

The Countryside Centre, Bassetsbury Manor, Bassetsbury Lane, High Wycombe, HP11 1QX
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Spinfield's STAGgering Record

Ellen Percival, a pupil of Spinfield County Combined School, Marlow reports on their amazing Stag Beetle survey

The national Stag Beetle survey had been given a lot of publicity this year and as they had been seen on the school field and in Marlow in past years our Tusk Force group, four year five girls at Spinfield School, decided to do a Stag Beetle survey and enter for the "Wild at Heart" award. The survey was introduced in the school assembly and we prepared a letter requesting sightings of the rare Stag Beetle. Every child at the School took a letter home in June last year, and for the next few weeks we waited for the results to come in.

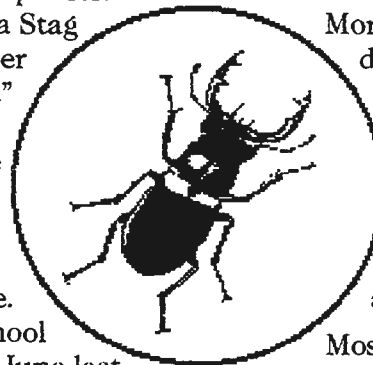
They came in thick and fast ; altogether we recorded 70 sightings - we had more, but some were clearly the same beetle spotted in the same place by several children on the way to school !

We also interviewed children and staff at the school and one of the dinner ladies now realizes that she is the proud guardian of a rotting tree stump that houses a whole colony of endangered insects; she has so many "stags" in her garden each year she assumed that they were common.

More sightings came in during the Marlow Schools' Environment day. We discovered that Sandygate School also has a colony and the beetles abound in Marlow Bottom as well as Marlow.

Most of the results came from the school catchment area, NW Marlow, but beetles are found all over the town I suspect that the NW is their favoured habitat as it is a warm slope and there are still plenty of open spaces, mature trees and rotting tree stumps.

(Continued on page 82)



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Wycombe 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 & 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 & 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.

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 Pat Morris, Frances Wilding
 and Maurice Young.

As stated in the **WATCH** report on page 89 Project Officer Nikki Frost left us in September 1998 to take up paid employment as did Helen Eastman, who had been coming from Twyford in North Bucks, since last May. Helen has moved to Cambridge to work on a project with the Environmental consultants Mott Macdonald. We thank both Helen and Nikki for their hard work and wish them every success in their new posts.

Congratulations to our remaining officer Tim Hiatt, in gaining his Master's in Coastal Zone management last December. Tim is hoping to become a student teacher at one of the local schools, as he has enjoyed working with children so much during his stay with us. The hunt is now on for new Project Officers to carry on the good work when he leaves.

Penn Woods Update

In December 1998 Secretary of State, John Prescott, refused permission for a golf course in Penn Woods. This leaves the Woodland Trust in a better position to negotiate the purchase of the Wood from its present owners. So far £923,000 has been raised to buy the woodland but a £250,000 grant from a nearby landfill company does not now look likely. Further funds will be needed if the wood is to be preserved intact for people to enjoy.

Mammal Survey

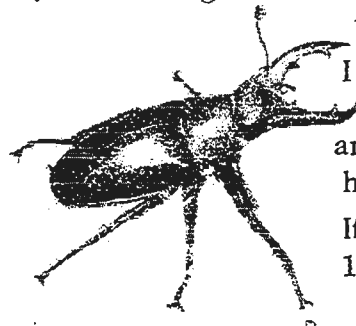
There is still time if, like Irenke, (see P84) you have mammals visiting your garden, to fill in a Mammal Survey form. But hurry, completed forms have to be in by the end of February. Contact the Countryside Centre if interested.

Spinfield's Staggering Record (continued)

Many people said that they had seen fewer "Stags" this year - was it the dull, cold weather ? Some had seen them flying unusually early in the warm spell in the spring.

I recorded and collated the results and sent them off to the Survey organisers and we had a letter back confirming what we suspected - more Stag Beetles were recorded in Marlow than any where else in Bucks !

We are following up the survey; a felled tree at the school is going to be put out on the Nature Trail to rot and provide homes for Stag Beetles; Wycombe Rangers are helping with this, and we shall repeat the survey this coming summer.



I would like to extend the survey and raise awareness of Stag Beetles in Marlow - is there anyone in other schools/groups interested in handing out and collecting forms next summer ?

If so please contact Kate Finch,
 19 York Road, Marlow, SL7 2QB. *Ellen Percival*

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.



Brush Hill Local Nature Reserve

Since **Brush Hill** was declared a **Local Nature Reserve** by **Wycombe District Council** in June 1997 there have been many exciting changes and new discoveries - the WDC Rangers provide an update.

Community Involvement

One of the most encouraging aspects of the last 18 months has been the high level of local support and community involvement in the project. Already, over 2100 volunteer hours have been spent on various projects including scrub clearance, bird box building, pond restoration, litter clearance and wildlife surveys and several local schools are now using the site for environmental education.

Wildlife News

Ongoing survey work has revealed several new species for the reserve. Woodcock and Buzzard have been spotted on several occasions roosting in the scrub. The Woodcock has superb brown camouflage and a long bill for probing wet ground for its food. Winter heliotrope, which produces a lilac, slightly vanilla scented flower between January and March, and stinking hellebore have also been identified. Bluebell, Cuckoo pint, wood sorrel and lesser celandine have also been a feature during the spring. Badger activity within the woodland has been

evident since early February: fresh latrines or dung pits have been found throughout the reserve especially along territorial boundaries.

Project Work

The top-field has been re-fenced and new access gates installed. Winter sheep grazing has been introduced to encourage wild plants such as bird's-foot-trefoil, rock-rose and knapweed. Part of the middle section of hillside has also been fenced and

selected areas of scrub removed. This will allow a mosaic of open chalk grassland, rich in insects and wildflowers and patches of dense scrub for nesting birds such as Garden Warbler and Blackcap. In time this area will also be grazed to maintain the balance of scrub and grassland.



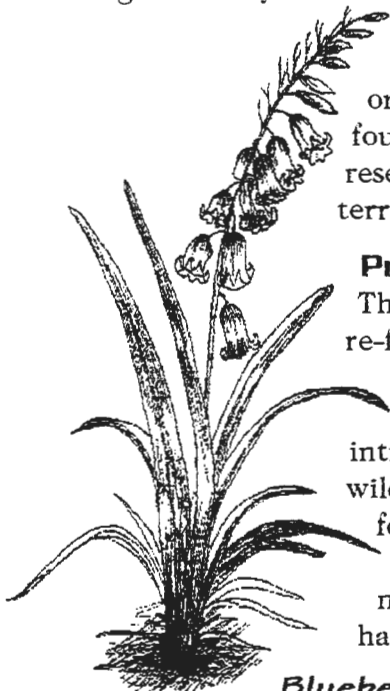
Bats fly over the reserve in the evenings

An old dew pond which last held water in 1976 is being restored in the oak woodland. The accumulated silt has been dug out and a new clay lining is being installed. This will provide a valuable watering hole for birds and animals during spring and summer.

The first area of coppice-with-standards was cut in the lime plantation at the bottom of the reserve during March 1998. This traditional form of management involves cutting trees near to ground level which encourages many new shoots or poles to grow back from the cut stump or stool. After 7-20 years these poles will be cut again to produce charcoal, tool handles, fencing material and other products. Eventually there will be four coppiced area or coupes at various stages of regrowth, creating a whole range of wildlife habitats. Open sunny conditions in the early stages of the coppice cycle will encourage plants such as wild strawberry and violets to flourish together with associated butterfly species. Shady conditions return as the coppice grows back, attracting Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs.

The material we coppiced last year has been left to season (dry out) for later conversion to charcoal. This will provide a superb opportunity to view a traditional sustainable woodland practice, as well as fuel for local summer barbecues.

(continued on page 88)



Bluebell



Mammals of Brands Hill Avenue

In this issue Irenke describes a few more of the highlights of her wildlife garden

Badgers : Probably due to the abnormally mild weather at the beginning of the year, the first visit occurred on Jan 6th, 1998, with a badger tucking into some chicken scraps with great relish. The second was on February 2nd, unusually early at 6 a.m. (for us too) when he gave up trying to eat frozen bread and dripping in favour of peanuts. When he turned to go we noticed he was limping, he had a very nasty wound on his lower back - probably due to fighting.

Sightings, which have included a small very lively badger have built up over the year to a record 60, and on six occasions two at once. This is unusual for us, as we generally appear to only get the outcasts, like the wounded badger in February.

Hedgehogs : Perhaps the high frequency of badgers accounts for the scarcity of hedgehogs, since a neighbour saw a badger attacking one. We have only had two sightings of hedgehogs this year, the most recent being on Sept 25th.

Foxes : Over the years we have had visits from a variety of foxes that we have learnt to recognize by distinguishing features, like black legs, or extra big ears, or a limp, and earlier in the year, one with terrible mange. Generally though they are in excellent condition, and very well fed, judging by the "picky" eating habits - no boring stale bread will do. When offered a range of food they nearly always go for bread and jam rather than

savoury food, so they have a sweet tooth like many of us.

Last February we had an unusually high number - 11 sightings during the month instead of the usual three or four. The count is now over 100, again a record.

A vixen came regularly, taking food for her cubs. she was obviously worn out and developed slight mange.

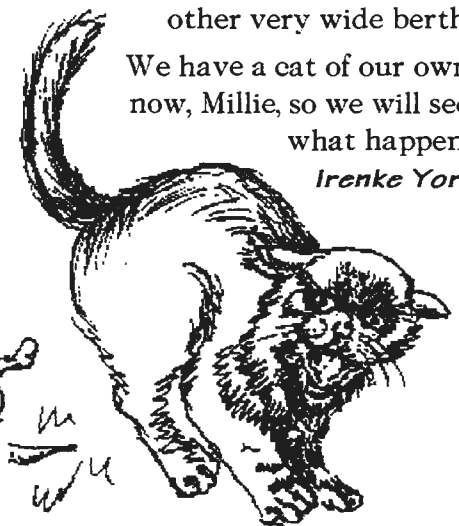
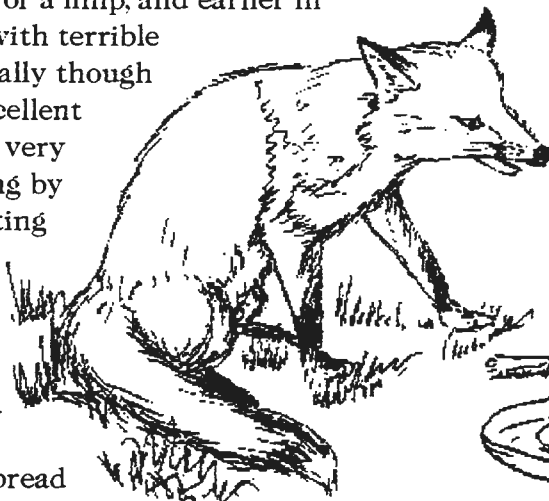
We christened her cubs Bigs Ears, Black Socks, Pale Legs, and Kinky Tail, according to their characteristics. Big Ears and Black Socks were seen mostly.

People often accuse foxes of killing cats, but this was not borne out by our observation of a cat versus fox confrontation in February 1995.

A large black cat and a fox we had named "Fine Freddy" stood poised over a dish of chicken scraps - the cat was arching its back and spitting at the fox which acted all subservient with ears back, but Freddie eventually won out by nipping in and grabbing a chicken portion after making a very peculiar chattering noise. Both ran away and on several occasions we have observed other cats and foxes giving each other very wide berth.

We have a cat of our own now, Millie, so we will see what happens.

Irenke York

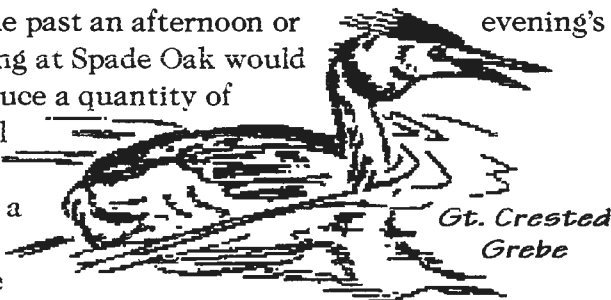




A Fisherman's Reflections

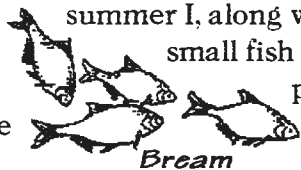
I have fished at Little Marlow gravel pit (Spade Oak as we know it in the Angling Club) now for around 20 years and at Weston Turville for rather less time and the pattern of behaviour of the fish and the wildlife seems to have dramatically changed at Spade Oak but not at Weston Turville.

In the past an afternoon or evening's fishing at Spade Oak would produce a quantity of small fish with a few large ones (several pounds) if you were lucky - these were mainly caught during the latter part of the day. The exception, for me, was in 1993 when I pre-baited the swim on evening and had a good catch of bream - mostly around 5 pounds early the next morning.



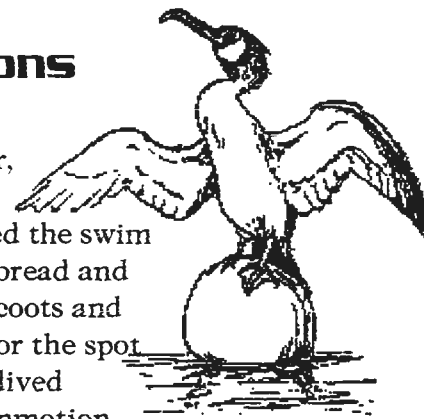
Gt. Crested Grebe

Nowadays the situation seems to have changed and this summer I, along with others caught no small fish at all, apart from a few perch, and the fish that were to be had were largish tench or bream. These were few and far between and were all caught between ten in the morning and three in the afternoon. I can not speak for the night fishermen who say they have caught quantities of large fish during the night!



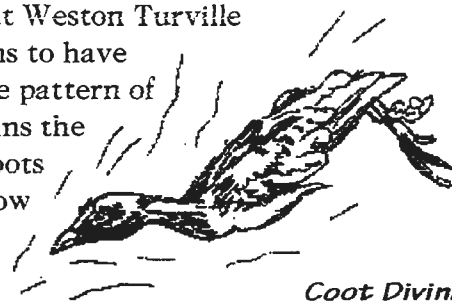
Bream

Further, this year, as soon as you had ground-baited the swim with mashed up bread and crumb, both the coots and the grebe made for the spot and continually dived causing great commotion apparently to get the ground bait for themselves and to feed their young. Also, for the first time, I have not seen any kingfishers.



Cormorant

In contrast, at Weston Turville nothing seems to have changed. The pattern of fishing remains the same. The coots and grebe show no interest in your ground-bait and the kingfishers remain as active as ever.



Coot Diving

I ask the question "Could this be due to the large numbers of cormorant at Spade Oak decimating the small fish population or is there some other explanation?"



Perch

So far I have not seen any cormorants at Weston Turville.

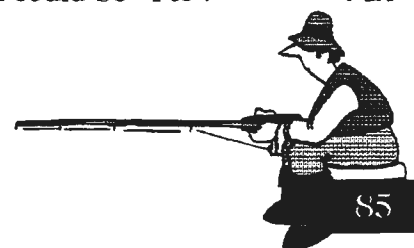
Michael York

Bucks Bird Club / British Trust for Ornithology Conference, October 24th. 1998

The effect of the spreading cormorant population on lakes and reservoirs was discussed at the above conference last October. Speaker Baz Hughes of the Wild Fowl & Wetlands Trust explained how the "Black Plague" had been attracted inland by the abundance of fish stocks there. Research showed that cormorants feed mainly on 10-15cm. fish, but could take fish up to 700grms. Fish larger than this were more

likely to be injured than consumed, a source of worry to anglers. It was suggested that the presence of large numbers of avian predators inhibited the breeding and development of fish by causing them stress. So the answer to Michael's question could be "Yes".

Pat





Fungus Foray Finds

Booker

I thought of Noah on Saturday 24th. October 1998 as the gales blew, the rain lashed down and the roads began to flood. Whereas Noah was warm and dry in his ark, I had to brave the elements and lead the walk at Booker Woods looking for fungi.

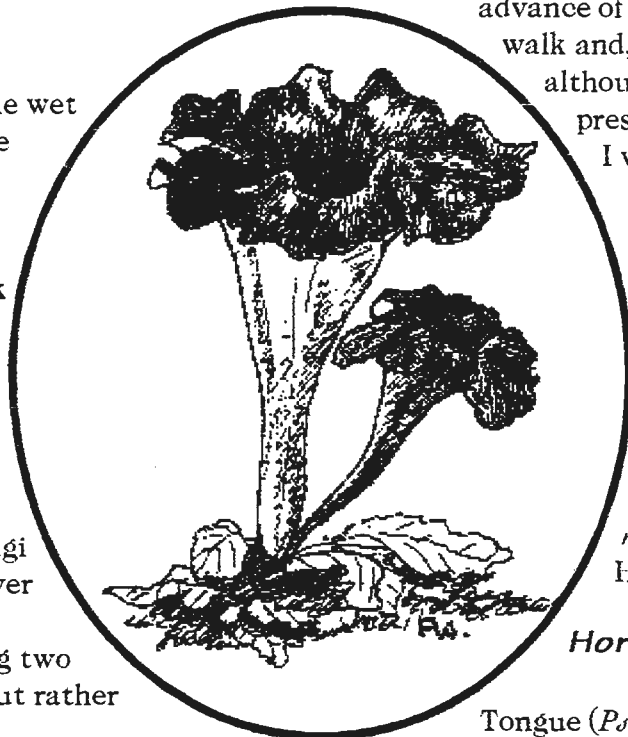
Just before entering the woods, as my umbrella did a flip flop and became a useless accessory for the rest of the morning, we spotted a few Parrot Wax Caps (*Hygrocybe psittacina*) in the short grass. By the end of the morning we had found over 30 different species, including Common Helvella (*Helvella crispa*) and white Coral Fungus (*Clavulina cristata*). My list for Booker Woods now totals well over 70 species.

Marlow

The day after the wet Booker walk, the sun shone and I joined the Reading Fungus Group on a walk around Pullingshill and Davenport Woods in Marlow. This is always a very good site for fungi and we found over 70

species including two very common but rather obscure species

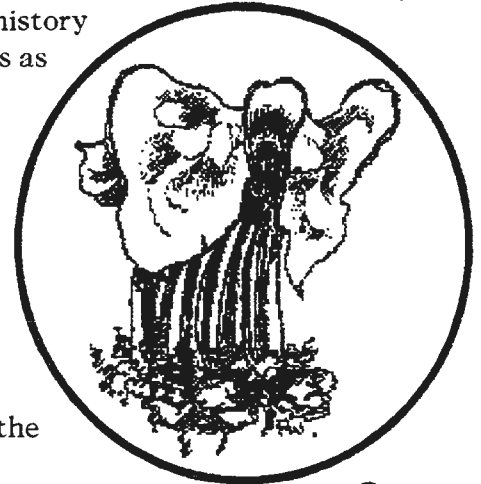
- *Trochila ilicina* which grows on dead holly leaves and *Rhopoglyphus filicinus* found on dead bracken stems. Adding the new species found to my list for these woods it brought it up to around 170 species.



Penn Street

The weather was good on Saturday 14th. November when Miles Green joined us for a walk from Penn Street church, across the common and around Penn Woods. Miles told us a great deal of the history

of the woods as we walked and kept a look out for interesting fungi. I had had a good look round the wood in advance of the walk and,



although fungi were not present in large numbers,

Common Helvella

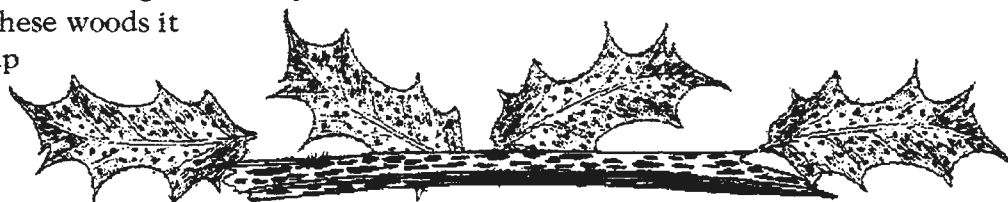
I was able to point out some of the more interesting species amongst the total of nearly 50 species I recorded. On the edge of the common we found the Aniseed Toadstool (*Clitocybe odora*) and on the short mown grass on the common we looked at numerous Crimson, Parrot and Ivory Wax Caps (*Hygrocybe coccinea*, *H. psittacina*, *H. nivea*). In the wood I pointed out

Horn of Plenty (*Craterellus cornucopioides*) growing in a bank of moss and Jelly

Horn of Plenty

Tongue (*Pseudohydnum gelatinosum*) growing on a tree stump. The day's fungus finds also brings the total number of species for this site up to around 170.

Roger Wilding



Holly leaves and bracken stems with associated fungi



A Botanical Request

Another year is almost over and botanists are busy recording for Atlas 2000. Since I live in grid square SU 89 I have naturally recorded its plants for some years for Roy Maycock, our Vice-County Recorder. Combining his records with mine and including established aliens we have almost 850 species on our list, most of which I have seen. But there are some tantalizing ones which I can't find. Can you help ?

The plants fall roughly into two groups :

A/. those found in adjacent squares which ought to be or might be in SU 89 and

B/. those recorded in the past but seem to have disappeared.

SU 89 includes High Wycombe, of course, in the middle but south of centre and goes north to Speen and south past Handy Cross. East to west it stretches from Loudwater to Piddington, but you will need to consult your O.S. map for the precise boundaries. Even so most of the requests are worth recording even if outside. If you can help I would be most grateful for a call on (01494) 562082 or a letter to 12 Wedgwood Drive, Hughenden Valley, High Wycombe, HP14 4PA. Postage will be refunded.

Here are the ones to look out for :

1/. Probably around Lane End / Moor End Common :

Danewort, dwarf gorse, marsh bedstraw, pale sedge, and smooth stalked sedge.

2/. a group probably in wet places :

Butterbur, marsh valerian, strawberry clover, orange balsam, and orange foxtail grass.

3/. some that could be anywhere :

Early purple orchid, green-wing orchid, butterfly orchids, wild columbine, tutsan, yellow birdsnest, and sessile oak (there must be some somewhere).

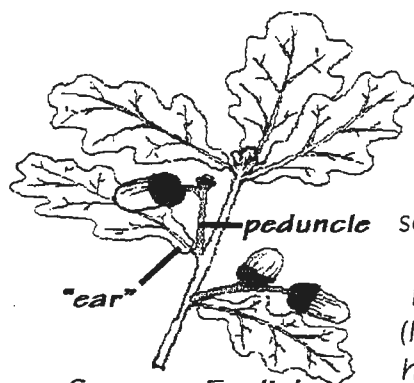
4/. And finally some not seen for a long time (last record in brackets) :

Common wintergreen (Spring Coppice), meadow saxifrage (Bradenham churchyard), hard fern (Naphill), Mezereon (?) and spiny restharrow (Saunderton - error ?).

Now you will be thinking "I'm sure I saw that somewhere - or did I ?".

With thanks in anticipation.

Alan Showler



Common, English or pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*)

Identification

Acorns of the common oak (left) are borne on a stalk or peduncle, hence the other common name for this tree is the pedunculate oak. The acorns of the sessile oak are "sessile" i.e. without a stalk - see drawing on the right. The leaves, however of the sessile oak have a petiole (leaf stalk) while those of the common oak have a very short petiole. The base of the leaf of the common oak is "eared" while that of the sessile oak is wedge shaped.



Sessile or durmast oak (*Quercus petraea*)



Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*)

The Hard Fern is a fern of shady woods and hedgerows on acid soils. The leaves, illustrated left are up to 40cms. long and usually form a flat rosette on the ground. Fertile leaves are erect but much thinner looking like a fish backbone - as Roger Philips describes it in his book Grasses, Ferns, Mosses and Lichens.

Maurice



History and Location of Brush Hill

Prehistory Archaeological evidence indicates that the area to the west and south of Princes Risborough, that includes Brush Hill, was inhabited at least 4,500 years ago. For example :

- ▶ There are remains of three Neolithic burial chambers at Whiteleaf Cross.
- ▶ The Upper Icknield Way, a Neolithic highway, one of this Country's first great highways, runs just below Brush Hill LNR. It was created to link East Anglia to Wessex. The name Icknield is derived from the Iceni tribe.
- ▶ There are Bronze Age burial mounds at Lodge Hill and Bledlow Cop.
- ▶ There was an Iron Age hill fort at Pulpit Hill northeast of the reserve.
- ▶ Cattle herding ditches - Grimm's Ditch, which dates from about 500BC., run alongside Kop Hill Road.

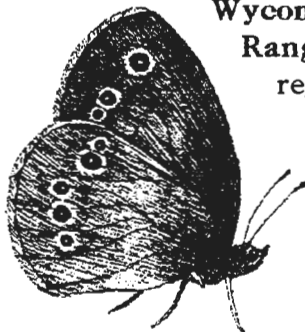
Photographs of Brush Hill taken towards the end of the last century and up to 1910 show a pattern of strip cultivation running down the slope. Although the history is unclear, maps dating back to the 1820s (eg Bryants County map 1824) indicate that the hill top from Loosley Row via Parslows Hillock and Green Hailey to Whiteleaf as common land, described as 'Risborough Hillock' or 'Green Hailey Hillock'. Hillock is probably a corruption of Hillwork, a name given to common land on higher ground, often poorly managed former woodland which provided brushwood to those that used it.

(Taken from "A History of Brush Hill"

by John Grimes [a former WyWG Project Officer] and Francise Gomm)

(continued from page 81)

Brush Hill is well worth a visit at any time of the year. There are spectacular views of up to 25 miles over the surrounding countryside and a wealth of wildlife and different habitats to explore.



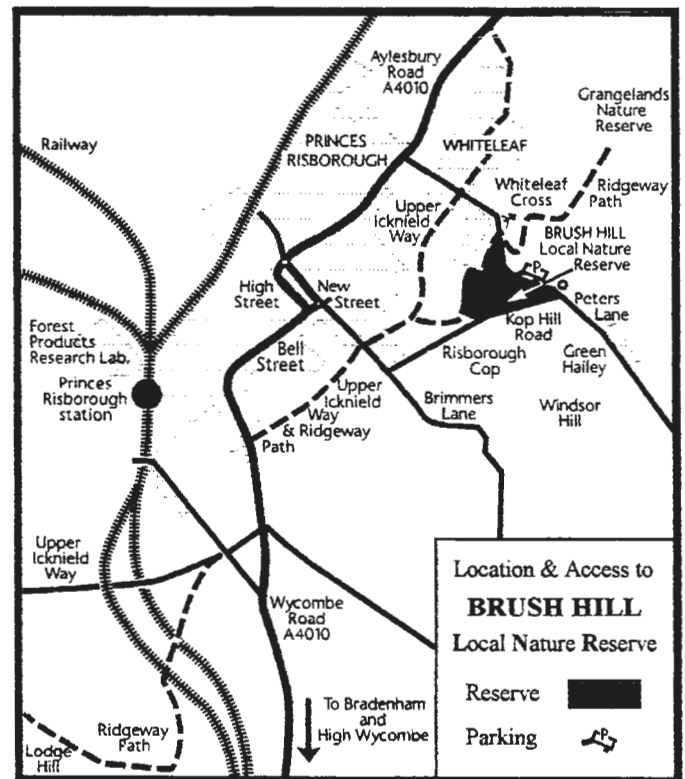
Ringlet, one of the many butterfly flies to be seen on the reserve.

Wycombe District Council's Ranger Service organizes a regular programme of guided walks, conservation projects and other events. The Risborough Countryside Group also organizes a programme of activities in the area, including several based at the reserve.

For more information contact the Rangers on (01494) 421825.

For details of the Risborough Countryside Group contact Frances Gomme on (01844) 274 865.

WDC Ranger Service



When coming from Wycombe on the A4010 turn right at the roundabout (third off) into New Road. Take the fourth right at the top of the hill - Kop Hill (road). At the junction with Peters Lane turn left. The Whiteleaf car park is about 50m. on the right. Park here and take the bridlepath at the far end of the car park down to the road. The path (sign-posted "Ridgeway/Circular path) a little way down the road on the opposite side leads up the bank and into the reserve.



Sadly we had to say goodbye this summer to **WWG** Project Officer Nikki Frost who had been a keen helper with the **wildlife WATCH Group** during the spring and summer. We hope that her replacement will join Elaine and myself in leading the Group in the spring. It is planned that the Group will combine with the Marlow Branch of the **Young Ornithologists Club (YOC)** to enable us to cater for a wider age range and provide a fuller programme. In September we had a day "Celebrating Wildflowers" at the **Calvert Environmental Education Centre**. Although a little late in the season everyone had a good time finding out why such things as Devil's Bit



Scabious is so called and how bees make honey. "Autumn Colours at Burnham Beeches" gave us all the opportunity to explore and learn about the many different species of these ancient woodlands. We were fortunate to be given an excellent walk and talk by one of the local wardens. Especially interesting was the

opportunity to see the reintroduced livestock in the woodland which included ponies and cattle.

The theme of the November meeting held at Penn School was "Preparing for Winter" and included a visit to Little Gomms Wood.

The last event of this year's programme was a practical task at Gomm Valley. Despite a spot of rain and a chill wind a hardy band of souls gathered to carry out some much needed scrub clearance. A bonfire was got going to burn the scrub and cook our jacket potatoes. Wendy Thomas provided hot chocolate and mince pies and we returned tired but satisfied with our afternoon's work.

Tim Hiatt

Any children wishing to join WATCH should contact us on 01494 536930.

Members Meetings

Members meetings are light-hearted, sociable evenings. At the meeting on Monday 12th. October, two members of the group gave a talk and slide-show. Roger Wilding gave a talk on fungi (eat them if you dare) and Maurice Young gave a talk on galls. Both talks were very interesting and informative and gave us plenty of ideas of things to look for over the coming weeks. Refreshments were served, during which everyone had a chance to chat and get to know the other members of the group. So do come along to the next members meeting and have an enjoyable evening

Wendy Thomas.

Grape Picking at Old Luxters Vineyard

On a bright frost morning in October we went to **Old Luxters Vineyard** in Hambledon to pick grapes. On arrival we were offered cups of hot coffee to warm us up while waiting for more pickers to arrive. We were complete novices but some folk came every year and we soon discovered why. The company was brilliant and picking the grapes was fun, even if it was very muddy underfoot. In no time at all, it seemed, we were off for a coffee break and more pleasant conversation with fellow pickers. Then it was back to the vines to make sure every last bunch had been picked.

There followed a really delicious lunch, served in the barn, accompanied by wine produced at Luxters and very good it was too.

Hopefully we will be invited to go again next year and, if so, we will be there come rain or shine.

Wendy Thomas

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

2 Red admirals, comma feeding on grape juice - Old Luxters vineyard (18/10/98)
Small tortoiseshell - Angus's gdn (11/12/98)

Other insects

Field cricket - Tyler's Green (20/09/98)

Mammal sightings

Glis glis - Hughenden (14/10/98)


Bird sightings

Chiff chaff - Pat's garden (14/10/98)
Greenfinches - Angus's gdn (16/04/98)
Eating yew arils (berries)
Redwing - Irenke's gdn (12 & 22/11/98)
Heron - Irenke's gdn (14/11 & 1/12/98)
Mistle thrush - Irenke's gdn (16/11/98)
Red kite - over Irenke's gdn (21/11/98)
Chough - Hazlemere (mid/11/98)
Teal - Wycombe Dyke (9/12/98)
Unseasonal Amphibians - 2 frogs
- Pat's (9/12/98) - 1 Maurice's (8/12/98)



The WyWG Contact list:



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Roger Wilding, 01494 438374
Treasurer : Peter Hazzard, 01494 447949
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Biological surveys : Angus Idle, 01494 563673
Education Officer & Assistant Editor :
Maurice Young, 01628 472000 

MEMO : COPY DATE Friday, 5 March, 1999

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Names of Contacts for Wildlife Groups in Wycombe District



BBONT	Berks, Bucks & Oxon Naturalists' Trust	(Oxon Office)	01865 775476
	South Bucks Region, Vol. Reserves Manager	Maurice Young	01628 472000
BNA	British Naturalists' Assoc., S. Bucks Branch	Marion Hussey	01494 488336
BTCV	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	Marion Lyon	01494 536930
BBG	Bucks Badger Group	Mike Collard	01494 866908
BTO	British Trust for Ornithology (Regional Rep)	David Hughes	01844 275472
BC	Butterfly Conservation	Ron Beaven	01494 444158
BBC	Bucks Bird Club	Arthur Brown	01628 604769
CPRE	Council for the Protection of Rural England	Tom Cotton	01844 345183
CWP	Chiltern Woodlands Project	John Morris	01494 565749
EN	English Nature (Thames & Chilterns Team)	Corina Woodall	01635 268881
SWS	Saunderton Wildlife Sanctuary	Margaret Baker	01844 342188
St.T	St. Tiggywinkles	Les Stocker	01844 292292
SL	Swan Lifeline	Tim Heron	01753 859397
TVMG	Thames Valley Mammal Group	Ian Saunders	01734 344127
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature	Valerie Lambourne	01494 443761
WDC	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