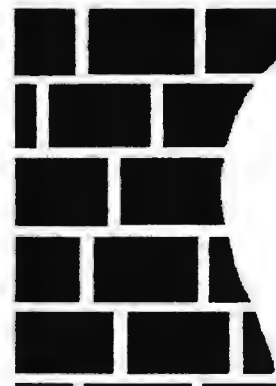


# WYCOMBE WILDLIFE



# NEWS no. 23

## URBAN WILDLIFE

GROUP

APRIL 1997

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

01494 536930

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**Support your AGM  
Monday 21 April 1997**

### Programme

**7. 30 - 8. 00pm Annual General Meeting**

**Should we change our name ?**

**Come and hear your Committee's views  
and express your opinion**

**8. 00 - 8. 20pm Refreshments**

**8. 30 - 9. 45pm**

**- TALK -**



Sandpiper

**Estuaries in Britain**

**by John Wyatt**



Dunlin

**following John's outstanding talk on bird song in 1994  
we are pleased to welcome him back for a second illustrated talk**

**Raffle, goods for sale during refreshment interval**

**Entry by donation of £1. 50 to help cover costs**

This issue generously sponsored by :

**THE DOCUMENT COMPANY  
RANK XEROX**

## Wycombe Woodlands Strategy is Five years old !

**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, Rob Andrews,  
 Robin Harley and Maurice Young.

**W**Wycombe District Council have just published a nice glossy report on the first five years of the **Wycombe Woodlands Strategy**. This project is their primary vehicle for practical community base, environmental action and nature conservation work and, as you know, the **Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group** has been intimately involved with it from the start.

The booklet outlines the aims and described the progress through the first five years from November 1990. As you know our Wildlife group was formally launched in April 1989 with full support from the Council, and it was from comments from Eric Britnell about Sands Bank and Roger Wilding about Chairborough Road that prompted **Wycombe District Council** to apply for **Local Nature Reserve** status for these sites. **Chairborough Road LNR** was only the second LNR to be set up in Buckinghamshire ! Since then other sites have been added to the

list. at first these were in the immediate area of High Wycombe, at Tom Burt's Hill and Gomm's Wood. Latterly sites at Princes Risborough, Marlow and Wooburn have been added. By now 112 different groups have participated in the projects giving over 27000 volunteer hours. Our involvement continues apace with the biological monitoring of many of the sites by Angus Idle working with the **WDC Ranger Service**. The work has now a database of nearly 18000 records of nearly 300 species of plants !

Plans are now afoot to complete our ambition of the Phase One mapping of the whole of the Wycombe area with John Grimes joining our team of assistant project officers. We have had the project on the back burner more or less since 1989.

Hopefully we can now complete it in a year or so. You can get copies of the Strategy report from the Council or through Steve Crosby.

*Angus Idle*

### WyUWG Allotment

**T**The new allotment has been rotovated and there is plenty of room for plants. So :-

**WANTED :** Your surplus seedlings of plants good for wildlife, or vegetables. There is plenty of room on the allotment to grow them on for use or sale later. Plants raised on the allotment could be used on school wildlife area

projects, or to 'improve' members gardens.

Excess stock will be sold at shows and meetings to raise funds for the Group. If you have any spare plants or cuttings contact the **Team** at :

**The**  
**Countryside Centre**  
 on  
**01494 536930**



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.



## 1997 Biodiversity Update

**B**IODIVERSITY has become a buzz word since the Rio summit several years ago now.

What was meant by it then and has, if at all, this meaning changed since then? I took it to mean then that there had become an awareness that species were being lost to extinction at a great rate due to man's activities all over the world, and that something should be done to halt that. It started off with the political statements of world leaders at the summit and there has since been an uneasy feeling that those statements would be an end of it

But no, it seems that the buzz word is trying to escape from the politicians, and that we all should become involved. At the Bucks Recorders Seminar last November that word was being bandied about as the description of what we ought to be doing or at least planning to do. There was talk of creating local action plans at all levels of the wildlife community. The action that we have become involved in is being co-ordinated by **BBONT** and in particular by Christine Bailey, the **Habitat & Species Officer** of **BBONT**.

Last year she sent us a long list of species she would like us to report on to them. Many of the species are, as you might well imagine, those that we feel are endangered for some reason.

They want records to show how real that danger is, which can be used to implement action to save them. But the list also contains species that are plainly common and in no immediate danger. The intention being that we should become more aware of the wildlife that surrounds us.

As a result of the monitoring of the nature reserves in and around High Wycombe which I have been doing with **Wycombe District Council** we were able to give them information on quite a few species which will go towards the wildlife picture of Buckinghamshire. Species such as the Chiltern Gentian and Kidney Vetch. **BBONT** have recently sent us a list of all the responses to date to their request for information, which you can look at as it will be available at the **AGM** on 21st. April. All the species I sent information in about are plants. There are others (invertebrates) under the name of Martin Harvey, but we need to make a more intensive response in the area of birds, mammals and river animals. With the **English Nature Recorder** available to us, as well as the **Monitoring Database** which I run, there is certainly no reason why many more of our members should not take part in the **BUCKS BIODIVERSITY CHALLENGE**.

*Angus Idle*

### Can you take up the CHALLENGE

**H**ere are some species on the **BUCKS BIODIVERSITY CHALLENGE** for you to look out for and report on:

**Birds:** Bullfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Skylark. Song thrush.

**Mammals:** Bats, Brown hare. Maurice is already monitoring Dormice on a number of sites.

**Invertebrates:** The project team monitor Butterflies for the **Wycombe District Council** on a number of their sites. Yellow meadow ant - found in large anthills in meadows, glow-worms and Atlantic crayfish.



*Great spotted woodpecker*

Often visits gardens in winter for peanuts



*Skylark*

Declining in numbers. Easily recognised as it rises in song over the field



*Bullfinch*

An occasional visitor to gardens where it feeds on berries & buds of your favourite fruit tree.

A full list is available from the **Countryside Centre**. You can help by keeping records of any sightings you make of any or all of the above.

Make a note of the date, place and number of individuals, and send your findings to the **Countryside Centre** for entry on the **English Nature Recorder** or **Monitoring Database**.

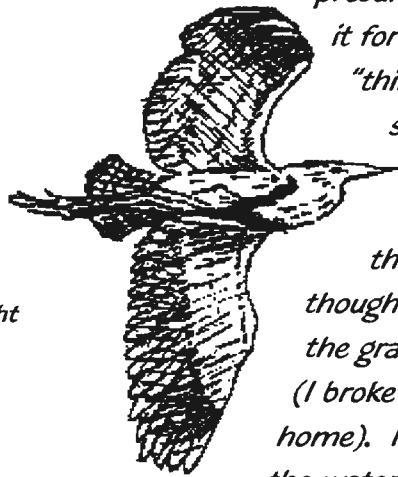
*Angus Idle*





## *Heron and Kingfisher on the Rye*

*At 10.30am I looked over the Dyke waterfall and saw a heron about 75 metres away standing on the bank. After about two minutes it jumped into the stream and came out again onto the bank with a long wriggling creature, presumably a fish. The heron attacked it for several seconds and it then lay still. As the "thing" was taken from such a narrow shallow stream, I was curious to determine whether it was indeed a fish. To get a closer look I started to walk along the path high above the stream, out of sight of the heron - as I thought, but the heron flew off leaving the catch on the grass.. It was a pike exactly 19 inches long (I broke a twig to size and measured the twig at home). In the minute it took me to get back above the waterfall the fish had gone; presumably the heron had returned for its catch.*

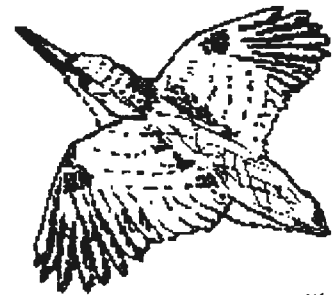


*Heron in flight*

*This heron has been seen many times recently around the Rye, in and around Pann Mill, and of course, flying over the Rye.*

*Then I walked along the river towards Pann Mill.*

*Close to the Mill, at 10.50am a kingfisher flew past me skimming the water and landed 20 metres away on the downstream parapet of Pann Mill bridge. I stopped and stayed motionless waiting for the bird to make a move; it looked like a common brown bird, well camouflaged against the wall. After a couple of minutes it was disturbed and flew into the shrub beside the mill steps. Looking down into the water where the bird had perched I could see a trout - probably its intended prey.*



*Kingfisher*

*Kingfisher*



*The kingfisher has been seen many times recently in the waters around Pann Mill. Both sightings surely indicate healthy waters around the Rye - long may this continue. Peter Hazzard (Sunday, 22/12/96)*



## Creating

# WYCOMBE'S

## WILDLIFE GARDENS

It was very wild when we arrived. About a sixth of an acre, 1920s house, 4 pre-house apple trees, dense, tangles of undergrowth, a holly hedge untrimmed for years, with a veritable mountain of cinder heaps! Very, very wild - you know what I mean - really WILD man, yeah —. But not much garden.

It's all about fun, balance, and loving tender care - wildlife gardening I mean. We need gardens (not just primeval impenetrable forest), but we also need wildlife. So which is it to be? Balance is the key. What balances for you and the wildlife (not forgetting the fun element too).

There wasn't a lot of wildlife to start with, believe it or not. There certainly is more now, than then. I trimmed the hedge to a low eight to ten feet, and now it has an interesting Henry Mooreish shape. It is a wonderful home to nesting birds - blackbirds, thrush, sparrows, nuthatch and it helps keep the magpies out! Trimming makes holly really dense. I know magpies are wildlife, but in our garden there are limits! In the hedge self set plants prosper. There is spindle, wild honeysuckle, woody nightshade, blackberry, whitebeam, ivy, & rather too much convolvulus.

Over the years nest boxes & bat boxes have gone up on the apple trees, the elder jungle has come out, replaced by a naturally appearing grass and wild plant lawn. Butterfly, moth and other insect attracting plants have been planted, and my two garden bees hives have kept the pollination levels up.

And don't forget the fun element!

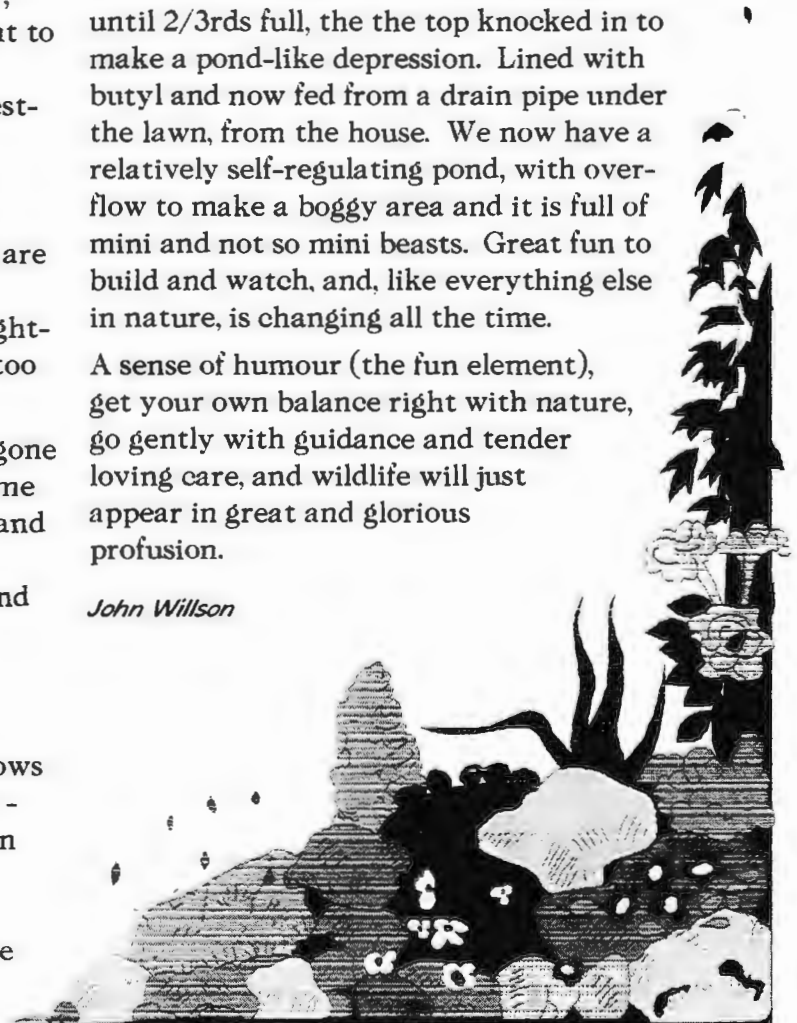
Have you tried grass sculpture? Mini-meadows are all the rage in wildlife gardens at present - uncut bits left to see what comes up. So when you mow round your mini-meadow leave interesting shapes in the grass - a cat silhouette, a heart, and so on. If you don't like it then mow it off and start again.

Make sure you have the mandatory pile of old logs for insects, fungi and hedgehogs; a nettle patch for caterpillars; a corrugated sheet on the ground for bugs etc. to hide under; a birdtable & birdbath and flowerpot nests for bumble bees buried in the ground - and turn it all into garden art! - even nettle patch sculpture (ouch!)

But I almost got caught out - no pond! Absolutely mandatory in wildlife circles. Ponds can be easy, half a barrel will do, or an old sink to start off with. Our garden had two features to help, an unused septic tank, and the piles of cinders. The cinders went into the tank until 2/3rds full, the top knocked in to make a pond-like depression. Lined with butyl and now fed from a drain pipe under the lawn, from the house. We now have a relatively self-regulating pond, with overflow to make a boggy area and it is full of mini and not so mini beasts. Great fun to build and watch, and, like everything else in nature, is changing all the time.

A sense of humour (the fun element), get your own balance right with nature, go gently with guidance and tender loving care, and wildlife will just appear in great and glorious profusion.

*John Willson*





# Birds to look for in the Spring

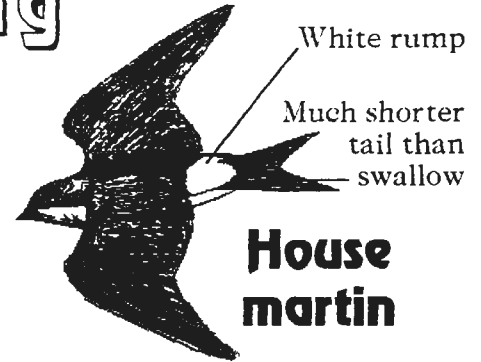
## Sand martin



All brown above

Brown breast band

## or Migrants for the Mystified



## House martin

The blackcap that had been overwintering in my garden for two months finally left on March 28th. It had been the most steadfast of my winter visitors, siskins, bramblings and redwings appearing only occasionally. But by then the first chiffchaffs were already singing in the surrounding woods; the annual influx of summer migrants had begun.

My blackcap had probably found its way to my garden from Germany - ringing has established that this is where at least some of our winter blackcaps come from - but almost all of our summer migrants come from South Africa. Some cover enormous distances as the recent television programme on the migration of swallows revealed. It was shown flying all

the way to South Africa from Britain. But the achievements of other migrants are no less impressive - a journey of 2500 miles in the case of the willow warbler - especially when one considers the hazards of weather, shooting, trapping and predation they encounter on the way.

The swift is the last to arrive, in late April, and the first to leave again, in August. As the day length decreases hormones produced by the bird's pituitary gland stimulate the urge to migrate. By the end of October all our summer migrants will have gone.

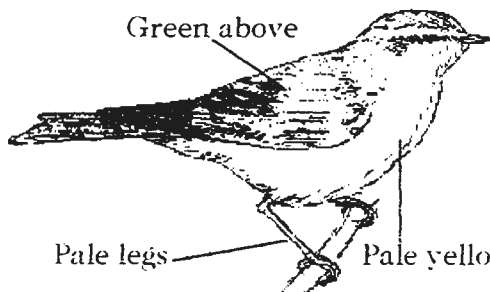
Birds navigate by using the sun and the stars and, for those who have travelled the route before, geographical features. Particular trees, hills, valleys and even buildings, will lead them back to the place of their birth, or to the area of last year's breeding. How they find their way is even more amazing in young birds like the

chiffchaff and willow warbler, where the juveniles set off a fortnight or so after their parents, having stayed on at their birth place, building up essential extra body fat to sustain them on their journey, before they depart.

I have tremendous respect for all migratory creatures. They accomplish feats of endurance unsurpassed by man. It is always a joy when they return, although one can not develop the same personal relationship I had with my blackcap, for whom his visits were a question of survival in harsh weather. For our summer visitors it is a matter of finding a suitable place in which to breed. It is up to us to make sure their effort is not wasted and to preserve their habitats for them so when they arrive they are not homeless, and without nesting sites and insects on which to feed their young. These annual migrants deserve our help. *Pat*

This is really what biodiversity is about - maintaining sufficient area and diversity of habitats to support ALL the wild-life still present on earth. *Maurice*

## Willow warbler



Green above

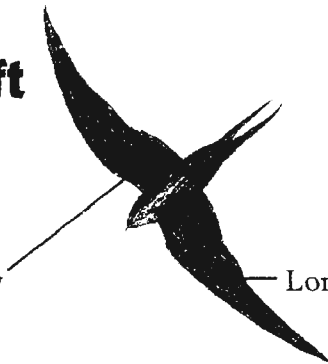
Pale legs

Pale yellow below





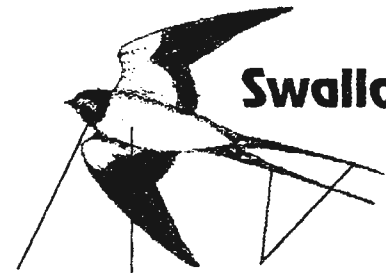
## Swift



All dark below

Long scythe-like wings

## Swallow



Red face

Long tail streamers

Buff (pale) below

Chiffchaffs arrive two to three weeks before willow warblers and depart two or three weeks later in the autumn, possibly because they are a little hardier than the willow warblers and they don't go quite so far, some overwintering in Southern Europe and others in North Africa.

There are two distinct races of chiffchaff. One found in north-east Europe, usually called the Scandinavian form and one that is found in Southern, Central and Western Europe including the UK.

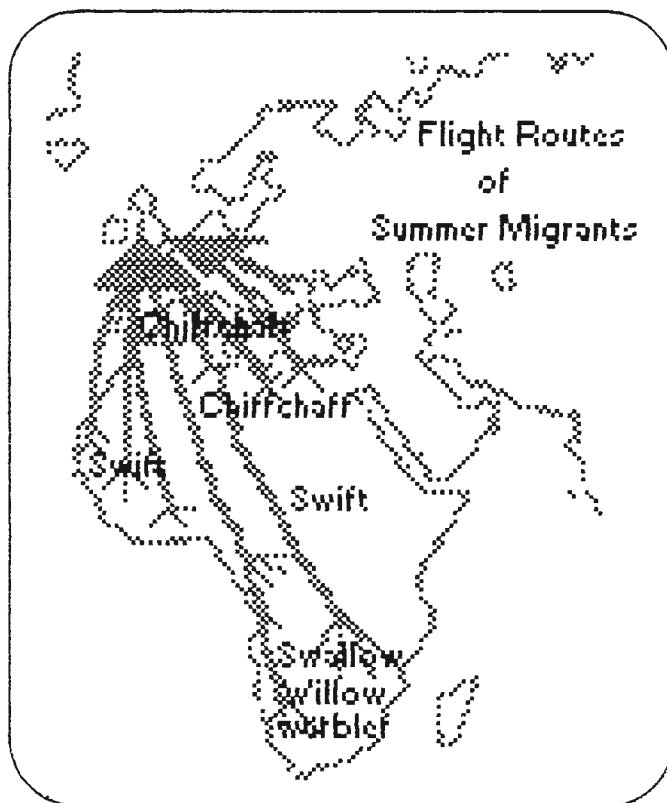
The willow warbler overwinters in Tropical and Southern Africa. The willow warbler is unusual in that it moults twice a year. This is no doubt of benefit as its feathers will be in better condition to withstand the rigours of its long migration flights. In fact the long migration flight they undertake may have been the factor which 'selected' those birds which moulted twice a year as being the 'fittest' for this way of life.

Swallows, like the other species we are discussing here, also occur on the continent and all migrate to Southern Africa but it seems that the British, European and Eurasian races overwinter in different parts of Africa. Thus birds from Germany are generally found, in the Congo basin, 1000 miles north of those coming from the UK.

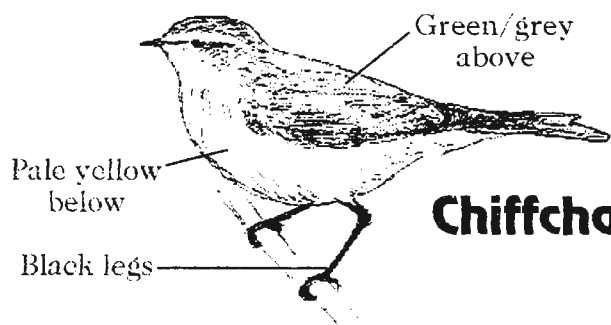
Swifts, which arrive at the end of April and usually depart in August overwinter in the central, tropical region of Africa, as do house martins.

Sand martins overwinter in equatorial West Africa, Senegal and the Sahel.

*Maurice*



If you are mystified by bird song come to the Dawn Chorus at our Wildlife Marathon on Sunday, 11th. May. See the Summer Programme for details.



Green/grey above

Pale yellow below

Black legs

## Chiffchaff



## New Frogs on The Block

The Group has continued its work with schools through 1996 and was approached by **Beechview Middle School** for help with a new wildlife area. It was decided that the existing concrete pond system was past saving and the best idea would be to design a new liner pond and create a fenced area for wildlife.

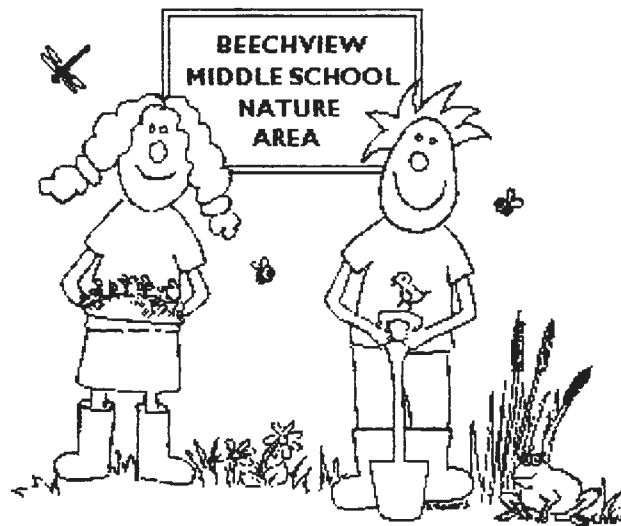
Thanks to an environmental grant from **Wycombe District Council** the project took shape. A suitable site within the grounds was selected and with the help of contractors the pond was dug and the area fenced for safety.

Voluntary labour consisting of a mixture of parents, teachers, Group members, District Council Rangers and children was then employed.

After some hard trench digging and 'soil stamping' the pond could be finally lined. The liner was surrounded with fibre matting to ensure its protection and covered with soil. With the help of a long hose pipe the pond was finally filled.

In the spring the pond was stocked with a wide variety (27) of native pond plants including marsh marigold and meadow sweet. It is planned to develop the area further later in the year with more planting, construction of a dipping platform and creation of wood-chip paths.

It should become a thriving environment for local wildlife and a valuable educational resource. *Robin*



## Questions and answers

Where do the bullfinches go when there are no buds on our apple trees? We only see them in the spring - generally one male and two females at a time. *Hilary Hide*

Bullfinches are conspicuous in the spring, when they come into our gardens to feed up on the fruit buds on our trees. They are normally very secretive, their soft, wistful 'dew' often being the only sign of their presence, while they remain hidden among the leaves. But at this time of year there are no leaves to hide them, their food in the wild has run out and they are easy to spot feeding high up on bare branches.

Bullfinch numbers have declined dramatically, and it is one of the birds on the "red alert" list. Bullfinches nest in hedgerows, bramble and other deep cover, so are unlikely to be found in our suburban gardens. So when they have

fattened up on your future apple crop, they will have moved out into the countryside, field edges or woodland. Hopefully by then their natural food will have been renewed & they will be able to bring up a new generation, which they feed by regurgitation from special throat pouches.

Even if we don't want bullfinches wrecking our fruit trees (they can be a pest for fruit farmers) we can provide water for them. Bullfinches come occasionally to my garden ponds to drink, though they no longer appear in numbers each spring, although I still have several huge apple trees. They like forget-me-not seeds, honesty seeds and the fruit of *Leycesteria formosa* - the Himalayan honeysuckle or "nutmeg tree". Try growing a specimen of the latter and you may be rewarded in the autumn with the sight of several bullfinches feeding on the attractive, pendant clusters of fruits, and leave what flowers you can to go to seed for them and other birds. *Pat.*





The year started well with 22 children turning up for our winter bird event in January. After an informative slide show we set out along the Dyke to search for water birds. We saw a great selection including: little grebe, coots, swans, and of course mallard. Elaine pointed out the winter plumage of black headed gulls (see last newsletter) and later quizzed the children on what they had learnt with a wise owl game.

In February we "polished" our woodworking skills by building a selection of nest boxes, not only for birds but also for bats and dormice. **Chepping Wycombe Parish Council**

## Wycombe



kindly lent their workshop for the session which was held in **National Nest Box Week**.

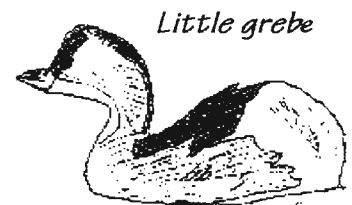
Such was the quality of the workmanship that the boxes sold like bird seed on a busy day at Trafalgar Square (?)

In March we set out on a quest over Marlow Common looking for signs of spring. Several parents joined in the fun and

we took note of trees in bud, birds in song and turned over logs to discover some stirring creepy crawlies. We then rescued some frog spawn from a puddle and temporarily became birds and had a go at building nests from materials we found in the woods. A game that involved creeping up on a bird to steal its eggs (golf balls!) proved particularly popular - as did the chocolate mini-eggs.

Don't forget our forthcoming events - particularly our 24 hour wildlife marathon which will include a wide range of activities.

*Robin*



*Little grebe*

*in winter plumage*

Reminder: The **1997 AGM** is at the **Countryside Centre on Monday 21st. April.**

Starting at 7.30 pm.

Followed by refreshments and an **illustrated talk** by **John Wyatt** on

**Estuaries in Britain**

and the birds to be found on them

## New Members

The names of new members will in future be published on a regular basis in the Newsletter.



to the following people, who have joined Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group since August 1996:

Elsa Phillips	Mr & Mrs	Mrs J Hardy
Clive Maddock	John Oster-Ritter	Mr & Mrs Roger &
Sylvia Sanderson	Mr & Mrs R Mulkern	Louise Davies
Amanda Horder	Mr R Grayston	Ms S Devlin
Mr & Mrs D Hughes	Lesley Cowley	Mr N Martin
Paula Rosewarne	Mrs T Farrant	

We look forward to seeing you at our forthcoming events, and thanks to all members for their support.

## 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 ?



### January

Heron - Bassetsbury  
 Buzzard - Radnage  
 Willow tit- Radnage

### February

Red Kite - Booker  
 Red kite feeding on road carrion - Radnage  
 10 Carrion crows - Deeds Grove (8/3/97)  
 50 Fieldfares - Peterley (7/3/97)

### First sightings - birds

1st chiffchaffs - Mop End (17/3/97)

### First sightings - butterflies

1st Peacock - Carver Hill Road (2/3/97)  
 Brimstones, commas & small tortoise-shell - everywhere (6/3/97)  
 1st Orange tip - Pat's garden (31/3/97)

### First sightings - others

1st Frogspawn - Pat's pond (24/2/97)  
 1st Early purple orchids in flower - Holtspur LNR, & 1st Green-vein orchids in flower - Monday Dean (12/4/97)

## 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, 1 Aug. 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>TVMG</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**