

# WYCOMBE WILDLIFE



# NEWS

no. 16

## URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP

JANUARY 1995

The Countryside Centre, Bassetsbury Manor, Bassetsbury Lane, High Wycombe, HP11 1QX  
01494 536930

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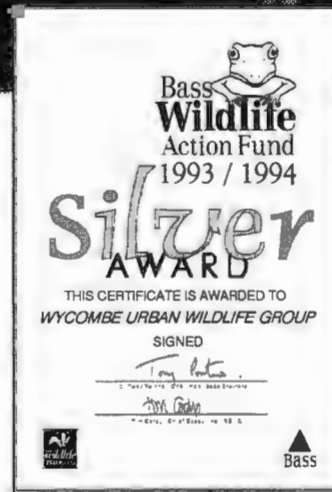
### Silver Award for our Sheepridge Project.

In September we received a summons to attend the launch of the 94/95 Bass Wildlife Action Fund, with a hint that we might get an award. So on Monday 3rd.

October I tootled along to the Old Hatchet pub at Winkfield near Windsor wondering what it was all about. It was an informal gathering, and after a few words of welcome and an introduction from the **Wildlife Trusts** Chief Executive, Tim Cordy, in which he thanked **Bass** for their generosity in funding a further series of projects - to the tune of

20,000 - he announced that the work of three of last year's participants was to be marked by the awarding of bronze, silver and gold certificates. "Gold to —, the **Silver Award** goes to **Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group**. Bronze to —, will their representatives please step forward". (con...)

photo: David Hatfull



On behalf of **Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group** Maurice Young receives the **Bass Silver Award** from Dr Tony Portno, Chairman, **Bass Brewers** and Sir David Attenborough, National President of **The Wildlife Trusts**

This issue generously sponsored by: **THE DOCUMENT COMPANY**  
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Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group is a voluntary organization the **OBJECT** of which is to further the ecology and knowledge of the urban and fringe areas of High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire; to conserve, protect, restore and create wildlife habitats; to encourage colonization and survival of all plant and animal life in such areas and to promote the education of the public in matters pertaining to urban wildlife and its conservation.

Within Wycombe District the Group aims to:

- Survey and map wildlife habitats.
  - Protect important wildlife sites.
  - Study wildlife sites and their associated wildlife.
  - Manage wildlife sites and associated flora and fauna.
  - Stimulate public interest in wildlife & its conservation
  - Encourage wildlife gardening.
  - Co-operate with other groups with similar aims.
  - Promote the objectives of the Group.
  - Encourage active participation in conservation of all persons and groups and provide appropriate training to that end.
- (A detailed copy of the aims is available on request)

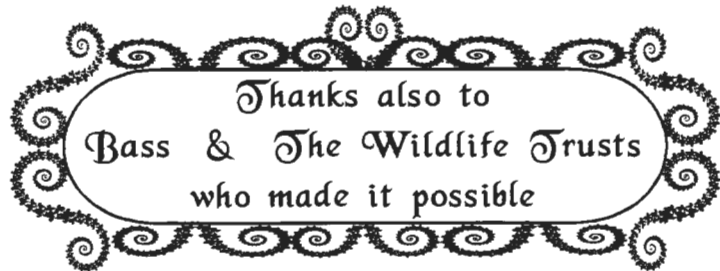
Wycombe Wildlife News is published 3 times a year to promote the Group's activities and inform members & the public of its progress.

Editor: Pat Morris.  
Produced by Maurice Young.  
Printed by: Rank Xerox.  
Illustrations by: Roy Barks, Frances Wilding, John Willson, Maurice Young.  
Photos: David Hatful, Michael York.

## Silver for Sheepridge - Thanks to all who helped

(.tinued) So, on the Group's behalf, I did just that and was presented with the **Silver Award Certificate** by Dr. Tony Portno, Chairman of **Bass Brewers** and duly shook hands with Dr. Portno and Sir David Attenborough. There was then, of course a photo-call. So that is why yet again our newsletter has Sheepridge splashed across the front page.

Our special thanks must go to Jo and Andy for entering our Sheepridge Project for the **Bass Grant**, and for the work which they & students from the Berkshire Agricultural College put in to the project. Thanks also to all our members who helped at the work parties over the past four years there are more (work parties!) - hope to see you there.



### Some Super Photos

Our thanks and congratulations must also go to Ann Priest for the super pictures she took at the opening of Sheepridge. We sent a set to **RSNC** with our Sheepridge Project report and I suspect they played an important part in landing the **Silver Award** for us.

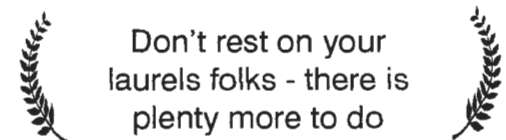
One, not surprisingly, was selected by **The Wildlife Trusts (RSNC)** for the front cover of their new, nationally distributed pamphlet outlining their five year corporate strategy. Copies of this pamphlet can be seen in the Countryside Centre.

### ○ ○ ○ ○ Red-ringed Greenfinches ○ ○ ○ ○

No! not a new species. Hughenden (Bird) Ringing Group would like you to keep a look out for colour-ringed greenfinches. A number of greenfinch were ringed (or is it rung?) in a Lane End garden last summer. Adults are ringed with one or two different colours on either leg and juveniles will have a **SINGLE RED RING** on the left leg. Please keep a keen eye open for these birds. If sighted please record the sighting - colour ring

order, left or right leg, time and place - then contact the Group on the number below.

12 different colours have been used - Red, Yellow, White, Black, Orange, Mauve, Light Blue, Dark Blue, Light Pink, Dark Pink, Light Green and Dark Green. The contact number is: 01494 881982



Views expressed in the 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. Any members who object to their membership details being held in this way should notify the Secretary.

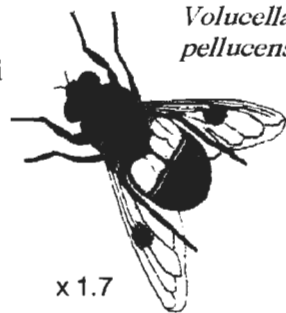


## Two bees or not Two bees

Last July Angus Idle was doing what botanists do, that is looking at flowers. If you spend much time looking at flowers you soon become something of an insect watcher as well, since many flowers are attractive to insects. In this way, Angus found two intriguing bee-like insects, which he brought to a WyUWG meeting.

The first bee-like insect was in fact a hoverfly, *Volucella pellucens*.

This handsome, large hoverfly is mostly black with a broad white band on the front of its abdomen. It is quite common, especially along woodland rides, where it often hovers about 4 metres above the ground. Often you can stand under this hoverfly and look up and see the white patch on the abdomen, which looks almost transparent against the sky. This hoverfly lays its eggs in wasp nests, as the larvae feed on debris in the nests. The adults will sometimes take nectar and/or pollen from flowers where they sit with wing folded in an "arrow" formation.



*Volucella pellucens*

x 1.7



x 1.7

Wool carder bee

Angus' other bee was more of a puzzle, and I wasn't sure if it was a bee or a wasp. However, I showed the specimen to Raymond Uffen of the British Entomological and Natural History Society, and he immediately recognised it as the Wool Carder Bee (*Anthidium manicatum*). Raymond kindly provided the following information.

The Wool Carder Bee gets its name

from the habit of collecting tiny hairs from hairy plants such as woundworts. It takes the hairs back to make a woolly lining for its nest which is found in cavities in wood, masonry or in the ground.

It is one of the insects that seems to have spread from the south-east over the last few years, and is now fairly widely distributed. Angus saw the bee flying around rest-harrow on Tom Burt's Hill. The Wool Carder is a 'solitary' bee, and does not live in colonies like honey or bumble bees. The male Wool

Carder Bee is quite territorial, and will defend its 'own' flower patch and nest. Each new generation of Wool Carders disperses to find new territories, and will travel for at least 30 km.

Botanists are in a good position to study bees, and may well be able to add to our knowledge of which bees prefer which plants. Unfortunately they are not easy to identify, and there are few books on them. One good one, however, in the Naturalists' Handbook series, is "Bumblebees" by Prys-Jones & Corbet, Richmond Publishing, 1991.

Martin Harvey.  
(Habitat Conservation Officer,  
Amateur Entomologists' Society)

I am pleased to report that the Collins Pocket Guide to Insects of Britain and W. Europe by Michael Chinery (principal illustrator - Denys Ovenden) is back in print, and in stock in the Wycombe Bookshop. Both species mentioned here, and many more are illustrated in it. Maurice.

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Will we get  
Wool Carder Bees  
at Sheepridge?  
that is the question,  
whether tis nobler to  
suffer the stings . . .

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We will never know if  
we don't get the bee  
and wasp wall  
finished.

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So please come  
along and give a  
hand at the work  
party in March - see  
the programme.

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Don't forget  
- Bee there !

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## Winning

## WILDLIFE

### GARDENS

#### PRIZES

50 vouchers donated by the West Wycombe Garden Centre

#### PRIZES

A garden spade and fork donated by Hall & Co

#### PRIZES

Sheltering from the rain under a garden centre umbrella Ray Fountain of Hall & Co presents a spade & fork to pupils of Castlefield School

#### PRIZES

Awards for winners of WyUWG 1994 Wildlife Gardening Competition.

Joanna Hunter, John Willson and Wendy Willson were each presented with a 50 voucher to spend at the West Wycombe Garden Centre by the Centre Manager, Stephen Moore, on Saturday 22nd. October. The vouchers, donated by West Wycombe Garden Centre, were the prizes for the 1994 WyUWG's Wildlife Garden Competition. A fork and spade donated by Hall & Co. went to Castlefield School. It was presented to Vanessa, Gillian & Russell, pupils of the school, by Mr Ray Fountain of Hall & Co. The wildlife garden at Castlefield School was specially commended in the competition.

WyUWG thank West Wycombe Garden Centre and Hall & Co. for their generosity and support.



photo : Michael York

## Dulcie Gray comes to West Wycombe

To mark the *Flora for Fauna* campaign actress Dulcie Gray, pictured above, accompanied by her husband, Michael Denison, visited the WyUWG Demonstration Wildlife Garden at the West Wycombe Garden Centre & planted two honeysuckles.

In addition to her acting career, Dulcie Gray is a keen naturalist and Vice-president of **Butterfly Conservation**. It was, therefore, appropriate that we chose honeysuckle for the planting as it is the food plant of the caterpillars of the white admiral butterfly, although, as Miss Gray pointed out, as this is a rather rare species of woodlands it is unlikely to appear at West Wycombe or in any 'town' gardens. Maurice.



photo : Michael York



## Flora for Fauna in WYCOMBE'S WILDLIFE GARDENS

A good wildlife garden is like a motorway cafe - I bet you have never thought of your garden in those terms before! But it is, or should be; passing wildlife, birds in particular, should be able to drop in at any time of the day, or night, for a quick snack. Like every good cafe the traditional baked beans are on the menu in my wildlife cafe as I write this (November) - well, not actual baked beans, but a beautiful show of delicious orange-yellow firethorn berries, delicious in the opinion of my local blackbirds, song thrush, and others, including blackcaps, who drop in several times a day for a feast.



*Flora for Fauna* is a database of "the diets of garden wildlife", available on a computer disk, the aim of which is to help gardeners select the best plants to enhance their garden's potential for wildlife. For those who do not have access to a computer the information has been published as a booklet and, in addition to this, 25,000 labels, covering 25 species of the garden plants dealt with in the booklet, have been printed and distributed to garden centres nation-wide.

In the section on birds, the *Flora for Fauna* booklet gives the details of the "menus" (diet) of 30 of the bird species that visit our gardens. Reading these through it becomes clear that many of our garden birds have a summer diet of insects and a winter diet of fruits & seeds.

Birds, like the swallows & swifts, that do not change their eating habits in the winter, migrate to warm climes where they continue to feed on insects. In winter the fruits & seeds of our native trees and shrubs such as hazel, beech, ash, hawthorn provide sustenance for tits and finches. Smaller species, like goldfinch and siskin take the fruit and seeds of thistles & dandelions and, perhaps more acceptable in a garden, sunflowers and teasels. If you grow sunflowers, do leave them over winter for the birds to feed on.

The blackbirds, thrushes and their relatives the fieldfares and redwings like the softer hips, haws and berries including those of popular garden shrubs & trees such as the firethorn (*Pyracantha coccinea*), herring-bone bush (*Cotoneaster horizontalis*) and rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). The firethorn is one of the plants you will find in the West Wycombe Garden Centre with a *Flora for Fauna* label. The idea behind these labels, which carry the logo shown above is that they will help garden centre customers identify which of the plants on sale are "hospitable" to wildlife. Why not pop along to the garden centre & pick up a *Pyracantha* this spring, it is one of the best garden shrubs for wildlife.

In the late summer Blackbirds appreciate bramble berries



WyUWG have copies of the campaign booklet, one for reference in the Office and the others for sale. We will also install the *Flora for Fauna* database on our computer.

A good wildlife garden is like a motorway cafe



Pick up a *Pyracantha*



## Park Farm - a Time Shift



It's 1950. I wake up, a whole summer's day ahead, stretching out almost limitlessly to tea time. A quick breakfast - "Enjoy yourself" from mum, and off I go. Jam jars on strings, a tin of small worms, black cotton thread, and the sun shining.

Down Mill End Road and along Gilletts Lane past the old mill

Memories revived by the WyUWG walk round Park Farm, West Wycombe, in September

Getting up, I feel sick, after hours of lying down. Time

house. Turn into Chapel Lane and then to the strange 'Pepper Pots' guarding the river at the bridge. I scramble up onto the bridge parapet and peer down - no, no trout (I caught one under the bridge, about half a pound, a few days ago). Then, balancing on top of the old wall, I walk along to the Park Farm lane entrance and meet my friend Dennis, who lives in the corner cottage there. We go straight to the rickety bridge just down from the farm itself, where the young

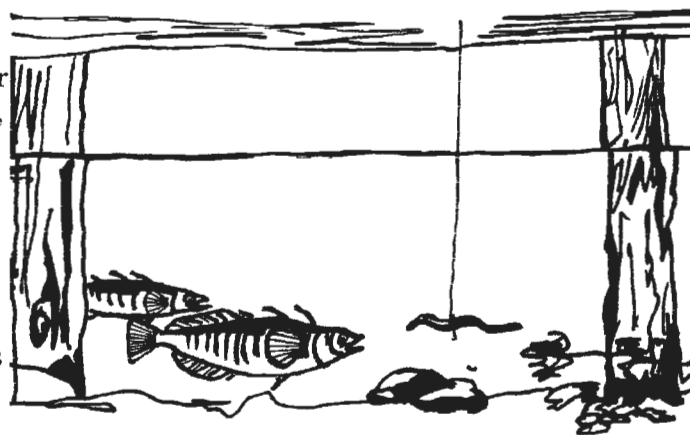
I lift the thread out, complete with fish, gently pull it off the worm and put it into one of the jars..... The hours drift on, fish after fish fill the jars until there is a glittering, swirling mass of them.

continues and we idly search for 'Millers Thumbs' under the bigger pebbles, then get off home with the catch, taking the short cut across the water meadows, then splash through the shallows, past the maze of hummocky reed beds running quickly to avoid being seen by the game-keeper who lives in the flint folly. At home I'm greeted by mum saying "Put those poor things back, they'll die in those jars!" So next morning they go back into the river at Desboro'



Miller's thumb

river Wye gurgles over the pebbles, with smooth water where it's deep under the bridge. Red throats abound here, in



Catching red throats

Rec but not before I admire yet again those gorgeous red throats and their spiny, stickle backs.

shoals! We tie worms to cotton threads and, lying flat on the bridge, heads over the edge, we lower them down into the water. A 'red throat' approaches the worm - "keep still! .....", and it slowly begins to swallow it.

*"An idyllic day, unrecognised at the time, but that's life, I guess."*

John Willson.





# Questions and answers



Hilary Hide  
asks:

If a feeding hedgehog is disturbed and runs away will it go on its way or will it return ?

Research has shown that hedgehogs go on quite long "walk abouts" usually following the same route each night. Without using the rather expensive radio tracking equipment and following a "disturbed" hedgehog I cannot answer with certainty. I suspect, however, that if disturbed they hurry off along familiar, well trodden paths, feeding, where all is quiet, as they go. I assume you put food out for them and to suggest they might return would imply that they realised that there was some food left and possess the "intelligence" to come back for it.

However, they are creatures of habit, so even if they don't come back that evening they will turn up at about the same time the next and subsequent evenings. If the disturbance becomes a regular occurrence, however, they may change their nightly itinerary.

Several winters ago I over-wintered an albino hedgehog. Since then we have had light coloured hedgehogs in the garden as well as darker ones. Is it likely that the light coloured ones are part of the albino's family ?

dark hedgehog

albino hedgehog



The answer to this one lies in their genes and the inheritance of albinism in hedgehogs which, I am sure, is similar to that of other animals. Albinism is a recessive character so an animal has to inherit the gene for albinism from both parents if it is to show the character. If your albino animal survived and successfully mated with a "normal", i.e. dark hedgehog that was not "carrying" this gene none of the offspring would have been albino, however, they would all be "carriers". Not that you could tell from their appearance for their colour would be "normal". So, although you can not see it, the gene for albinism may still be there in your hedgehog population and more albinos might turn up in the future.

I have baffles fitted to two bird tables. From observations it seems that squirrels get used to them and do not waste energy trying to feed on the tables. However, sometimes a slightly smaller squirrel will try to get round them. Is this a young squirrel getting to know his way round our garden ? On one occasion the wind blew off one of the baffles and it was about three days before the squirrels realised there was no baffle - then they hoovered up the food.



You are probably right. Squirrels are more intelligent than hedgehogs and learn quickly. I rarely see one in my garden since "caging" the nut feeder. One - perhaps a youngster or one new to the area occasionally inspects the holder but they rarely come back



## Birds of Little Marlow Gravel Pits

Despite the poor weather it was a lovely autumn day with just a few wispy clouds as we met in the Spade Oak car park. As we made our way along the edge of the woods on the north of the lake, almost immediately in the distance we could hear a Green Woodpecker calling.

Behind the woods, across the ploughed fields, a Kestrel was hovering above searching the ground for any likely catch. At this point two Jays flew overhead and half way across the field, well camouflaged against the long dead grasses, we noticed a Red-legged Partridge feeding in the undergrowth.

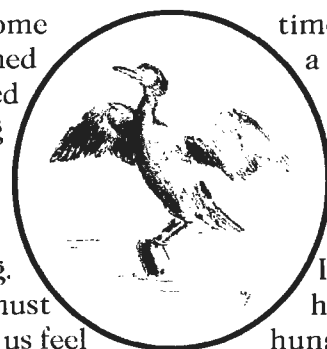
With some twelve species spotted so far, we made our way across the stream on to the north side of the gravel pit where we heard a wren

churring. By the lake-side the bright pink spindle berries looked resplendent and hovering by the water several Southern Aeshna dragonflies were still mating so late in the year.

Over the lake a large number of Cormorants could be seen perched high in the trees while on the lower branches several Heron were busy preening. On the water we spotted Pochard, Shelduck, Gadwall, Greylag Geese and Tufted Duck doing their usual disappearing trick once you had them in view in the telescope.

Overhead we were given an aerobatics display by a Pitts special bi-plane while a number of Lapwing passed close by and more than 100 Canada Geese came over the hedge to land in the water. Further round the lake Teal and Widgeon pecked around the grassy sandbar at the foot of the reed bed.

For some time we watched a Great-crested Grebe diving and catching young, this must have made us feel



time we a Great-crested Grebe to fish feed- its I think have hungry so

we made our way back along the riverside to the car park. Here, in the fields we spotted a Mistle Thrush, a group of Linnets feeding and a flock of Goldfinch. Finally, we could hear a Robin singing as at about half past one we arrived back at the cars feeling very satisfied at having spotted, and identified, some 40 different species - thanks to the expertise of Rob Andrews from Bucks Bird Club whose help was much appreciated.

Michael York.

## Birds spotted

Cormorant, Water Rail, Robin, Wren, Shelduck, Magpie, Blue Tit, Kestrel, Tree-creeper, Carrion Crow, Grey Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, Jay, Coot, Mallard, Moorhen, Chaffinch, Linnet, Wood Pigeon, Teal, Goldfinch, Herring Gull, Mistle Thrush, Widgeon, Lesser Black Backed Gull, Common Gull, Lapwing, Black Headed Gull, Gadwall, Greylag Geese, Grey Heron, Great Crested Grebe, Canada Goose, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Green Woodpecker, Red-legged Partridge.

### Getting to know the birds of Bucks



with Rob Andrews of Bucks Bird Club





## Wycombe WATCH Group



The first session of the autumn work programme was, appropriately, an 'Autumn Walk' through Gomm Valley, a BBONT Nature Reserve, led by the warden, Maurice Young. The views, of course, were glorious but the children were more fascinated by the insects that Maurice caught in the sweep net; green leaf beetles, shield bugs etc. A slow worm was spotted but slow worms being not so slow it was missed by those at the back of the 'snake' of children and adults.



More children than bats turned up for the Bat talk given by Maurice at the second session, so the bats (chocolate shortbread biscuits) had to be broken

in half. The talk was followed by bat box making and other 'batty' activities. There will be a follow-up bat walk in the Spring/Summer programme - look out for it.

The November meeting was a shared event at Gomm's Wood, the children joining the walks to explore the woods and craft events.

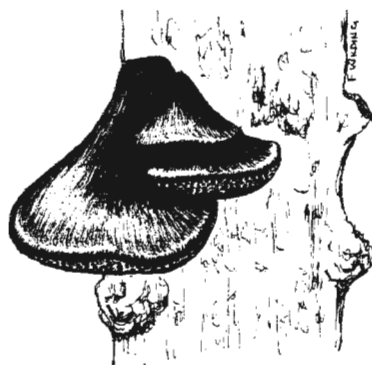
All children between 8 and 12 years old are welcome at WATCH meetings. For outdoor events wear old clothes and sensible shoes. The talks are suitable for all members of the family. Details of forthcoming events and membership from Elaine Tague at the Countryside Centre (01494 536930).



## Strange Goings-on at Burnham

Warm sunshine greeted the ten members of WyUWG gathered at Victory Cross for their tour of Burnham Beeches on Sunday, 16th October.

The walk focused on fungi, providing a useful follow-up to leader Roger Wilding's course for beginners the previous month. Thirty different species were found, perhaps the most curious being the beefsteak fungus (*Fistulina hepatica*). It was growing, as usual on oak but, in this case the host was 500 years old. When fresh it is thick and juicy and exudes a blood-like sap, just like real meat. The party were horrified to see Roger first pounce with glee on a blackened remnant in the grass - looking for all the world like something you would rather avoid.



Apart from the old oaks and beeches themselves another strange feature of the Beeches are the swallow holes. These sinister chasms appear at the lowest and gloomiest points in the

woodland and act as 'drains', swallowing up excess water. Here we also noted "back-to-front" nest boxes, their entrance holes facing the tree trunks - these were dormouse homes.

Light relief was provided by one respected member spotted lying flat on his back, camera pointing skywards, and by another on all fours crossing a log over a stream. No, we had not been eating fly agarics, the hallucinogenic toadstools which can be found at Burnham. We were by then lost, a not unusual feature, I am assured by his family, of Roger's walks. However, he safely guided us back to the starting point before sunset with the aid of a compass.

Many thanks to Roger and his kin, who filled in on ferns and heaths when he was otherwise engaged, for a fun-filled afternoon.

Pat Morris.



# WILDLIFE NOTICE BOARD

## DID YOU SEE ?



### September

Buzzard & Peregrine - Rye, HW (4/9/94)  
 Wryneck - Speen (7/9/94)  
 Little Stint (10/9/94) } Little  
 Black-tailed Godwit (11/9/94) } Marlow  
 Ring-billed Gull (25-29/9/94) } Gravel pits

### October

Stonechat - Sheepridge (7/10/94)  
 Rock Pipit - L. Marlow Grav. Pits (15/10)  
 Redwing - Amersham Hill HW (28-30/10)  
 Ls. Spotted Woodpecker - Fennel's Wood (30/)

### November

Pheasant - Lily's Walk, HW  
 Mandarin duck (27/11) Little Marlow  
 Jack Snipe (27/11) Gravel Pits  
 Buzzard - Speen (28/11)  
 Water Rail - Easton Street, HW

### December

Mediterranean Gull - LMGP (3-4/12/94)  
 Greater spotted woodpecker  
 at **WATCH** December meeting  
 in the Editor's garden on Amersham Hill

## The WyUWG contact list:

Chairman & Newsletter Editor:  
 Pat Morris, 01494 529484  
 Secretary and Wildlife Gardening Officer  
 Roger Wilding, 01494 438374  
 Treasurer: Sue Haines, 01628 532334  
 Membership Secretary:  
 James Donald, 01494 445334  
 Project Co-ordinator: Elaine Tague 01494 536930  
 Administrator: Wendy Thomas, 01494 536930  
 Biological Surveys: Angus Idle, 01494 563673  
 Education Officer & Assistant Editor:  
 Maurice Young, 01628 472000

Welcome to Wendy Thomas who will  
 be helping Elaine Tague in the office

*memo: copy to Pat Morris by 24 March 1995, please*

## Late arrivals at the Wildlife Watchers Ball

mid-Sept. - Clouded Yellow - Sands Bank  
 Brimstone - Sands Bank (7/11/94)  
 Red Admiral - Brands Hill Av. HW (17/11)  
 Many early spring flowers in flower  
 incl. Winter Heliotrope - mid November

## NAMES OF CONTACTS FOR WILDLIFE GROUPS IN WYCOMBE DISTRICT

BC	Butterfly Conservation	Ron Beaven	01494 444158
BFCU	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers		
	Buckinghamshire Office / County Officer	Marion Vere	01296 383393
	Wycombe Office - The Countryside Centre	to be appointed	01494 536930
BBONT	Berks, Bucks & Oxon Naturalists' Trust	(Bucks Office)	01296 433222
	South Bucks Region, Reserves Manager	Maurice Young	01628 472000
BBC	Buckinghamshire Badger Group	Mike Collard	01494 866908
BBC	Bucks Bird Club	Arthur Brown	01628 604769
CPRE	Council for the Protection of Rural England	Tom Cotton	01844 345183
CWP	Chiltern Woodlands Project	John Morris	01494 461286
FOE	Friends of the Earth	Lyn Jack	01494 447680
EN	English Nature	Frances Richmond	01635 268881
SWS	Saunderton Wildlife Sanctuary	Margaret Baker	01844 342188
StJw	St. Tiggywinkles	Les Stocker	01844 292292
SL	Swan Lifeline	Tim Heron	01753 859397
TUMG	Thames Valley Mammal Group	Ian Saunders	01734 344127
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature	Valerie Lambourne	01494 443761

For other groups or if you have any enquiries about BATS contact **The Countryside Centre**, Bassetsbury Manor, Bassetsbury Lane, High Wycombe, HP11 1QX, telephone: 01494 536930