

WYCOMBE URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP



WILDLIFE NEWS

No. 17

APRIL 1995

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

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Blowing our own trumpet again !!!

Praise from the Professionals

It is obvious from a first glance that this is a newsletter someone loves producing. The time spent on detail and layout all contribute to a quite beautiful newsletter. The drawings obviously help in the layout but the restrained use of rules, typefaces and other furniture ensure this is a pleasure to look at. The obvious knowledge of the writers ensures it is a pleasure to read.

The glowing words of commendation from Alan Cleaver, Editor of the South Bucks Star Series when he presented the award.

We are the OVERALL WINNERS of the 1994



Its design begs you to pick it up and read it

This issue generously sponsored by :

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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 plants and animal life in such areas and to promote the education of the public in matters pertaining to wildlife and its conservation.

Within Wycombe District the Group aims to :
Survey and map wildlife habitats.
■ Protect important wildlife sites.
■ Study wildlife sites and associated flora and fauna. Manage wildlife sites and associated flora and fauna.
■ Stimulate public interest in wildlife & its conservation.
■ Encourage wildlife gardening.
■ Co-operate with other groups of 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 & public of its progress.

Editor : Pat Morris
Produced by : Maurice Young
Printed by : **Rank Xerox**
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Illustrations by :

Pat Morris, Michael York and Maurice Young.

Update

NEWS Pleasant & unpleasant.

On the same day in February as we received the pleasant news that the **Mellanby Watch Group Development Fund** had awarded us £200 for educational equipment for use at Sheepridge, we learnt that our picnic tables on the reserve, that we put in for the use of visiting school groups, had been stolen. It was a bitter blow, after our Project Co-ordinator had spent much effort setting them in concrete to deter thieves! Also in February, the Countryside Centre was burgled and our computer taken. We were unable to claim insurance as there was no visible signs of a break-in. The **National Rivers Authority** promptly came to the rescue with a donation of £500, & **Biffa** followed with a gift of £50. Both sums will certainly help mitigate our serious loss. In addition, **UK Waste** offered us a redundant computer and Peter Cudd of **Grant & Stone** has kindly donated 300 used bricks for the construction of new, we hope thief-proof, benches at Sheepridge.

It is heartening to know that there are such generous people about, while there are others, so mean, that they think nothing of removing our hard won assets. Another good Samaritan has been the **Chiltern Paving & Building Supplies** (Lane End) who have allowed us over 20% discount on paving slabs needed to improve access to our Demonstration Wildlife Garden at the West Wycombe Garden Centre.

We thank everyone who has assisted us through unpleasant times this spring and thus helped restore our morale. We are most grateful for their kindness.

Last and not least - in fact the complete opposite - **Marks & Spencer** are giving us £800 from their 94/95 **Urban Environment Programme**. Half of this money is for further equipment for studying wildlife at Sheepridge and the other half to fund transport for school groups visiting the reserve.

Work at Chairborough Praised.

Some 40 members of the Boys Brigade turned up at the March work-party at Chairborough. They toiled in brilliant sunshine on path improvements. They were so eager that Reserve Warden Roger Wilding, who directed their efforts, had no time to do any practical work himself. The results of their efforts won praise from local people later in the week.

All the way from Aylesbury.

Of the 14 helpers who came to build a bee & wasp wall on our Educational Reserve at Sheepridge, two young people came all the way from Aylesbury. Matthew Holton (16) and Lloyd Craker (13) took on the wall as part of their "Environmental Challenge" with the St. John's Ambulance. This is one of 5 or 6 challenges, spread over 3 years they are expected to take on. When they heard of our work party at a **BTCV** residential weekend, they thought it "sounded interesting".

--- STOP PRESS ---

TWO WUWG MEMBERS WIN ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS
ROGER WILDING HAS WON THE COVETED "SWAN ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD" FOR HIS WILDLIFE GARDEN WHICH WAS JUDGED TO BE THE BEST OVERALL PROJECT SUBMITTED FOR THE 1995 WYCOMBE DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS AND MAURICE YOUNG IN HIS BBONT GUISE WILL RECEIVE THE AWARD FOR THE BEST GROUP/ORGANISATION PROJECT ON BEHALF OF THE SOUTH BUCKS REGION OF BBONT FOR THEIR WORK ON THE GOMM VALLEY NATURE RESERVE

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.



What is Happening to Our Cherry Trees?

You may have noticed last year that a number of cherry trees are dying, with dead branches and dead, shrivelled leaves replacing the usual glorious autumn show.

Prunus 'Kanzan' (a showy ornamental Japanese flowering cherry) is particularly prone to die back in late summer, where the leaves die but do not drop. The disease is a type of wilt thought to be caused by a bacterial infection. It can spread to other branches but trees sometimes recover, varieties of cherry differ in their susceptibility.

Because cherry trees are prone to airborne viral & bacterial diseases, such as canker, which causes the tree to produce an amber gum from its bark, the Forestry Authority now limit the amount of cherry that can be planted in the Chilterns to 20% when restocking existing woods, and only 10% of any new planting.

Wild cherry trees are prone to basal heart rot, which often causes the tree to fall over. This rot may lead to a hollowing of the trunk and loss of valuable timber at the base of the tree. Cherry trees should, therefore, be inspected regularly for evidence of decay. These diseases all enter the trees via wounds in the bark, so it is recommended that pruning should only be carried out in mid-summer (June-August) leaving the smallest scar possible so the tree can heal quickly.

The wild cherry or Gean (*Prunus avium*) is a feature of many old woods in the Chilterns. It is a fast growing, attractive tree often found on the edge of woods. Its white flowers in spring and red autumn foliage add a splash of colour to the landscape.

John Morris.
Chiltern Woodlands
Project manager.

Putting a Sting In It

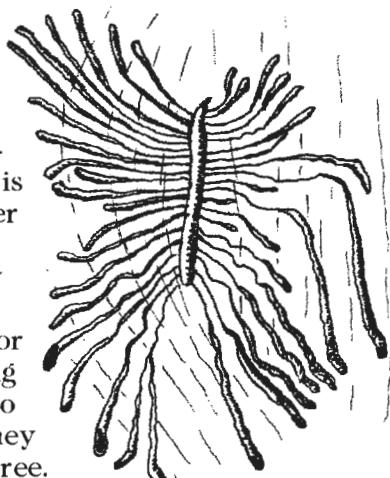
In 1967 Dutch Elm Disease started attacking elm trees around the country and by the mid 70s most of our finest elms had died and had to be felled.

Most people thought that this was the end of our most impressive species, but luckily the elm is a suckering species and wherever elm grew in hedges new suckers soon sprouted which apparently were not infected by the disease and these have grown steadily for the past 20 years. One nice thing about this has been the ability to see the elm in flower, because they always flower at the top of the tree. You have to look very early in the year (Jan-Feb) for the very small crimson flowers.

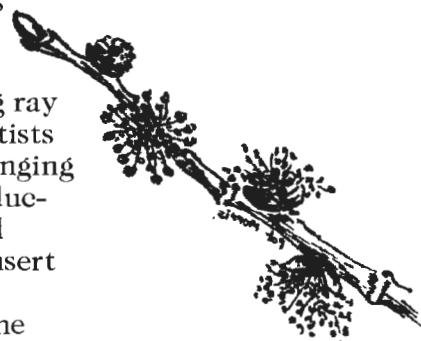
Last year's hot summer unfortunately saw a resurgence of the disease, with the telltale brown dead leaves seen widely in this area. Whether this will mean the end for the 20 year old elm remains to be seen. But it does suggest the elm is destined to remain a small hedge-row tree rather than regaining its status as one of our most beautiful large trees.

There has been one interesting ray of hope reported on TV. Scientists have taken a gene from the stinging nettle, which is a gene for producing substances with fungicidal properties, and are trying to insert it in the genome of the elm to enable the trees to deal with the Dutch Elm fungus themselves. If successful, this could herald the return of the elm to the English countryside. Keep your fingers crossed.

Angus Idle.



Tunnels of the Elm Bark beetle which are revealed when the bark is removed from the trunk of a dead elm.



Elm flowers

Dutch Elm disease is a fungal disease which is transmitted by Elm Bark Beetle (*Scolytus scolytus*). The central chamber, see drawing above, is made by the female beetle. She lays eggs along the sides of the chamber & the larvae then create the tunnels that radiate from this chamber as they feed on the nutritious young tissues on either side of the cambium.

Maurice.





Wildlife Gardening



Wycombe's

WILDLIFE GARDENS

**Save lives by
turning your garden
into a year-round
bird haven !**

Keep up the Good Work

Both **BTO** (British Trust for Ornithology) & **RSPB** (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds) now recommend that you continue to feed birds during the summer. The main period for adult mortality of greenfinches is from March to June, when natural seeds are no longer available. Numbers of blue and great tits are at their greatest when the young are fledging, from July to September, making this a period of high demand on natural resources. So don't stop feeding when April comes. If you want to help the birds survive the summer, continue to put out seed for finches and peanuts for the tits, along with the usual supply of clean water for drinking and bathing, the whole year round. Scatter sunflower and other seed on the ground, away from cover where predators may lurk, or hang them in a seed dispenser. Always put the peanuts in a feeder with a suitable mesh, so that whole nuts cannot be extracted and choke the birds to death. You will be rewarded, by seeing birds in your garden, all summer long.

Wildlife Garden Competition



We are proud to announce our **3rd Wildlife Garden Competition** sponsored, as last year, by the **West Wycombe Garden Centre**.

Prizes of £25 vouchers

There are 3 categories :

Best established wildlife garden

Best new wildlife garden

Best small wildlife garden

Use the entry form
in this newsletter

or pick up one from the library.

Visit past winners' gardens
Closing date for entry:

30th June 1995

Judging by : Sue Goss,
Lecturer in Garden Design
and Roger Wilding,
WyUWG Gardening Officer
from 15th to 30th July

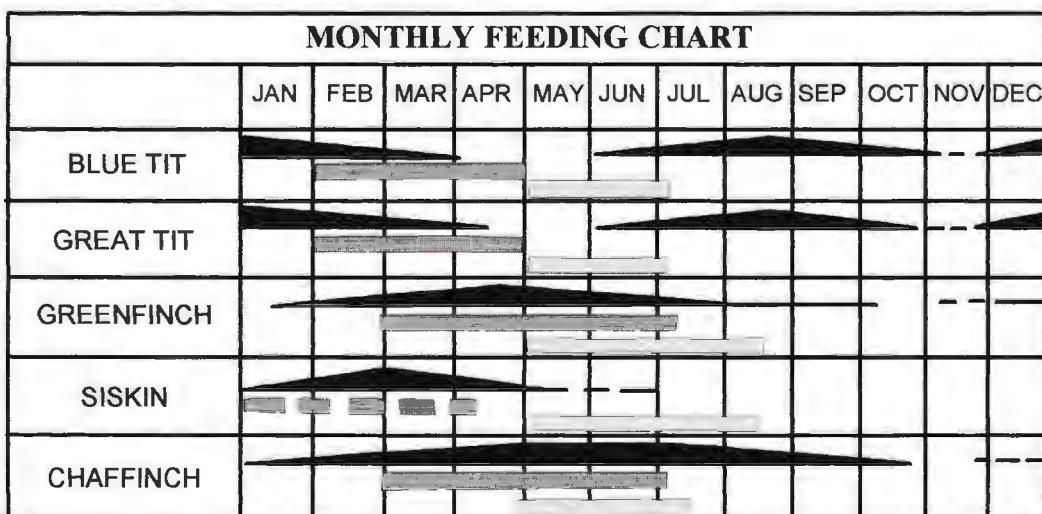
KEY

Maximum number present

Main period of adult mortality. Juvenile mortality occurs 2 to 6 weeks after fledging.

Eggs and young in nest

Increasing from some to many on a daily basis
Very few if any present

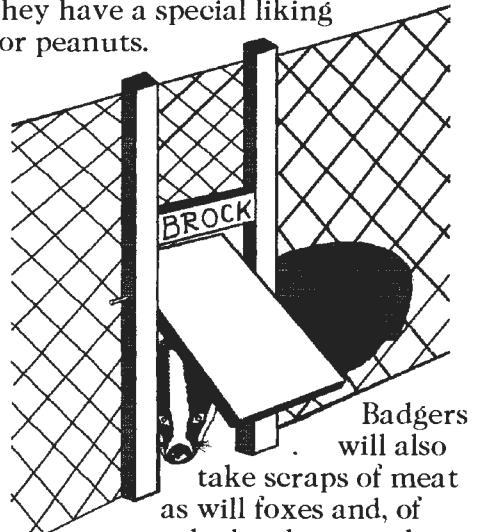


This chart copied, with permission, from The C.J. Wildbird Foods Guide to Garden Feeding

Flora-for-Fauna in WYCOMBE'S WILDLIFE GARDENS

We have ways of
enticing mammals to
your gardens

In the last edition we introduced *Flora-for-Fauna*, the campaign to encourage wildlife friendly planting of gardens. So what can we plant to encourage mammals? Brussels sprouts, cabbage and roses are all enjoyed by rabbits and muntjac, but I don't expect you are too keen to encourage these into your garden and, surprise! surprise! rabbits and muntjac are not mentioned in the *Flora-for-Fauna* literature. Apart from munching your vegetables, the burrowing activities of rabbits are equally unwelcome. For the same reason few will want badgers residents in a garden but I am sure all WyUWG members would feel privileged if badgers were to visit their garden regularly. If your garden backs onto woodland in which badgers are resident why not put a badger gate in your fence - it is like a large cat flap. As badgers are omnivores they will eat almost everything you put out but they have a special liking for peanuts.



Badgers will also take scraps of meat as will foxes and, of course, the local cats and, possibly, rats! So if you do put food out, particularly late in the evening do check what eats it - the last thing we want is a plague of rats in High Wycombe, even if the Wye at the moment is deep & wide.

Attracting all the local moggies can be counter productive in a wildlife garden as I have found to my cost. When I first moved to Marlow I could throw a chicken carcass or other bones out during the day and attract scores of starlings and even one or two seagulls, while in the evenings hedgehogs would feast on the chicken skin and scraps of fat. However, over the last year or so several neighbours have bought cats and now all I get is a succession of cats - the starlings hardly get a look in and are in danger of becoming items on the menu rather than diners. Nothing is left at night for the hedgehogs so I now put out peanuts for them. The hedgehogs drink from the birdbath on the patio which, as it has a broad base and a skirt like rim, does not tip over when they climb up on it.

Water is the wildlife garden's greatest asset.

Other wildlife garden features that favour mammals, especially the smaller ones, are log piles and compost heaps, providing them with places to hide & nest, as well as being excellent hunting grounds for the insectivorous species.

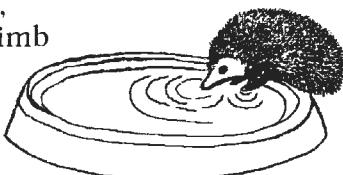
Small mammals, woodmice and shrews, sometimes find their way into the house - particularly in winter. If they do please don't use old fashioned back breaker traps. There is an excellent plastic trap available now which will allow you to catch your "visitors" and return them 'live' to the garden or the wild. The best way to avoid unwelcome visitations is to keep your peanuts and bird seed etc. in closed tins or buckets with lids.

Maurice.



- for a small fee

**Water is the
wildlife gardens
greatest asset**



The *Flora-for-Fauna* booklet is now available in colour illustrated with a selection of Beatrix Potter's natural history drawings



cost, £4 inc. p&p from :
Flora-for-Fauna,
c/o
The Linnean Society
of London,
Burlington House,
Piccadilly,
LONDON. W1V 0LQ



Joining in National Research



Field vole

(*Microtus agrestis*)

Head & body of the adult animal up to 13 cm (5 inches), colour: dark yellow-brown - greyer in young animals. It is "chubbier" than the bank vole and has a blunt nose, short, almost hidden ears and a short tail.

They form and live in runs and burrows in dense herbage and feed on grass, bulbs, roots and bark and take the occasional insect, snail or other invertebrate.

Members of WyUWG recently joined in national research by helping with the **Mammal Society / Hawk & Owl Trust Field Vole Survey**. The site selected for investigation was an area of brashings and brambles in Wendover Woods. Conifers blown over in the 1987 gales lay hidden in the undergrowth. In this wilderness, organizer Ian Saunders of the

Thames Valley Mammal Group, had concealed 50 Longworth traps, placing them in pairs at 8 metres, over a 32m x 32m square. For 5 days the traps were left "pre-baited", i.e. with food in and permanently open, while the animals got used to them.

On the 6th day the survey began. Under Ian's instruction, those assisting learnt how to identify, hold & sex small mammals by blowing on their belly fur to reveal the relevant parts. We weighed and fur-clipped new animals on their flanks, and recorded findings. While the creatures scuttled away in relief, bedding was renewed as required and fresh bait was put in the traps; cereals for rodents and casters (blow-fly pupae) or cat food for the insectivores. The traps were then reassembled for the next round. This routine was performed for 3 days, morning and evening, taking us about an hour each time.

Although numbers for the target species were surprisingly low, we learnt a tremendous amount about small mammals by taking part, and our eyes were opened to a new, secret world.

To quote 4-year old Callum Saunders, budding mammal expert, "We had good fun" - thanks to his dad.

Pat Morris.

	Mammals caught in Wendover Woods		
	Autumn 21-23/10/94	Spring 25-27/03/95	Totals
Bank voles	30	26	56
Wood mice	18	3	21
Field voles	2	2	4
Pygmy shrew	1	1	2
C'mn shrew	1	0	1
Harvest mouse	0	1	1

Bank vole (*Clethrionomys glareolus*)

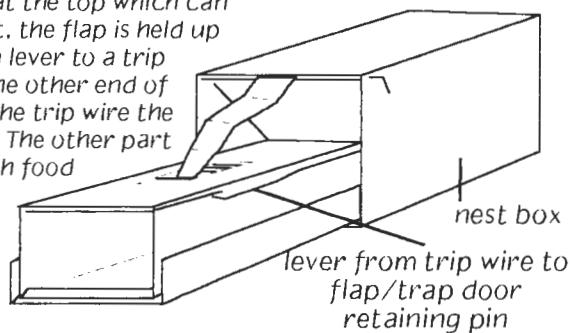
Head & body up to 11 cm (4.5"), tail about half length of body. Colour: dark red-brown, young animals greyer. An agile climber and often makes stores of nuts and berries under logs. Food: roots, nuts, berries, fungi etc. and the occasional invertebrate (insects etc.).



The Longworth trap is used to catch small mammals. It is made of aluminium and consists of two parts: an entrance tunnel which has a flap hinged at the top which can drop to close the entrance. When set, the flap is held up by a small wire pin. This is linked by a lever to a trip wire which runs across the floor at the other end of the tunnel. When an animal crosses the trip wire the pin is withdrawn and the flap drops. The other part of the trap is a large nest box in which food and nesting material is placed so the animal will survive in comfort! until the trap is opened.



Longworth Trap



Questions

and answers

This morning (25/3/95) I noticed swarms of tiny dark creatures gathered on top of the frog spawn in my pond. Are they newt tadpoles? There were several newts in the pond last year.

Jennifer Anthony

newly hatched frog tadpoles are jet black with small external gills

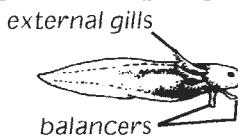
a fold of skin grows over the gills covering them by the tenth day



Why do long-tailed tits peck at windows? I have watched one repeatedly flying to my greenhouse & tapping on the glass. Hazlemere Resident.

These would be the newly-hatched frog tadpoles, which cluster on the jelly as you describe when they first emerge. It is only when they grow older that they become solitary and secretive. Newt eggs are individually wrapped in pond weed leaves by the female, and hatch much later. You would not find them going about in groups.

Pat



newt tadpoles have well developed external gills which they retain until they metamorphose

I have noticed that often the local blackbirds bath late in the day during the winter months - it would seem more practical to bathe earlier than this when there is a bit of warmth as other birds do. Is this a blackbird trait? Hilary Hude



Quite frankly I don't know, but will put forward a few theories:

a/. They might be avoiding the rush hour - bathing late in the day because the water is full of starlings earlier in the day

b/. Some birds go early to roost. Blackbirds are amongst those that go late - I am sure you have heard the noise they make calling to one another as it grows dark. Thrushes and robins also sing well after dusk, and I have seen both these birds bathing at nightfall. So maybe they still have time for their feathers to dry before they settle down.

c/. Birds, like people, are individuals. My blackbirds always bathe in the morning, so perhaps your birds just prefer late bathing. Or perhaps they were going out for the night!

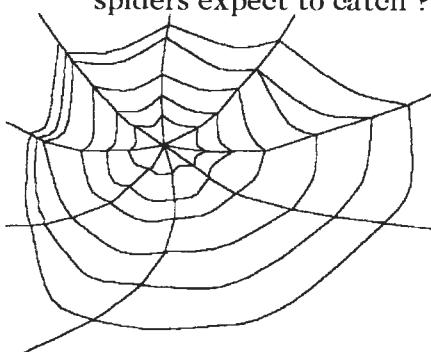
It would be interesting to hear from other readers what times their birds bathe - do let us know, along with any other interesting observations. Pat.

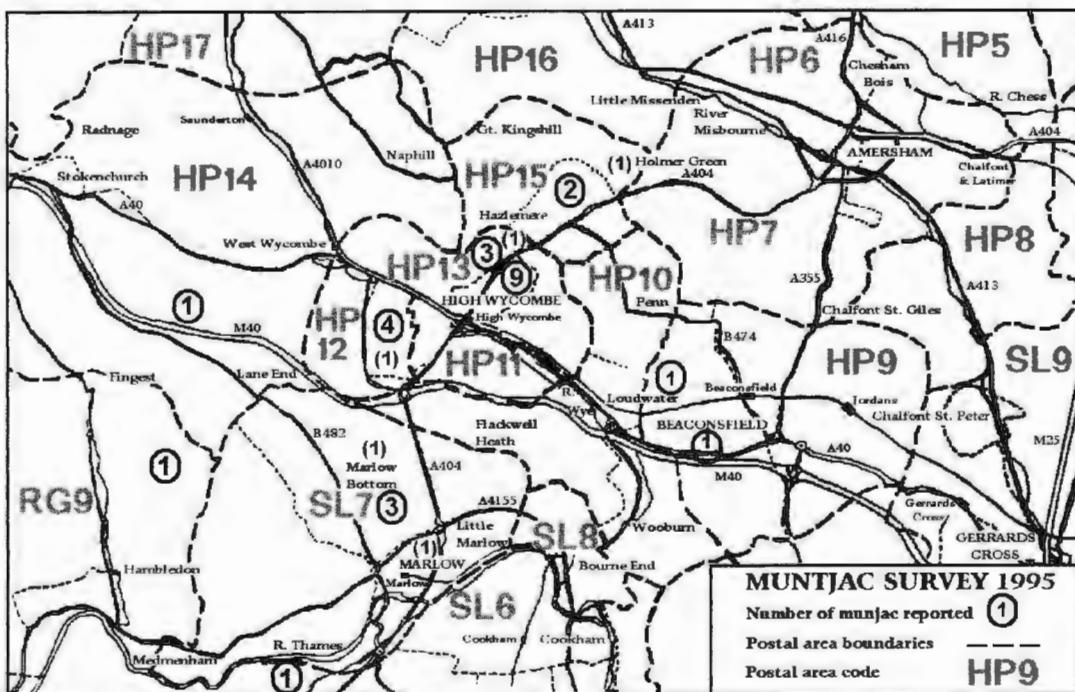
There have been some exquisite spiders webs after particularly cold nights. With the temperatures below freezing what can the spiders expect to catch?

Hilary Hude.

Yes, they have been particularly spectacular this year haven't they. One in Marlow, which was encrusted with sparkling ice crystals, was strung across a red-berried Pyracantha bush - it was really beautiful. Although perfectly formed these were 'old' webs which the spiders had spun several days earlier while it was warm. The threads of the web provided 'nuclei' for dew to condense on as the air cooled down - season of mists etc... Then on the first night of the frosts the dew drops changed to ice crystals producing this beautiful effect. The ice melted the following day and the webs collapsed - as they had been shattered by the ice.

Maurice.

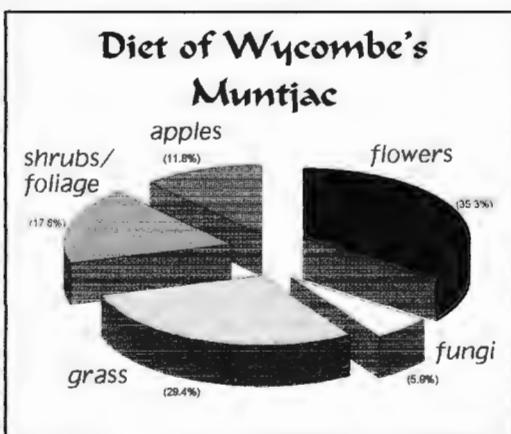




Muntjac Survey

In the spring of 1994 help was sought for a survey of Muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*). Many thanks to all who contributed. 28 replies were received, one containing two sightings. Where questionnaires were not returned locations are shown on the map in parentheses.

This small sample is not statistically significant, as it was not a "scientifically selected sample" as they say on the chat shows when they have a show of hands, but it gives us some idea of where these animals can be seen in Woombye.



of the sightings were of single deer, the remainder being in twos and one group of three. 13 of the animals were feeding/foraging, 2 were injured and one was reported

clambering over a five foot garden fence - it later clambered back ! There was a slight bias towards early morning sightings, the rest being more or less evenly distributed throughout the day and night.

The diet of Muntjac varies with the season, although brambles or raspberry make up 40% of its diet, whatever the time of year. Not surprisingly, as most were reported from gardens, the Muntjac in our survey showed a preference for flowers, while in the autumn windfall apples were popular.

Only three people reported hearing Muntjac barking, but half-a-dozen reported other signs : gnawed bark; spoor; footprints; erosion of foot-paths and trampling of flower beds.

Most people were unaware of complaints about Muntjac, only 8 of the 28 respondents being aware of complaints from farmers and gardeners. One person had resorted to use of wire netting to protect the garden from the deer's "exotic taste".

The surveys were passed to the recently formed **Thames Valley Mammal Group** whose first survey this was. **Elaine.**

Wildlife WATCH

January's meeting was an illustrated talk on the mammals of Wycombe given by Ian Saunders and ranged from humans to bats. Members will probably be searching the countryside for discarded bottles filled with dirty water, for here can be found the remains of many small mammals. Others may prefer to examine hazel nut shells to see what ate the nut, for wood mouse, squirrel, weevil and dormouse open the nuts in different ways.

February's talk, given by Kelvin Stevens, was a very different topic - Astronomy. Kelvin, who is a member of Wycombe Astronomical Society, showed some superb slides of the planets and told us where to see them in the sky. After the talk some members stayed behind to view the moon through a telescope.



It is OK to view the moon, stars & planets through binoculars or telescopes but **NEVER** look at the sun through them.

More Questions and answers

Does a queen wasp build the football-sized nests we find on her own or does she have help? Over a two week period in April last year I watched a queen build a golfball-sized nest on the underside of a bird box lid. I assume the first workers were hatched in it. Did they then take over the building of subsequent nests?

Barbara North

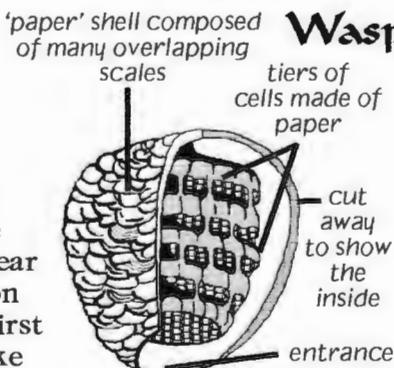


common wasp

You surmise correctly. The queen wasps that survive the winter build the initial nest, a structure that resembles a small umbrella on the underside of which are attached a few six-sided cells. The queen rears this small brood of future workers on her own providing them with a diet of insects and other mini-beasts. When these workers emerge they take over the nest building duties and the rearing of further broods leaving the queen to concentrate on egg-laying. These workers and subsequent broods enlarge the original nest which, as you observe, can get to the size of a football and produce up to 25,000 wasps! A wasp's nest is good news for the gardener as the larvae are fed on insects many of which are garden pests! So only destroy a wasp's nest if it is near the house and an actual nuisance. They become a nuisance in the autumn when the queen stops laying and the workers have nothing to keep them occupied.

The late summer broods include new queens & males. These will mate and the males will die with the onset of cold weather. The females will feed on nectar from late flowering species such as ivy before they go into hibernation. They will hibernate under loose bark of trees and similar protected places and in our houses in the attic & folds in curtains.

Maurice.



Wasp nest

Social wasps construct their nests from 'paper' which they make from woody material which they chew from old stems such as hogweed. They glued it all together with their saliva. They build them in hollows of trees, nest boxes, garden compost heaps and lofts!!

WILDLIFE NOTICE BOARD

Did You See ?



January

Grey Wagtail - Cressex Indust. Estate
 Red-crested pochard - L M'rlow Grav. Pt
 Slavonian Grebe - L.M.G.P. (6/1/95)
 15 Little Grebes - Wycombe Rye
 Charm (100) of Chaffinches - North Dean
Encoelia furfurcea (fungus) - Chair Museum

February

1 Merlin - L.M.G.P (5/2/95)
 2 Redpoll - garden, Hughenden Vall. (5/2)
 1st frog spawn - Deeds Grove
 1st. frog spawn - Hazlemere (19/2/95)

March

1st. frog spawn - Amersham Hill (5/3/95)
 1st frog spawn - Sheepridge Ed. R. (20/4)
 1st. Brimstones & Small Tortoiseshells
 - Sands Bank (12/3/95)
 Bellfield (24/3/95)

WANTED
YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1995
YOUR NOTABLE WILDLIFE RECORDS

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MEMO COPY DATE - FRIDAY 11 AUGUST 1995

STAR NEWSLETTER AWARDS 1994

Wycombe Wildlife News

was chosen as a winner in
 The Star News letter Awards 1994

Presented by

ALAN CLEAVER, EDITOR
 SOUTH BUCKS STAR SERIES

Names of Contacts for Wildlife Groups in Wycombe District

BC	Butterfly Conservation
BTCV	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
	Buckinghamshire Office / County Office
	Wycombe Office - The Countryside Centre
BBON'T	Berks, Bucks & Oxon Naturalists' Trust
	South Bucks Region, Reserves Manager
BBG	Bucks Badger Group
BBC	Bucks Bird Club
CPRE	Council for the Protection of Rural England
CWP	Chiltern Woodlands Project
FOE	Friends of the Earth
EN	English Nature
SWS	Saunderton Wildlife Sanctury
StT	St. Tiggewinkles
SL	Swan Lifeline
TVMG	Thames Valley Mammal Group
WWF	World Wildlfie Fund

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Tim Heron	01753 859397
Ian Saunders	01734 344127
Valerie Lambourne	01494 443761



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