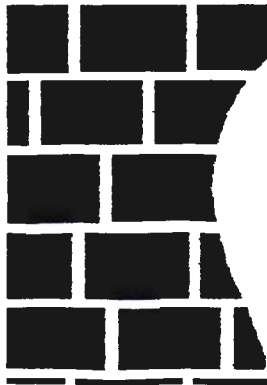


# WYCOMBE

# WILDLIFE



# NEWS

## no. 27

## WILDLIFE GROUP

SEPTEMBER 1998

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

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### Wildlife Notice Board

The Woodland Trust's campaign to save Penn Woods ensured a huge crowd of 80 people for the Rhododendron Walk on Sunday, 24th. May, 1998. Visitors arrived from as far afield as London, as well as from the Chilterns.

Led by Pat, Roger and Frances of Wycombe Wildlife Group, the crocodile of visitors wound their way first to the pond adjacent to Penn Street Vicarage, with its colourful show of lady's smock alongside. They then went round the cricket pitch, causing one unlucky player to be bowled out at the sight of so many walkers. Finally they entered the wood, and proceeded along the narrow permissive ways where rhododendrons grow in rampant profusion. It was an evocation of past history, for from 1937 to 1967 the Woods had belonged to the Ernest Cook Educational Foundation, and the public was allowed to view the exotic blooms each spring. But now the rides were more reminiscent of the Lost Gardens of Haligon.

The empty bramble-covered basin, where the statue of Ernest Cook once stood, neglected paths and bracken-covered areas of heathland, are sad reminders of its former glory.

During the walk the songs of the blackcap, willow and garden warbler, and chiffchaff were heard, while the leaders pointed out the diminutive heathland plants, such as heath bedstraw, heath speedwell and the yellow tormentil at their feet. A muntjac was spotted in the distance, but he quickly disappeared in the face of the advancing hordes. The bluebells, in flower a month later than at Sands Bank, were particularly appreciated by one participant, who had missed them elsewhere "A bonus", she said.

Thanks to Roger and Frances, who helped Pat cope with such large numbers. Their enthusiasm for their subject ensured that people came away satisfied with their afternoon's outing.

Pat Morris

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### The State of the Rye Dyke

The Rye Dyke, running along the back of the Rye and fed by calcareous springs rising in the grounds of Wycombe Abbey School, has historically been an excellent wildlife haven. It has always been characterised by crystal clear waters and an abundant submerged plant community that supports a thriving invertebrate and vertebrate fauna (including overwintering tufted duck, breeding little grebe and, at least until recently, native crayfish). Its amazing success in remaining of high ecological quality in the midst of a densely populated town is largely due to the close proximity of its chalk-filtered water source, which means that the risks of contamination are greatly reduced.

The Dyke has recently suffered from several severe algal problems and elimination of growing shoots of its submerged macrophyte flora (large submerged water plants) devastating its ecology and causing public dismay. These very visible impacts have raised questions as to the cause of the problem, with the finger being pointed at a range of factors including nutrient enrichment, dredging, construction works and herbicides. It is clear that the issue requires detailed scrutiny, and any comments on the causes of recent problems can only, therefore, be conjectural at present. However, the casual observations I have made over the past 10 years lead me to believe that the current, highly visible problems in the Dyke are the culmination of less visible algal problems that have been building up for some time. Whatever the actual trigger for the recent spectacular growth of filamentous algae, the root cause is likely to be nutrient enrichment.

In any lake, rooted submerged plants and various forms of algae fight for dominance by competing for resources, particularly nutrients and light. The ecological processes that influence the battle between the two are complicated, but what is clear is that the balance is tipped in favour of the algae as the nutrient status of the water increases. When there is a good coverage of submerged plants in a lake, they can prevent filamentous algae developing in a number of ways. This is largely achieved by restricting the

amount of nutrients (particularly phosphorus in freshwaters) that is available to the algae in the water (in addition to other mechanisms).

The submerged plant community can become gradually overwhelmed by increased nutrient concentrations, succumbing to growing algal populations that kill by restricting light availability. Other factors such as the clearance of submerged vegetation, increased turbidity (as from construction works) and herbicide contamination can further tip the balance in favour of the algae. These other factors typically act as triggers for change and should not automatically be seen as the root cause of the problem. The likelihood of a switch to algal dominance, and the scale of algal growths, are essentially dictated by the nutrient status of the waterbody. Over recent years there has been build-up of filamentous algal populations within the submerged macrophyte beds of the Dyke that is consistent with increased phosphorus availability in the water column. This leads me to conclude that nutrient enrichment should be treated seriously as the likely root cause of the Dyke's problems. What is clear is that proper consideration of all the issues is required before a lasting solution is identified and agreed. Investigations into ambient concentrations of nutrients in the water and the sediment, sediment release of phosphorus into the water column, the importance of different external sources (there are few that are likely to be significant, leaf-fall and duck feeding being the most obvious), and the role of variations in the flow of water through the lake would all be sensible initiatives, as would a reconstruction of recent events that may have triggered the catastrophic algal growth. Some information is likely to be available from historical sources or can be grossly estimated, which would act as a useful start to the process.

*Chris Mainstone*

*The diagram on the opposite page illustrates the cycling of phosphorus in the Dyke. It is not to scale and organisms shown in circles (planktonic algae & water fleas etc.) are highly magnified.*





## Swan News

David and Amanda, resident in Wycombe, nested again on the island in the Abbey and eight cygnets appeared in April. Unaware to David an unidentified pair set up home over the fence on the Dyke opposite to the boat house. David inevitably discovered the intruders and after several attempts to remain they were forced to abandon their nest and eggs and move away. Even while his cygnets were quite small David marched his family through the gates round to the Dyke and then over to the Rye to the river between Pann and Rye Mills. The cygnets certainly enjoyed the water buttercup and other natural food in the stream, gaining weight rapidly, albeit at different rates. The parents constructed a large mound of weed, sticks, plastic bags and assorted debris where the brood could rest above the level of the swiftly flowing water. They occasionally moved back to the Dyke and to the Abbey lake and at times some of the cygnets were on opposite sides of the fence causing much consternation to the parent swans and people walking along Wendover Way. However the young birds survived being worried by dogs, but one died on the water from no apparent cause. There may be some anxious times ahead when the cygnets are fully feathered and start to make test flight circuits around the rye and over the town. Some landed on building roofs last autumn.

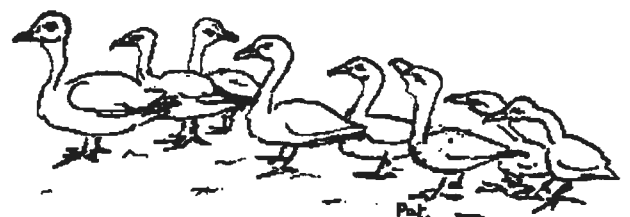
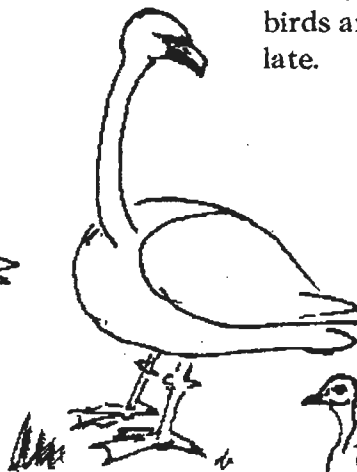
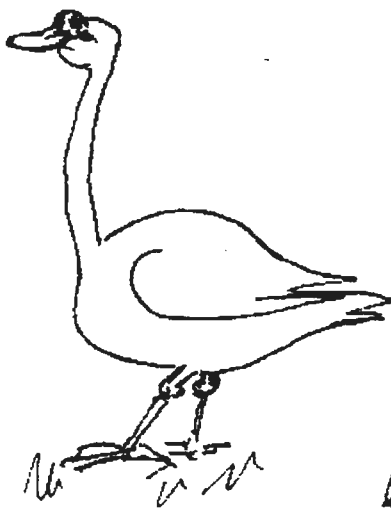
Sevvie and Brenda returned to West Wycombe at snowdrop time having spent the time since summer '97 at Henley and stopping off at Marlow, "Swan" lake having dried out for several months. Park Farm cob Nicholas, who had been at Windsor and Henley returned with a new mate but soon abandoned her before being accompanied by Brenda some weeks later. Any news of Sevvie's whereabouts would be welcome. (Ring lettering NDY). We hope that Nicholas takes care of Brenda, they are now about 11 years old, but he can be a wayward bird. Meanwhile on Swan lake a new pair raised some cygnets. These could be the same swans noted on the Dyke earlier.

A week after a mallard was found dangling from a tree caught on broken fishing tackle one of the cygnets picked up a nasty barbed hook from the Dyke but after a ride to Eton for a precautionary injection was soon back on the water. An unlucky cygnet at Spade Oak gravel pit with two lots of tackle was rescued by an angler and is now named Frances (Francis). Its sex can not be stated with certainty until the beak knob develops - when it matures.

Parents of children and anglers who use the Dyke and other waters for fishing are reminded of the danger to wildlife from lost tackle. Coots, moorhen and often pigeon at Marlow have been found caught on to hook and line. Swans can usually be captured and dealt with but smaller birds are often impossible to catch until it is too late.

*Eric Britnell*

If you should see a swan in any distress a call to **Swan Lifeline** on 01753 - 859397 will bring a response.



*"Now remember - look left, look right, look left again and if all clear - - -"*



Creating

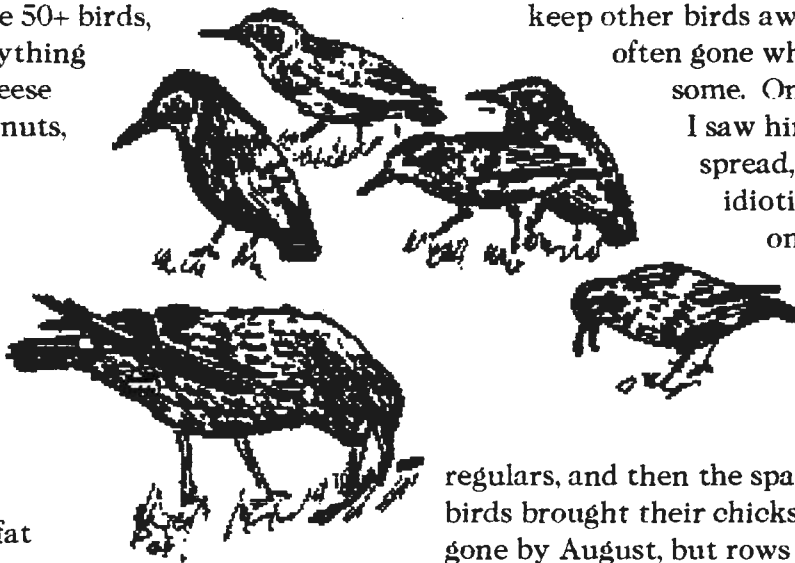
WYCOMBE'S

WILDLIFE GARDENS

The Derelict Garden

Last October I left a flat backing on to a well-wooded embankment where I regularly saw foxes, badgers, squirrels, muntjac, wood mice and hedgehogs and 16 to 18 species of bird, and moved to an urban bungalow in a grassy square. This had tiny gardens back and front, neglected for several years, and I decided to rejuvenate the back one (18' x 24') as a wildlife garden.

I put food out straight away and soon found that the 50+ birds, that engulfed everything from bread and cheese to currant and peanuts, were all starlings! For several days they had it all to themselves, though I saw a blackbird in the garden next door. Then one day two collared doves turned up and, most surprising, a fat wood pigeon.



Then I noticed two dunnocks making unobtrusive use of the facilities, and several sparrows, and about three blackbirds. I put out a large tin of water, which was much enjoyed and new visitors continued to arrive.

By the Spring regulars included 5 chaffinches, 4 dunnock, and 4 blackbirds. Occasional visitors were a greenfinch, a robin and, on one wonderful occasion 2 goldfinches, trying the peanuts and the fat ball. A great tit and 2 blue tits sampled the peanuts.

This was not much compared with my flat, but the birds give me endless pleasure and enjoyment. The witterings and occasional bell-like notes of the starlings and their glorious

iridescent green feathers, when the sun catches them, can be breathtaking. It is amusing too to watch one pulling at a string of grated cheese - as if dragging a worm out of a hole.

One male blackbird lurked around the starling flock, occasionally darting in for some food, but any starling or even another blackbird who visited alone was immediately attacked viciously - he wasted so much time trying to keep other birds away, the food was

often gone when he went to eat some. One sunny February day, I saw him sunbathing - wings spread, leaning back, with an idiotic rapturous expression on his face.

Early summer brought changes. The wood pigeon disappeared, the blue tits became

regulars, and then the sparrows and the blackbirds brought their chicks. The blue tits had gone by August, but rows of young sparrows still sit on the fence, and several baby starlings all try to bathe in one baking tin. Not so welcome were ten feral pigeons, although only about four of them remained until August.

An unfortunate wood mouse fell prey to the next-door cat in April, but one July evening a hedgehog ambled through the garden.

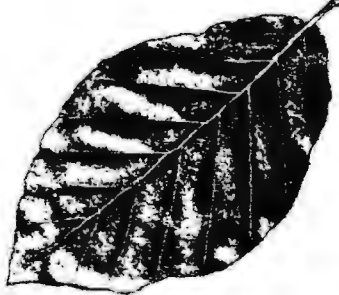
My wildlife garden consists so far of a flower bed, a minute lawn and a Buddleja. I salvaged one tiny plant from the remaining wilderness and put it in the flower bed - it turned into a giant flowering thistle about 6 ft. tall!

Most of the remaining wilderness must go soon, but I look forward to what winter will bring.

Mary Williams.



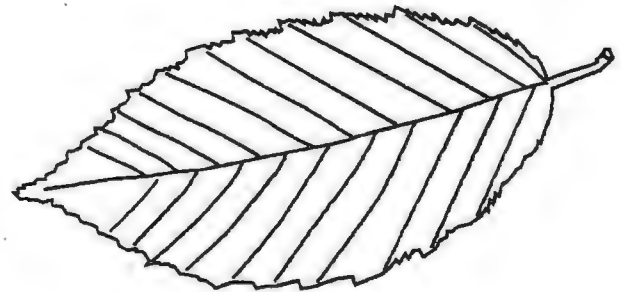
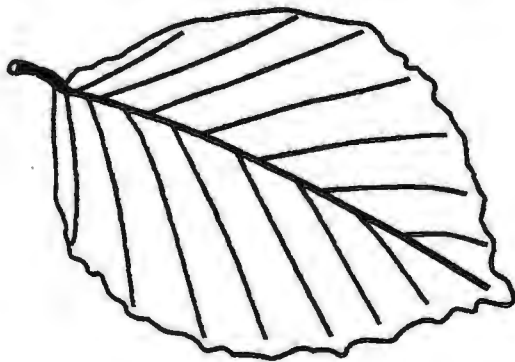
## Beech & Hornbeam



These scans of a beech (left) and hornbeam (right) leaf illustrate one noticeable difference. Although of a similar green colour the beech leaf is glossy whereas the hornbeam is matt.

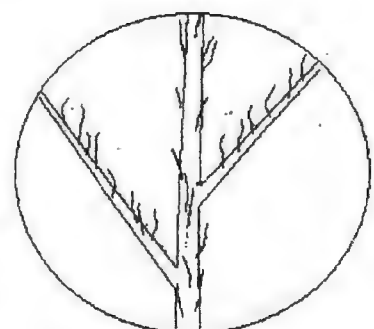
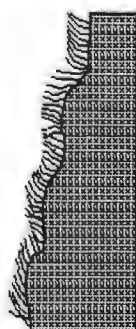
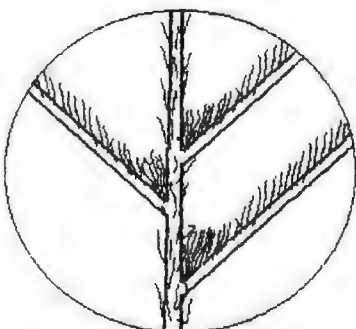


Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) is not common in the Chilterns and its similarity, at a casual glance, to beech, when in leaf means it is easily overlooked, so beech (*Fagus sylvaticus*) the predominant tree of the Chilterns and the hornbeam make a good pair with which to start our look at tree ID. It tolerates coppicing well and is a good hedging plant, if somewhat slow growing. This is, perhaps, why in three of the woods around Wycombe where it is found it occurs on old woodland boundary banks. It can be seen on the southern boundary bank in the Gomm Valley NR, on a boundary bank in Kings Wood and the boundary bank along Winchbottom Lane running through Horton Wood. It also grows on and near the woodland boundary bank in the Holtspur Bank LNR.



Beech has "ovate-elliptic" leaves - oval but broader at the base than the tip. The margins are "somewhat sinuate" - wavy. This waviness is three dimensional as can be seen by looking at the leaf edge on. The leaves have 5-9 pairs of parallel veins. Young leaves have very noticeable "long-ciliate margins" - a margin of long silky hairs. These hairs persist but they become less obvious as the leaf ages. There are also long silky hairs on the underside of the veins and in the axils of the veins (see diagrams below).

Hornbeam, like beech, has ovate leaves but are less "rounded". The feature which distinguishes them from those of the beech are margins which lack the long silky hairs and are doubly serrate, i.e. the margins are toothed - large teeth on which there are smaller teeth. The leaf has 10 - 15 pairs of parallel veins, see diagram below. Unlike beech the leaves are flat and show no undulations when viewed edge on. (Continued on page 78)



veins underside - beech - leaf margin (x20) leaf margin - hornbeam - veins underside





## Flora & Fauna of the Rye - 2

Roger & Frances Wilding continue their look at the wildlife of the Rye and its immediate surroundings.



For another interesting walk on the south side of the Rye, follow the river downstream from the waterfall to the eastern end of the Dyke.

The shallow stretch of water immediately below the waterfall is a popular place for children to play, but if you choose a quiet time to visit, it is worth keeping an eye open for kingfishers which are often seen here. Freshwater crayfish used to be a regular sight here but unfortunately their numbers have been drastically reduced by a widespread disease which attacks this species. Where the river reaches the road, continue downstream to Bowdean Lane under the former railway bridge as far as the sewage works. The clear water alongside Bowdean Lane has a number springs and the lake adjacent to the sewage works must surely be the most peaceful retreat in High Wycombe. A short stroll along the former railway track gives further views of this wetland, Hartstongue fern grows on the bank next to the lake.

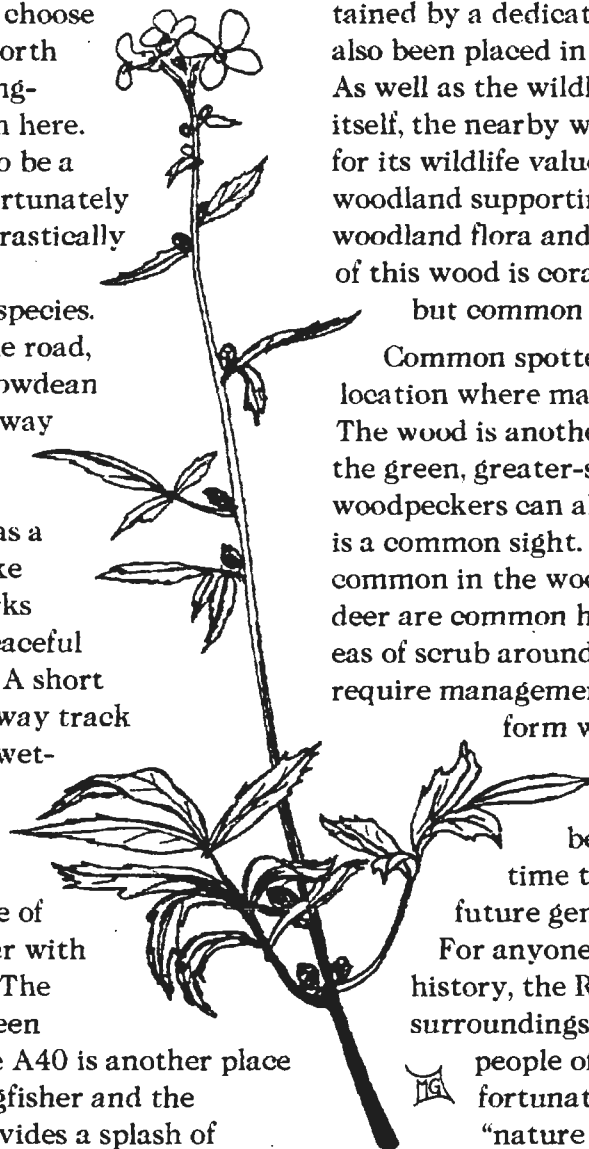
A walk along the north side of the Rye presents the walker with yet another wetland area. The quiet stretch of river between Bassetsbury Manor and the A40 is another place where you might see a kingfisher and the invasive Indian balsam provides a splash of colour here. Pellitory-on-the-wall, a relative of the stinging nettle grows on the bank. On reaching the A40 you can ignore the traffic noise and enjoy the wide range of wetland flowers blooming in the lush riverside vegetation. The tall spikes of reed mace and water dock tower

above low-growing species such as monkey flower, bistort, water forget-me-not, water mint and branched bur-reed. In the grounds of Pann Mill, an attractive garden with a mix of native and garden plants has been created and is maintained by a dedicated enthusiast. Bat boxes have also been placed in the trees in the mill grounds. As well as the wildlife habitat offered by the Rye itself, the nearby woodland is worth exploring for its wildlife value. Keepphill Wood is a mature woodland supporting a good range of local beech woodland flora and fungi. One of the specialities of this wood is coralroot, a rare plant nationally but common around High Wycombe.

Common spotted orchids grow in one location where management has taken place. The wood is another good place for birds and the green, greater-spotted, and lesser-spotted woodpeckers can all be seen or heard and the jay is a common sight. Grey squirrels are common in the wood and foxes and muntjac deer are common here as in many woods and areas of scrub around Wycombe. All woods require management in order to survive in a form we can enjoy and for this reason some of the mature trees in the wood have to be felled and replanted from time to time for the benefit of future generations.

For anyone with an interest in natural history, the Rye and its immediate surroundings have much to offer. The people of High Wycombe are very fortunate to have such an interesting "nature reserve" so close to the town centre. *Roger & Frances Wilding*

Ed. The Group is participating in discussions on setting up an Environmental Centre on the Rye and if this comes to be you won't have far to go from the Centre to find something of interest throughout the year. Illustration: Coralroot in flower.





## Pilgrimage to Christchurch

to see what Robin is getting up to

One of the highlights of the Summer Programme was the trip to Christchurch on Saturday 1st August to visit former Project Officer, Robin Harley. Robin appears to have settled in well in his new post as Countryside Warden and looked quite at home with his 'walkie-talkie'.

The first part of the tour was to St. Catherine's Hill, an area of lowland heath where much practical work is being carried out to control invasion of bracken, rhododendron and birch, allowing species of heather to survive.

Unfortunately we did not see any of the six species of reptile found on the heath but we did catch a glimpse of a Dartford Warbler. We were, however, entertained by observing Robin's athletic prowess while catching a Holly Blue. Angus found plenty of grasses and wild flowers to identify, including the rare dodder growing on *Calluna* (Heath).

Having started off warm and dry, the weather turned while we were half way round the heathland and we were in for a bit of a soaking. Typically the rain stopped as we arrived back at the minibus. From there it was a short drive to the warden's main centre in an area of woodland on top of the cliffs where lunch was eaten and a welcome cup of tea provided. The sun came out and the view across to the Isle of Wight and the Needles was crystal clear.

Having driven off we drove on to Stanpit Marsh where Robin was able to relax, passing the duties over to Julian, the seasonal warden at the reserve, who was to be our guide for the afternoon. The area is managed by grazing with horses and

cattle with marshland species such as sea lavender and thrift providing pretty swards. Angus was again on hand to identify species on the reserve such as strawberry clover. Unfortunately not only did we have to share the reserve with numerous dogs because of a dog show, but also

with a large number of twitchers. Word had spread that there was a hybrid egret crossed with a heron on the reserve. We finally left Christchurch at about 5pm. All those who had attended had a thoroughly enjoyable

day and thank Robin and his colleagues very much for entertaining us. We wish him all the best for the future and hope that we may all visit him again soon.

Helen Eastman



WWG members following in Robin's footsteps at St. Catherine's Hill Nature Reserve - despite the rain!

### Beech & Hornbeam ID (continued)

Both trees have a fairly smooth grey bark but as hornbeam ages the darker steely grey markings develop and the trunk becomes "fluted" (grooved) and has the appearance of being slightly twisted. In fruit they are easy to distinguish as the hornbeam fruits (nutlets) are born on three lobed bracts while the triangular beech nutlets are born in pairs in a very spiny, 4-valved, cupule. In winter the long, pointed awl-shaped buds make beech very easy to identify.



beech



hornbeam





The **wildlife WATCH** group has had a fun packed summer despite the unseasonable weather. We successfully spotted plenty of wildlife during a walk round a local nature reserve, but we were all amazed at the sight of a red kite and a buzzard as we warmed ourselves with hot chocolate.

Breakfast with the birds at the Sheepridge Nature Reserve held more surprises especially the pond which, despite almost having dried up earlier in the year, was found to be teeming



with life when we pond-dipped. The Calvert Camp weekend was held again this year. As usual the weather was unable to stop the fun even if we did all get a bit soggy.

Events in store for autumn include Celebrating Wildflowers, which is a family fun day, held at the Calvert Environmental Education Centre, a mini wildlife marathon, and the Christmastime activities of wildlife, such as hibernation.

Any children wishing to join **WATCH** should contact Elaine or the Project Team on 01494 536930.

*Nicki Frost.*

## Report - Visit to Sands Bank LNR

Although it had been the wettest April this century, the sun shone down for a bluebell walk at Sands Bank on Saturday, 25th April 1998. Eighteen people gathered to hear leader Ian Butterfield of WDC Ranger Service explain the role of community involvement in the success of this reserve. Local people had helped create the pond of puddled clay at the top of the reserve, for example, and the children from local schools discovered nibble marks on hazel nuts which proved the presence of dormice in the woods.

Today, the effects of everyone's hard work were evident, with brimstone, peacock and orange tip butterflies enjoying the sunshine on the chalk bank, while the green woodpecker "laughed" in the woodland, and the songs of a chiffchaff, blackcap, robin and wren rang out. Ian pointed out three great tits answering one another, and described how recording such territorial behaviour was part of the Common Bird Census carried out regularly at Sands Bank. He also stressed the importance of the right amount of sheep grazing on the grassland for the survival of different butterflies. Some, like the chalk hill blue, require a short sward for their breeding success, while others, like the marbled white, need longer grass.

Finally everyone stood paying homage to the expanse of bluebells, in perfect condition, while below the crowd roared their encouragement at the home football match at Adams Park. It seemed a strange paradox to be a witness to a scene of such tranquil beauty so close to hundreds of people who derive their pleasure from a totally different source. Many thanks to Ian for a most enjoyable walk.

*Pat Morris*

*The display of wildflowers at Sands Bank has been outstanding this year, culminating in the spectacular flowering of the tuberous pea.*

## Would you like to join us ?

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

I / We wish to join **WyWG**  
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 ?



### Moth & butterfly sightings

Lime-hawk moth - Angus's Gdn (9/05/98)  
 Purple hairstreak - Penn Woods (17/07/98)  
 Buff-tip moth - Larches, Tyler's Green  
 (19/07/98)

Blood-vein moth - Penn Woods (27/07/98)  
 Roesel's Bush cricket - Angus's kitchen  
 (11/08/98)

### First flowers of the year

Bee orchids - Gomm's bank (11/06/98)  
 Tuberous pea - Sands Bank (30/06/98)

### Bird sightings

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker  
 - Pat's garden (15/04/98)  
 2 Canada Geese - Rye (16/04/98)  
 & early May  
 Red Kite - Carver Hill (3/05/98)  
 Cuckoo - Cockshoot Woods (4/05/98)  
 Yellow Hammer - Angus's gdn (5/05/98)  
 Skylark - Downley Common (21/06/98)

## The WyWG Contact list:

Chairman & Newsletter Editor:  
 Pat Morris, 01494 529484  
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 Roger Wilding, 01494 438374  
 Treasurer :Peter Hazzard, 01494 447949  
 Membership Secretary :  
 James Donald, 01494 445334

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Nicola Frost, Tim Hiatt, 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, 27 Nov. 1998

## GOODS FOR SALE

Car stickers - £1 (inc p & p)  
 T- shirts Cream or blue M/L/XL/XXL  
 £6.50 - less if you buy them at meetings  
 Sweatshirts - Navy with white logo S/L /XL  
 £16.50 (£15 at meetings)  
 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, Vol. 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 565749
<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>TVMO</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