. compost as much garden and vegetable waste as you can and mulch with leaves and other natural materials such as shredded bark and wood, - fungi and worms will do the rest !

DON'T throw all the leaves you sweep up from your paths into the dustbin to add to the amount of waste the council have to collect - they are not waste! properly composted they are a valuable soil improver.

GROW comfrey and/or nettles and use them as a green manure in your garden or to pep up your compost heap. Maurice & Pat.

## WYCOMBE WATCH GROUP

In November the group made a tremendous effort to raise funds on behalf of the world's rainforests. Children's Tropical Rainforests U.K. are currently running two projects, the purchase of a rainforest area in Costa Rica, and the setting up of a Forest Protection Centre in a lowland reserve in Thailand. £65 was raised, and split between the two projects. Well done children!

Later in the month we continued our conservation efforts in Keep Hill Wood. Last year the Group helped open up an area of the wood to encourage the return of chalkland plants and insects. We removed the regrowth of dogwood and extended the clearing downhill. There will be more conservation meetings in February and November this year. Anyone is welcome to come and join in.

Finally fans of the Really Wild Show will see some of our WATCH Group on TV in February. Last August 15 members joined in the the filming of the show at Windsor Safari Park. It took nearly 2 days filming to produce one programme. Highlights of the show (excluding humans) will feature lion cubs, elephants, butterflies, hedgehogs & birds of prey. So WATCH out for them.

We look forward to meeting new families at our Wildlife Hospital talk in January (see the events calendar). Bring old towels and tins of pet food, the hospital will be grateful for any help you can give them.

Sylvia Barnes.

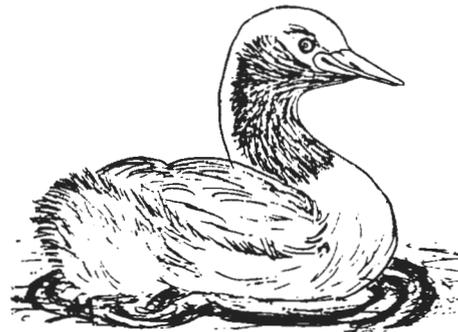
### History of the Dyke on Wycome Rye.

Lorna has been looking into the history of the Dyke as she and Frances Alexander are doing a booklet with illustrations for children to colour on "High Wycome Now & Then". Lorna reports that "The dyke, waterfall and landscaping were part of work done by Capability Brown for Lord Shelburne who owned the Wycome Abbey Estate in the 18th. century. At the time part of the old town was taken into the estate, cottages demolished and the old Windsor Road disappeared under the lake. The landscaped walk known as "Wendover Way" was given back to the town by the then owner Lord Carrington in memory of his only son killed in the first world war".

Lorna Cassidy.

The dyke was landscape creation on a grand scale, the sort of work for which C.B. was renowned. It is not only an attractive landscape feature but attracts wildlife that would not otherwise be seen in the valley - manifest proof of the point we make in this issue of the value of a pond in your garden. (albeit on a somewhat larger scale!).

Members of our Group, who braved the rather cold weather, enjoyed a winter stroll round the dyke on December 16 with Mike Wallen as their guide. Mike helped us sort out true Mallard ducks from the many hybrids present. We also saw 15 little grebe periodically disappearing from view as they dived for fish in the beautifully clear water. In addition to the usual coots and moorhens we were pleased to see Swans back on the Dyke.



Little grebe  
or dabchick

Earlier in the month Mike had regaled us with some fascinating facts on the bird life of Wycome and some amusing tales of the awkward situations in which an absorbed birdwatcher can land himself.

Did you know that over 200 pied wagtails have been known to roost in the Octagon Car Park, in cold weather? During the evening we viewed slides, not only of common species like the pied wagtails but also rare ones, & were told whereabouts in Bucks they could be seen. Buzzards over West Wycome and flocks of crossbills at Seer Green. As many as 88 little grebe, we were told, were seen on the Dyke 2 years ago.

Differences in look-a-likes, such as gold-and firecrest, brambling and chaffinch and yellow and grey wagtails were pointed out, and behavioural differences in those close relatives, redwing & fieldfare, explained.

Hot mince pies and a glass of wine, to herald the festive season, rounded off this entertaining and informative evening.

Thank you, Mike !

**Programme of Events - WINTER/SPRING 1991**

**JANUARY**

**Sunday, 6th. January 2.00 pm. WATCH**

Wildlife Hospital Trust - a talk by Mrs. Bunker, for children and adults. Rye Health Clinic. All welcome.

**Sunday, 13th. January 2.00 pm.**

New Year Walk from Hughenden church car park, in Hughenden Park.

**Monday, 14th. January 8.00 pm.**

Planning meeting, at the Priory Centre.

**Sunday, 20th. January 10 am. to dusk.**

Conservation task, on our Sheepridge Nature Reserve of Sheepridge lane. Meet on the reserve: SU 884 886.

**Monday, 28th. January 8.00 pm.**

Seminar at the Priory Centre for all interested in the wildlife mapping project.

**FEBRUARY**

**Sunday, 3rd. February 2.00 pm. WATCH**

The Recycling Roadshow. A 'WATCH' programme of games, drama, songs & puppets, Rye Health Clinic.

**Sunday, 3rd. February 10.30 am. to dusk.**

Pond restoration at Grange Farm, Widmer End. SU 883 958. Access via Widmer End sports ground. Details from Matthew: 0628 522455.

**Saturday, 16th February 2.00 pm.**

**Sunday, 17th February 2.00 pm.**

Conservation task at Chairborough Rd. Public Open Space. Meet at: SU 849 922

**Sunday, 24th. February 10.30 am. - 3 pm.**

**WATCH** Conservation work at Keep Hill. Come for the day & bring lunch. Meet in Swimming Pool car park 10.30 am. or 1.30 pm. families welcome.

**Sunday 24th. February 10.30 - 4.30 pm.**

Conservation task at Gomm Valley. Contact: Maurice on 0628 472000 for details.

**Monday, 25th. February 8.00 pm.**

Talk by Nick Bowles on "Butterflies of Bucks" at the Priory Centre, High Wycombe.

**MARCH**

**Sunday 3rd. March WATCH**

Winter Wildfowl Walk at Tring reservoirs. Bring wellies & bino's. Meet in car park by Grand Union Canal, Marsworth, 1 mile N of Tring.

**Sunday 3rd. March 10.30 am. - 4.30 pm.**

Pond restoration, Northcroft Estate, Wooburn Green. Contact Matthew for details.

**Monday 4th. March, 7.30 p.m.**

'Amphibians', ring torches and warm clothes. Meet in Rye Swimming Pool car park.

**Sunday, 10th. March.**

Conservation task at our Sheepridge Reserve. Work will include pond construction. Contact Matthew for details. Meet at SU 884 886.

**Monday 11th. March. 8.00 pm.**

Planning meeting at the Priory centre.

**Sunday 24th. March 10.30 am. - 4.00 pm.**

Conservation task at BBONT's reserve in Gomm Valley. SU 897 922. Contact Maurice for details.

**APRIL**

**Monday 8th. April 8.00 pm. AGM.**

Plus our 'traditional' slide show at the Priory Centre, Priory Road, High Wycombe.

**Sunday 14th. April 2.00 pm. BBONT/WATCH**

Family Walk at Park Wood, Bradenham. Meet N.T. car park, Small Dean Lane. (SU 823 987) Leader: Maurice Young.

**Sunday 21st. April 2 pm.**

Spring Woodland Walk. Meet in the Rye Swimming Pool car park.

**WATCH** indoor meetings 30p

**MANY THANKS** to all contributors.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Due to heavy demand on the Group's resources and expenses arising, membership fees will have to be raised to £3 in the coming financial year, April 1991-92.

**WHO'S WHAT The WyUWG contact list.**

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