

**Issue 33**

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**SEPTEMBER  
2000**

**NEW  
LOOK  
& 16 PAGES !**



**THE RYE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE  
HOW DOES IT PROGRESS ? - REPORT**

**COMPOSTING**

**WHY ?  
HOW ?  
WHO'S WHO**

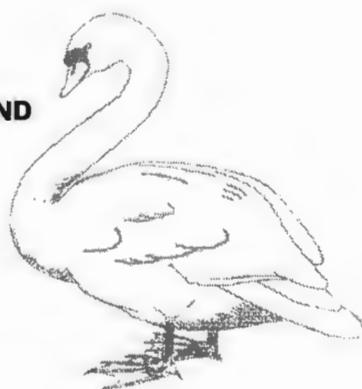
**HEDGEROWS**

**SCHOOL POSTER & POETRY COMPETITION - RESULTS  
NETTLES IN HEDGEROWS  
GARDEN HEDGES**

**WYCOMBE'S WILDLIFE HAVENS  
SANDS BANK**

**REPORTS**

**SUCCESSFUL OPEN CHURCHYARD AT CADMORE END  
WYCOMBE DISTRICT RANGER SERVICE  
WILDLIFE WATCH REPRIEFED  
SWANS ON THE WYE IN WYCOMBE**



**NOTICE BOARD**

**CONTACT LIST :  
YOUR GUIDE TO LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS - EXPANDED**

**The Countryside Centre  
Telephone : 01494 536930  
Registered Charity, No 1075175**



**60 Fennel Road  
High Wycombe  
HP11 1SL**

**SUPPORTED BY WYCOMBE DISTRICT COUNCIL**



**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 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 & 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 of the group is available on request)

**Wycombe Wildlife News** is published 3 times a year to promote the Group's activities and inform members and the general public of its progress.

**Editor** : Pat Morris

**Produced by** : Maurice Young

**Illustrations by** :

Matthew Anstey, Natalie Gutteridge, Frances Wilding, Pat Morris & Maurice Young

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**Wycombe Wildlife Group**  
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## - IN THIS ISSUE -

<b>Editorial</b>	2	<b>The Rye Environment Centre</b>		<b>Wycombe's Wildlife Havens</b>
<b>Composting</b>		First draft	8	Sands Bank
Why recycle organic waste	3	<b>Wycombe District Council News</b>		<b>Composting who's who</b>
		Ranger Service	9	13
<b>Composting 2</b>	4	<b>Hedgerows</b>		<b>Reports</b>
How to compost		Learn to lay a hedge		Open Churhyard
<b>News from schools</b>		Garden hedges	10	WWG AGM report
Poster & poetry competition results	5-6	<b>Hedgerows</b>		14
<b>The Rye Environment Centre</b>		Management of nettles		<b>Reports</b>
Progress report	7		11	wildlife WATCH
				Swan watching
				15
				<b>Wildlife Notice board</b>

## Editorial

Wycombe District Council has always been generous to environmental groups. When Wycombe (then "Urban") Wildlife Group was formed, the Council funded and produced the Group's first edition of their Newsletter, **Wycombe Wildlife News**. When the **British Trust for Conservation Volunteers** wanted to set up an office in the south of Buckinghamshire, as a focal point for its work in the area, Wycombe District Council leased them a room at Bassettbury Manor, to be shared with Wycombe Wildlife Group and the **District Ranger Service**. That office came to be called "**The Countryside Centre**"

Next came **Countryside News**, which reported the activities, not only of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, but also of other local environmental groups. It was printed by the District Council, and produced at the Countryside Centre. Sadly, Countryside News had to be abandoned, due to insufficient staff and pressure of work at that office.

In 1997 Frances Alexander, then Chairman of Wycombe District Council, took **Local Agenda 21** as her year's theme. She identified the cafe at the Holywell Mead Swimming Pool as a redundant building that could be used by local environmental groups. Local, regional and national organizations came together and the plan for the **Rye Environment Centre** took shape.

It was felt that Wycombe District now needed a newsletter which kept all the organizations involved with the Rye Environment Centre scheme informed of its progress and also kept schools, who may be the prime users of the site, in touch with its development. Wycombe Wildlife Group was pleased to offer to incorporate these facets in its own Newsletter, and Wycombe District Council has generously agreed to print it. Hence the current, revamped, bumper edition of our Newsletter. We hope you will like it.

*Pat Morris*

## New members - Welcome

We welcome the following new members who have joined since March 2000:

Mr & Mrs A Dodd,	Miss Tracy Cockram	Mr Sean Sworm,
Ms S Layram,	Miss Ismina Lane,	Dr & Mrs D Clark,
Mrs Kathy Dix,	Ms Ruth Douglas,	Mr & Mrs J Simmons

We look forward to meeting them at future events.

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.

# Composting

## Recycling Organic Waste

### Why recycle organic waste ?

There are a number of very good reasons for composting - apart from the fact that we must reduce the amount of vegetable and garden waste going to landfill, especially as legislation is likely to be passed to prevent it being sent to landfill.

■ It is easy and better to grow plants using natural organic fertilizers and soil conditions.

■ In the soil, compost helps retain moisture so reducing the need to water

■ Compost is an excellent alternative to peat. In the UK alone 94% of lowland peat bogs have been damaged or destroyed

■ If you compost your garden waste you don't need bonfires so you avoid the risk of upsetting your neighbours and the risk of prosecution !

You can compost almost anything that was once alive other than cooked food. (Well you can add cooked food to a compost heap, after all it is 'organic', but as a result of cooking it breaks down differently often generating unpleasant smells, particularly if it includes meats. It will attract pests and vermin such as flies & rats, so you don't put cooked food on a compost heap ! - *Assistant Editor*)

However, you can put vegetable peelings, egg shells, natural material such as hay and straw used for pet bedding, spent tea bags, coffee grounds and wood ash on the compost heap. Soft, green, leafy ingredients such as lawn mowings and young weeds are quick to decay and get the composting process started.

How you compost will depend on your circumstances. Organic matter left lying around will decompose but it is better to collect it together in a heap - cover it with an old carpet or plastic sheet and it will make good compost. A neater solution is a compost bin. You can either make it yourself or purchase one. The Council still has some for sale on special offer

(Details below, bottom right).



Disposal of organic waste to landfill must be dramatically reduced



Garden compost is an excellent alternative to peat

### Potential Problems

■ Many questions are asked about composting perennial weeds. These can be composted but lay them out and leave them to dry and die before adding them to the compost heap. The heat from a well managed compost heap should kill most of their seeds.

■ Tough, woody prunings will break down very slowly and are best shredded.

■ Large quantities of autumn leaves are best dealt with separately. If you have the room, put them in black plastic sacks and leave them for a year or two to turn into leaf mould.

■ Don't put diseased plants on compost heaps

■ The skins of citrus fruits will decompose but need to be cut up first.

■ Recycling mowings on the lawn itself can help reduce the huge volumes of grass clippings. It is better not to cut the grass too short, as it will retain its green colour longer in dry weather and so doesn't need watering.

■ Compost can attract rats but if carefully managed and cooked foods are avoided this should not be a problem.

*Lesley Stoner*

Compost bins are available (special offer) from the Council.

Order them from Blackwalls on 0870 849 4868 - payment by credit card or phone

Wyc. Dist. Council on 01494 421459 for an order form.

# Composting 2

You have read the why so here's how to do it

Air - Oxygen  
is essential  
to produce good  
“sweet” compost.  
Water is also  
essential - but  
not too much.

A quote from the  
Organic Gardening  
magazine (April 1999):

“The activity of millions  
of microscopic plants  
and animals and a host  
of other living creatures  
breaks down unpromising  
ingredients into a  
brown, pleasant  
smelling material we  
call compost.”

Compost activators  
contain nitrogen.

Slow release, organic  
forms of nitrogen  
include dried blood  
and hoof & horn.

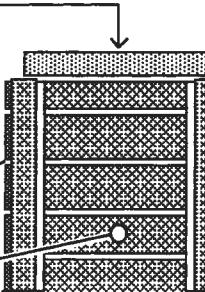


The main organisms involved in converting dead plant material into compost are bacteria, but as I describe on page 13, there are many other small insects and invertebrates concerned in the process. These animals require oxygen and will die in the absence of air. If a compost heap becomes too wet anaerobic (without oxygen) conditions develop and different bacteria (anaerobic bacteria) take over producing an often smelly, acid, soggy mass. Water, however, is essential to the decomposition of the material in the compost heap and if the heap becomes too dry break down

Cover with a wooden top  
or an old mat to keep out  
the rain.

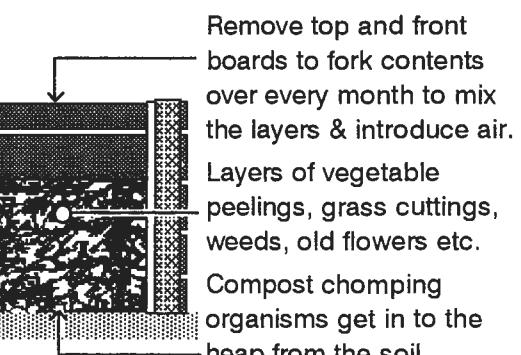
Sides made from wooden  
boards fixed so there is  
about a 10mm gap to  
allow air to get in.

Front boards slot in so  
they can be removed for  
access to compost.



need when starting to break down fresh plant material. These are available from Garden Centres.

Alternatively you can sprinkle in a handful or two of garden soil which will introduce the bacteria. They will also benefit from the addition of nitrogen, e.g. ammonium nitrate. Although disdained by the true organic gardener, this is OK if used in moderation - a little at a time. The organic gardener can use dried blood or hoof & horn - but take the Organic Gardening magazine's advice & wear gloves to handle dried blood (BSE!). Woody material breaks down very



of the dead plant material will slow down or even cease. Thus a good compost heap must be free draining, to allow excess water to run away, but the top must be covered to keep out rain water. The sides are also best covered as this prevents drying, but there should be some small holes or slits to allow air into the heap.

The composting material should rest on the soil to allow the organisms active in breaking down the plant material, that I describe on page 13, to migrate from the soil into the heap. If you are setting up a compost heap for the first time you can hasten the process by adding brandling worms which you can get from a fishing shop and “compost activators”, some of which contain bacteria as well as nitrogenous compounds, potassium and phosphate which the bacteria

slowly, and as Lesley Stoner suggests in her article it is best put through a chipper. Even so it will take up to two years to break down. The best use for it is as a mulch - it will save water and slowly break down and be taken into the soil.

Fork the compost over every 3 or 4 weeks to mix the various materials together and introduce air. If you use the New Zealand system of a double bin, shown above, you can fork the material from one to the other each month until you have filled one bin. Then leave it covered to “get on with it” while you fill the other - which, of course, you will have to fork over occasionally until it is full.

Further reading : Geoff Hamilton,  
Successful Organic Gardening,  
published, Dorling Kindersley

Maurice

# News from the Schools

## Wycombe Wildlife Group

### "Hang on to Hedgerows" Poster & Poetry Competition for Schools

On Friday 14th July 2000, prizes were awarded for Wycombe Wildlife Group's "Hang on to Hedgerows" Poster & Poetry Competition for schools. The ceremony was held at Curzon C of E School, Penn Street, nr Amersham, between 4.30 and 5.30pm, when the school acted as host to the two other participating schools.

Prizes for the competition were donated by

**Mr Ray Fountain**, of Builder Centre, Coronation Road, High Wycombe, and

**Mr Neil Syrett**, of the Art Shop, Easton Street, High Wycombe.

The Prizes were presented by Mrs Frances Alexander, former Mayor of High Wycombe, to the following prize winners:

#### Poster Section :

Miriam Beard (aged 7),  
Curzon C of E School

#### Poetry Section :

Matthew Anstey (aged 7),  
Carrington County First school.

#### Overall winning school :

Marsh School.

Many thanks to the Headmistress, Miss Kay of Curzon School, and the leaders of the Environment club, Liz Bingley-Hall and Elizabeth Beard for organizing this event.

Prizes donated by  
Mr Ray Fountain &  
Mr Neil Syrett

were presented by  
Mrs Frances Alexander

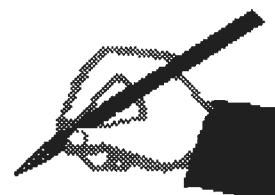


Winning poem of the poetry section by :  
Matthew Anstey. Carrington County First School

Winning poem

### My two Sesuns

Green in the Springtime  
All fresh and bright  
Brown in the Autumn time  
Not very light  
Nests in the Springtime  
Birds in flight  
Hedgehogs in Autumn  
Rolled up tight.



Florence Bingley-Hall (aged 8) used a computer to produce her poster. With a line of seven, very juicy looking, pink strawberries along the top and bottom of the poster it was very eye-catching. The poster was about the Environment Club at Curzon School and reported the visit Pat & I (Maurice) made to the school to help them with their hedgerow survey. It read :

Environment Club is all about helping the plants and creatures of the world. We meet at our school every Friday, take the register and go off in groups to do different things.

When Pat and Maurice came to our school I took loads of leaf specimens and we had to find out what they were. We measured how long the hedges were and how many different types of leaf and trees we had.

Curzon School  
Environment Club  
poster





The poem with illustrations above was written and drawn by Natalie Gutteridge, aged 7.  
and the poem below written by Oliver Sowden, aged 6.  
Both attend Marsh County First School

### Hedgerow, Hedgerow

All of those creatures you help. You are so nice  
 You give them food. You give them food  
 You make the spiders home.  
 You make nuts for the squirrels,  
 And you make room for the hedgehog.  
 The birds fly round you. how nice you are.  
 You help all the creatures making homes.  
 And you help all the creatures that are  
 going to get some food.  
 The birds make nests with your branches.  
 You are the loveliest hedgerow in the world.

**Note :** We had intended to include a copy of the winning poster but neither photocopying or scanning (with an old hand scanner) produces acceptable results. The photocopier reproduces all poster paints as black - whatever the colour and the scanner, as you can see from the drawings around the poem above, converts the half-a-dozen crayon colours used by Natalie to a just two shades of grey. We hope you saw them when they were on display in the library from Friday 10th to Saturday 22nd July.

Maurice

# The Rye Environment Centre

No visible signs of progress  
but behind the scenes  
all is going swimmingly

Those of you using The Rye will have seen no physical changes in the derelict cafe building and may have been wondering what the Management Group, composed of representatives from Wycombe Wildlife Group, the Environment Agency and the Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, has been up to.

The Management Group has, in fact, been hard at work over the past few months and has passed one of the major milestones for the project in selecting and appointing the architects to design the new centre. The Management Group created a brief based on the findings of the consultation with nineteen community groups carried out over the preceding year. This was sent to a number of architects with experience of creating this kind of community-led environmental building. Of those approached, we were delighted that nine practices submitted proposals. The Management Group met with the four practices we felt offered the best fit with our requirements and were given presentations on the schemes proposed. The presentations were exciting and varied; all the architects had picked up on the exciting opportunities the building offers.

As a result of this final selection process, the Management Group were delighted to offer the job to Rickaby Thompson. This practice, based in Milton Keynes, has been involved in "green" building projects for almost

20 years. We were very confident that they will create a scheme to match the wider group's vision and a building which will sit comfortably in its setting on the Rye. The building will be designed to use the minimum energy possible whilst providing a practical centre for meetings, exhibitions on the environment, school visits and workspace for local groups to develop their environmental work.

We are now arranging a meeting with the wider group to discuss the proposals. We will be consulting as widely as possible to ensure that people can comment on the facilities being created and the visual aspects of the design.

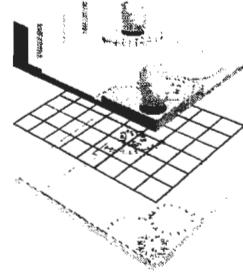
It remains our aim to open the Centre for business in Autumn 2001. This is a tight but achievable deadline.

Through-out the consultation there has been widespread agreement that this was an excellent way to put back into use a building that had been redundant for over two decades.

People using the Rye will know it well and when we first met Peter Rickaby he termed it an "old friend in need of a facelift". We like that analogy but the plan has always been to go further than that - the old friend will be thoroughly rejuvenated to create an exciting new centre with a sustainable future.

*Nick Forster*

Conservation & Education Manager  
Berkshire, Buckinghamshire  
& Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.



Architects  
Rickaby Thompson  
appointed



will create a scheme  
to match the  
wider group's vision



proposals to be  
discussed with the  
wider group



"Our old friend  
in need of a facelift"  
will be thoroughly  
rejuvenated



This project is being funded  
by **Biffaward**,

a multi-million pound scheme set  
up by **Biffa Waste Services**

**Biffaward**  
investing in the environment

Our aim to open  
in Autumn 2001  
is achievable

# The Rye Environment Centre

## First drafts



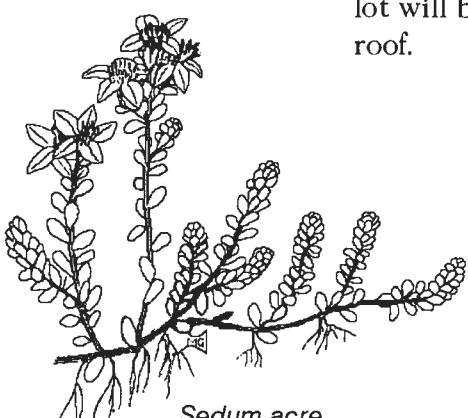
**South East Elevation**

- what you will see when approaching from the car park

Sedum is a succulent, perennial herb which can grow in shallow, dry soils and even on walls and roofs. In the Readers Digest Guide to Wild Flowers of Britain they say there is a superstition that asserts that if it is planted on roofs of houses it wards off thunderstorms. So if you get caught in a thunderstorm in Wycombe in the future you'll know where to go !

Its Latin name, *Sedum acre*, refers to its sharp, biting taste - hence the preferred common name of biting stonecrop but it has also been known as wall pepper.

It grows throughout the UK and I have seen it on Watlington Hill, Lodge Hill and the platform of Saunderton Station where, 30 years ago it thrived on the dry gravelly surface.



*Sedum acre*  
(Biting stonecrop)

At Bassettbury Manor, on Monday 31st July 2000, Peter Rickaby of Rickaby Thompson Associates + Energy Consultants gave a presentation of their plans for the Centre to Council Members & staff, & members of Wycombe Wildlife Group and other groups interested in the progress of the Rye Centre.

Mr Rickaby has kindly provided copies of their drawings for the Centre so that we can present them to you in this newsletter.

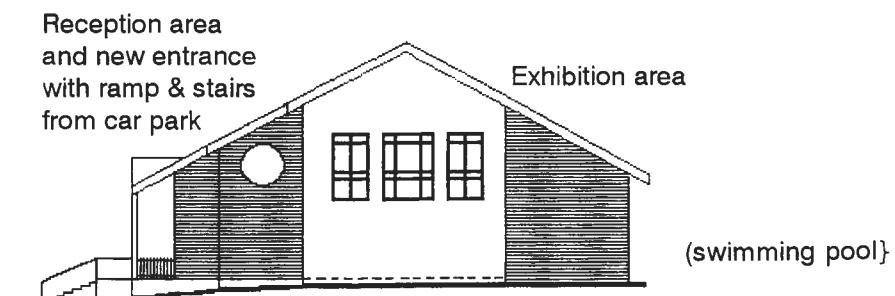
(In reducing down and scanning these for the newsletter I regret much of the fine detail has been lost - *Maurice*).

The original building, now about 50 years old, is to be retained as it houses the Swimming Pool Plant and toilets. To provide extra room for the new Centre extensions will be built on the car park and swimming pool sides of the existing building and the whole lot will be covered with a new pitched roof.

A "Sedum" roof is currently under consideration.. Sedum is a succulent herb which grows in very dry situations - you often see it on walls and roofs. If adopted this feature will be interpreted in the displays in the Centre - as will all the energy saving and other special features of the building. - renewable energy sources for heating the building, use of recycled and recyclable materials, waste management, grid-linked photovoltaic panels - what are they ? - all will be revealed in the interpretation displays in the Centre when it opens towards the end of next year.

Apart from a centre in which the general public can find out about and contact all the local environmental groups it will be a working demonstration of sustainability so that we :

Meet the needs of the current generation without compromising the needs of future generations.



**North East Elevation**

- what you will see when approaching from the Rye

# Wycombe District Council News

## Wycombe District Ranger Service

The District Council Ranger Service has been very active in the past few months.

The Section welcomed Fiona Robertson and Tony Speight to the full-time strength of the team together with Phil Horwood and Tom Winter. Fiona joins us from the Horley Project, a consortium based in West Sussex. Tony, as some of you may know, comes to us with experience with BTCV in Wycombe and recently in Milton Keynes.

Phil is an active member of the Small Mammal Group. Tom being a match fisherman is very interested in the contents of water areas. He is an enthusiastic pond dipper. The recruitment of these staff has allowed us to discover new, unrecorded populations of water vole, a BAP threatened species.



*Pond dipping*

During the past few months the normal Ranger conservation activities have continued. We are actively engaged in 29 school projects, some of them long term. We have also had an unusual number of Brownie, Guide, Cubs and Scout special evenings, giving talks and walks/working parties on areas local to the groups. We have also continued our links with 12 local businesses giving their employees opportunities to get involved in conservation days.

Following on links made with the American High School a long term

project over several years has started giving the opportunity for students to gain local community working. 1600 hours of such work has been carried out this year.

Our general works have included publishing three new leaflets on local woodlands, organizing walks for the active over 50's, serving on working parties for the Biodiversity Action Plan and bringing it to final publication with the AONB in a consortium bid for HLC funds.

To improve our service we are also obtaining new vehicles giving room for extra passengers, giving the opportunity for larger numbers of volunteers and work placement students. Existing staff are due to undergo training to assist district-wide bat handling advice and services.

We hope to increase our numbers shortly as we are actively recruiting two new staff members.

If you would like to volunteer with the Council Rangers please contact Mike Ambrose on 01494 421824 or 421825.

*James Porter*

BAP - Biodiversity Action Plan  
HLF- Heritage Lottery Fund

District Ranger Service back to strength and expanding

New records of water vole in the District

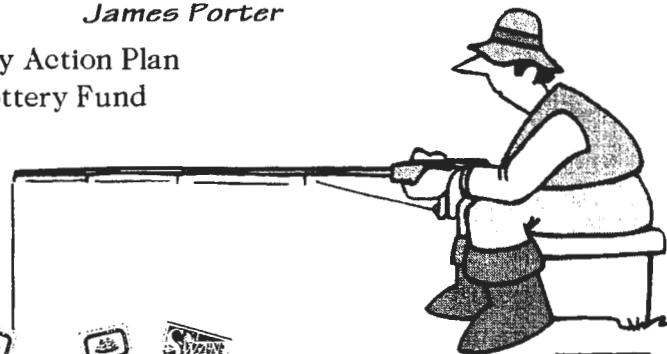


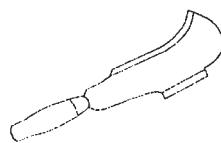
Work with schools and youth groups continues



New rangers to train as bat wardens

Match fisherman



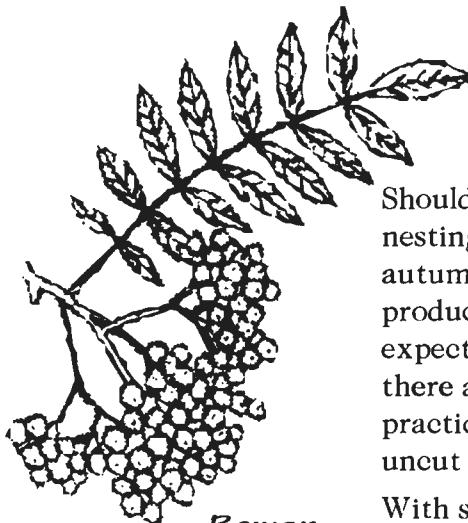


Most woodland birds  
feed & breed in our  
hedgerows



The British Trust  
for  
Conservation  
Volunteers  
**(BTCV)**  
provides training in  
hedgelaying at their  
weekend work parties

why not join them ?



*Rowan*  
Standard trees in  
hedges will provide  
fruit for the birds

# Hedgerows

Learn & help to lay hedges in Bucks with B.T.C.V.

As Britain's woodlands have disappeared, hedges have become increasingly important for wildlife, providing a range of habitats - including strips of rough grassland & freshwater ditches, as well as the hedge itself. Almost 1000 species have been recorded in our hedges and verges.

Neglected hedges become a line of trees with little or no growth at the base. Traditional hedgerow management - laying and trimming - encouraged rejuvenating at the base, providing thick, stockproof barriers which were good home for wildlife. Farm, garden and amenity hedges can all be laid, maintaining an important part of our landscape heritage and encouraging biodiversity in a part of the world where wildlife is increasingly pushed to the margins.

BTCV will be co-ordinating hedge-laying weekends around Bucks from October to February.

If you would like to have a go at laying your own section of hedge, join the group on Saturday mornings 9-9.30am so you hear all the instructions or book onto one of BTCV's Natural Break working holidays. If you can't spare a whole weekend, drop in and say hello and have a go for an hour or two. Old, warm clothes and strong footwear are the order of the day and a packed lunch if you plan to stay all day. Tools & protective clothing are provided. Children are welcome to observe proceedings, but should be accompanied by an adult.

For details call Marion Lyon, BTCV's Bucks County Manager at the Countryside Centre on 01494 536930



## Garden Hedges

"To cut or not to cut - - - -"

Should hedges be left uncut in the nesting season and again in the autumn when they contain berry producing species? You would expect the answer to be "Yes" but there are many reasons why it is not practicable to leave garden hedges uncut for long periods.

With slow growing species like beech and hornbeam a single annual cut after the nesting season should be sufficient to keep it under control. Fast growing species like Hawthorn

and the very fast growing *Lonicera nitida* have to be cut frequently in the growing season and they soon form safe nesting sites for birds. If you only trim off young growth in the nesting season it should not expose any nests or disturb the birds.

To provide autumn fruits in a garden hedge, rather than leaving the hedge untrimmed from summer on, grow standard trees of holly or rowan at intervals in the hedge adding interest with flowers & fruits

*Roger Wilding*

# Hedgerows

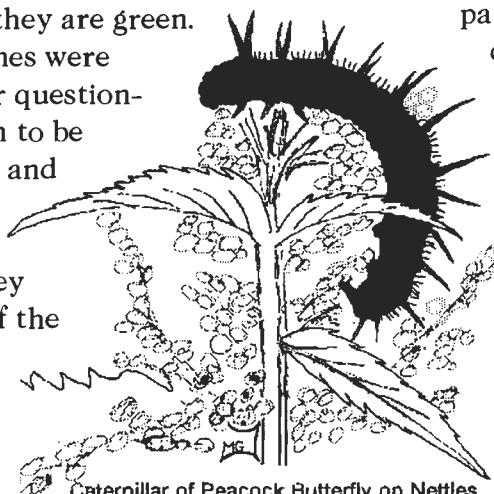
Some members thoughts on hedgerow management  
arising from a closer look at hedgerows  
during our Hang on to Hedgerows Survey

## Nettles & Hedgerows

In mid-July I received a phone call from a Wycombe Wildlife Group member "Can you identify some caterpillars I have found?" This is a question I dread. Some caterpillars are notoriously difficult to identify, especially if they are green. However, these ones were black, and further questioning revealed them to be about 4-5cm long and spiny-hairy. I could say with certainty that they were the larvae of the peacock butterfly, since I had been monitoring 7-8 colonies of these along a footpath adjacent to a farm hedgerow.

Further questioning from me confirmed that there were nettles along the footpath where my caller had found them. "Though I have never noticed the larvae on them", my caller said.

The peacock, along with several other of our most beautiful butterflies, breeds on nettles. At first the larvae are concealed in a web at the flowering tip of the nettle, but as they grow they spread down to the leaves, the initial colony splitting up in search of fresh food supplies. When they are ready to pupate, they either suspend themselves from a silk pad on the



Caterpillar of Peacock Butterfly on Nettles

nettle stem, or seek some other suitable spot. My friend's caterpillars were obviously looking for such a place.

Sadly, the caterpillars I was monitoring never had a chance to pupate. Because he was about to become busy with the harvest, and because foot-

path users frequently complain if footpaths are not kept clear, the farm manager cut down and removed the nettles while he had time, but just as the caterpillars were reaching maturity. If he had only been able to leave them for another week, they could have escaped and become the beautiful,

harmless insects that brighten garden flowers and Buddleia bushes at the end of summer. As it is, the next generation in that particular spot has been lost forever. I hope that if the situation arises again, I may be able to warn the farm manager of the treasure he has on the nettles, so that a notice can be displayed to forestall complaints of irate walkers, and if necessary, Wycombe Wildlife Group's practical conservation officers can go along a week later and complete the necessary maintenance for free, and ensure the survival of this striking butterfly.

Pat

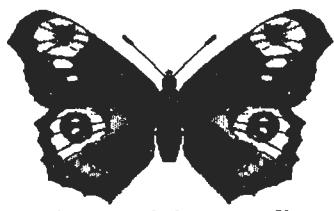
I have witnessed the same problem. My Buddleias used to be covered with peacock and small tortoiseshell butterflies. They came from nettles on the path that runs along the back of our gardens. The path, however, leads to the local Scout Hut and although the nettles do not obstruct the path,

in recent years they have been cut & sprayed. The result? So far this year I have seen just one small tortoiseshell butterfly on the Buddleias.

If only people were more tolerant of nettles these beautiful butterflies would be far more common.

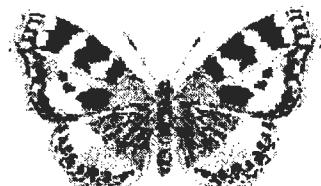
Maurice

Some caterpillars, especially green ones, are difficult to identify, but if they are black and spiny-hair caterpillars and on nettles they are the caterpillars of the peacock butterfly



Peacock butterfly

If only people were more tolerant of nettles these beautiful butterflies would be far more common



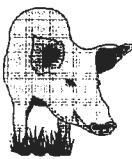
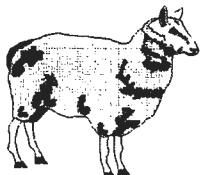
Small tortoiseshell butterfly

# Wycombe's Wildlife Havens

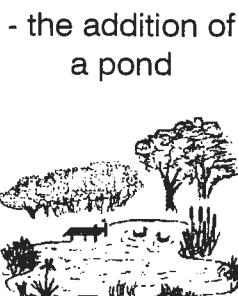
Buzzard



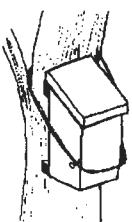
"A privilege to have been brought up within sight of it"



Human intervention



- the provision of nest boxes for dormice



"Take a walk at Sands Bank - you will be enthralled!"

I have always had a close affinity with the "Sands Bank" having had the privilege of being brought up within sight of it. I have never moved more than a mile away from it and now for the last few years I have been working right below it. During my lifetime the meadow has had a range of occupants including cows, sheep, donkeys and horses, all playing their part in allowing the wildlife to flourish. At one time the wood was even given over to the farming of domestic pigs.

At this particular time the whole area is in the hands of nature, but with some human maintenance, particularly in the wood. Human intervention is often seen as negative but in this case many benefits are easy to see, just two of which are :

- ❖ the addition of a pond, which has rapidly become occupied by common newts, frogs & dragon flies (both Darters and Chasers have been seen) damselflies, water snails and a myriad of insects, even the occasional pair of Mallards have visited.
- ❖ the clearing of dead bracken has created a habitat for grass snakes. Nest boxes have been erected for dormice (which are present but I have yet to see one!) and birds, while squirrels like the larger ones.

The water in the pond provides drinking facilities for numerous muntjac deer, birds and I am sure foxes too. The great variety of flowers in and around the pond provide nectar for insects and seeds for birds.

The variety of birds changes with the seasons, some, like the blackbird, robin and wren are with us all year. In the winter, with a good harvest of beech mast, an influx of brambling are a welcome sight especially early

## The " Sands Bank"

in the year when the males are in breeding plumage, they look superb. Redwing and fieldfare are also regular visitors. In early spring bullfinch (a beautiful bird) treecreeper, great spotted woodpecker and nuthatch walking head first down the trunk may be seen by the keen-eyed walker.

In recent years red-legged partridge have been bred for shooting and are in abundance in the Autumn along with pheasants. There are also Jays, shy birds but easy to spot at this time of the year when acorns are plentiful.

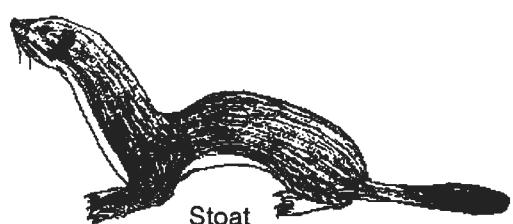
The landlubber wildlife and, of course, the birds need to keep a wary eye, for there are kestrels, sparrowhawks, red kites and the occasional buzzard scanning the scene from above.

The rush of a dive to get a rabbit or vole is a thrilling experience. But that is not all, there is plenty of evidence of stoat too.

The wonderful scene is just the tip of the iceberg of the variety of wildlife that inhabits this area. I have said nothing of the plants and trees and what of the insects ? If you have the time to take a walk I am sure you will see much more than I have described. But I guarantee, like me, you will be enthralled.

Malcolm Pusey

Angus Idle of Wycombe Wildlife Group has been carrying out monthly botanical surveys & counts of invertebrates, and both his and Malcolm's records are sent to the District Council Ranger Service at the end of each season to assist in their assessment of their management of the site.



Stoat

# Who's who of the Compost Heap

A well managed compost heap will have many of the organisms normally found turning dead plant and animal material in a healthy soil into humus. Their activity in the soil improves its fertility. By composting, the gardener harnesses these organisms to create the best soil improver known.

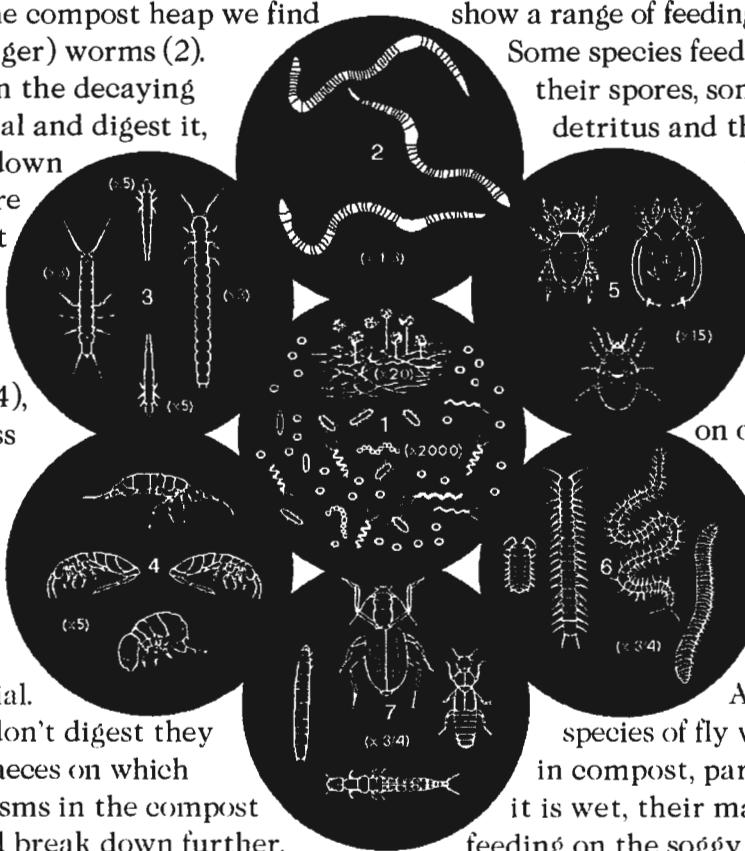
Most important and "out of sight" are the micro-organisms - fungi (moulds) and bacteria - illustrated below in the centre circle (1). The fungi start the decay process as they can penetrate the tough skins of fresh plant material and let the bacteria in. Micro-organisms in the compost heap feed by secreting (releasing) enzymes onto the material being composted. The enzymes break down some of the plant tissues to release nutrients which the microorganisms absorb and use to grow and multiply. This softens the plant material and makes it more easily eaten by a host of organisms many of which are minute insects. Some of these organisms are illustrated and described below.

Earthworms are very important in the soil but in the compost heap we find brandling (tiger) worms (2).

These take in the decaying plant material and digest it, breaking it down further, before passing it out as faeces.

Bristle-tails (3), and springtails (4), tiny, wingless insects, feed on the fungi and their spores as well as the decaying plant material.

What they don't digest they pass out as faeces on which other organisms in the compost will feed and break down further.



Mites (5) in the soil & compost heaps show a range of feeding strategies.

Some species feed on fungi & their spores, some on plant detritus and the liquefied products of the decay process, while many are carnivorous feeding on other mites, springtails and other small animals in the compost.

A number of species of fly will lay eggs in compost, particularly if it is wet, their maggots feeding on the soggy mass.

With the exception of the worms most of the animals described above are very small, 3 to 5 millimetres or less. The larger invertebrates found in a compost heap include: woodlice, centipedes, millipedes (6) & beetles & their larvae (7). The woodlice and millipedes feed on the dead, decaying plant material but the centipedes and the larvae of the beetles are the carnivores of the compost heap food chain feeding on the other animals in the compost.

All these organisms in the compost heap age and die and in their turn are broken down by the micro-organisms or eaten by some of the occupants of the compost heap so they also get incorporated in the compost. The bacterial activity in a compost heap generates heat and, if there is easy access to the heap, a number of animals find it a nice warm, cosy place to sleep. In the summer, grass snakes and slow worms might take advantage of this, while in the winter hedgehogs and even dormice may hibernate in a compost heap.

*Maurice*

Creating the best  
soil  
improver known

1  
Fungi  
&  
Bacteria

Microbial decay  
makes dead plant  
material easier  
to eat for a  
host of organisms



2  
Brandling  
worms

3  
Bristletails

4  
Springtails

5  
Mites

6  
Woodlice  
Millipedes

which are  
eaten by

6  
Centipedes  
&

7  
Beetles



A cosy place  
to sleep



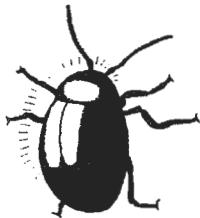
# Reports



## The Living Churchyard Open Day - Cadmore End

### The Green Mint Beetle (*Chrysolina menthastris*)

A welcome, though' captive, visitor to Cadmore End church-yard is about 10mms long and, as aptly described in the Collins Pocket Guide to Insects



is "one of our most brilliant leaf beetles". Not only are they a very bright green, they are very shiny - almost as if they have been polished with metal polish.

June 17th turned out to be a scorcher for the Wildlife Day at Cadmore End Churchyard which was attended by about thirty people from Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

Small groups of people sat around under the trees listening to various speakers covering birds, butterflies, wildflowers, trees and churchyard management. The tranquil setting with the cricketers in the meadow adjoining was appreciated by the visitors from more built up areas. Two red kites obliged by soaring overhead and almost stole the show. Thirteen species of plant not previously recorded were found, which must prove something?

The botanists were most impressed with the wildflower patch by the Lychgate and commented on the number of grasses flowering there. The day had started at 10 am with a welcome and a prayer from Robert, our Vicar, followed by outdoor workshops and a slide show in the hall on butterflies, their caterpillars and food plants, followed by refreshments at 11am. Dee Barlow was chief tea-maker boiling up the urn several times during the day to grateful thanks from thirsty members!

More churchyard trails followed, then at 3.45 the Chairman ended by thanking all who had put up exhibits in the hall and all who had made the day run so smoothly. The brilliant green mint beetles which arrived in a jam jar after lunch, causing breath-taking gasps from admirers, also received a vote of thanks.

The feedback forms also had some interesting comments :-

- \* Very accessible and peaceful
- \* Good facilities and ideal for outdoor workshops
- \* Notable interest in the churchyard
- \* Very friendly, helpful & relaxing
- \* I learnt a lot - well presented
- \* Very interesting churchyard
- \* Very, very useful
- \* Excellent photographs and slides
- \* Useful for those without any experience
- \* ***and the best one!*** - Shall set up a churchyard conservation group in my church - I feel fired up with enthusiasm!

*Barbara North.*

### Wycombe Wildlife Group AGM Report

The AGM held on Monday 17th April 2000 was well attended. copies of the reports were distributed with the Newsletter prior to the meeting.

A talk on "Butterflies of Buckinghamshire" by Dr. Roger Kemp of **Butterfly Conservation**, which followed the short AGM, was very interesting and informative and enjoyed by all. A vote of thanks was given by Angus Idle. A raffle was held which included a video and book donated by Dr. Kemp, wine from Hazlemere Food Hall and other prizes donated by members of the Group.

Pat Morris thanked everyone for attending.

**Footnote :** Now that **Wycombe Wildlife Group** is a registered charity members no longer vote for Officers at the AGM. They only have to select whom they want as Trustees. The trustees were voted in en bloc for the coming year, incidentally enabling the business of this part of the AGM to be completed in 10 minutes - surely a record! Officers were appointed by the Trustees at the following Trustees Meeting, held on Monday, 8th. May 2000.

**James Donald** took over as **Chairman** from Pat Morris. Pat has spent some eight years in this post.

Other posts were as follows : **Vice-chairman - Angus Idle,** **Secretary - Wendy Thomas,**

**Treasurer - Peter Hazard.** Lesley Stoner has regretfully resigned as co-opted Trustee, leaving the position vacant. We thank her for her valued service over the past year. We no longer have a Project officer, this person's duties being carried out by the Chairman, with help from other Trustees.

## Wildlife Watching

Just as we thought Wycombe wildlife WATCH would have to fold, another leader came forward - Kristina Frydberg. 16 young people came to the relaunch - a "batty" night out - despite the rain!

Everyone helped to make bat boxes, joined in the bat and moth game, and we even saw a couple of bats between the showers.

In July at Gomm Valley, the weather was sunny for a bug hunt so the butterflies were out : Marbled White, Ringlet and even a Dark Green

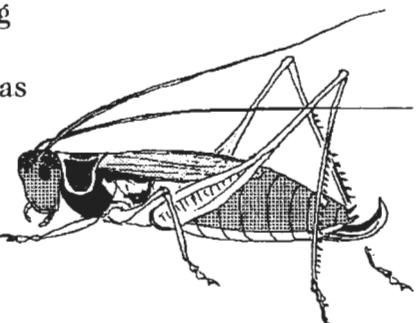
Fritillary seen in the distance. Other minibeasts included Roesel's Bush Cricket, a beautiful Violet Ground



Beetle & quite a few spiders carrying eggs! My favourite was the Burnet Moth (can't remember whether it was 5 or 6 spot) because we found the moth, caterpillar and empty pupal case from which the moth had emerged - if we had found the eggs we would have had the complete life-cycle! Oh and Woolly Worms - a popular camouflage game.

Telephone Elaine Tague on 01494 716492 if you are 8+ and would like to be on the mailing list for a complete

Autumn Programme which also includes regional events run by the Local Wildlife Trust. *Wendy Thomas*



*Roesel's Bush Cricket*

Crickets can be recognized by their long antennae. Roesel's bush cricket is distinguished from others by the yellow or green margin to its pronotum - the saddle-like structure across its back just behind its head

## Swan Watching

David is still at Wycombe Rye after arriving in 1991. He must be over 12 years old and can be recognized by the large white ring he carries on his left leg. He enticed his present mate Amanda from Nicholas in 1997.

Their 8 cygnets hatched, after 35 days incubation, on the Abbey Island in April this year were soon made to walk out of the main gate and down the pavement to the swiftly flowing river below Pann Mill by the A40.

Seven remain at the time of writing and they are much larger than other cygnets noted on the Thames during the swan upping survey this July from Sunbury to Abingdon. The Wycombe birds have no doubt benefited from the natural food sources of the Wye. When you are next down there compare the water buttercup beside Pann Mill with that below, which has been heavily grazed. This plant does not do well in the slow flowing Dyke, although the swans get more handouts of bread there.

David & Amanda obviously know what is best. The lighter weight broods on

the Thames have also been caused by the nests being washed away during this year's heavy spring rains, resulting in second clutches being laid later in the season.

David will probably take his family across to the Dyke in September for flying training. *Eric Britnell*



Cygnets on the Wye are heavier than those on the Thames

### Would you like to join us ?

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

I / We wish to join **WWG**

Name :

Address :

Tel. no.

Amount enclosed, (please circle)  
£5 (Individual/Family/School member)  
£2.50 (Student or Retired Person)

Don't just think about it, do it - now !



# WILDLIFE NOTICE BOARD

## Did You See ?



### Birds

Com. Sandpiper - under Marlow Bridge 14/4/00

Com. Sandpiper - Rye Waterfall 17/5/00

Wryneck - Hazlemere garden 10/5/00

### Butterflies

Brown Argus - Mop End 6/6/00

Painted Lady - Pat's garden 10/6/00

Clouded Yellow - The Park Hazlemere 18/6/00

Hummingbird Hawk-moth - Hazlemere 30/6/00

## The WWG Contact list:

Chairman & Membership Secretary :

James Donald, 01494 637877

Newsletter Editor : Pat Morris, 01494 529484

Site Management Coordinator :

Roger Wilding, 01494 438374

Treasurer : Peter Hazzard, 01494 447949

**wildlife WATCH** : Emma Firth, 01865 775476

Biological surveys : Angus Idle, 01494 563673

Education Officer & Assistant Editor :

Maurice Young, 01628 472000

Project Officer : Post vacant



## Names of Contacts for Wildlife, Conservation & Environmental Groups - Wycombe District

Bassetsbury Group	Nigel Mossman	01494 462059
Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust (South Bucks Region, Vol. Reserves Manager)	(Oxon Office)	01865 775476
Booker Common & Woods Preservation Society	Maurice Young	01628 472000
British Naturalists' Assoc., S. Bucks Branch	Ron Walker	01494 444824
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	Marion Hussey	01494 488336
British Trust for Ornithology (Regional Rep.)	Marion Lyon	01494 536930
Bucks Badger Group	Mick A'Court	01494 536734
Bucks Bird Club	Mike Collard	01494 866908
Bucks Community Association	Roger Warren	01491 638544
Butterfly Conservation	Francis Gomme	01844 274865
Chiltern Society	Jaci Beaven	01494 444158
Chilterns Conference AONB	Angus Idle	01494 563673
Chiltern Woodlands Project	Steve Rodrick	01494 510954
Council for the Protection of Rural England (Bucks branch.)	John Morris	01844 271315
David Dyson & Associates	-	
English Nature Conservation Officer Bucks.	David Dyson	01494 511278
Frieth Natural History Society	Jenny Young	01635 268881
Grange Action Group	Alan Gudge	01494 881464
High Wycombe Society	Dave Wainman	01494 716726
Lane End Conservation Group	Frances Presland	01494 523263
Marlow Society	Joyce Davis	01494 881295
National Trust	Michael Hyde	01628 485474
Pann Mill Group	Ruth Douglas	01494 755573
Ramblers Association	Myra King	01494 523968
Princes Risborough Countryside Group	J.L. Esslemont	01494 881597
Saunderton Wildlife Sanctuary	Francis Gomme	01494 274865
St. Tiggewinkles	Margaret Baker	01844 342188
Swan Lifeline	Les Stocker	01844 292292
South Bucks Organic Group	Tim Heron	01753 859397
World Wide Fund for Nature	Diana Pfetscher	01494 815119
Wycombe District Council Ranger Service	Valerie Lambourne	01494 443761
Wycombe Youth Action	Julie Hopton	01494 421824
	Lynda Cockerell	01494 447250



If you have any queries about BATS contact the COUNTRYSIDE CENTRE,  
Kingsmead Depot, 60 Fennels Road, High Wycombe, HP11 1SL 01494 536930

MEMO : COPY DATE Friday, 24 Nov 2000