

WYCOMBE

WILDLIFE



NEWS

no. 30

WILDLIFE GROUP

SEPTEMBER 1999

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

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Hang on to Hedgerows



Hedgerows are vital lifelines to wildlife and a much valued component of the British landscape. Legislation is in place to protect the best, but the best hedgerows can only be protected if they are identified and recorded.

Wycombe Wildlife Group aims to survey hedgerows around Wycombe as this year's main project, quite a challenge, but we can do it - with your help!

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Project Officers Present and Past

On 9th June we welcomed **Michelle O'Riley** as a new Project Officer for our Group. Mego, as she likes to be called, graduated in Countryside Management from Bishop Burton College, East Yorkshire, this summer, after gaining 12 distinctions and 12 merits on her Higher National Diploma the previous year. Mego has been joined by **Dawne Lemon**, who is currently in full-time employment elsewhere, but hopes to dedicate more time to the Group later on. So far Dawne has been helping by providing ideas and advice based on her years of experience in the Promotions Department of a big international company.

Mego comes from Thame, in Oxfordshire, and Dawne from Great Kimble near Aylesbury. We wish them both a happy and successful stay with us. Former Project Officer **Fatima Patel**, who has been working in Australia, has decided to stay there and train as a diver.

Former Project Officer **Helen Eastman** has been to New Zealand and Fiji, and is now secretary to her company, Mott Macdonald's Wildlife Group.

You will see from the Newsletter Information Panel on the left that the Group is now a Registered Charity. Our thanks to James Donald for arranging this so swiftly and efficiently.

Pat

Wycombe Wildlife Group AGM Report

The AGM held on Monday 26th April was attended by 37 people. Copies of the reports were distributed with the Newsletter prior to the meeting. It was the Group's 10th birthday party and a cake, made by Frances Wilding, was cut by Cllr. Mrs. Frances Alexander, Town Mayor and later enjoyed by all along with other refreshments.

Councillor Alexander also took the opportunity to present **Wycombe Wildlife Group** with a special **Environmental Award** in recognition of their services to the community.

During the meeting, a presentation of white wine was made by Pat Morris to retiring Auditor Mr. K. Lunnon, who was thanked for his 7 years of service to the Group, and was made an Honorary Member in gratitude.

A talk on 'The Reserves of Wycombe district and their History' by Ian Butterfield of the WDC Ranger Service followed and made us appreciate the beautiful woodlands and open spaces we have in High Wycombe and the surrounding areas.

A raffle, with prizes donated by Kevin Brown of the West Wycombe Garden Centre, Roger Bennet - In Time, Derek Newcombe - Milton Keynes Borough Council, Hazlemere Food Hall, and members of Wycombe Wildlife Group, was held.

Pat Morris thanked everyone for making it such a pleasant evening.

Wendy Thomas.

Appologies to Francis Gomme for mis-spelling his name (Issue 28).

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 & 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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Reg. Charity no: 1075175

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.

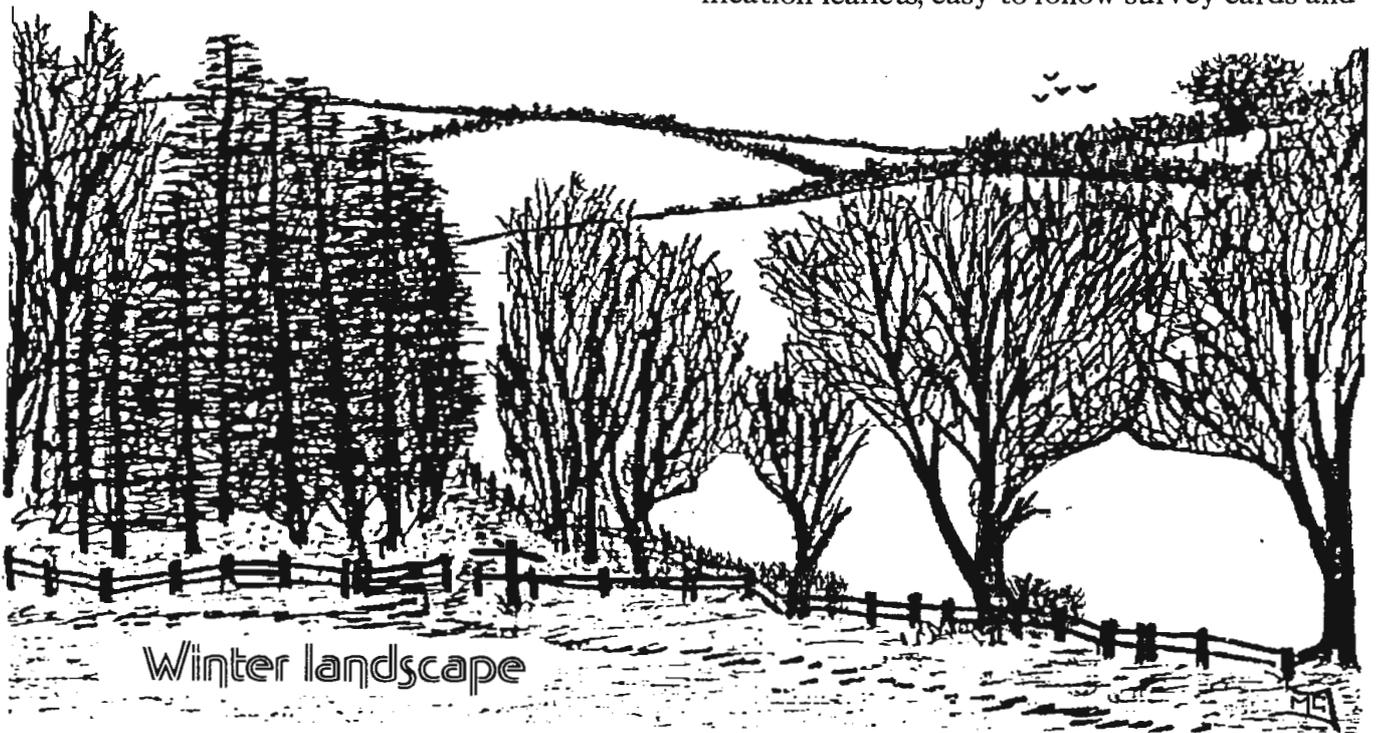


Get ready to 'Hang on to Hedgerows !'

As some of you may know, our major project for the year 2000 will be the hedgerow campaign "Hang on to Hedgerows". The aim of the project is to promote the ecological, landscape and historical value of hedgerows and collect information about hedgerows large and small in the Wycombe area. The main focus of the campaign will be to get YOU involved in your local environment.

The smallest garden hedge can provide an oasis of birds, small mammals, hedgehogs and a variety of associated hedgerow flora.

Hang on to Hedgerows will offer the opportunity to all our members to survey a hedge near them, large or small, short or tall (that's the hedgerows not our members!) We will be producing a survey pack to include simple identification leaflets, easy to follow survey cards and



Winter landscape

Hedgerows provide vital wildlife corridors or links between increasingly fragmented habitats in both rural and urban areas. Despite their high habitat and visual amenity value, the length of hedgerows in England and Wales has HALVED since 1947 (CPRE 1998) with an annual loss of approximately five percent every year. The loss of one of the oldest man-made landscape features has been largely due to changing agricultural practice of increased field size and increased use of agricultural chemicals. Housing and building developments have also contributed to the loss. Hedgerow removal has also made an impact on urban wildlife reducing urban habitat havens available to many species of flora and fauna.

information leaflets. There will be a schools pack made available as well, to include games and competitions, practical hedgerow planting advice and an introduction to the concepts of habitats and wildlife corridors. We also hope to offer a winter lecture, an identification and an introductory workshop and walk, together with the opportunity to get involved in more practical tasks such as hedgerow planting at the West Wycombe Garden Centre.

So the message is . . . Watch this space and if you would like to get involved with the project planning don't hesitate to get in touch - any small contribution welcome.

Mego .



Looking at Hedges

As a project for the next year we have decided to look at hedgerows around Wycombe. Hedges come in all sorts of ages. Some are very ancient, while others are not nearly so old. I know of hedges near here which have been planted in the last two years. Whatever their age, we regard hedges as part of our countryside heritage; something we do not want to lose.

But some hedges are being lost. That is and always has been inevitable. Now though, there is legislation to ensure that the best, and the most ancient hedges and those with historical provenance can be protected. We would like to make sure that in our area we do all we can to ensure that protection.

How can we do that? We need to know, in advance of anyone wanting to grub out a hedge, which hedges in our area are of special importance. And the only way to know that is to go out and look at the hedges around about us. That could be a very large task. I've seen it being done in North Oxfordshire, and it is really a big job.

The legislation sets out rules which enable you to say what sort of grade any hedgerow is in. Typical of government legislation, these rules are complex and the document containing them is very difficult to read and understand. Nevertheless, don't be too dismayed, there really are only two basic criteria for a hedgerow to be deemed to be very important.

Firstly, hedgerows which have historical links are regarded as important heritage features, and you have to research these links at libraries or record offices to prove the importance. If you like delving through historical documents such as tithe lists etc., then you may well be able to help us produce a list of such important hedgerows.

Secondly, hedgerows with more numerous tree or shrub species in them are regarded more

highly than those with fewer, because the number of woody species present is often equated with age. If a hedge contains more than seven tree species it will come into the most important grade, and should be given the greatest protection.

You may well say, "I can't help with that, that's a job for the botanists among us, because I can't identify many trees", but you would be wrong. You may not know the name of trees, but you can certainly recognize different leaf shapes sufficiently to say that a particular hedge has, say, five different species. Why not keep a small pocket notebook with a pressed leaf of all the different species you recognize, or even sketch the leaves in the book life size. One of us can put names to your collection of leaves.



Oak is often seen as a tree in hedgerows

There are going to be many more hedges with only a few tree species in them, so to keep the

whole project within a manageable size, we need initially a simple look at many hedges to see the number of tree species each has, which any of us who are keen enough can do. We need your help at this stage. By the way, one thing makes it easier to do - the hedgerow rules say that you only have to survey a representative 30 metre length of each hedge. That will whittle the job down to a workable size. We have got a simple form that you can have to collect your results on. Just let me (Angus) have them when you have filled them in.

Then, when we have found hedges in the important botanical or historical categories, we can send out the botanists and ornithologists and lepidopterists and Uncle Tom Cobley to do a full survey. We will need full lists of trees, shrubs, ground flora, birds, and insects at this stage so that we have the evidence of how good the hedgerows really are.



Looking at Hedges continued :

We can put these data onto the English Nature "Recorder", treating each hedge as a linear site, but I have spoken to Joanne Hodgkins at the Environmental Records Centre at The Bucks Museum who will act as a countywide depository for these records, because it will not only be the Wycombe Wildlife Group who will be looking at hedges. For one example, the Princes

Risborough group are surveying hedges.

There will only be a limited time this year in which you can do this surveying, because as soon as the leaves drop it will become very difficult to continue. But we plan to have training sessions throughout the autumn and winter, so that when leaves reappear next spring you will be fully prepared to start. Please help as much as you can.

Angus Idle

Hedgerow Trees & Shrubs



Common hawthorn



Midland hawthorn

The main reason for planting hedges was to keep livestock in, or out, of the fields. For this the tough, spiny hawthorn is ideal and it was and still is the most frequently used species. It was mainly the common hawthorn that was used. But here in the Chilterns another species, the Midland Hawthorn, occurs. You are unlikely to find a hedge composed solely of this species but it is well worth looking for them within the hedges you survey.

As you can see from the illustrations above the leaves of the two species are different. Those of the common hawthorn have deep lobes reaching over halfway to the midrib and the lobes are longer than they are broad, while the lobes of the Midland hawthorn are shallower, reaching less than halfway to the midrib and they are broader than long.

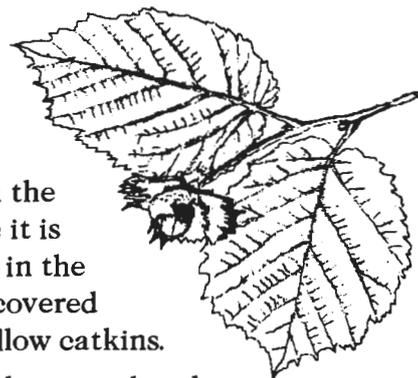
The blackthorn or sloe is another very thorny shrub that makes an excellent hedge that is smothered with white blossom in spring and produces plum-like sloes in the autumn.



Blackthorn

Hazel

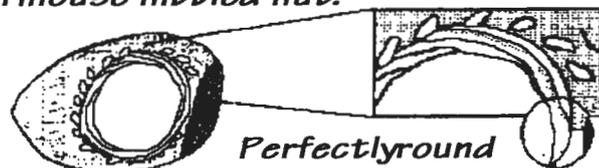
Although not armed, hazel is a very common hedgerow tree. In the untrimmed hedge it is most conspicuous in the spring when it is covered with masses of yellow catkins.



If you have several mature hazel hedges in your area which produce good crops of nuts it is worth looking for signs of dormice. Graham Thorne, who was a member of Wycombe Conservation Volunteers - the Group which preceded Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group, found signs (nibbled nuts) of dormice in overgrown hazel hedgerows at Coleshill some years ago. Graham made some dormouse boxes and with Ann Trotman has been surveying them for dormice since then. I was very pleased to hear recently from Graham that they found their first dormouse last autumn - proof that dormice occur in yet another site in Bucks. Can you find another? The coming months are the time to search for dormouse nibbled nuts, the illustrations below show you what to look for. If you find any do let me know.

Maurice

Dormouse nibbled nut.



Perfectly round hole with teeth marks running round the hole



A Hedgerow Survey

In 1993, Wycombe Wildlife Group surveyed the hedgerows of Wycombe Urban Parish Boundary, as part of the national PLANTLIFE's Great Hedge Project. The aim was to revive boundary hedges nation-wide, and this was Wycombe Wildlife Group's contribution to the scheme.

The section I studied was in the north-east of Wycombe, around Terriers and Lady's Mile, so when we launched our "Hang on to Hedgerows" campaign, I decided to continue my investigations in the same area, but this time further east.

There is a bridle way which runs east to west from Green Street in Hazlemere to the Great Kingshill Road, with a hedgerow on its southern side. In 1993 I had studied the western end of this hedgerow, from a stile where the Urban Parish Boundary,

travelling north, meets it, and the power lines pass overhead. This time I started at the stile and surveyed more of the eastern section.

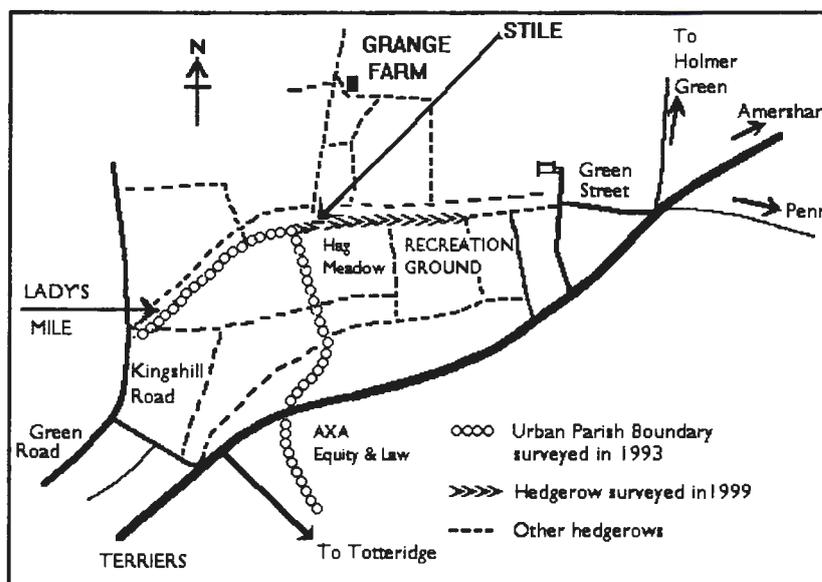
At the stile, on the northern side, there is a narrow field which was rich in flora and butterflies, but which its owner cleared as grazing for horses. Nowadays there are few butterfly species and much of the original flora has disappeared, though pignut still grows there. But there is a cultivated field, about 30m wide, with another hedgerow on the further side. In the gap between the two fields Goldilocks buttercups can be seen.

On the southern side there is a huge understorey of blackthorn and brambles below the trees, 10m wide in places, and a hay meadow

beyond. The more easterly sector of my study forms the northern boundary of the Hazlemere Recreation Ground. It has been interesting to compare what under-flora exists on the northern side of the hedge to that on the south. (mainly bracken and grasses on the north) and also differences between the unmanaged bramble and blackthorn at the edge of the hay-meadow, to the clipped back, maintained section of Hazlemere Recreation Ground. The former is lush and butterfly-rich, with all the nectar producing blossoms, while the latter

has a slightly greater variety of wild flowers, because of the exposure to the sun, but a thin and spindly hedge-line.

Both managed and unmanaged sections comprise a large number of hazel shrubs, and also many holly bushes in the "stile" section.



Holly and field maple also achieve the size of full grown trees in that section. But the dominant large trees are ash and oak. These are truly impressive, with a girth of between 2 and 3.5m, and up to 11 trunks arising from the base. Their branches sweep to the south over the blackthorn and brambles where these exist, and touch down in the hay meadow. To the north all trees are kept in check because of the bridleway.

The horizontal form of some of the tree trunks in both managed and unmanaged sections suggest that the trees were laid a long time ago. But the strongest evidence of age is in the number of woody species per 30m - from eight to twelve. According to Hooper's Law,



Hedgerows



this makes the hedgerow from 800 to 1,200 years old ! Since my own 45 year-old privet hedge now has 9 additional woody species growing in it, this has to be treated with caution.

I already knew from local residents

that the bridleway

was previously

a drovers way. But

looking at the first Ordinance

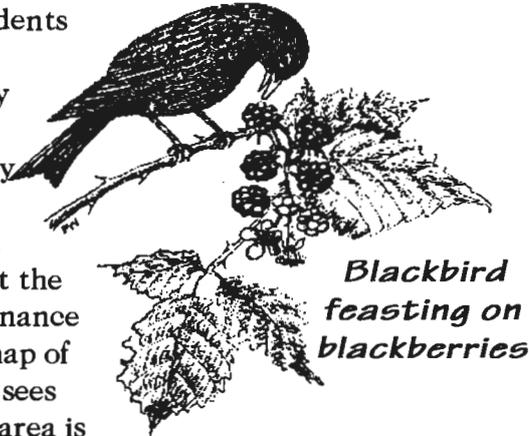
Survey map of 1822, one sees

that this area is

marked as a green street, and is known to be Saxon (Gantzel) but could be part of a series of Roman roads.

An exciting prospect !

So far, I have recorded 16 woody species growing the hedge, 24 other ground flora, and



12 species of birds. There have been 11 species of butterflies, nectaring on blossoms, and I have seen rabbits and squirrels.

During the five months of my study, bare branches, decorated with catkins have become

clothed in green, and hazelnuts, acorns, sloes, plums

and blackberries are

growing

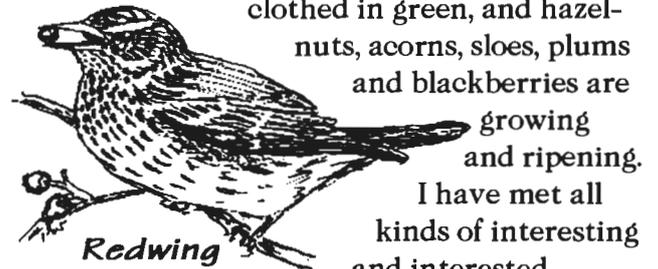
and ripening. I have met all

kinds of interesting

and interested people, and have been given help by local conservation groups and a local historian.

Not everyone will want to devote the time and study to their hedgerow that I have to mine, but I am sure all will find it rewarding, and will know that they are making a contribution, however small, to our "Hang onto Hedgerows" campaign.

Pat Morris



More Hedgerow Trees & Shrubs

Driving from Postcombe to Thame via the B4012 I noticed a line of small hedgerow trees that were dead at the top but still green below. Those must be elms, I thought, for when elms get to the size of small trees they often succumb, at present, to Dutch Elm Disease and the main

trunks and branches die. However they sucker and sprout from the base so the hedge line stays in tact.

Where hedges are trimmed regularly, keeping the growth of any elms in it "young" they are not subject to the disease as the bark, under which the Elm Bark beetle tunnels, has to reach a certain thickness before the beetle can



English Elm



Wych Elm

attack it. The devastation of elms over the last two decades confers some degree of significance on hedgerows that contain healthy elms.

Elms are easily identified from their leaves which feel rough due to the presence of bristly hairs and the base of the leaf (←) is unequal.

i.e. on one side the edge of the leaf blade is straight while on the other side the blade is broader and rounded and stretches a little farther down the leaf stalk. In the Wych Elm the longer side forms an ear-like flap that overlaps the stalk, see drawings above.

Maurice



Reports

Walks :

A glance at the 'Did You See' column on the back page illustrates what varied and interesting flora and fauna can be seen during our wildlife walks.

At our special **10th Anniversary walk** to **Buttler's Hangings** we were rewarded with the sight of an elm tree in flower in the car park by the West Wycombe Garden Centre; later on we were treated to the spectacle of a Red Kite swooping at close range along the valley below us. During a visit to Funges Meadow we saw Mullein moth larvae on a plant in someone's front garden. While at the **Water Research Centre** at Medmenham, we were shown a White-legged damselfly by our leader, Chris Mainstone. Wild candytuft was still blooming at Lodge Hill when Maurice checked it there. Although small numbers attend all these meetings, the results were well worth it for those who came. Many thanks to all the walk leaders and especially Chris Mainstone of the Water Research Centre for his help and support of the Group over the years. We wish him well in his new post.

Grass study sessions were rained off, except for the highly successful evening at Sands Bank, which provided its usual floral feast as well as a large variety of grasses and even a few butterflies, including Marbled White.

Moth Trapping

At the time of writing four moth trapping sessions have been held, with varied fortunes.

1. 30/04/99

30 Amersham Hill Drive,
High Wycombe.

3 species of moth and a Maybug - a day early. Although the day had been hot, the evening cooled rapidly and the moon was full, both of which affected numbers.

2. 21/05/99 10 Whitfield Road,
Hughenden.

9 species of moth.

3. 25/06/99 Cherrywood Gardens,
Flackwell Heath.

9 species, one of which was a colourful
Elephant Hawk-moth.

4. 30/07/99 8 Stewart's Way,
Marlow Bottom.

A magnificent 34 species including Poplar Hawk Moth. This was the last moth trapping at this venue - a pity, because the results are so good.

Open Gardens

Though, or perhaps because! no gardens were open solely for Wycombe Wildlife Group, they were well attended, with a constant stream of visitors. In general the weather was very warm and sunny and everyone was most appreciative of the beautiful gardens and the art and craft work on display.

West Wycombe Garden Centre.

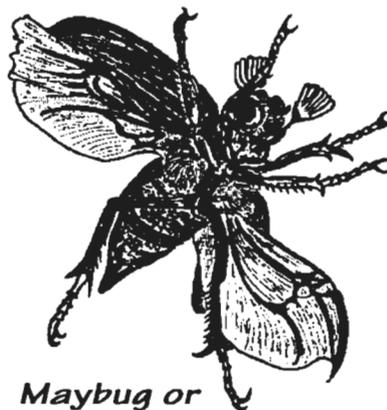
Fortnightly work parties have continued in our Wildlife Garden at the Centre throughout the summer, with the result that the garden has been looking extremely attractive. Grateful thanks to all the wildlife gardeners, especially Mary and Irenke, for all their hard work.

Year's Overview

The good start of the butterfly year has not been maintained, with generally common species such as Small Tortoiseshell and Common Blue almost totally absent from their usual habitats.

Beechmast and acorns seemed fairly plentiful, however, which is good news for Nuthatches, and other birds that feed on such fruits.

Pat



*Maybug or
cockchafer
in flight*



Reports



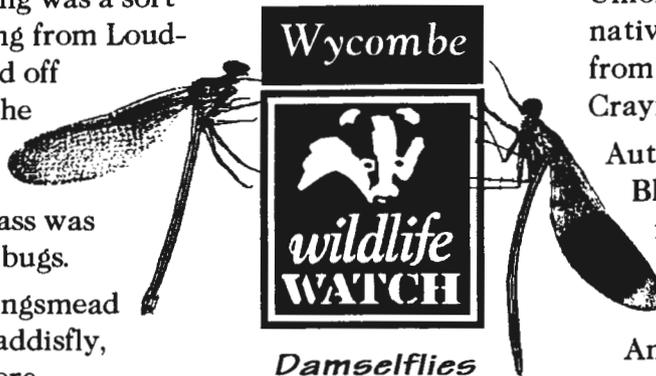
The June Watch meeting was a sort of urban safari.. Starting from Loudwater School we started off hunting insects along the old railway line.

A sweep net inspection showed that the grass was literally crawling with bugs.

Down to the Wye at Kingsmead to inspect the river : caddisfly, damselflies, fish and more.

Finally we had a look for "Ratty" - Watervole which had been spotted in this area but unfortunately, holes droppings and other signs could not be seen for nettles.

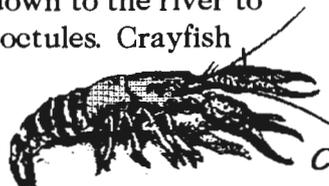
July again was down on the river but this time starting at Funges Meadow where pipistrelle bats were seen before walking down to the river to look for Daubentons and Noctules. Crayfish were also spotted by torch light, their eyes glowing an eerie red,



Damselflies



Sticklebacks



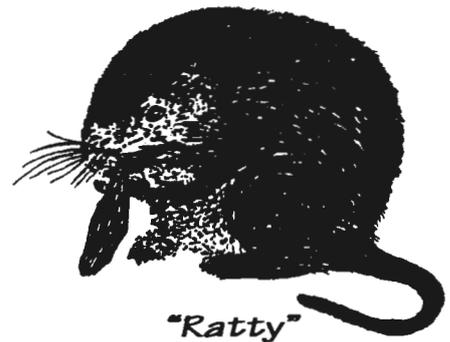
Crayfish

Unfortunately they were not our native crayfish but alien invaders from America - White Signal Crayfish.

Autumn events planned are Blood and Pizzas (or preparing for winter), A Fungus Foray & Orienting with a difference - lots of fun.

Anyone over 8 welcome.

Elaine



"Ratty"

It's Official - Spring is getting earlier !

The Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (ITE), with the aid of many volunteers, gathers information on all forms of wildlife in Britain. Gomm Valley is one of over 60 sites monitored for them in a national survey for butterflies. Other phenomena monitored for them include the time of leaf-break and the flowering period of many common species (phenology - what Angus is always on about).

It was announced on the radio the other day that analysis of these records has shown that Spring is about ten days earlier now than it was in the previous decade.

I have been aware of this for some time for when I took over leading the Munday Dean Open Day to see the Green-vein orchids in the 80's they were always at their best on the last Sunday of May (29-30th). Then, one year, they were all over on the Open Day so I brought the meeting forward a week the following year and I had to bring it forward again after another couple of years. The green-vein orchids are now at their best around the 15th of May ! The cause, of course, global warming !

Maurice

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 ?



April

Elm flowers -

W Wycombe G. C. car park (17/04/99)

Juniper seedling -

Buttler's Hangings N. R. (17/04/99)

Red Kite -

Buttler's Hangings N. R. (17/04/99)

May

1st. Cuckoo - Cockshoot Wood (02/03/99)

1st Swallows -

Puttenham Place Farm (06/05/99)

Small Copper - Hazlemere Rec. (20/05/99)

2 Red Admirals - Penn Woods (22/05/99)

June/July

Mullein moth larva -

Bassetsbury Lane (14/06/99)

White-letter hairstreak - Sands Bank
(07/07/99)

The WyWG Contact list:

Chairman & Newsletter Editor :

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Roger Wilding, 01494 438374

Treasurer : Peter Hazzard, 01494 447949

Membership Secretary :

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wildlife WATCH : Elaine Tague 01296 730814

Biological surveys : Angus Idle, 01494 563673

Education Officer & Assistant Editor :

Maurice Young, 01628 472000



MEMO : COPY DATE Friday, 3 Dec 1999

PLANT SALE

Lane End Village Hall

Saturday 16th October 1999

10 a.m. to 12 noon

Another chance to get those plants for your
wildflower garden that you missed at the
Wycombe Show

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
BGG	Bucks Badger Group	Mike Collard	01494 866908
BTO	British Trust for Ornithology (Regional Rep.)	Mick A'Court	01494 536734
BC	Butterfly Conservation	Jaci Beaven	01494 444158
BBC	Bucks Bird Club	Graeme Taylor	01296 625796
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
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