

Issue 36

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ONE OF LIFE'S ADVENTURES
THE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE
- A CHANGE OF NAME

WILDLIFE NEWS
WILDLIFE GARDEN - GETS A NEW LOOK
HAWK MOTHS
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION DAY FOR THE FAMILY
SWAN NEWS
PUBLICITY PAYS

THE WATER VOLE

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE WYE

CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS FOR WILDLIFE GARDENERS
FLATS FOR SPARROWS
INSECT HIBERNATION BOX

LADYBIRDS & LACEWINGS

SURVEYING OUR LOCAL WILDLIFE GEMS

I TAWT I SAW A PUDDY CAT

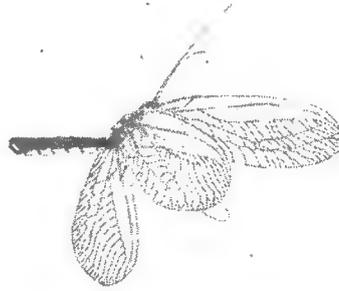
WYCOMBE DISTRICT RANGER SERVICE

HIGH WYCOMBE NATURAL HISTORY - PAST & PRESENT
CORALROOT BITTERCRESS

REPORTS
WILDLIFE WATCH
WWG AGM
SCHOOL HEDGEROW:
E-MAIL & WEBS

NOTICE BOARD
DID YOU SEE ?

CONTACT LIST - YOUR GUIDE TO LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS



SEPTEMBER
2001

Telephone : See the WWG
contact list on back page
Registered Charity, No. 1075175



Address : WWG, c/o
73, Carver Hill Road
High Wycombe, HP11 2UB

SUPPORTED BY WYCOMBE DISTRICT COUNCIL

WYCOMBE



WILDLIFE GROUP

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.

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Editorial

The sombre situation reported in the last edition of Wycombe Wildlife News, when bad weather and Foot and Mouth Disease restrictions were affecting conservation activities, has now greatly improved. Not only have we had several spells of very warm weather, but renewed access to the countryside has meant that we have been able to carry out our full programme. Work at our wildlife garden, guided walks and moth trapping have all taken place as planned, and surveys resumed.

The Group thanks all those involved in these activities, but especially Sarah Bentley, **Chalk Streams Officer**, who led such an interesting walk at Hughenden on July 11th, **County Moth Recorder** Martin Albertini and colleague Peter Hall for moth trapping at Green Farm on July 6th and Ruth Douglas and Neil Harris of the National Trust, for hosting this latter event. (See separate reports elsewhere). The report on Sarah's walk will appear in the next issue, giving Neil Harris the opportunity to reply to her comments about the Hughenden Stream.

Due to the hot dry weather, many insects have done extremely well, with numerous hoverflies and bumblebees busy round flowers during the day, and moths raining from the skies at night. Large numbers of Gatekeeper butterflies have been noted everywhere, along with other Browns, and Whites have been plentiful also. Sadly, though, the Small Tortoiseshell and Small Copper seem to have continued their decline. Many birds have had a successful breeding season, and Red Kites have been reported supposedly nesting in Wycombe District

Pat Morris

New members - Welcome

We welcome the following new members who have joined since April 2001:

Mrs J A Allen and Mrs Patricia Burridge

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.

WWG

One of life's adventures

Beginning the saga of the exploits of
James Donald, Wycombe Wildlife Group Chairman,
in South America

Do you remember when you were eight years old and the summer holidays lasted forever? I guess many of you had an early interest in 'nature' and spent many a happy hour collecting creepy crawlies. I did - my speciality was caterpillars, often collected from my neighbours' cabbages. My memories include the awful smell of the cabbage which the caterpillars were feeding on, in their jam-jar world, and, on the other hand, watching with amazement and wonder as a large white emerged from its pupa.

Although those days passed and my caterpillar days were over, life is an ever changing tapestry and umpteen years later it suddenly turned full circle in the most unexpected way. Just before Christmas I learned about **Earthwatch Millenium Awards**, a unique and fully funded opportunity for those aged fifty and over to take part in a conservation research team overseas, and then run a community action project on their return to the UK. **Earthwatch** is an international environmental charity which supports research, education, and conservation programmes in 50 countries and funding for these

awards comes from The **Millenium Commission** with co-funding from **Royal & SunAlliance insurance group**.

My bid for sponsorship was successful and in June I joined two others from the UK on a two week trip to assist with the **Rainforest Caterpillars Project**.

The project, led by Dr Lee Dyer, Ph.D. has already been running in Costa Rica for several years, with some of the goals being:

- 1) to document diversity of caterpillars and parasitoids,
- 2) to understand how different caterpillar defences function against different types of natural enemies,
- 3) to examine chemical defences in caterpillars and their host plants,
- 4) to construct models that predict success of biological control based on caterpillar defences.

The research has now been extended to a second site, in Ecuador and I joined the first Earthwatch team to visit this location.

James

For information about Earthwatch go to:

www.earthwatch.org

Another step (no not for mankind) but in the development of our newsletter - we are into serialization - for the next episode of James' exploits be sure to get the January issue.



The Environment Centre on Holywell Mead

There is little to say this quarter about the Environment Centre as these things grind exceedingly slow. But you may have noticed a change in the title. The "Rye Environment Centre" was something to call it whilst the idea was being "incubated". But for Charity & Company registration and other legal niceties a name must be given. So following careful discussion the Trustees decided upon the name :

The Environment Centre on Holywell Mead



Millennium Awards



*Caterpillars in the UK
are also parasitized,*

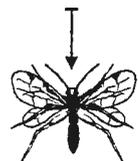
e.g.:

*Caterpillars of the
large white butterfly
shown here bursting with
pupae & larvae
of
Apanteles glomeratus*



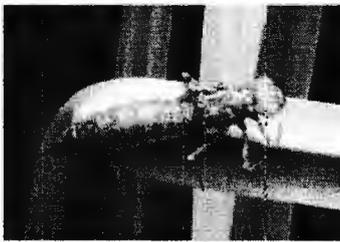
an

Ichneumonid wasp



Wildlife Garden gets a new look

*Dragonfly nymph
emerging from
our pond at
West Wycombe*



Visitors to our **Demonstration Wildlife Garden** at **West Wycombe Garden Centre** will have noticed a new, defining plant border within the grassland area, the addition of a herb wheel, and that the compost bins have been moved. All this, plus updated signs, have contributed to a new look for the garden. Emptying of the pool to repair a leak, early in the season, has not deterred dragonfly nymphs from emerging in July, and 10 species of butterfly have nectared on the flowers. There have also been a newt, a field vole (alas, dead) and many unidentified grubs in the soil.

Altogether 147 hours of work have been completed by project leader Irenke York and her team, with the additional "man" power from James Donald when needed. Irenke is to be congratulated on the team's splendid achievement. Thanks to Irenke, her team, and James, and also to Michael York for his work on the new signs. We are also grateful to the new Garden Centre Manager, Philip Petty, for his support and generosity.

Those interested in joining the wildlife gardening team should contact Irenke on 01494 532042. Extra help is always welcome. See the programme for dates of work parties

Hawk-moths home-in



PRIVET HAWK-MOTH

wingspan 10-11 cms

At **Wycombe Wildlife Group's** biggest moth-trapping event of 2001, at Green Farm, Hughenden, on July 6th five different Hawk moths homed in to the light traps set up by **County Moth Recorder** Martin Albertini, and his colleague Peter Hall. They were the Large & Small Elephant Hawk-moths, and the Pine, Poplar, and Privet Hawk-moths. The latter has a wingspan of more than 10cm. Leafletting of local residents by the National Trust, to whom Green Farm

belongs, together with fine weather, ensured a good support for this event, with enthusiastic children among the participants.

Eager children also kept moth enthusiasts Paul Bowyer and Eric Britnell busy identifying on 27th July, at Bassetsbury Lane with the huge Old Lady moth (wingspan nearly 7cm) being one of the 20 species brought to them. The weather was perfect, fine and warm.. *Pat*

**children had lots
of opportunity
to do carpentry**



*Emily Braisher
making an insect
box*

An Environmental Education Day for the Family

Bucks Continuing Education Department and **Wycombe District Council** held a family education event at Downley school on July 1st. Families were able to find out about red kites, wildlife gardening, and waste disposal, as well as crafts including making nature collages, sun printing and mask making.

The children had a lot of opportunity to do carpentry as Maurice Young kept them busy making insect boxes and the Ranger Service helped them make bat boxes. They were also able to have a go at the ancient craft of

bodging.

Parents were able to take away free energy efficient light bulbs after filling in an energy survey form. They also had an opportunity to fill in some 'leaves' for a **Tree of Life** borrowed from **Aylesbury Vale District Council**, giving their opinions on issues they considered important to Downley such as facilities for young people and community safety.

The event was very well received and it is hoped to repeat this type of event next Summer. *Lesley Stoner* (*Wycombe District Council*)

Swan News 2001

In the spring Wycombe's resident mute swan pair David and Amanda again nested in the grounds of Wycombe Abbey. Nine cygnets were hatched but eight were soon lost, probably to a predator. A fox or a pike is possible. As in recent years the swans soon marched out of the main gate, finishing on the River Wye below Pann Mill. Most unusually a second nest was constructed whilst accompanied by the rapidly growing cygnet. Pens lose much weight during the incubation process. Amanda probably was quickly returned to egg laying condition by the abundance of food in the river, especially water-crowfoot. She started incubating six eggs about June 1st for five weeks among the reedmace, alongside the London Road pavement. The eggs would also have had to be covered to prevent overheating during the heat wave. Two cygnets hatched on 6th July, followed by a third. This bird was noticeably smaller and the Abbey cygnet had been noted attacking this weakest bird, which disappeared. Some birds often behave in this way if chicks are seen to be unwell.

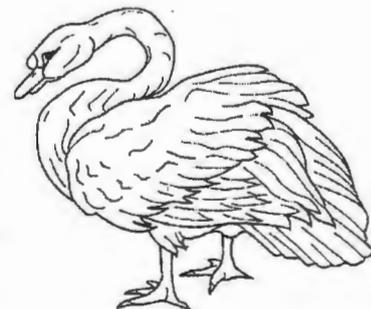
The river channel between Pann and Rye Mill is now narrow, and with the volume of water flowing the speed is quite high. Swans are nidifugous, which means that the cygnets leave

the nest within two days. They are vulnerable to fast flowing water and the two survivors found themselves being swept downstream over some "rapids" by the footbridge to calmer water at Rye Mill much to the concern of the adults. Passers-by were able to scoop them up. This happened at least three times and on 15th July a group member raised the alarm at 7.30 am and three of us were able to gather them up. On this occasion your reporter, when placing a cygnet on the water received an almighty blow on the other hand from the ungrateful Amanda.

Enquiries at Oxford University's Department of Zoology, which rings many swans on the Thames, revealed that David was hatched in the Reading area, probably in 1988 - he was at Sonning in April 1991. I saw him on the Dyke the following winter. Enquiries from the British Trust for Ornithology should reveal information about Amanda.

A successful second brood with any first brood cygnets in the family is very rare. Tim Heron of Swan Lifeline said this happened at Reading a few years ago, but no youngsters survived.

Please telephone Swan Lifeline on 01753 859397 if you see any swan in distress. *Eric Britnell*



two cygnets found themselves being swept downstream over some "rapids"



Publicity Pays

Publicity in the local press following Wycombe Wildlife Group's "Wake up to Birds" walk on the Rye in May, resulted in 17 people turning up for the next Rye walk in June. Both walks were led by Group member Frances Wilding, and among the 135 plant species found on the Rye she pointed out the rare coralroot

bittercress, growing in the woods just above the Dyke.

Eight supporters arrived for the walk at Grange Farm, Widmer End, a fortnight later. Leader Angus Idle showed them the ancient site of Pirenore, tucked behind Grange Farm.

Pat

(Everyone who came enjoyed the walks !)



The Water Vole

BROWN RAT

big, ears pointed nose

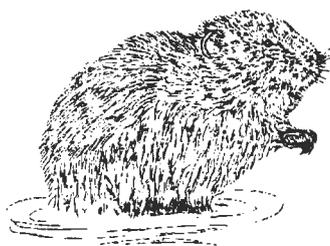


grey-brown fur long hairless tail



WATER VOLE

small hidden ears blunt rounded nose



reddish-brown fur

hairy tail



**an opportunity for
W W G
members to
"prove the experts
wrong"**

The water Vole (*Arvicola terrestris*), one of the five voles of the British Isles, is probably better known by its more familiar name, the Water Rat. Few people can now rely on seeing one as surveys indicate that 90% of the habitats once holding water vole populations, no longer do so.

Several reasons have been given for the decline of Ratty, over the last 20 or so years. These include habitat damage by river engineering, mowing regimes and general tidying up, chemicals released into waterways and predation by mink. Combined with the natural predators, pike, heron, owls, rats, raptors, weasels, stoats and domestic cats it is not surprising that animal's survival is threatened. One can no longer expect to walk beside a river and see a water vole or hear the distinctive plop as this shy animal dives for safety.

The water vole is the largest of the vole family (20cm), about the same size as the common rat (25cm) with which it can easily be mistaken, as both are good swimmers and divers. Both when wet look black but the rat has a pointed snout and erect ears, whereas the vole has rounded snout and furry ears that just protrude from its fur. The rat's tail is longer and scaly. Fur is much darker in the vole, a rich brown or black, the tail hairier and shorter. Altogether the vole is a much more rounded animal and appears furrier than the rat.

They require a riverine habitat with slow moving water and densely vegetated steep banks. Water needs to be present throughout the year, and a minimum depth of water is required. Shallow areas may contain no voles, but adjoining areas giving a good depth of water may be well used and this situation can occur in very short stretches of river. Some populations are found away from rivers where the animals live underground like moles. Food requirements are mainly

vegetarian, consisting of grasses and common reed (*Phragmites*) but fish, swan mussels, and insects are sometimes taken. They prefer the growing parts of plants and the lower stems of reeds. They need to eat some 80% of their body weight daily during their life span of about two winters. Breeding takes place between April and September, and up to five litters, of six young may be produced, but numbers and types of predator affect final population size. Those born before the end of June have the best chance of survival. Living quarters are in holes in banks 4-8 cm in size, the holes often appearing wider in relation to height.

Here in Wycombe there have been many reports of a population on the backstream on the Rye down to the sewage works, and an individual was seen at Pann Mill, but so far no definitive proof has been obtained. With the large rat population on the Dyke, swimming common rats may have been mistaken for the better-loved animal. The nearest positively identified population of voles remains downstream on the Wye at Bourne End and there is clearly an opportunity for Wycombe Wildlife Group members to "prove the experts wrong" by finding a population closer to home.

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan has set specific goals for recovery: to halt the present decline, which gives an indication of species extinction by 2003, and by concerted action to restore populations to those sites known in 1970, by 2010.

Julie Hopton

If you want to look for water voles an excellent record card describing river mammals and the signs to look for has been produced by the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Wildlife Trust. (For availability see note at foot of Sarah Bentley's article opposite)

Did you know that the River Wye is a chalk stream a globally rare habitat, supporting some of our most threatened plants and animals?

How do you think the river should be managed?

What issues should we be addressing?

The Chilterns Chalk Streams Project, a partnership of statutory agencies, water companies and local authorities led by the Chilterns Conservation Board, needs your help to identify priorities for the management of the river. The Project is working in partnership with Wycombe District Council to review and update the River Wye Study, a landmark document produced by the Council in 1992. To start this process, a workshop was held in June for representatives from organizations and societies with an interest in the river. The group discussed a range of issues including low flows, flooding, improving the river channel by decanalisation and deculverting to improve wildlife habitats and surveys for key species such as water voles. Public access and recreation were also discussed, including the development of a River Wye Walk and environmental interpretation at key sites. The next step will be to fully review the 1992 Study and develop an updated action plan. Your ideas on what should be included in this plan would be welcomed.

The River Wye was also the subject of this year's **Annual Chilterns Chalk Streams Forum**. Over 70 delegates met at the Cricket Club in High Wycombe to find out about the activities of the Chalk Streams Project. A major topic for discussion was the impact of last winter's record rainfall, with the return of many chalk streams not seen for years. Both the River Wye and its tributary the Hughenden Stream started flowing much higher in the valleys than normal, causing flooding in several areas. So, with all this extra water, you

could be forgiven for thinking that there's no need to save it. Not so, with water consumption in this region likely to increase by as much as 4% a year, we risk damaging our chalk streams and the wildlife they support. The Southeast is the driest region in the UK, but also has the highest water consumption per capita. If we are to keep healthy rivers, we will all need to use water wisely – regardless of weather conditions.

In brief :

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project – Current work on the River Wye Funges Meadow

Improvements have been carried out at Funges Meadow in partnership with Wycombe District Council and the Environment Agency, including tree planting, management of trees along the back stream to prevent over-shading and anti-slip surfacing to the board walk & dipping platform.

Holywell Mead

An archaeological survey has been done to investigate the extent of the Roman villa complex.

Water Voles

A training day was recently held for volunteers who will be helping with a survey for this rare mammal along the Wye. A survey card showing how to identify water voles and other river mammals has been produced and is available from the Chilterns Conservation Board (01844 271308).

Contact : Sarah Bentley, the Chalk Streams Officer, at the Chilterns AONB Office, 8 Summerleys Road, Princes Risborough, Bucks, HP27 9DT or e-mail sbentley@chilternsaonb.org.



*tracks of
water vole*

the River Wye
and its tributary the
Hughenden Stream
started flowing much
higher in the valleys
than normal

with all this
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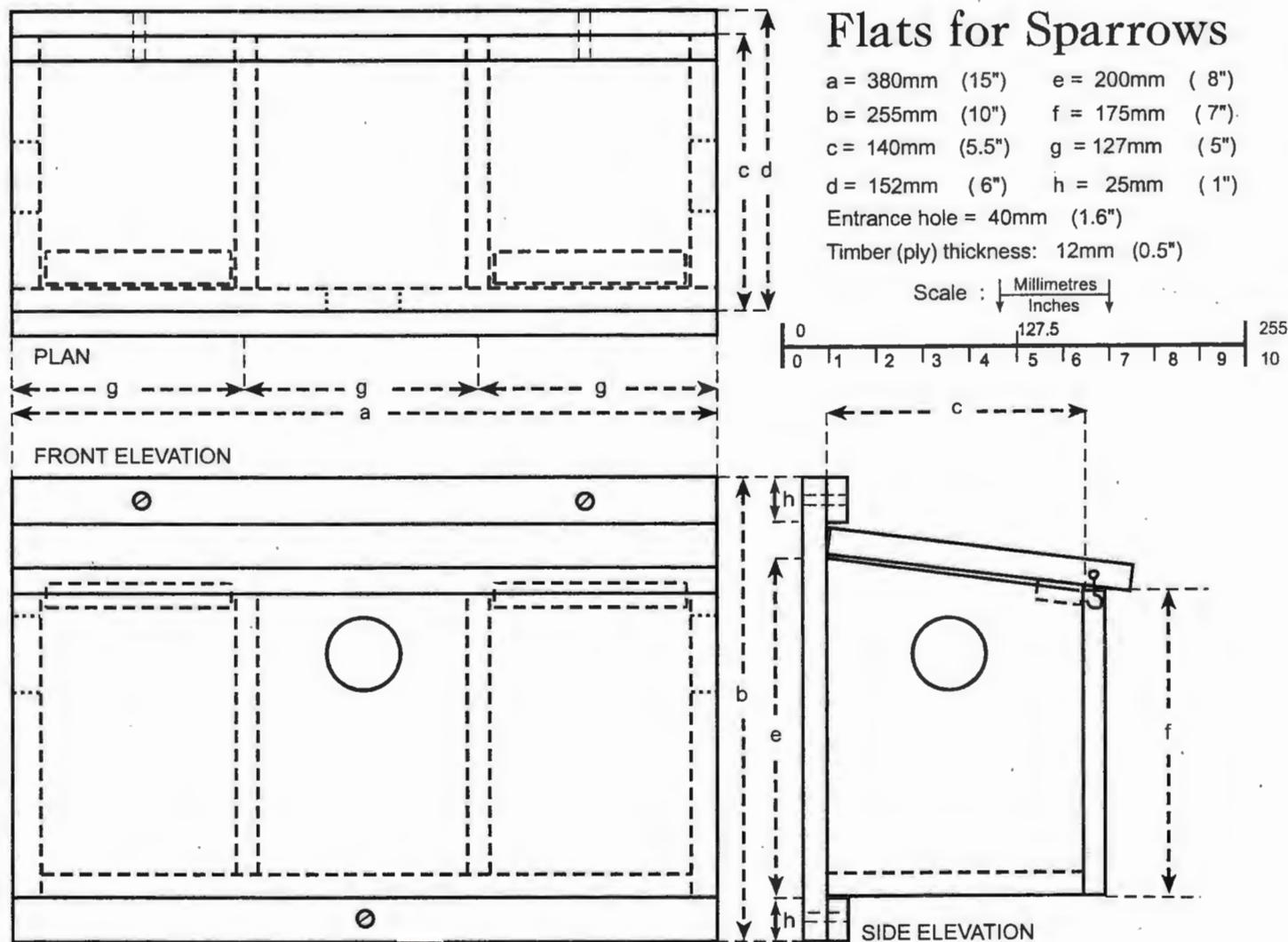
*tracks of
brown rat*

Construction Projects for Wildlife Gardeners and for schools



Over the past 20-25 years the house sparrow population has declined by about 50%. There are probably many reasons for this and the causes are currently being investigated. One possible factor is the improvement of the quality of the boxing of the eaves of modern houses - often, now, rot proof plastic, so birds can no longer get in to nest in them. If this is a significant factor we can compensate for it by providing nest boxes. One design, details below, provides three nesting compartments in one box.

12mm (1/2 inch) timber or plywood will produce a strong, but not too bulky, box. If ply is used it must be marine ply or the edges and outer surfaces must be thoroughly sealed with a clear, exterior quality varnish.

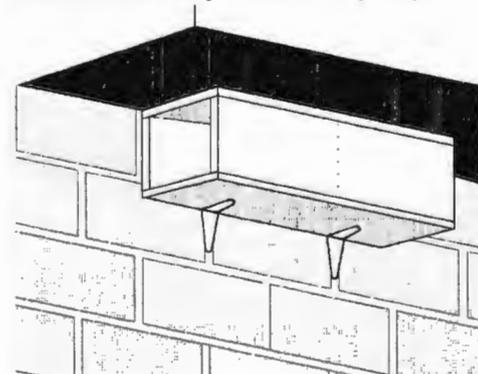


Michael Chinery in his book "The Complete Amateur Naturalist" suggests a simpler box for sparrows. It is an open ended, square tube 150mm x 150mm (6"x6") & 300mm (12") long, mounted horizontally under the eaves. Extended to 400mm (16") and given a central division it would provide two compartments for the birds to nest in. If it is fitted close under the



Tweetie-pie: My pet sparrow named after the bird in a popular song of the 1950s. I rescued it as a chick when a nest was cleared from a ventilator in the Biology lab at my school. Maurice

eaves it will be fairly well protected and should stay reasonably dry.



Lacewings & ladybirds, two very useful insects in the garden (see below), hibernate as adults. You can, as I do, leave a layer of dead leaves under your hedges for them, and many other insects, to hibernate in. Not all survive, our blackbirds see to that - they regularly search among these leaves during the winter, and some of the insects, no doubt, succumb to heavy frosts.

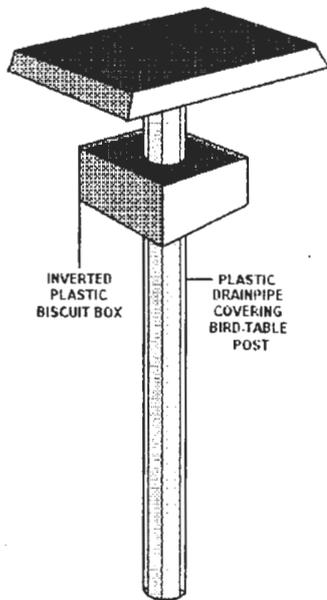
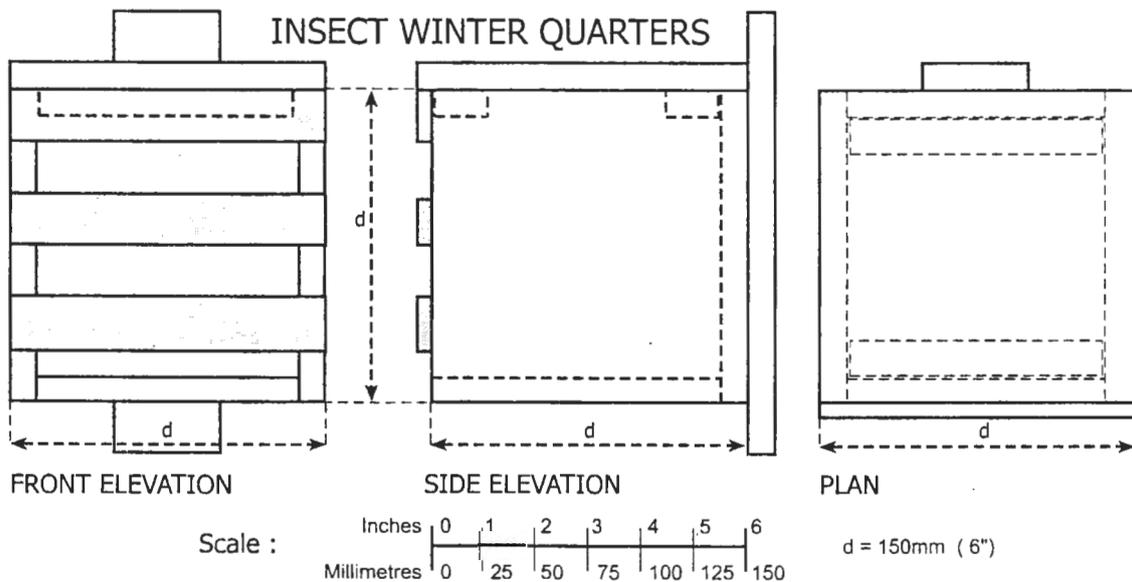
The box illustrated below will provide these insects with a safer place to hibernate in. The open, slatted front allows air to circulate but stops the loose packing, among which the insects will hibernate, from dropping out.

You can make the box with a loose top so that it can be removed for cleaning; or you can nail the top on and attach the slats on the front with brass screws so they can be removed to clean the box.

Fill the box with a loose mixture of dry leaves and straw. Attach the box, by means of the batten on the back, to a fence or post in the early autumn. Take the box down in mid-November and put it in an unheated outhouse (garage or shed) to give the hibernating insects some protection against frost.

In the spring put the box out in a sunny spot in the garden and the lacewings & ladybird should emerge and fly off to find a mate and the larvae they produce will search out and destroy greenfly in your garden.

Maurice



Bird table described on the next page

Ladybirds

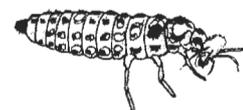


2-spot ladybirds may be red with black spots or black with red spots

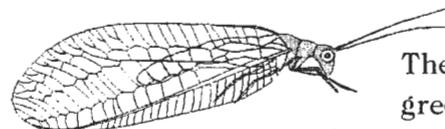
Most species of ladybird are carnivorous. Adults & larvae of the 2-spot and the 7-spot feed on greenfly & blackfly so the effort you put into making the insect hibernation box(es) described above will pay dividends.



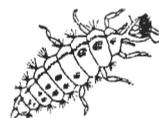
7-spot ladybird



Ladybird larva devouring a greenfly



Lacewing larvae are similar in appearance to those of the ladybird but pale in colour. Larvae of the common ladybird species are black.



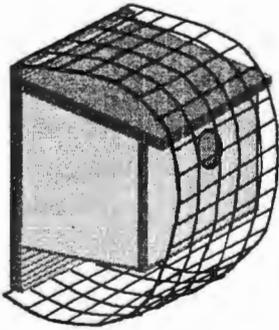
Lacewings

The larval and adult stages of these delicate green, winged insects also feed voraciously on greenfly & other small insect pests. The common green lacewing becomes pinkish fawn when it hibernates, but changes back to green when it emerges in the spring.

'I tawt I taw a Puddy Cat'

Tips on feeding and housing garden birds safely

275 million
wild animals
a year
are slaughtered
by cats.



Anti-cat & magpie
guard
on nest box

For clarity the guard has been drawn the same width as the box, but it will give more protection if it is cut wider than the box and projects by 2 or 3 squares either side.

According to a report by the Mammal Society, 275 million wild animals a year are slaughtered by cats.

To help your garden birds survive the onslaught by cats you can try out the following:

- ▶ Include some dense hedges and shrubs round the edge of your garden, where birds can take cover quickly when threatened.

- ▶ Install bird tables at least 2m (6ft) from walls, fences & trees, to minimize cat ambush points. A good, clear view from a bird-table is safer for the birds and a good view of the bird-table more enjoyable for you.

- ▶ Two-inch plastic-coated wire mesh round the bird-table prevents cats from getting in. Nail it from the roof to the table leaving one side so you can detach it for cleaning and replenishing food (light weight plastic fencing is as good & easier to cut)

- ▶ An "arch" of plastic fencing over nest-boxes mounted in trees will provide protection for the birds as they emerge from the box.

- ▶ An upturned tin, or large plastic flowerpot, halfway up the bird-table post. Deters cats from climbing it.

- ▶ If your bird-table is on a pole, grease may discourage cats from climbing up.

In his book 'The Complete Garden Bird', Les Stocker suggests covering the post of the bird-table with a length of plastic drainpipe - see previous page.

Hanging feeders such as those containing peanuts, should be at least 1

$\frac{1}{2}$ metres (5ft) from the

ground, so that cats do not reach them if they spring up. As with bird-tables, place them well away from any raised point from which cats could jump across.



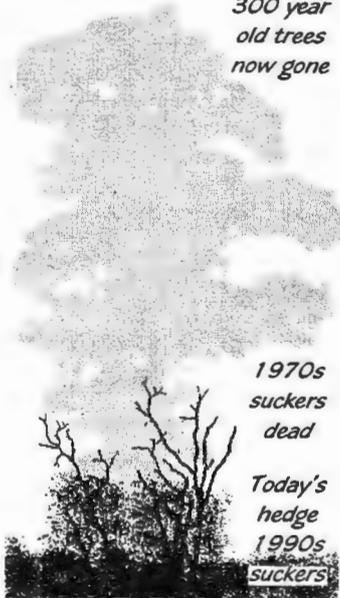
Food scattered on the ground should also be well away from cover (low, leafy shrubs) where cats can lurk.

A Catwatch electronic cat deterrent may also keep cats at bay, but it costs £50, plus cost of batteries or mains adapter and extension cable.

Pat

School Hedgerows

Hedgerow elms 1960s
300 year
old trees
now gone



1970s
suckers
dead

Today's
hedgerow
1990s
suckers

I had a request from Great Marlow School who wanted us to survey a hedge to see if it is worth taking steps to protect it. The hedge in question marks the school's boundary with Wycombe Road in Marlow.

Before the Marlow Bypass took over the nomenclature of the A404 this road was the main road between Marlow and the south, and High Wycombe and the north. Before Dutch Elm Disease struck thirty odd years ago, this particular hedge sported five or six mature English Elms (*Ulmus procera*) which could have been up to five hundred years

old. The word 'procera' by the way means lofty, & those Elms certainly were. The old trees were killed by the disease, but their suckers lived on and now provide the bulk of the hedge, together with the Ivy (*Hedera helix*), and gaps mark where the old trees once stood. Hopefully we may have found, at Bucks County Council, a Millennium Fund which will enable the school to refurbish the hedge. It's a pity that the lofty Elms will have to continue as small trees from the old'uns suckers.

Angus Idle

Wycombe District Council Ranger Service

The Ranger Service has little to report regarding any new plans, being fully occupied getting back onto sites that have been shut for the past few months through Foot and Mouth Disease. Grazing animals have been confined to their sites giving problems to owners and site management plans.

A large number of school groups have been engaged in activities on their own grounds, many due to the restrictions mentioned above, together with the regular school summer term activities of pond dipping, environmental games and nature walks.

Support for a new "Friends" group has been given in the Micklefield area for Highfield and Hanging Croft woods and progress has been made with the plan to clean up Slayter Road Pond in Lane End with the Lane End Conservation Group. Long term plans have also been realized as Wheeler End Common has an enthusiastic conservation group who have already had two Rangers lead working sessions and will continue their good work, starting on cleaning Huckenden pond on the western edge of Wheeler End Common where it adjoins Cadmore Common.

As some people will know, problems at the Depot have also caused curtailment of plans to improve electronic data gathering, but we hope to be back on track shortly. In the meantime seasonal matters rear their head. Yes it is ragwort-pulling time again. If only florists could make it popular we might find a shortage in our pastures and have a holiday. *Mike Ambrose*

Robins

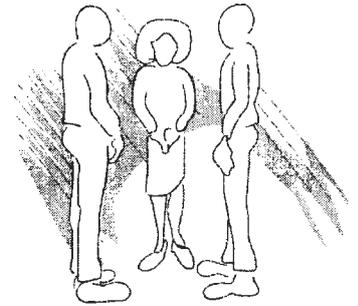
I normally see two pairs of robins in my garden, one of which regards it as their own, and the others rather furtive visitors.

Looking through the kitchen window on 27th April, I was surprised to see another – a tiny baby robin sitting on the trellis fence. I watched as he flew to the ground and explored a little on the ground, then he hopped up on one of the big stones around my new pond, and seemed to peer down into the depths. He then did something really strange – he jumped quite deliberately from the rock, straight into the deep end of the pond. As I tried, frantically, to remember where the net was, I noticed that the water was being churned up around him, and suddenly his tiny beating wings bore him up and he landed beside the pond, looking rather surprised.

For a few moments he flapped his wings & fluffed himself up, then he hopped back up onto the same rock, and looked down into the water. Then to my astonishment, he did exactly the same thing again – jumped down from the rock straight into the deep water. I think there was some water weed just below the surface, because again he seemed to hover, splashing and beating on the surface of the water, before his wings lifted him out of the pond again.

At that moment one of his parents, who had been calling frantically from the other end of the garden, caught his attention, and he flew over to be fed.

I haven't seen him since and assume he was one of the non-resident family, because the others are still coming regularly and taking away food loaded in their beaks, so hopefully some chicks are still to come. *Mary Williams*



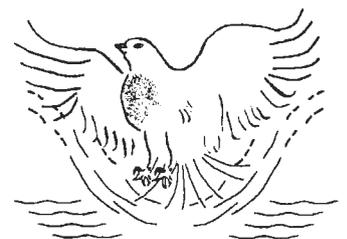
new friends groups



ragwort pulling
unfair to
cinnabar moths

he jumped
quite deliberately

straight into
the deep end



High Wycombe's Natural History

- past and present

Angela Colmer has passed given us some pages of the Journal of the High Wycombe Natural History Society with reports of field visits and a talk on rare plants in 1880 which we think worth reprinting and updating

Of particular interest is a report of a talk on one or two of the rarer flowers to be found in our woods round Wycombe by J. Britten, Esq., who wrote :

Nomenclature :

Coralroot

(no hyphen now!)

The descriptive, specific name *bulbifera* has been retained but it is now placed in the genera *Cardamine*, i.e. its Latin name is *Cardamine bulbifera*.

The family name *Cruciferae* is no longer valid under present day rules. This family's name now is *Brassicaceae*

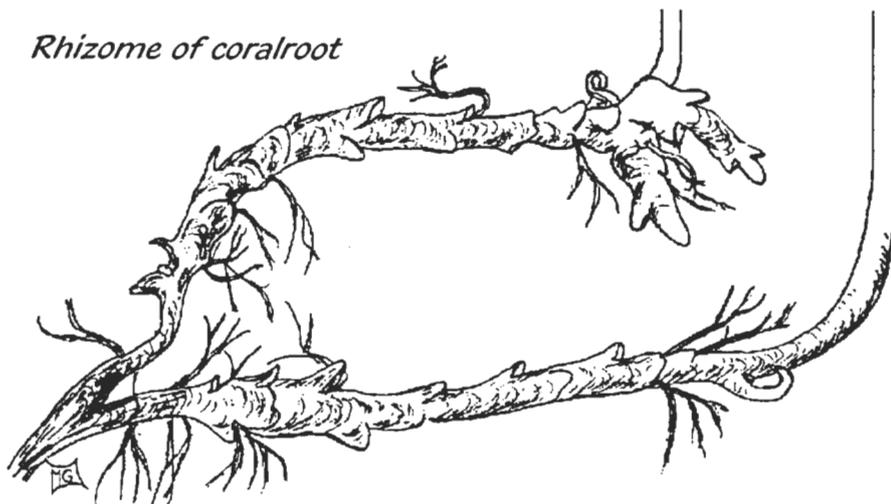
Our locality is upon the whole a favoured one for botanical treasures, and has not been so thoroughly worked as many other parts of England. The total number of British species of flowering plants is upwards of 1500; of these we have within a radius of five miles certainly 700; probably further search will discover more.

The four plants to which I shall direct your attention are the Coral-root, the Mezereon, the Lily of the Valley, and the Snowdrop, - species which I have selected because three at least of them are pretty generally known, and because they are especially interesting on account of their beauty or rarity.

The Coral-root (*Dentaria bulbifera*) is one of the rarer plants of this country, being found in but few of the English counties, and in but one Scottish locality, in the county of Ayr. It is a very elegant species, growing usually in patches in woods, and blossoming at the end of April and beginning of May. Though a tall plant, and having bright coloured blossoms, it is extremely

liable to be overlooked, except in the flowering season, as the stems and leaves soon wither, and the latter, in a young state, bear considerable resemblance to those of the Gout-weed (*Aegopodium podagraria*). The method in which the Coral-root is propagated is somewhat remarkable. Its elegant flowers seldom, if ever, produce seed; nor is this necessary, for in the axils of the leaves, are small buds or bulbs, which are described by Parkinson (an exhaustive writer of the 17th century), as being 'of a sad purplish greene colour, which being ripe and put into the ground will grow to be a roote, and bears leaves like as the bulbes of a red bulbed lillie.' These bulbs easily drop off, and are with difficulty retained upon dried specimens; to them the plant owes its specific name *bulbifera*, or bulb-bearing. The flowers are of a delicate purplish lilac colour, which, however, fades away when they are dried; their shape at once places them in the order of cross-shaped flowers or *Cruciferae*, and they have a faint, sweet scent. Both the English name Coral-root, and the Latin *Dentaria*, or Toothwort, are derived from the curious appearance presented by the root, which is long, thick, brittle, and very white, running along horizontally at a short distance beneath the surface of the ground, and somewhat resembling branches of white coral; it is covered with large white scales, which are supposed to resemble teeth: when the root is dried, however, it shrivels up, and these peculiarities are no longer observable. In olden times Coral-root, like every other plant, had

Rhizome of coralroot



its "vertues." Parkinson says that "a dram of the powder of the roote taken for many days together in red wine is exceeding good for inward wounds that are made in the breast and lungs, and it is also very beneficial to be drunke in the distilled water of the herbe called horsetail." This author appears to have first discovered the *Dentaria*, to be a British plant, for in his '*Theatrum Botanicum*,' a quarto work of about 2,000 pages, he mentions it as having been found 'at Mayfield in Sussex, in a wood called Highreede, and in another wood called Foxholes, both of them belonging to Mr. Stephen Perkhurst at the writing hereof.' He gives an illustration of it, which exhibits many features of interest. Ray, in his 'Synopsis,' takes no notice of it, nor does Dillenius, his subsequent editor. Blackstone, in 1737, records it as growing abundantly in the Old Park Wood at Harefield, Middlesex, a locality in which it may still (1880) be found; and in 1801, Turner, in his 'Botanist's Guide' mentioned it, on the authority of Mr. Gotobed, from the woods at Loudwater, between Beaconsfield and High Wycombe, a locality in which it still abounds. I have seen a specimen gathered in Dane Garden or Burland's Wood in 1852, and here it was observed by the members of this society on their first ramble in the past year. I have also seen it in the Winch Bottom, Oakridge, Booker, West Wycombe, Bradenham, and Kingshill Woods, as well as in Wycombe Park, among the trees which border the river; and the Rev. Bryant Burgess informs me that it occurs at Latimers, near Chesham. Besides the counties already mentioned, Kent, and perhaps Surrey, produce this very local species.

J. Britten (1880)

The most recent investigation on the distribution of coralroot was carried out by Alan Showler in 1993, so I have asked Alan to compare his records with those of the 1880s.

Maurice

There are lots of plants to be found in woods at Mayfield in Sussex but the exact whereabouts of the 2 named woods are not known.

It is also doing well at Old Park Wood in Middlesex.

Around Wycombe it can be found in Cut-throat Wood and Fennels Wood which could be the "woods at Loudwater" and it is still in Dane Garden (Deangarden) Wood - growing by the Ski slope!

Eric Britnell told us there was an Oakridge Wood but it has been built on so only the name now survives in Oakridge Road which led to the wood.

It is in the woods south of Ray Farm at Winch Bottom and there are 20 year old records of it in Gillfield Wood but I have failed to find it. It is still on the verge of Lane End Road, Booker Common and John Morris has half-a-dozen plants in Bottom Wood, Radnage.

Bradenham. It is in The Coppice on the west side of the road leading to Walter's Ash.

Kingshill woods. It is in all the woods in Hughenden Valley that face west, i.e. are close to Kingshill. Hughenden Valley did not exist in 1880 so he would have called it Kingshill.

Yes, it still occurs at Latimers and in several woods along the Chess Valley

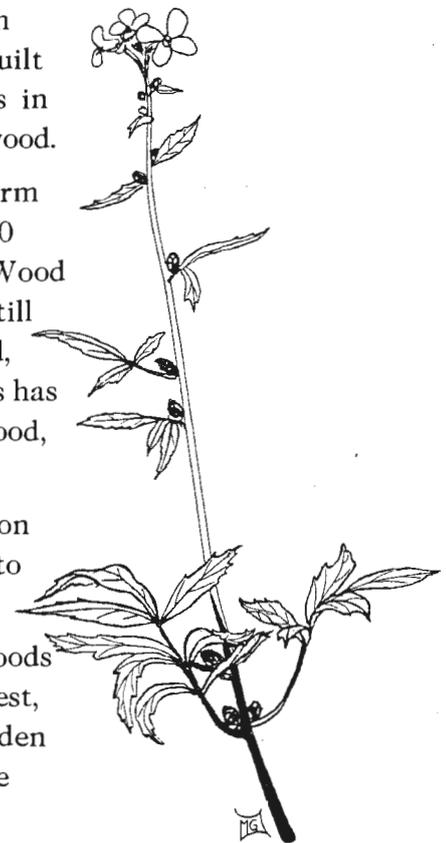
There is plenty around the Weald in Kent & there are a few sites in Surrey.

It is listed by Hooker (1870) for Ayr, as "doubtfully native", but it is not there now although it has been introduced in 1 or 2 places in Scotland.

continued over



Germinating bulbil of coralroot



Coralroot in flower

Wildlife Newsletters - Past and Present

J. Britten, Esq., then proceeded to read the following paper on a few of our local flowers:—

"Having been requested by the secretary to read a paper this evening, I have put together a few notes on one or two of the rarer flowers to be found in our woods round Wycombe. Our locality is upon the whole a favoured one for botanical treasures, and has not been so thoroughly worked as many other parts of England. The total number of British species of flowering plants is upwards of 1500; of these we have within a radius of five miles certainly 700; probably further search will discover more.

Above is a copy of a part of the original article from 1880 - they really packed it in. At a rough estimate 1200+ words per page - and no illustrations! They must have had good eyesight in those days or strong magnifiers - the illustration above is as close as I can get it to the original size.

We usually aim for about 350 words a page - although we have managed 1195 words on the two and a bit pages of this article.

Maurice

Wycombe's Natural History, past & present, cont ...

It was first recorded at Mayfield in 1634 by J Goodyer (not Parkinson who was, maybe, repeating information. So coralroot seems to be a survivor so is doing well both here and in Sussex. Some good work by J. Britten Esq.

Alan Showler

For Alan's & Tim Rich's report see: *Cardamine bulbifera* in the British Isles by A.J. Showler & T.G. Rich, in *Watsonia* (Journal of the Botanical Society of the British Isles) Vol. 19, part 4, August 1993, p. 231-245.



Pine cone nibbled by a grey squirrel

Wildlife Watch - Reports

May Trapping & Tracking on Downley Common

On a gloriously unclouded Saturday in mid-May, the Wycombe Wildlife WATCH group met uncharacteristically early. Early because Tony Speight, one of our Wycombe District Council rangers, had risen even earlier to set some small mammal traps ready for our meeting, and we didn't want the hoped-for small mammals to spend long inside the traps.

As it turned out our traps had been avoided by all the animals with the possible exception of a slug, so we became mammal seeking

detectives instead, looking for evidence of an earlier presence. The first clues were spotted on the slope by the Methodist Chapel: heaps of dry orange soil surrounding dozens of small holes - Ants!

At the top of the rise, hundreds of pine cones with characteristic squirrel nibbles, showing they had been sampled for their seeds

Great excitement at the discovery of a small burrow about 10cm deep, occupant unidentified, close by a scattering of mole hills.

Kristina Frydberg

June

The WATCH outing in June was a trip to Pann Mill on the Rye, which was very kindly opened for us by the High Wycombe Society. Everyone enjoyed looking round, and finding out how the Mill worked. We also had a tour of the very pretty mill gardens, and used the stream to pond dip, with Julie from the Ranger service

July

In July WATCH went to Gomm Valley, looking for glow-worms. This was an evening meeting and very well attended. 3 glow-worms were found around the field margins and some bats were spotted as well.

Wendy Thomas

To join in the fun of WATCH meetings - which are open to children between the ages of 8 and 12, please contact Wendy Thomas on 01494 814 068 Please note: Parents are very welcome as well

Wycombe Wildlife Group AGM Report

The AGM was well attended, with more people joining the meeting in time for the talk by Sarah Bentley, the Chalk Streams Officer, Chilterns AONB, on Chalk Streams.

It was extremely interesting, especially as it was dealing with our own area of the countryside.

Sarah explained how pollution, building etc were destroying the streams and how it was planned to save them, and put them back the way they

should be, wherever possible.

She also talked about the loss of habitat and the mink being responsible for the very serious decline in water voles; and indeed asked people to report sightings of voles.

Angus Idle thanked Sarah for a talk that gave a real insight into Chalk Streams

A raffle was held and refreshments served

Wendy Thomas



Surveying Our Local Wildlife Havens

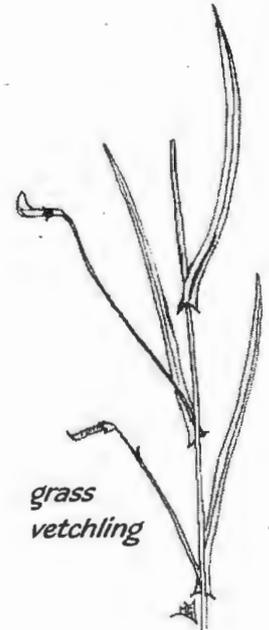
I recently received a request from residents in Hicks Farm Rise to do a botanical survey of a piece of very steep land behind Tamar, Conway and Severn Houses because it has appeared that the council want to develop it for some housing.

On 19th July I went round (or rather up and down) the site with a number of residents, who repeatedly told me how much they enjoyed the wildlife

there. Much of the area has been invaded by sycamore trees (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and blackberry brambles (*Rubus fruticosus*).

I found 119 species of flowering plants, including grass vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*), basil thyme (*Clinopodium acinos*) and flattened meadow grass (*Poa compressa*) and many other chalk grassland species.

Angus



grass vetchling

Compressor



Poa

www. & e-mails

Our web sites :

www.wycombewildlifegrp.co.uk

www.comunigate.co.uk/bucks/wwg

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73 Carver Hill Road

High Wycombe

HP11 2UB

Would you like to join us ?

If so complete this application (or a photocopy) and send to :
WWG Membership Secretary
(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)





WILDLIFE NOTICE BOARD



Did You See ?



Bee Orchid, Harry Wheate's garden, Downley
early June

Grey Wagtail, Rye Dyke, High Wycombe
29/5/01

White Helleborine Cemetery footpath
High Wycombe 1/6/01

60 Herring Gulls
Over Frances Wilding's Garden July

Stag beetle on wall, Little Marlow School,
6/6/01

Stag beetle flying, Flackwell Heath, 15/6/01

The WWG Contact list :

Chairman & Membership Secretary :
James Donald, 01494 637877

Newsletter Editor : Pat Morris, 01494 529484

Site Management Co-ordinator :
Roger Wilding, 01494 438374

Treasurer : Peter Hazzard,

Wycombe wildlife WATCH & WWG Secretary :
Wendy Thomas, 01494 814068

Biological surveys : Angus Idle, 01494 563673

Education Officer & Assistant Editor :
Maurice Young, 01628 472000

Project Officer : Post vacant

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Bassetsbury Group	Nigel Mossman	01494 462059
Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust	(Oxon Office)	01865 775476
(South Bucks Region, Vol. Reserves Manager)	Maurice Young	01628 472000
Booker Common & Woods Preservation Society	Ron Walker	01494 444824
British Naturalists' Assoc., S. Bucks Branch	Marion Hussey	01494 488336
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	Kate Mallard	01296 330033
Bucks Badger Group	Mike Collard	01494 866908
Bucks Bird Club	Roger Warren	01491 638544
Bucks Community Association	Francis Gomme	01844 274865
Butterfly Conservation	Jaci Beaven	01494 444158
Chiltern Society	Angus Idle	01494 563673
Chilterns Chalk Streams Officer	Sarah Bentley	01844 271308
Chilterns Conference AONB	Steve Rodrick	01844 271300
Chiltern Woodlands Project	John Morris	01844 271315
Council for the Protection of Rural England (m' Chilterns branch)	Sandy MacFarlane	01844 343004
David Dyson & Associates	David Dyson	01494 511278
English Nature Conservation Officer Bucks.	Jenny Young	01635 268881
Frieth Natural History Society	Alan Gudge	01494 881464
Grange Action Group	Dave Wainman	01494 716726
High Wycombe Society	Frances Presland	01494 523263
Lane End Conservation Group	Joyce Davis	01494 881295
Marlow Society	Michael Hyde	01628 485474
National Trust	Ruth Douglas	01494 755596
Pann Mill Group	Robert Turner	01494 472981
Ramblers Association	J.L. Esslemont	01494 881597
Red Kites in the Chilterns Officer	Cathy Rose	01844 271306
Princes Risborough Countryside Group	Francis Gomme	01844 274865
Saunderton Wildlife Sanctuary	Margaret Baker	01844 342188
St. Tiggywinkles	Les Stocker	01844 292292
Swan Lifeline	Tim Heron	01753 859397
South Bucks Organic Group	Howard Raimbach	01494 531214
World Wide Fund for Nature	Valerie Lambourne	01494 443761
Wycombe District Council Ranger Service	Julie Hopton	01494 421824
Wycombe Youth Action	Lynda Cockerell	01494 447250

If you have any queries about BATS contact Maurice Young 01628 472000
or the WDC Rangers: 01494 421824

