

WYCOMBE WILDLIFE



NEWS

no. 18

URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP

SEPTEMBER 1995

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

01494 536930

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WyUWG School's Wildlife Corner Competition



A quiet corner in the arid area of the Marlow C of E School's Wild World.

The Marlow C of E School deservedly won our Wildlife Corner Competition and the schools' section of the WDC 1995 Environmental Award this year.

The two outstanding features were the variety of different areas

created in their "Wild World" and, to use the technical jargon, the degree of cross curricular activity generated; i.e. it isn't "just a patch of pretty flowers" in the corner of the school field tended by a few children in the lunch hour and after school but has involved the whole school and provides inspiration for many classroom activities.

The beautiful work of the Biology and Art classes, on show in the hall, clearly conveyed the benefits of the project and the deep involvement of the children.

One of the innovative ideas used in the Wild World, covering the paths with pine cones instead of bark chippings, must have got several children and their families out searching the woods for pine cones. Some of the larger cones found by the children have been used as a decorative feature. Other items they have collected include large, water-worn pebbles for the "arid area". (continued of page 88.)

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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**
THE DOCUMENT COMPANY
 Illustrations by:
 Pat Morris, Fiona Wilding,
 Frances Wilding and
 Maurice Young.

The WyUWG 1995 AGM

The AGM was held on 24th. April and was well attended.

Reports were received from the Chairman, Membership Officer, Treasurer and Project Co-ordinator.

It would seem that in spite of several setbacks during the year, mainly the theft of the computer and picnic tables, the year has been good with many excellent awards being won. To mention three, Roger Wilding for his garden, Maurice Young for his work for **BBONT** on the Gomm Valley site and the 1994 Star Newsletter Awards for our Newsletter. The Chairman thanked the many companies and individuals who have helped during the year with time, donations and sponsorships.

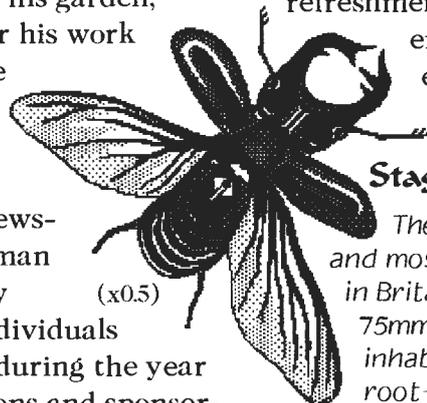
Membership continued to grow steadily but new members would always be welcome. The post of Honorary Treasurer has been filled by Jean Johnson & Wendy Thomas was voted onto the committee and has taken the post of Secretary.

After the AGM a very interesting talk was given by Martin Harvey entitled "Save our Bugs". Martin, with the help of slides, showed us the kinds of habitat that bugs live in and how, whilst some are on the increase, many are in decline. This is often the result of management of parks, woods and even gardens. Many insects prefer long grass and it was explained that this habitat

can be provided by leaving longer grass around the edges and around trees. Many bugs require dead wood and it was suggested that a wood pile in a corner of the garden would encourage all types of visitors.

Martin asked for sightings of stag beetles as these are currently being surveyed. He would also like information regarding sightings of mullein moth larvae. A vote of thanks was given by Angus Idle and refreshments were served at the end of a very informative evening. Wendy Thomas.

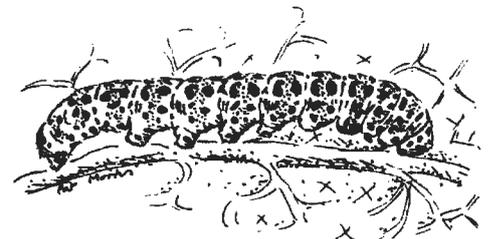
(Secretary)



Stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*)

The stag beetle is the largest and most impressive beetle found in Britain. Males can grow to 75mm in length. They mainly inhabit oak woods living in the root-stocks of tree stumps. The larva can take up to 5 years to mature. As they fly after dark they occasionally come into houses attracted by the lights.

Mullein moth larva



The caterpillar of the mullein moth is also very striking in appearance. It is a pale silver-green with black and yellow markings. It feeds on Mulleins eating both the leaves and the flowers. But beware it might be a Striped Lychnis, see Questions & Answers.

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.



HEDGES FOR WILDLIFE

In a past Newsletter I suggested a new wildlife garden should cater for the needs of birds, have a pond and contain plants to attract butterflies. A valuable addition to a wildlife garden is a hedge, which will provide long-term and increasing benefits to wildlife, a great deal of pleasure and some occasional healthy exercise for the wildlife gardener.

There is room in most gardens for a hedge along at least one of the boundaries. A hedge can help keep unwelcome visitors out while providing a welcome for a great deal of wildlife and, unlike a fence, will withstand the strongest of winds.

The ideal hedge for the wildlife garden comprises a mixture of native shrubs with a tree or two growing out of the top. As the hedge matures, climbers can be allowed to clamber through it and woodland edge plants can be encouraged to grow in the shade at the base.

Leaving leaf litter and other natural plant debris to accumulate beneath the hedge increases the value of the habitat. Using some of the species listed below, your hedge can provide a home and source of food for birds, shelter for small mammals and invertebrates and a breeding area for butterflies and moths.

In addition to the direct benefits of food and shelter that it affords the wildlife that lives on and in the hedgerow its influence extends outwards for a metre or more allowing many woodland edge plants, like the primrose, to flourish in its protective shade.

Shrubs providing berries for birds include :

Hawthorn : 100 different species of moth breed in Hawthorn.

Elder : useful for Elder-flower Champagne !!!

Purging buckthorn : food plant of the larva of the Brimstone butterfly.

Yew : the leaves are poisonous

Spindle: Pink capsules with orange seeds.

Firethorn : not native but birds love the berries.

Mountain Ash : ideal as a small hedgerow tree.

Wild cherry : another good hedgerow tree but will need to be trimmed as it can grow to 12 metres

Holly : a food plant of the Holly Blue butterfly.

Climbers producing berries :

Ivy : the other food plant of the Holly Blue.

Honeysuckle : succulent berries and beautifully scented flowers that attract moths in the evening.

Easy to grow woodland edge flowers :

Foxglove : on non chalky soils.

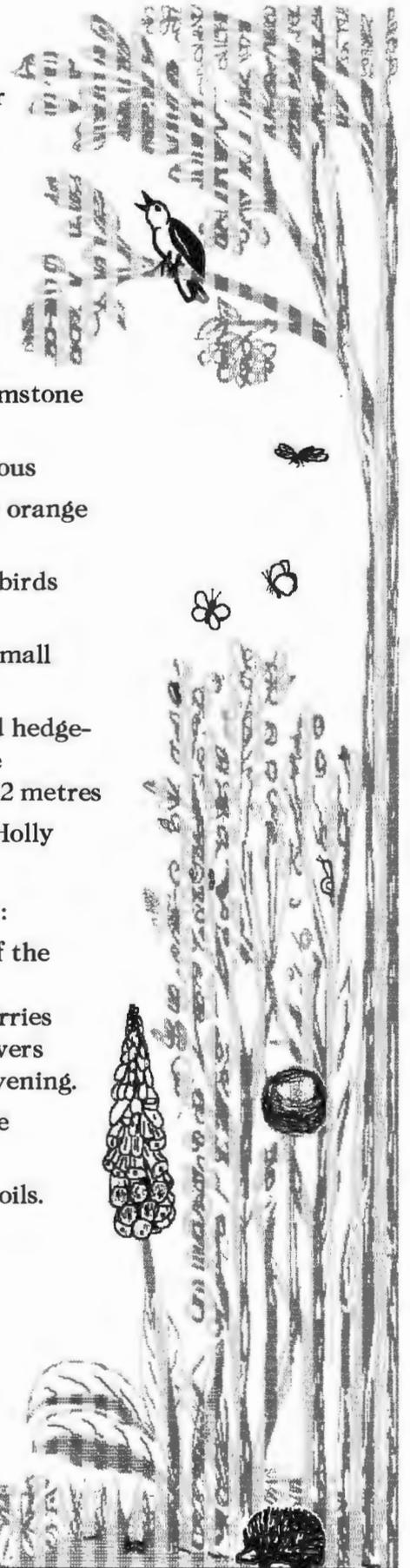
Woodruff

Primrose

Red campion

Hedge garlic : food plant of the Orange Tip butterfly larva.

Roger Wilding.





Wycombe's

WILDLIFE GARDENS

Visiting Wycombe's Wildlife Gardens.

Thank you to all the entrants who spent time showing us round their gardens; we saw some most inspiring gardens.

How did we arrive at our conclusions?

We not only assessed the value to wildlife, but also the general attractiveness of the garden; the winning gardens combined both aspects often in original ways.

My main impression was of vivid colours - brilliant magenta of purple loosestrife, pale silver yellow of evening primrose, cheerful hollyhocks in rich tones of pink and purple-mauve phlox in green corners, splashes of orange and vermilion nasturtiums, soft pink tree mallows and the yellow-green of Robinias. In the winning garden a blue-green trellis set off the deeper pinks beautifully. The brightest gardens were alive with insects.

The gardens that won prizes all mixed native and garden plants with gay abandon. The end of July is not the best time for either native or cottage garden plants, but none-the-less outstanding natives included Mulleins, Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon, Nettle-leaved Bell-flower, Meadow-sweet, St. John's Wort, Wild Basil, and most of all, Wild Marjoram formed the focus for bees, butterflies and hoverflies.

Another feature worthy of note was the creative use of grasses, not only in flowering meadow areas but also as bold features, as with blue-grey *Festuca glauca* and Giant Pampas Grass. The latter is not a native grass but seemed in keeping with the wild garden scene. Tall teasels and sea hollies also added striking shape to some gardens. Good use of trellis arches and screens, both rustic and more formal, in some gardens allowed scope for climbers and made the space available seem much bigger and more interesting, in fact in one garden I actually got lost!

Congratulations to all the winners - encourage your neighbours to enter next year. Sue Goss.

The 1995 WyUWG WILDLIFE GARDEN Competition

List of Winners :

Overall winner

Joanna Hunter £25 voucher

Joint runners-up

Irenke Yorke £15 voucher

Wendy Willson £15 voucher

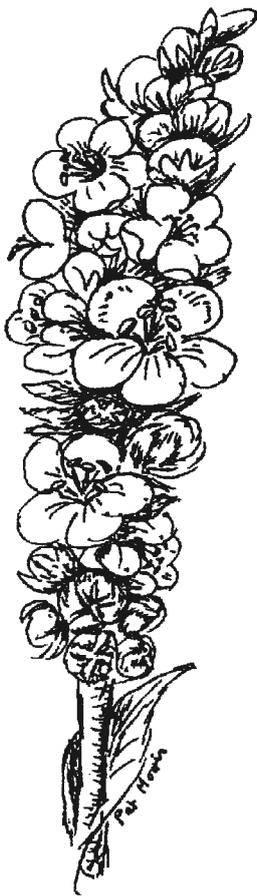
Highly commended

John Willson £10 voucher

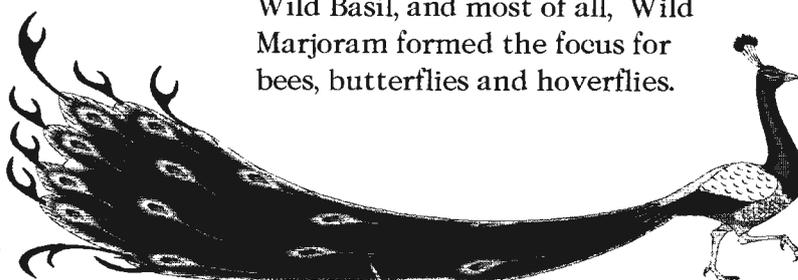
Joan Fane £10 voucher

Prizes generously
donated by

The West Wycombe
Garden Centre



Great Mullein
(*Verbascum thapsus*)





Flora-for-Fauna in WYCOMBE'S

WILDLIFE GARDENS

WyUWG Wildlife Garden Competition 1995.

It was a delight to take a few days off work to visit the gardens entered in this year's competition with Sue Goss, the other judge, and Pat Morris. The weather was perfect and we saw dragonflies and damselflies in some gardens during our visits and were told or shown evidence of frogs, toads, slow worms, hedgehogs, foxes, muntjac deer and badgers. Many of the wildlife gardens had provided for the need of birds by putting out water and nest boxes. We were impressed both by the wildlife interest in the gardens and the enthusiasm of the gardeners.

Judging the competition was far from easy this year. To ensure a high standard former winners were not debarred from entering. Sue Goss and I assessed the gardens independently but were pleased to find we had come to the same decisions as to the winning entries.

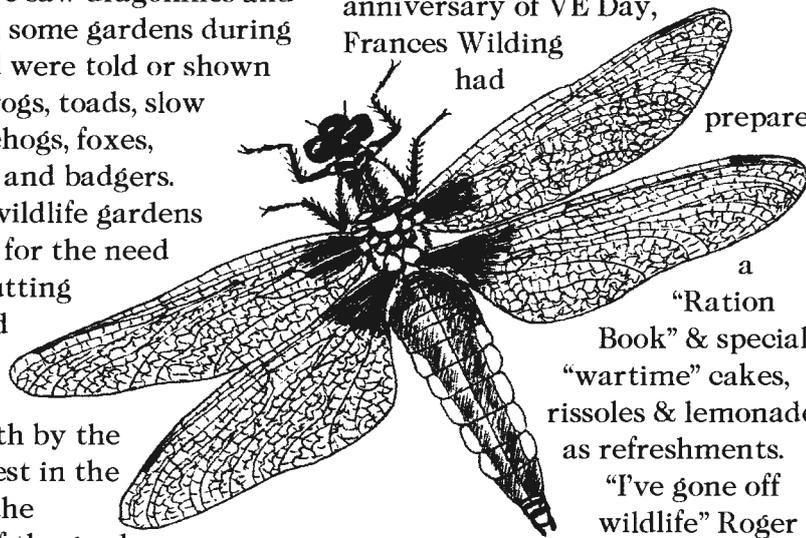
I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the winners and thank other entrants to whom we will be offering a selection of plants to enhance the wildlife value of their gardens. We hope this will encourage them to continue to develop their gardens for wildlife and enter next year's competition.

Roger Wilding.

Once again, a lot of careful thought had gone into the planning of the WyUWG members' Open Gardens. A home made video of their night visitors was an impressive extra at Irenke York's Open Afternoon; since their award-winning garden was open during the 50th anniversary of VE Day, Frances Wilding

had

prepared



a

"Ration Book" & special "wartime" cakes, rissoles & lemonade as refreshments.

"I've gone off wildlife" Roger

Wilding said, however, as he showed people round, since a fox had taken three of his four hens two nights earlier. These two events were well-supported, one of Roger's visitors even preferring to spend the afternoon looking round his domain than going to Lord Carrington's The Lyle Garden, as originally planned. Far fewer people attended the rest of the programme, which was a pity. One of the gardens was, in fact, overall winner of this year's Garden Competition. So don't miss these other gardens next year, just in case. Many thanks to all who dedicated so much time & effort to make these days a success. Pat.

Our thanks to
Roger and Sue
for judging the
competition

Over £110 was
raised for
WyUWG funds
by the
Open Garden
event

Illustration:

Broad bodied chaser
dragonfly
(*Libellula depressa*)
by Frances Wilding.



Swanning around Wycombe



Update on Wycombe's Swans

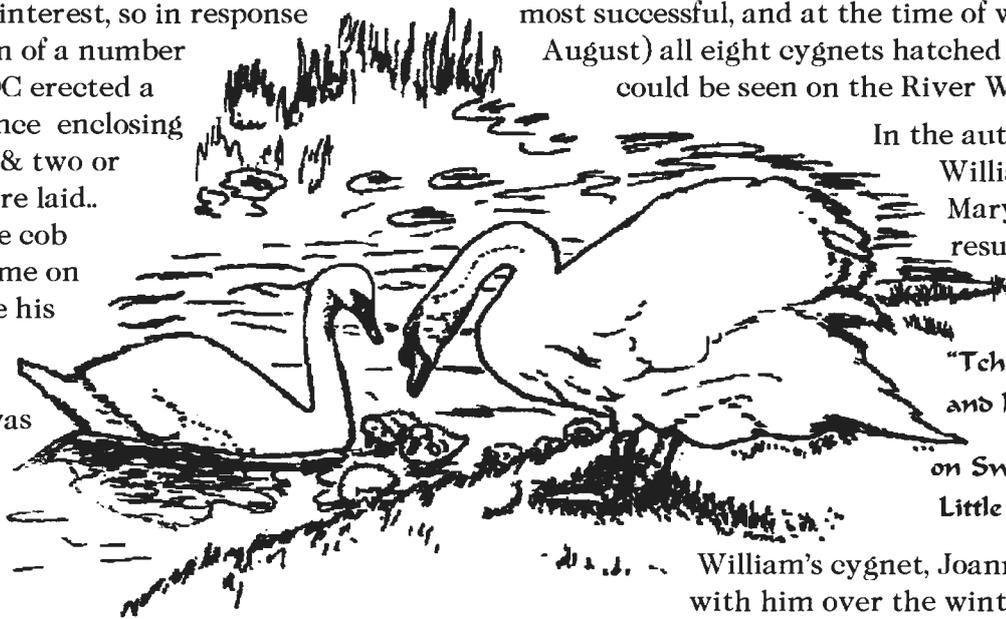
Since some Swan notes appeared in the September 1992 issue of this newsletter, there have been a number of changes in our local swan population. At that time, cob William, hatched in 1988, was resident on the Dyke with a newly acquired mate. In February 1993 he started nest building on the river bank by Wendover Way. Initially his pen, Mary, showed little interest, so in response to the concern of a number of people, WDC erected a temporary fence enclosing the nest area & two or three eggs were laid. Unusually, the cob spent some time on the nest while his mate bathed and fed. A lone cygnet was hatched in early May, the first one to be born at the Rye since 1971, when a nest was similarly protected by a fence. William was seen to pull up river weed and stir the river bed, for the cygnet to obtain food. Swans are mainly vegetarian.

Meanwhile Nicholas and Deirdre (both eight years old), after no success at Park Farm in 1992, built a rather insubstantial nest and laid eggs but these disappeared. A second nest was quickly constructed nearby. A solitary cygnet was subsequently seen on the river but only for a few days. Deirdre continued to incubate the remaining eggs, but as is usually the case no further cygnets appeared. Ideally pens do not start to incubate until all the eggs have been laid, resulting in all the cygnets hatching in a few hours, when they soon go on to the water. Nicholas and Deirdre had a much better season in 1994, and probably laid eight eggs. During the five week incubation period Deirdre rarely left

the nest, and when she did Nicholas, the cob, remained on the water unlike William's behaviour on the Rye. The family remained together and when the cygnets could fly they visited the Thames at Marlow from time to time.

During a visit in January this year the cygnets were given the slip, leaving the parents a clear territory at Park Farm, to start nesting all over again. This year Nicholas and Deirdre have been most successful, and at the time of writing (early August) all eight cygnets hatched in the spring could be seen on the River Wye.

In the autumn of 1993 William's mate Mary died as a result of injury.



"Tchaikowski"
and his family
on Swan Lake at
Little Missenden.

William's cygnet, Joanna, remained with him over the winter of 93/94 and, although a nest was built, no eggs were laid in 1994. Another nest was constructed in 1995 on the island in Wycombe Abbey Lake and in late May two cygnets appeared.

Cobs do occasionally mate with their daughters but it is interesting to note that Joanna is only in her third summer, i.e. only two years old.

Thank you to local friends for their observations and Swan Lifeline for providing details to determine ages of the swans. Eric.

It is sad to note that although most sizes of angler's lead shot are now banned swans are still suffering from lead poisoning.

In May a one year old cygnet with typical lead poisoning symptoms was removed from the Thames at Spade Oak and, following examination, it was thought that recovery would be unlikely.



Memories are made of these

Witnessing a wildlife drama, the excitement of a rare find, and the accomplishment of a personal ambition, have all formed part of WyUWG members' wildlife memories.

Drama:

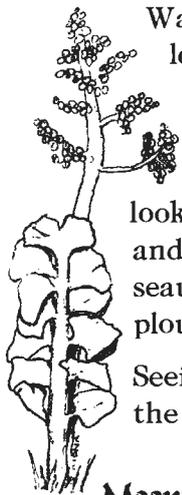
Seeing a Sparrowhawk dropping out of the air and carrying off a tame sparrow while we were feeding it. (Roger)

A Magpie pouncing on an injured baby Starling, pinning it on its back, and trying to peck it to death. The youngster fought back valiantly and, assisted by its parents, finally escaped. (Pat)

Anguished calls from a small brown bird dangling from the talons of a Sparrowhawk, and from other feathered witnesses, as the hawk flew low through the garden. (Pat)

Seeing a Tawny Owl take one of our fish and fly off across our lawn and up over the trees with it in its talons. (Irenke - 11.10pm.)

Rare Finds :



Wading through a New Forest bog, looking for a small Bog Orchid and actually finding it. (Roger)

Out for a stroll on a hill top footpath near Booker, not looking for anything in particular, and finding a perfect fossil (flint) searching lying on the surface of a ploughed field. (Maurice)

Seeing & successfully photographing the weird looking moonwort fern. (Roger)

Moonwort

(*Botrychium lunularia*)

Finding the spore horns of the rare and strange fungus *Libertella faginea* in the wood at Sands Bank. (Roger)

Finding the first dormouse in the nest boxes I had put up at Homefield Wood and signs of dormice, in the form of nibbled hazel nuts at Cut-throat Wood (Beaconsfield) (Maurice)

Not so rare:

Seeing two muntjac rutting in Deangarden Wood - an experience spoiled by not having a camera with me. (Roger)



Red kite

Roe deer in Millfield Wood NR, while hunting Dark Green Fritillaries (Roy Morris)

Personal ambitions satisfied:

Persuading a robin to take meals worms from a handheld dish to feed its nestlings. It was all rendered useless, when the nest was found destroyed and the young scattered round the garden 18 days later ! A cat this time ? Why are my most vivid memories horrible ? (Pat)

The unexpected :

A hedgehog ambling into the lounge, on a very hot evening, via the open conservatory door. It declined to eat the cat's food and finally had to be helped back out of doors - with gardening gloves ! (Sue Haines)

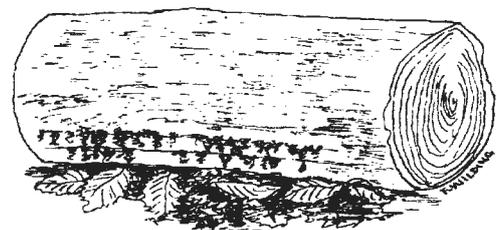
Abstract - sight, smell, sound :

Watching Red Kites gliding in the thermals on the Chiltern escarpment. (Roger)

The sound of a Badger on one of its regular visits, chomping its way through peanuts and other scraps of food left out for it. (Irenke)

Cloud of purple hairstreaks in Oaks near Finemere Wood. (Eric)

The scent of lime blossom in Wendover Way, on the Rye, while watching froglets emerge in dozens from the water, and damselflies darted about. (Peter Hazzard)



The fungus *Libertella faginea* on a log in the wood at Sands Bank.

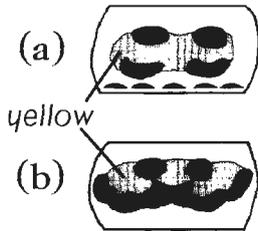


Questions and answers



When is a mullein moth not a mullein moth ?

Markings on the segments of Mullein Moth & Stripped Lychnis caterpillars



Answer : When it is a Stripped Lychnis.

If you do find some very distinctive caterpillars on Aaron's rod (mulleins), look carefully before reporting them to Martin Harvey (See page 82). The two diagrams (left) should help you identify them.

(a) shows the markings of the caterpillar of the mullein shark moth (*Cucullia verbasci*), there are 4 black spots around the central yellow "splodge" across the centre of each segment.

(b) In the Stripped Lychnis (*Cucullia lychnitis*) there are 2 spots like eyes and a W shaped line, like a moustache. As each segment bears one of these lines across it they are, presumably, the reason for the description "striped". The Stripped Lychnis is a "nationally notable" species but does occur in this part of the Chilterns.

Maurice.

WyUWG Schools' Wildlife Corner Competition. (continued from page 81)

Benefits of a school wildlife area for other class-room studies were also in evidence at the other schools visited. Although the grounds of Little Marlow C of E School are small & the wildlife area completely enclosed so it can only be accessed via locked gates it has enabled them to establish a pond - the children only being let in to work at the pond when a teacher is present. The seclusion created by high hedges and limited access was reflected in the variety of wildlife present in this little wildlife haven.

There isn't space to comment in detail on each of the schools that entered but they have all

made an excellent start at developing their grounds for wildlife with its many benefits for all aspects of work in the school - if only all schools in Wycombe District would take up the challenge. I am pleased to report that a couple of schools are setting things in motion - one aiming to win the WDC Environmental Award and our competition within the next 2 years !

One final thought The development of school grounds needs the co-operation of the school staff but to achieve the maximum potential it also needs the dedicated involvement of parents and children to make it happen. Maurice.

WyUWG Schools' Wildlife Corner Competition

Winner : Marlow C of E School.

Runners up :

Hannah Ball County First School
Little Marlow C of E School.

Highly Commended :

Holy Trinity C of E School, Marlow.

Prizes generously donated by

Hall & Co.

Insect Day for Schools at Sands Bank

WyUWG, WDC Ranger Service & BTCV joined forces on Friday 16th. June for an Insect Day for Schools at Sands Bank., as a National Wildlife Week activity. The weather could have been warmer, and most of the butterflies remained hidden, but there was plenty of other insect life in the form of grasshoppers, flies, spiders and moths to keep the children interested. Many present expressed a wish to return at a later date. & it was generally agreed it had been a most successful occasion. Thanks to all the leaders involved & the organiser, Elaine Tague. Thanks also to **Marks & Spencer** whose grant made the event possible. If your school would like to make an educational visit to Sands Bank or any other reserve, please contact Elaine at the Countryside Centre.



A wide variety of activities have taken place in the last few sessions. In May the WDC Ranger Service organised environmental games, such as blindfold trails and smelly cocktails, at the Warren Nature Reserve. In June there was a visit to College Lake Nature Reserve near Tring - next year we plan to have a visit there for adults! In addition there was a 'normal' Watch Group activity in the form of a walk at Gomm Valley to look for mammals. Elaine.

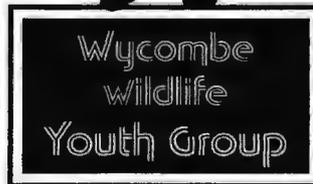


WATCH & Youth Group activities.



Cocktail mixing

wildlife WATCH is the junior section of the Wildlife Trust - the co-ordinating body of Naturalists' Trusts and Urban Wildlife Groups. Wycombe wildlife WATCH Group meets at Bassetsbury Manor at 2pm. on the second Saturday of the month & is for children aged 5-12+ Wycombe wildlife Youth Group is also based at Bassetsbury Manor and is for the over 12s.



We held our first Youth Group session. This was a bat, moth & BBQ session at Cock lane LNR.

A delightful cocktail of beer, bananas and treacle was concocted to attract moths and after the BBQ, a short walk was taken through Gomm's Wood. A few moths made it to the trap and a couple of bats put in an appearance just before we left at 10 pm.

For details of both groups contact Elaine on 01494 536930

Elaine.

The Cleanest Frog in Town ?

The frog, that used to occupy the smallest garden pond in Marlow, a 50cm x 10cm x 10 cm plant trough sunk in our rockery and filled with water, has moved - to our drain - the only permanently damp place in the garden in this very hot weather. I discovered it when clearing leaves (& frog!) that had blocked the drain grill. Obviously the drain cover is a little too loose in its fit - it not only lets in fallen leaves but frogs as well!

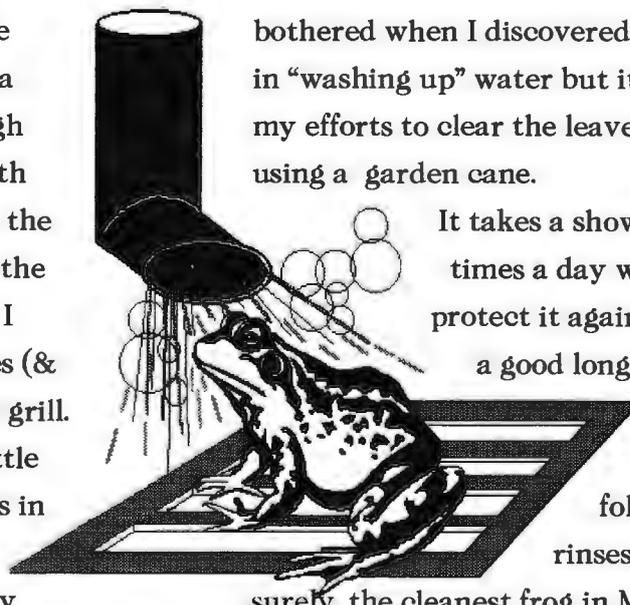
The frog did not seem particularly

bothered when I discovered it swimming round in "washing up" water but it did not appreciate my efforts to clear the leaves from the drain using a garden cane.

It takes a shower at least a dozen times a day with shield soap to protect it against you know what, a good long soak whenever we

bath and a real cleansing shower followed by several rinses on wash day -

surely the cleanest frog in Marlow. Maurice.





WILDLIFE NOTICE BOARD



Did You See ?



April

Reappearance of Holly Blues
Editor's garden and Holtspur Bank

May

Star of Bethlehem - Sands Bank (4/5/95)

and did you smell the
Stinkhorn there (7/5/95)

Female Dipper - Hughenden (15/5/95)

On the **Wildlife Marathon** (20/5/95)

3 Black-necked grebes - LMGP

3 Broad-bodied chasers - on our pond in
the **Demonstratiion Wildlife Garden at
West Wycombe Garden Centre!!!**

Longhorn beetle - and can you spell it -
(*Agapanthia villosoviridescens*) - Gomm Valley
Tree hopper (*Centrotus cornutus*) - Gomm V.

July

Little Egret - Little Marlow
Roesel's Bush Cricket - Holtspur (19/7/95)

August

Purple Hairstreaks - Downley & Holtspur



The WyUWG Contact list:



Chairman & Newsletter Editor:
Pat Morris, 01494 529484
Wildlife Gardening Officer:
Roger Wilding, 01494 438374
Treasurer : Jean Johnson
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



Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group

wish to thank

UK Waste Management Ltd.

for the donation
of a computer & laser printer.

Thames Water for a donation of £100

Latimer Sawmills who donated wood
for picnic benches at Sheepridge.

and **Wycombe District Council** for
this year's "core funding" grant

MEMO: COPY DATE - FRIDAY 1 DECEMBER 1996



Names of Contacts for Wildlife Groups in Wycombe District



BC	Butterfly Conservation	Ron Beavan	01494 444158
BTCV	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	Marion Vere	01296 383393
	Buckinghamshire Office / County Office	Andy Lyon	01494 536930
	Wycombe Office - The Countryside Centre	(Oxon Office)	01865 775476
BBONT	Berks, Bucks & Oxon Naturalists' Trust	Maurice Young	01628 472000
	South Bucks Region, Reserves Manager	Mike Collard	01494 866908
BBG	Bucks Badger Group	Arthur Brown	01628 604769
BBC	Bucks Bird Club	Tom Cotton	01844 345183
CPRE	Council for the Protection of Rural England	John Morris	01494 461286
CWP	Chiltern Woodlands Project	Lyn Jack	01494 447680
FOE	Friends of the Earth	Wendy Knight	01635 268881
EN	English Nature	Margaret Baker	01844 342188
SWS	Saunderton Wildlife Sanctuary	Les Stocker	01844 292292
StT	St. Tiggywinkles	Tim Heron	01753 859397
SL	Swan Lifeline	Ian Saunders	01734 344127
TVMG	Thames Valley Mammal Group	Valerie Lambourne	01494 443761
WWF	World Wildlife Fund		



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