

# WYCOMBE

# WILDLIFE



# NEWS no. 22

## URBAN WILDLIFE GROUP

JANUARY 1997

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

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### Wildlife Notice Board

*Photo, centre page:  
Cllr. Barratt & Ray Fountain  
presenting prize to winners.*

## Chairman of Wycombe District Council Awards Prizes

The Chairman of Wycombe District Council, Cllr. Mrs. Betty Barratt, awarded the prizes for Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group's Wildlife Garden Competition in 1996.

The Ceremony took place at the Group's Demonstration Wildlife Garden at the West Wycombe Garden Centre on Saturday 5th. October, 1996 before many friends and supporters.

During the event Cllr. Barratt gave out sets of garden tools, donated by Hall & Co., to the winners of the Schools' Wildlife Corner section, and then garden vouchers provided by the West Wycombe Garden Centre, to participants in the general Wildlife Garden Competition.

(Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group was delighted Betty could support the occasion, since a previous Chairman of Wycombe District Council, Mrs Pam Priestley, had launched the Demonstration Wildlife Garden in 1993, and Betty was able to see how much it had developed. She also took the opportunity of chatting to winners & Group members over coffee in the Cottage Tea Shop.)



The Group thank Cllr. Barratt for her support and also Ray Fountain of Hall & Co. and Kevin Brown of West Wycombe Garden Centre for their continued generosity.

*Pat Morris*

A full list of winners appeared in the September 1996 issue

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 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

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**THE DOCUMENT COMPANY**

Illustrations by:

Pat Morris, Fiona Wilding,  
 Rob Andrews and Maurice Young.

## Update

### *New faces join the Project Team*

Simon Neville, one of the three officers comprising the **WyUWG Project Team** appointed in March 1996, left in September to take up another voluntary appointment. His position has been filled by three part-time voluntary officers, John Grimes, Fatima Patel and Jo Thorn.



John comes from Radnage and has an M.Sc. in Vegetation Surveying and Conservation Assessment from Reading University. He will be taking over the mapping of Wycombe's wildlife habitats from Angus Idle and assist him with his surveys of District Council open spaces. His other speciality will be fundraising.

Fatima lives in Houslow. She studied for her B.Sc.



in Environmental Biology at the South Bank University, and also works for **BTCV** at Kings Cross, London. Her special project will be to provide a sensory garden at Holmer House, Cressex.



Jo graduated from Writtle College, Essex with a B.Sc. in Rural Resource Development and lives in Maidenhead. She will take over the production of the **Countryside Centre Newsletter** previously produced by **BTCV**.

All three new recruits will support Kate Howard and Robin Harley, our **Team Directors**, in current **WyUWG Projects**. It is a new and exciting development which will strengthen the bonds which already exist between those who use the **Countryside Centre**. Pat

### **Persil for Windows**

I use the spell checker in Word for Windows to make sure that I always type the Latin names of plant correctly. It is so easy to make simple spelling mistakes with some of the more complicated names and as I use the Latin names for the key for the plant monitoring database it is essential that the spellings are always correct. Unfortunately the spell checker only checks spellings a single word at a time, so I have to check the spelling of the generic and specific names (i.e. the two halves of the Latin name) separately. Now however I have found a way of joining the two together,

which, although it looks like a space, the spell checker "thinks" is another letter. It is actually an underscore ( \_ ) formatted as White, so it is invisible on the screen and to the printer. This is done by a mini macro or subroutine. If you want to know how to do this in Word for Windows 6, just let me know. You may not want it for Latin names but it can be used, for instance, to check post codes or with people's names. You can have a demonstration if you wish. Angus Idle

Where does Persil come into it? well Angus' original title was "White space for Windows" - Get it? Sorry!  
Maurice

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.



## Announcing the WyUWG 1997 Competitions

### Competitions for Schools

#### Schools' Wildlife Corner Competition

These will take place again this year, following on the success of 1996. You may enter any wildlife area created as a resource for study. However, there will be three categories this time - to make judging easier!

- i/. First schools
- ii/. Middle & Combined schools
- iii/. Secondary schools

As before there will be two sections "New" and "Established" Wildlife Corners

#### Schools' Wildlife Poetry Competition

A new competition to find Wycombe's young wildlife poets. Competitors may choose whatever form or style they like but the poem SHOULD NOT BE more than 24 lines. There will be four categories:

- i/. Aged 7 or under
- ii/. Aged 8 to 11 years
- iii/. Aged 11 to 14 years
- iv/. Aged 14 to 17 years

\* Watch out for details of these competitions - but start preparing now!

### Competitions for the General Public

#### Photography Competition

This is to replace the Wildlife Gardening Competition this year. Categories may include:

- |                  |                  |             |
|------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Landscape        | Garden Wildlife  | On the Town |
| Changing Seasons | Down on the Farm |             |

\* Look for details in your local library.



### Art Presentation at Spring Gardens

The presentation of prizes for the **WyUWG's Wildlife Art Competition** for schools, by the judges Mike Eaton and Lorna Cassidy, took place on Saturday, 28th. September 1996, in the **Spring Gardens Art Centre Coffee Shop**.

The entries, which covered every wall of the room, had been on display for over a month, courtesy of the Arts Centre Director, Charlie Dearden. They aroused a great deal of interest from all visitors.

Thanks are due to Charlie for her permission to use the Spring Gardens Coffee Shop, and to the **Project Team** for the hours of work mounting the exhibition

### Special Thanks

**Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group** thanks the **Parents Association of Spinfield County Combined School** for their most generous donation of £750, in appreciation of the help given by the **Group** in creating the school **Nature Trail**.

### Allotment

**WyUWG** are now the proud owners of a 14 by 18 metre Council Allotment, thanks to negotiations initiated by Lorna Cassidy with Steve Swindells of **Wycombe District Council**. The allotment will be used to raise plants of value to wildlife that can be used to enhance our reserves and other wildlife areas on which we work. We will also be able to raise plants for sale and we are grateful to **Wycombe District Council** for providing this means to increase our funds and broaden the scope of our work.

Pat Morris



# Diary of an Elizabethan Lady

## August to December 1996

### August

There has been a sudden explosion of butterflies this month, especially Painted Ladies. The best plant for attracting butterflies in our garden has been Hemp-agrimony. In one sunny spell there were: 4 Peacocks, 3 Painted Ladies, 3 Common Blues, 2 Meadow Browns, 1 Red Admiral and 1 Tortoiseshell, all feeding at the same time, as well as lots of bees and hoverflies. The bees and the hoverflies also like the Dahlias, as do the many Silver Y moths around this year.

### September

The Cheddar Pink and Harebell, which have had a very long flowering season this year, are still fully out. Two Jays have visited our garden.



### Painted Lady October

*Vanessa atalanta*

The Viper's-bugloss in the heathland is in full flower as are the Wild Pansies and Harebells - still! There is going to be a bumper crop of apples this year - we will leave some of the wind-falls for the birds over the winter.

### November

The first frost occurred at the beginning of the month and the leaves and apples are beginning to drop and the garden is looking very autumnal but there are still a few Harebells, Wild pansy, Corn marigold and Campions in flower.



Harebell  
*Campanula rotundifolia*

### December

There are not very many birds in the garden this December, just a few tits feeding. There are some Red Campions and Dame's-violets still flowering, but it is now time for the garden (and the gardener) to rest.

Fiona Wilding



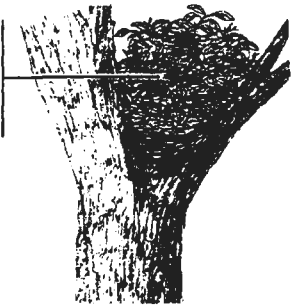


## Observations

### in WYCOMBE'S WILDLIFE GARDENS



*Football sized squirrel drey in fork of a tree. The twigs from which they are built often retain their dead leaves.*



## and Questions arising

**H**ow long do seeds remain dormant in the soil? We had to move a dead shrub and were surprised to see Flanders-type poppies appear. They made a fine show and I was surprised to see how the flowers turned towards the sun. *Hilary Hide*

The germination of seeds, and factors controlling it, is a fascinating subject and, if I were to dig out my old lecture notes, I could fill this newsletter easily with my answer. The longevity of seed is very variable. A few are relatively short lived but many will survive in the soil for a very long time, under the right conditions. A quote from "Introduction to Botany" by Priestley & Scott, is relevant to this answer: "The stories of germination of wheat from the tombs of Egyptian mummies seem to be without foundation, and the best authenticated case of long maintained viability is that of the fruit of the Indian lotus (*Nelumbium speciosum*), taken from peat at the bottom of a dried up lake in Manchuria. Dating of the sediments in which they were found suggested they were 3-400 years old". This phenomenon is known as dormancy and is due to a variety of factors: inhibitory chemicals in the seed, an impervious seed coat preventing entry of water etc., and gardeners have to resort to a variety of methods to "break dormancy". Primrose and cowslip seeds have to be exposed to frost (or put in a fridge); the seed coat of lupins has to be "chipped"; others, including some varieties of lettuce have to be exposed to light while seeds of Love-lies-Bleeding will only germinate in the dark.

Poppies and other corn field weeds need light and do well in that habitat because some seed is brought to the surface each year when the fields are ploughed - they are suppressed in modern fields by the use of herbicides. Your observation reminds me of the beautiful swathes of red poppies that appeared along the verge of John Hall Way in 1991 when the footpaths were made up and the adjoining verge disturbed. That seed may have lain in that soil for 10-20 years or more - can anyone remember when that land was last farmed? They set lots of seed but hardly any grew the following year because the ground was completely carpeted with grass and other plants. Those seeds will lay there until the soil is disturbed again and the right conditions for their growth return. *Maurice*

**S**itting one day at the window I was watching a squirrel as it stripped the bark from one of our Clematis and ran off with it. Would it have been collecting this to make a drey? *Roy Morris*

The short answer to this one is "Most likely, yes". In the Reader's Digest Guide to Animals of Britain it says "The football-sized nest, or drey, is made of twigs, often with the leaves still attached. It is built fairly high in a tree and lined with grass and shredded bark". I am not surprised by your observation as there is a lot of clematis in local woodlands and I suspect many squirrels use it.

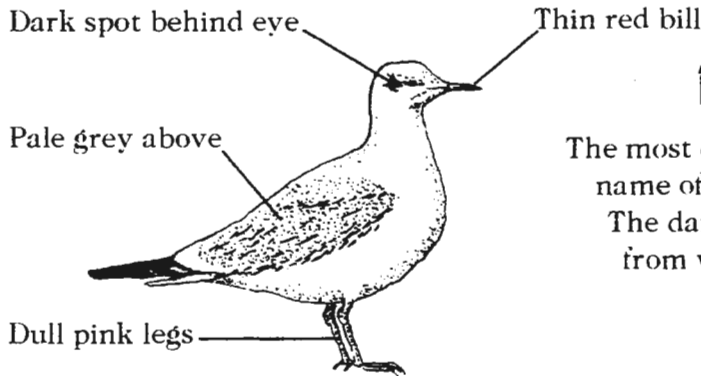
Dormice collect and use honeysuckle bark to weave their nests - when there is honeysuckle in their territory. There is very little honeysuckle at Homefield Wood and the nests in the nest boxes I have put up are made mainly from grass and leaves - and occasionally paper tissue, which I have used to plug the entrance holes when inspecting the box - and have forgotten to remove when I have finished. This shows that, although each species has its preferences for nest building materials, they, no doubt, will use whatever is available - and convenient! It looks as if your squirrel has discovered that the stringy bark of your garden clematis is as good material for lining its nest with as that of the wild clematis. *Maurice*



# Gulls

or bird i.d.

**D**uring the winter months thousands of gulls flock into Bucks to use the various gravel pits and rubbish tips. Here is a look at the six most likely species to be seen.

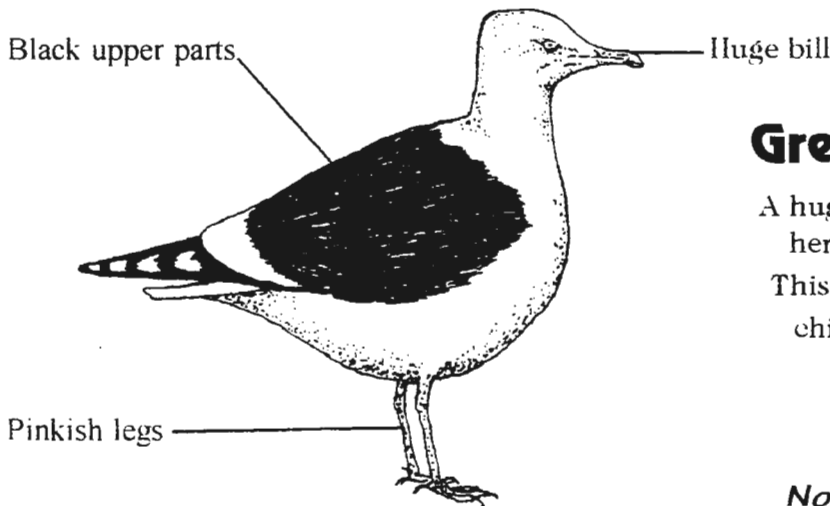
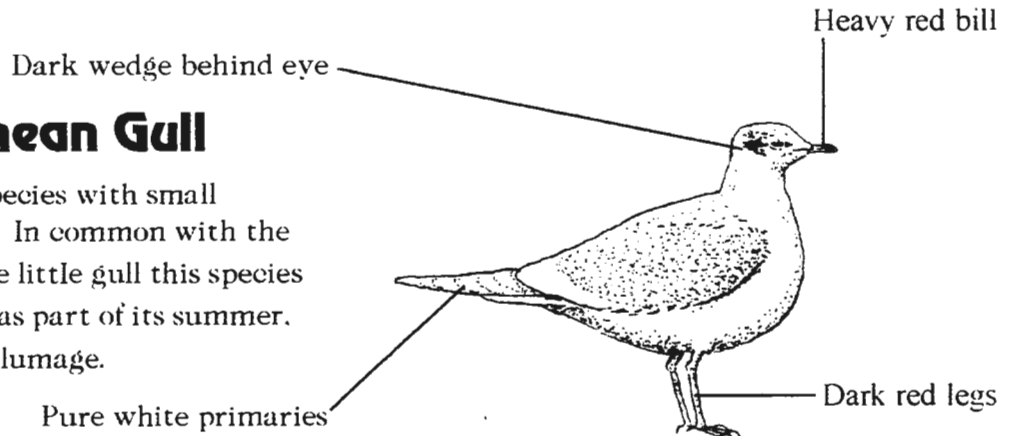


## Black-Headed Gull

The most common out of the six species, despite the name of the one at the top of the page opposite. The dark, chocolate brown colour of the head, from which its name is derived, is only seen in the breeding season

## Mediterranean Gull

Rarest of the six species with small but increasing numbers. In common with the black-headed gull and the little gull this species develops a black "hood" as part of its summer breeding plumage.



## Great Black-Backed Gull

A huge gull - much less common than the herring and lesser black-backed gulls. This "monster" will take mice, voles and chicks, including those of other gulls - "gullping" them down whole!

*Notes & drawings by Rob Andrews with additions by the assist. ed.*

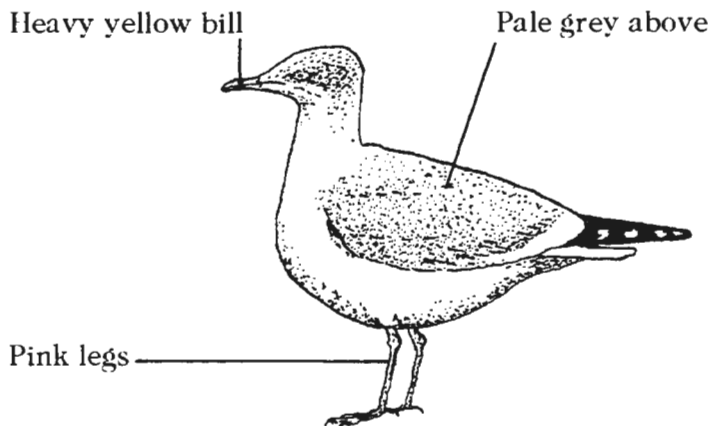
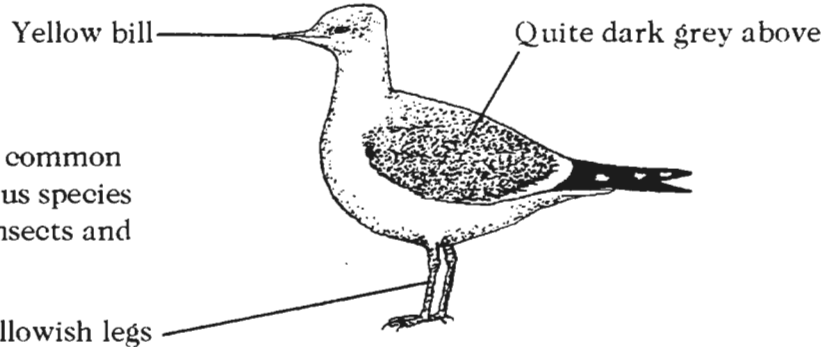


# Gullore

for the gullible

## Common Gull

Although called "common" it is not as common as the black-headed gull. A gregarious species often following the plough to feed on insects and worms that get turned up.

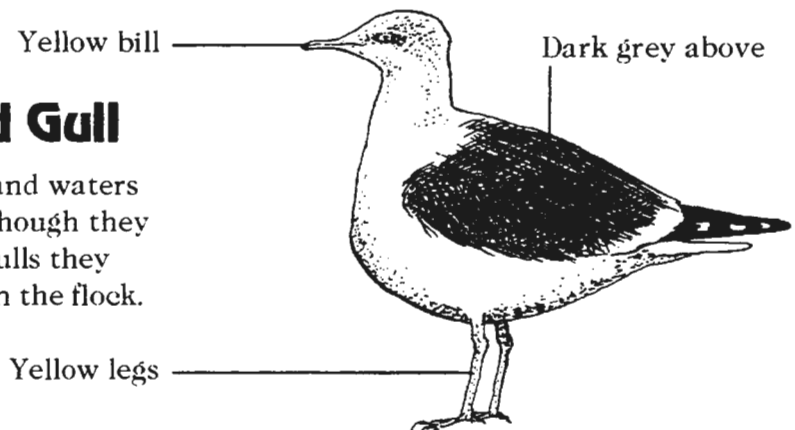


## Herring Gull

Fairly common - usually in good numbers. Its numbers inland have increased in recent years as more refuse dumps, where they can scavenge, have been established.

## Lesser Black-Backed Gull

Common in good sized flocks on inland waters where they roost for the winter. Although they can be found in mixed flocks of gulls they usually form a separate group within the flock.



To satiate your gulosity you must come along to  
Rob Andrew's Water Bird Watch at the  
Little Marlow Gravel Pits on Sunday 9th,  
February 1997 - 9.30a.m. - See the Programme



## What's on the wing at Keechill ?

Back in May the **Project Team** was asked by **Wycombe DC** to plan a butterfly transect & conduct a weekly survey in Keechill Wood. The site, now managed under the Council's '**Wycombe Woodlands Strategy**' and adopted by the Ercol Group, was formerly grazed common land but has, over the years, developed from chalk grassland into mixed woodland. Partly due to restorative clearance work a number of varied habitats now exist on the site.

The weekly walk round the woods made a pleasant change from our usual duties. Although at first we found identification difficult, with the help of a field guide we soon became more confident, recognizing most species immediately.

We only surveyed for 16 weeks but recorded 436 individuals and 18 species (there are about 40 species in all found in the County), varying from the beautiful painted lady and peacock to the more subtle brimstone. The most abundant species were the ringlet, meadow brown and speckled wood.

The results are not only useful as a guide to what is present on the site, but also for comparing with future years to identify trends and see what effect any management has on the butterfly population.

If you are interested in becoming involved with any of the surveys, even on an occasional basis, on local sites, then please contact the **Countryside Centre**.

*Kate & Robin*



*Clouded yellow  
(Colias croceus)*

*A migrant butterfly from S. Europe & N. Africa which was seen at Sands Bank*

## Phenology of Flowers

### Help survey wild Wycombe in bloom

One day in September when I was on Sands Bank I met a couple who now live in Cheshire, but who previously lived in Wycombe. They were just visiting and came to walk Sands Bank as they used to like to do. They told me that Sands Bank wasn't what it used to be. "There used to be spotted orchids all over the place". I replied "They still are just come back in May or June and you will see them again just as you remember them". The point being that all species have their flowering seasons and if you look for them at other times of the year, the best you can hope to see will be leaves and stems.

We have been monitoring the flowering of all the species on our reserves for four years now, so we are able to give you lists of plants to look for throughout the year.

PHENology is the study of the times of recurring PHENomena (PHEN is from a Greek word meaning show or appear). Hence the phenology of flowers is the study of when species

flower. Not all species local to Wycombe occur on the nature reserves. So I haven't got the information on the flowering of those species in our area. So I'm asking if you would like to help me complete this survey. If so, would you make notes, week by week throughout the year of all the wild flowers you see in bloom. I need to know the name of the plant (either by their Latin or common names), where and when you saw them, and whether you saw just one or two or many flowers at that time. Then let me have your notes so we can compile the Phenology of flowers for Wycombe. It won't be the same as other places. For all sorts of reasons, the times when particular plants flower will vary from place to place, even from one place to another in Wycombe.

If you would like to help please contact me via the **Countryside Centre** or phone direct on 01494 563673. If you experience any difficulty identifying the plants you see, we can help you. *Angus Idle*



*Common spotted orchid  
(Dactylorhiza fuchsii)*

*Can be seen on Sand's Bank only in May and June.*





# Reports



The Autumn session started with a visit to the **Calvert Environmental Education Centre (CEEC)** for the **Esso Tree Watch**. This was a regional event organized by **BBONT** and we were joined by other **WATCH** groups. We explored the woods and found signs of woodpeckers (lots of holes in dead birch trees), squirrels (lots of nuts eaten by them) & many more fox droppings than usual - which all contained blackberries!



### Fox droppings

*- have a characteristic "twisted tail". They often contain the remains of fruits in the autumn; in 1995 many were black and contained a lot of cherry stones, this autumn, at Keep Hill, it was blackberries.*

We also celebrated **25 years** of national **WATCH** with a cake and a party lunch, followed by parachute games. We explored some more but think the most popular event was the art: leaves made from tissue and willow, and woodland animals out of junk - a creative way to recycle your old plastic lemonade bottles.

In October we looked for signs and tracks and found deer tracks on the Rye, woodpecker holes, nibbled beech nuts and

## Wycombe



lots of droppings at Keep Hill. An added incentive for remembering signs was a bingo session at the end - very popular.

Wendy proved very popular at the meeting held at Gomm Valley - the **BBONT** reserve, by supplying the hot chocolate during the break in the coppicing task we did there.

Well done everyone.

I must say a big thank you to Robin and Kate, who with the help from Boggart's, produced a wonderful treasure hunt - with real treasure (smarties and chocolate coins).

On the way down from Keep Hill we collected twigs and foliage to make Boggart gifts to hang on Christmas trees. Then came Boggart snacks & games, including musical habitats and dead Boggarts.

For those who don't know what a Boggart is - well, you get different sorts - the ones at home live in the airing cupboard pinching socks, & Woodland boggarts, if you venture into woodlands after dark, follow at a distance, you hear their footsteps or is it your imagination, for you never hear them when you stop, to listen!

*Elaine Tague*

The Group (**WATCH**) is open to children aged 8 and up, the cost will be £6 per year or £1 per meeting with a 25% discount for **wildlife WATCH** members.

For further details contact Robin or Kate at the

**Countryside Centre**  
(01494 529484)  
or Elaine at the **CEEC**  
on 01296 730814.



*Fox footprint  
Front toes close together.  
Dog claws often wider apart*

## Would you like to join us ?

If so complete this application (or a photocopy) and send to WyUWG Membership Secretary c/o, The Countryside Centre, (see front page for the address)

I / We wish to join **WyUWG**  
Name :

Address :

Tel. no.

Amount enclosed, (please circle)  
£5 (Individual/Family/School member)

£2.50 (Student or Retired Person)



# WILDLIFE NOTICE BOARD



## Did You See ?



### August

Wryneck - Tom Burt's Hill (31/8/96)

### September

1st. Redwings - Hazlemere (24/10/96)

Water vole - River Wye

### October

5 Dormice - Homefield Wood (12/10/96)

4 Dormice - Holtspur LNR(16/10/96)

### November

Dunlin - L. Marlow grav. pits (10/11/96)

Water rail - L. Marlow grav. pits (10/11/96)

Red Kite - Abbey Barn Lane (30/11/96)

### Last butterfly sightings

Clouded yellow - Chairborough (26/8/96)

Speckled wood - Put. Pl. farm (12/10/96)

Peacock - PennWoods (14/10/96)

Red Admiral - Pat's garden (15/10/96)

Brimstone - Mop End (21/10/96)

(Comma - Haz. rec. (23/10/96)

Small tortoiseshell - Downley (9/11/96)



## The WyUWG Contact list:



Chairman & Newsletter Editor:

Pat Morris. 01494 529484

Wildlife Gardening Officer:

Roger Wilding. 01494 438374

Treasurer: Jean Johnson. 01494 816231

Membership Secretary:

James Donald. 01494 445334

**Project Team**: Robin Harley, Kate Howard,  
John Grimes, Fatima Patel, Jo Thorn 01494 536930

**wildlife WATCH**: Elaine Tague 01494 536930

Biological surveys: Angus Idle. 01494 563673

Education Officer & Assistant Editor:

Maurice Young. 01628 472000



MEMO: COPY DATE Friday 7 Mar. 1997

## GOODS FOR SALE

Car stickers - £1 (inc p & p)

Sweat shirts - £16.50 (inc. p & p)

Sweatshirts - navy with white logo

sizes: 12-14 years / S / M / L.

Contact the **Countryside Centre** to order



## Names of Contacts for Wildlife Groups in Wycombe District



<b>BBONT</b>	Berks, Bucks & Oxon Naturalists' Trust	(Oxon Office)	01865 775476
	South Bucks Region, Reserves Manager	Maurice Young	01628 472000
<b>BNA</b>	British Naturalists' Assoc., S. Bucks Branch	Marion Hussey	01494 488336
<b>BTCV</b>	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	Marion Lyon	01494 536930
<b>BBG</b>	Bucks Badger Group	Mike Collard	01494 866908
<b>BTO</b>	British Trust for Ornithology (Regional Rep.)	David Hughes	01844 275472
<b>BC</b>	Butterfly Conservation	Ron Beaven	01494 444158
<b>BBC</b>	Bucks Bird Club	Arthur Brown	01628 604769
<b>CPRE</b>	Council for the Protection of Rural England	Tom Cotton	01844 345183
<b>CWP</b>	Chiltern Woodlands Project	John Morris	01494 461286
<b>EN</b>	English Nature (Thames & Chilterns Team)	Corina Woodall	01635 268881
<b>SWS</b>	Saunderton Wildlife Sanctuary	Margaret Baker	01844 342188
<b>StT</b>	St. Tiggywinkles	Les Stocker	01844 292292
<b>SL</b>	Swan Lifeline	Tim Heron	01753 859397
<b>TYMG</b>	Thames Valley Mammal Group	Ian Saunders	01734 344127
<b>WWF</b>	World Wide Fund for Nature	Valerie Lambourne	01494 443761
<b>WDC</b>	Wycombe District Council Ranger Service		01494 421824
	Steve Crosby, Ian Butterfield & Julie Hopton		



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**