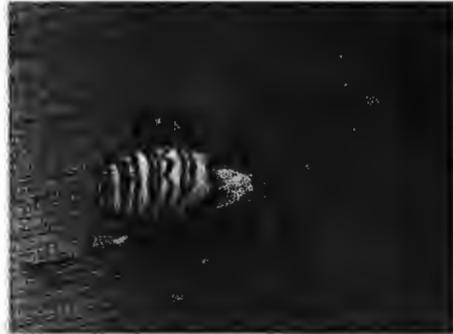


Issue 61

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JANUARY
2010



Female Wasp Spider (Argiope bruennichi) photographed by Angus Idle on the Isle of Sheppey. (See report of talk on British spiders on page 94).

PETER HAZZARD

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE DYKE

BIRDS ON THE RYE - AUG TO NOV 2009

THE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE - FOCAL POINT OF ECOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES

CHILTERN WILDLIFE EXHIBITION

FAMILY GROUP REPORTS

FLOWERS OF THE BERNESE OBERLAND

"FOOD FOR FREE" WALK

TALK ON CUBA

VISIT TO LONDON WETLAND CENTRE

TALK ON ASTRONOMY

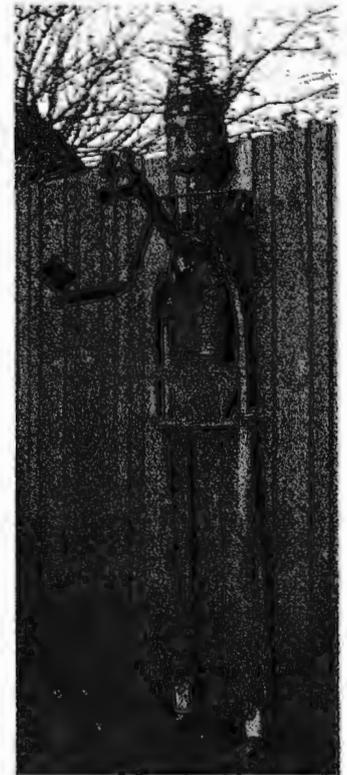
THE FASCINATING WORLD OF BRITISH SPIDERS

WWG CONTACT & MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

WILDLIFE OBSERVATIONS

LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

See page 95 for our contact details



The Twitcher (a sculpture by Gavin Darby made from finds of scrap metal, steel pipe and fire extinguishers) seen during the visit to the London Wetland Centre - see page 93. Photograph by Julie Hopton

Registered Charity No : 1075175



Wycombe Wildlife Group is a registered charity with the following objects:

To conserve the environment, mainly using volunteers, for the benefit of the public.

To educate the public in the principles and practice of conservation.

Within **Wycombe District** the Group:

Surveys wildlife habitats and their associated flora and fauna, giving those taking part plenty of opportunities to increase their knowledge and identification skills.

Helps manage local wildlife sites, undertaking practical conservation work on local nature reserves.

Provides advice to schools, other bodies and individuals on all aspects of wildlife.

Stimulates public interest in wildlife and its conservation.

Organises walks, talks and other activities covering a wide range of wildlife topics.

Provides advice on and encourages wildlife gardening.

Organises activities for young children and their parents.

Co-operates with other groups with similar aims and supports the Environment Centre on Holywell Mead.

Wycombe Wildlife News

is published 3 times a year to promote the Group and wildlife issues and inform members and the public of its activities.

Editor : Pat Morris

Produced by : Roger Wilding

Illustrations : Frances Wilding

Printed by : Design & Print,
Wycombe District Council

Printed on environmentally friendly paper

COPY DATE

Friday, 5th March 2010

Registered Charity No : 1075175

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Editorial - Gains and losses of the past year

The past year will be remembered by all wildlife enthusiasts as the year of the Painted Lady, when these butterflies invaded Britain in their thousands. It was a sight never seen before, and not likely to occur again. As far as I know, no other wildlife event has had such an impact over the past year in Britain. The good start experienced by butterflies in general did not persist into the autumn, when repeated spells of damp weather cut short their earlier success. In my garden at least, except for the odd Red Admiral or Speckled Wood, they failed to appear after the third week of August. The story of bird numbers could be said to be similar, though their absence from gardens later in the year had an entirely different reason. It was an absolutely bumper year for fruits of all kinds, and birds had no need to visit gardens when there was an abundance of natural food in the open countryside. It was only at the beginning of December that they started to appear on garden feeders, when gales and heavy rain wiped out the remaining seeds and berries. According to the Met. Office, last November was the wettest on record. Fungi, on the other hand, enjoy wet weather, and there have been scores of Fly Agaric and other fungi to be found in woodland. In my garden, they are even developing on my rope railings.

For Wycombe Wildlife Group, the past year will perhaps be remembered for two reasons. The first is the start of a programme of joint events with the South Bucks Region of BBOWT, and the second is the sad and sudden loss of our Treasurer, Peter Hazzard. Peter was key to the success of our Group, and his death was a bitter blow. Let us hope that the coming year will find a solution to filling the vital role that Peter played in the efficient running of our Group.

Pat Morris

Peter Hazzard 1927-2009

Peter became Treasurer to Wycombe Wildlife Group in 1998, succeeding Jean Johnson. Although not known personally to all members, he was a familiar figure to members attending AGMs, where he presented his reports on the Group's finances. Those attending our talks at the Environment Centre will remember him as the person who collected the admission fees at the door, before joining everyone upstairs to listen to the speaker. Peter's advice on, and control over, the Group's finances was highly valued by his fellow trustees, and his act will be a hard one to follow.

In former years, Peter was a keen sportsman, and it was hard for him when he became increasingly crippled by arthritis, and could only hobble about with a stick. He had looked forward to the hip operation to correct his problem. It was a cruel stroke of fate when, having recovered from the operation, he should die of a heart attack soon afterwards. We extend our deepest sympathy to his widow, Diana.

Views expressed in this 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.

Improvements to the Dyke

Wycombe Wildlife Group has always had close associations with the Dyke, ever since the Group's launch walk, which started from there 20 years ago. Wildlife walks to look at local flora, fauna, and aquatic life have regularly started from outside the Environment Centre, the purpose-built meeting place alongside, which the Group helped to establish. Wildlife talks, organised jointly with the South Bucks Region of BBOWT, take place bi-monthly within the Centre, so you could say the Dyke is the hub of local wildlife group activity.

In view of the existing wildlife value of the Dyke and its surroundings, it was pleasing to note the results of an £18,000 jointly-funded project between the Environment Agency and Wycombe District Council. The project, which was completed in the summer of 2009, improved areas for fishing for both able-bodied and disabled anglers, and created areas of marginal vegetation and reed beds.

This action will undoubtedly enhance the environment for the fish, as well as many other creatures, increasing overall wildlife value and interest. It will also soften the banks of the Dyke and make them visually more attractive to walkers. The angling platforms and access paths could also be used by visiting children for supervised pond-dipping, and it is an ideal spot to have your first go at fishing.

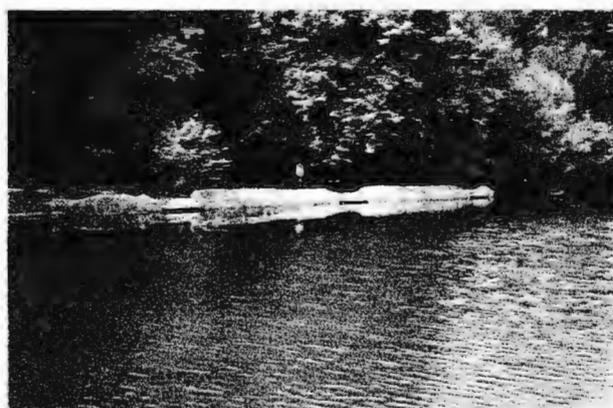
The improved facilities and habitat can be enjoyed by both young and old, and it is of benefit to the whole community. The Environment Agency and Wycombe District Council are to be congratulated on their initiative.

Our thanks go to Jenni Balmer, an Environment Agency Technical Fisheries Officer, for her help in compiling this report.

Pat Morris



Photographs of the improvements to the Dyke (provided by the Environment Agency)



Birds on the Rye - Sep to Nov 2009 (recorded by Roy Barkes)

	16 Sep	14 Oct	22 Nov		16 Sep	14 Oct	22 Nov
Mute Swan	15	21	20	Magpie	5	13	6
Mallard	205	258	281	Blackbird	3	7	11
Coot	28	31	27	Mistle Thrush	3	5	4
Moorhen	12	19	24	Redwing			22
Tufted Duck	13	27	33	Fieldfare			18
Little Grebe	2	2	4	Great Tit	4	4	5
Great Crested Grebe			1	Blue Tit	7	8	6
Black-headed Gull	55	146	88	Long-tailed Tit	14	6	2
Common Gull	1	7	2	Robin	4	3	5
Grey Wagtail	1		1	Jackdaw	9	2	
Nuthatch	3	2	2	Carrion Crow	14	21	5
Wood Pigeon	64	84	126	Red Kite	2	4	1
Chiffchaff	2			Great spotted Woodpecker			1
Kingfisher	1		1				

The Environment Centre

Focal point of ecological activities



The mission of The Environment Centre on Holywell Mead is to raise awareness and understanding of environmental issues, and to promote actions leading to changes in behaviour and lifestyle that will result in a sustainable future. Its location on Holywell Mead is at the heart of an area of great historical interest and environmental diversity.

The Centre's upper meeting room is home to a working Honey Bee hive and a Bumblebee nest, both managed by the High Wycombe Beekeepers' Association; these prove to be a great attraction to adult and young visitors alike. In addition, there are art and craft activities for children, a nest box to watch via a web-cam in the spring, natural history artefacts to investigate and nature films to delight.

Open to the public at weekends during school term-time and daily during the school holidays, the recently refurbished meeting room is also available for local schools, colleges and other groups to hire for undertaking specific ecological, geographical and historical studies.

The location of the Centre makes it an ideal starting point to follow the trails that have been developed by volunteers. Related leaflets provide information about the history of the whole area of the Rye and Holywell Mead, the highlights of the watercourses running through the area, and both the identities and

importance of some of the 1,500 trees growing in the vicinity.

Exhibitions relating to a diverse range of environmental issues, supported by local enthusiasts and local businesses alike, are staged regularly in the exhibition hall. There is also a wealth of reference material available to those seeking information about such issues.

The Centre is supported by a number of Group friends, other independent organisations which have a regard for good environmental practice, and individual volunteers who give their time and expertise to make this resource available to local people.

The Environment Centre can be contacted via its web site www.ecobuzz.org.uk or by telephoning the manager on 01494 511585.

Ann Coulthard

Editorial comment

Since this article was written, the future of the Environment Centre has once again become uncertain. It would be most unfortunate if the Centre were to close, particularly at a time when protecting the environment is a global issue and everyone needs to be educated on the importance of thinking globally but acting locally on the whole range of environmental issues.

Chilterns Wildlife Exhibition at Frieth Village Hall Sunday 25th October 2009

The Frieth Natural History Society held an exhibition to celebrate Chilterns Wildlife, on Sunday 25th October 2009. The event took place from 12 Noon to 4pm in Frieth Village Hall. The room was packed with exhibits, with stunning photographs of local wildlife stretching down the centre of the hall, and stalls set up by wildlife and conservation groups round the edges. Wycombe Wildlife Group, represented by Angela Rees and myself, chose wildlife in members' gardens as their theme, with photographs in illustration. Among the other exhibits were live Hornets and a dissected

Wasps' nest. The star of the show was undoubtedly Rose, the Noctule Bat, dutifully accepting live mealworms fed to her on tweezers by Julie Hopton from the WDC Woodlands Service.

Thanks to members for supplying photographs for Wycombe Wildlife Group's display, and to Angela for supporting me at this event.

It was a most friendly and enjoyable occasion.

Pat Morris

Reports of Wycombe Wildlife Family Group Meetings

Saturday 12th September 2009

Making bird feeders

The Wycombe Wildlife Family Group met on 12th September at the Environment Centre where Julie showed us how to make a range of bird feeders. The accompanying photo shows my son Jake holding peanuts knotted onto string in one hand and, in the other hand, a fir cone on the end of a piece of string, and a plastic soft-drinks bottle. Bits of bird food can be jammed into the fir cone and the string used to tie it onto a tree branch etc. The plastic bottle can be partly filled with birdseed. Windows are cut into the sides of the bottle to allow access to the seed and a short stick is passed through the bottle to provide perches.

String at the top enables the bottle to be hung up.

After finishing the bird feeders, we went over to the playground and eventually made it over to Pann Mill to look for some birds. Jake and his sister, Mikki, took an interest in the ice cream van. I didn't have quite enough money in my wallet for two ice creams. With absolute seriousness, and not the slightest hint of jest, Jake (aged 6) commented that I really should try to earn more money from my work.

Peter Bailey



Jake holding up his handiwork

(Photograph by Peter Bailey)

Saturday 12th December 2009

Making Christmas decorations

The final 2009 meeting of the Family Group took place on 12th December at the Environment Centre. About 30 people dropped in to make Christmas decorations and this resulted in a worthwhile and very enjoyable session. Some of the attendees were adults who came along without any children to make free wreaths. This is very strange as I would have thought our title of "Wycombe Wildlife Family Group" would have made people realise that the event was intended for children

with their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles etc., I saw only a couple of familiar faces, but this popular annual event has tended to attract people who we see just at Christmas.

Peter, Mikki and Jake did a sterling job of helping me clear up at the end of the session and made some beautiful wreaths too. Many thanks Peter and children.

Julie Hopton

The flowers of the Bernese Oberland

A talk by Frances Watkins on Friday 9th October 2009

Northern Europe is divided from the south by a line of mountain chains, the product of mighty geological forces that buckled the land like so much pastry. The westernmost of these chains is the Alps, and in the heart of the Alps lies the Bernese Oberland, a land of snow-capped peaks and ice-carved valleys. Glaciers push down from the peaks, in the past reaching far down into the valleys. As they retreated, they left behind them corries and hanging valleys, lakes and marshes and, of course, terminal and lateral moraines, composed of detritus scoured from higher regions. From each glacier, melt waters form a stream which cuts its way down to lower levels. Such was the introduction Frances Watkins used to set the scene for her talk about the flowers of the Bernese Oberland.

These mountains have distinct regions of botanical interest. At the lowest level, around the 1000 metre contour, are the wide valleys where the villages are situated. Here and on the lower slopes are the hay meadows. Pictures taken in June showed fields dominated by a range of wild flowers, including the pink of Bistort, the purple of Meadow Clary, the white of Spiked Rampion and the yellow of Yellow Rattle. The last of these is of particular importance because its parasitic habit tends to suppress grasses and allow the flowers to flourish. Frances also showed the effect of a summer snow storm, blanketing the uncut hay. When the snow cleared, the shorter stemmed plants seemed unaffected and the taller plants, though bent, could still be cut by scythe.

The slopes above the hay meadows are largely dominated by the forest of Norway Spruce. Here, in the cool and the shade, are to be found such specialities as One-flowered Wintergreen, Herb Paris, Yellow Wood-violet, Wolfsbane and the saprophytic Bird's nest Orchid. Above the stand of trees, at about the 2000 metre level, are the alpine meadows, which are snow covered for much of the year and grazed to a short sward by cattle during

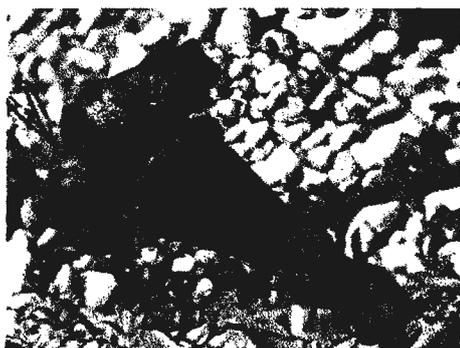
the summer months. Here can be found such species as the low-growing Alpine Cinquefoil, Bird's-eye Primrose, Oxlip and Trumpet Gentian.

At the highest levels, reaching up to about 3000 metres, are the rocky crags and scree slopes, where in places the Mountain Avens may be found growing in abundance. As a snow patch melts, the delicate fringed Alpine Snowbell emerges from the ground left free. This region is also home to many species, including the orange-throated Alpine Toadflax, the Trumpet Gentian and the appealing Moss Campion. Many of these species have their counterpart in northern Britain, though they are absent from the countries between. This discontinuous distribution is due to the shrinking of the ice cover at the start of the present inter-glacial, which forced cold-loving plants to withdraw either to higher latitudes or to higher altitudes.

The last picture projected onto the screen was not of a flower, but a pair of alpine cows. The wonderful diversity of alpine flora, Frances explained, was entirely dependent on these beasts and their kind. The valleys are too cold for any form of arable farming. The economy of the mountains is necessarily pastoral, with cattle being housed in the valley bottoms in the early spring and then being driven to the high alpine meadows in the summer, whilst the lower hay meadows are used to produce winter feed. This way of life is threatened by the familiar economic pressures on the younger generation. The government is fortunately aware of the danger and provides financial incentives to keep farmers on the land, as well as encouraging other sources of income-providing activities, such as the skiing industry.

Frances Watkins' talk was instructive as well as entertaining, illustrated by beautiful photographs of the landscape and the flowers, and was much appreciated by the audience.

John Hoar

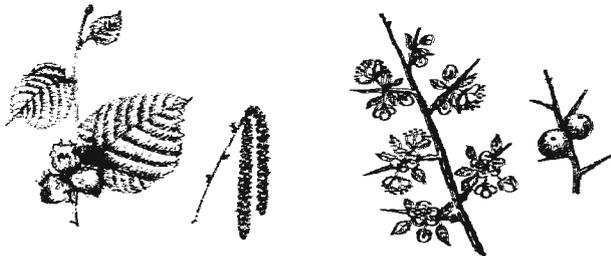


*Photograph of a Trumpet Gentian
(not taken in the Bernese Oberland)*

“Food for free” walk - Sunday 27th September 2009

Remembering the enjoyable “food for free” talk given to the Group by Juliet Gudge in September 2005, when we sampled some of her home-made treats, including sloe gin, we asked her to organise and lead a walk to see some of the natural food sources to be found all around us. 15 people, including 4 children, turned up for the resulting walk, which took place on Sunday 27th September 2009, starting and finishing at Frieth Village Hall.

Our circular walk followed footpaths around Frieth, providing some delightful views of the local countryside and a wide range of natural history sightings, in addition to the main theme of the walk. We found a few fungi, saw the larva of the Grey Dagger moth on a Whitebeam leaf and watched 15 Red Kites following the plough across a field and swooping down to feed, presumably on worms coming to the surface. I expect they have learnt to do this by observing and copying other bird species that we regularly see feeding in this way.



Throughout the walk we were on the lookout for natural food sources. Juliet pointed out trees and shrubs such as Sweet Chestnut, Crab Apple, Whitebeam, Beech, Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Guelder-rose and Elder, climbing, scrambling and thicket-forming plants such as Hop, Blackberry, Dewberry, Raspberry and Gooseberry and flowering herbs such as Wild Marjoram and Wild Basil. She explained how all of these plants can be used as “food for free” sources.

Alan Gudge stressed the importance of being able to identify plants which are poisonous to humans and, during the walk, he pointed out Spindle, Yew, Black Bryony, Bittersweet, Lords-and-Ladies and Purging Buckthorn.

Thanks Juliet and Alan for organising and leading the walk, which was of great interest to all of the adults and children who attended.

Roger Wilding

The Hazel (far left) and the Blackthorn (near left) produce edible fruits, but the fruits of the Spindle (right) are poisonous.



Talk on Cuba by Elizabeth Kerry - Monday 13th July 2009

Elizabeth explained that her trip to Cuba was not a normal foreign holiday, but an opportunity to experience the way in which Cuban society has dealt with its economic isolation from the western world. Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean, being 750 miles long and up to 130 miles from the Atlantic coast in the north to the Caribbean Sea in the south.

The island's political and economic history have shaped its social outlook. The communist revolution in 1959, under the leadership of Fidel Castro, led to the United States cutting off all trade links, forcing Cuba to trade with the former communist states of Eastern Europe, especially the U.S.S.R. Trade was again hampered by the demise of communism within Europe, since when Cuba has concentrated its efforts on improving social standards at the expense of the acquisition of wealth. Cuba now has a very high standard of literacy (100% in most of the younger age groups), has good levels of basic health care and, compared with other islands in the region, infant mortality rate is low and life expectancy is high. The Cuban people are still poor, as was illustrated by Elizabeth's pictures of Cubans bartering goods in the

street, and American cars from the 1950s being kept running by the locals using their ingenuity. Luxury items such as electrical goods were not readily available and a television could cost more than a flat. Elizabeth described her venture away from the main urban area into the hot and humid highlands, which were mainly forested, but supported tropical plants such as Mimosa, Hibiscus and Poinsettia.

Our thanks go to Elizabeth for this opportunity to learn more about this unusual island.

Paul Bowyer

Editorial comment

Whatever our views on Cuba's politics, this talk and television programmes about the island show the efforts made by the government there to maintain a sustainable lifestyle. The unemployed are paid by the government to undertake tasks which benefit the community, resulting in litter and graffiti being removed before they become a problem. Crime levels are low and the people are happy and content. Apart from the gas-guzzling old cars, a problem that can only be overcome by the relaxation of the current trade embargoes, many other countries could learn a few environmental lessons from the Cubans.

Visit to the `London Wetland Centre at Barnes - Saturday 28th November 2009

Editorial comments

Following the Group's visit to the London Wetland Centre, two articles were submitted for the newsletter. Both articles have been included, as they illustrate how the way wildlife centres interact with their visitors can result in very different reactions by equally keen naturalists.

A view of the London Wetland Centre by Michael York

I was born in a small village in the Midlands in countryside which I loved. University and a career took me to London, where I spent my working life. I did not like London then, and my opinion has not changed since. Consequently, a trip to the metropolis was not my idea of an ideal day out! With that in mind, read on if you wish.

Fortunately, the weather was brilliantly sunny, if rather chilly, when 14 of us arrived at Barnes. Most of us started with a coffee then set off on the two walks that Barnes has to offer.

I found the Wetland Centre to be a curious mixture of a sculpture exhibition space, a man-made wetland area with manicured tarmac paths, and an instructional theme park. It seemed more suited to Londoners for taking their children out than for serious bird watching activity, but I suppose there is nothing wrong with that. Situated in a city, surrounded by flats, and directly under the flight path to Heathrow, with jumbo jets thundering overhead at one per minute, it's not for me. (I suppose I have been spoilt - the beautiful RSPB site on the Conway Estuary with Snowdonia in the background is in another world, and the local Spade Oak Nature Reserve is hard to beat.) Then there were the hides! Hideously large structures competing with the tower blocks around and about. Clearly no bird watcher had a hand in the design of these - the lower windows were too low to sit

comfortably with binoculars and the upper windows too high to use a telescope. We were amused by the signs which said "keep quiet - birds have ears". With jet planes frequently roaring overhead, they can't be serious.

The restaurant, however, was another story. Although the menu was limited, the food was excellent, and we enjoyed our break from the cold wind, whilst we ate our meal and listed the birds we had seen.

Despite what I said, it was an interesting and enjoyable day. Unfortunately, probably due to the cold and the time of year, there was little out of the ordinary to see. Nevertheless, we saw some 30 bird species in the wetland area - a Snipe was the only unusual one. We missed a Water Rail, as it flew just below the hide we were in - those windows again. In the themed area, we were much amused by the Mandarin Ducks displaying. (They must have misread the season). We also enjoyed the noise of the Whistling Ducks and the antics of many other species. It was feeding time (for the birds) as we made our way out and set off for home around 3.30pm.

Finally a word of thanks to Pat Morris, for organising a very smooth day out, and to Chris, our driver, who took us safely there and back.

Michael York



Photographs of Whistling Ducks and a Mandarin Duck taken by Michael York during the London Wetland Centre visit. (He left the sculptures for Julie Hopton to photograph - see the next page).



Birds listed by Michael York during the visit (in no particular order)

Snipe, Ring-necked Parakeet, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Great Tit, Teal, Shoveler, Pochard, Heron, Black-headed Gull, Common Gull, Canada Goose, Shelduck, Wigeon, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Wood Pigeon, Crow, Coot, Moorhen, Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe, Lapwing, Magpie, Cormorant, Mute Swan, Eider Duck, Black-bellied Duck, Whistling Duck, Hooded Merganser, Carolina Wood Duck, White-winged Duck, Plumed Whistling Duck, Black-necked Swan and Chioe Wigeon.

An alternative view of the London Wetland Centre by Julie Hopton

I thought it was absolutely wonderful to find that the Wetland Centre is hosting the "Love London Recycled Sculpture Show" until April 2010. It was an unexpected bonus to a trip to my favourite haven, where I go in times of stress. It is such a beautiful place to go at any time of the year. Good for the soul too!

It was brilliant to see how the artists had produced such an array of beautiful sculptures from things that we all just discard. I was entranced by a fantastic Heron made from shopping trolleys, that had been dumped in a local canal, before being rescued and recycled by the sculptor. Another vibrant piece was a multi-coloured bird, produced from carrier bags and bike rims, following a campaign started by a 16 year old girl in Plymouth who wanted to rid the city of plastic bags. Nice to see that the younger generation is taking on-board the recycling ethos. We could all learn something from this.

You can really lose yourself at Barnes, and I think that it is a twitcher's paradise. Even the aircraft noise doesn't seem to stop the birds, including wintering Bitterns and Cetti's Warblers, going there. It is so educational for people of all ages and abilities. There is always something different to observe there.

So much thought has been put into planning, not only the wetland habitat, but also the bird hides and pathways, to ensure that everyone can take part, both able-bodied and those with a disability. The viewing slats in the hides have been placed low enough for use by children and wheelchair users, and the lift in

the Peacock Tower hide allows everyone to go right to the very top for a fantastic bird's-eye view. Hearing loops also allow those with hearing difficulties to participate.

The observatory provides a list of birds visiting the site on a daily basis, and people can use their own binoculars, or borrow one of the telescopes, to get a closer look across the lake and scrapes. You can stay dry and warm, if you don't want to brave the weather.

The new bat house has already been visited by bats, and the Wetland Centre has recorded 8 species passing through the site. The open water and margins make good feeding ground for them during the summer months. Bat walks are a regular event during the warm evenings, educating the public. This could be the first time some people have seen bats flying, or heard their echo location calls on a bat detector.

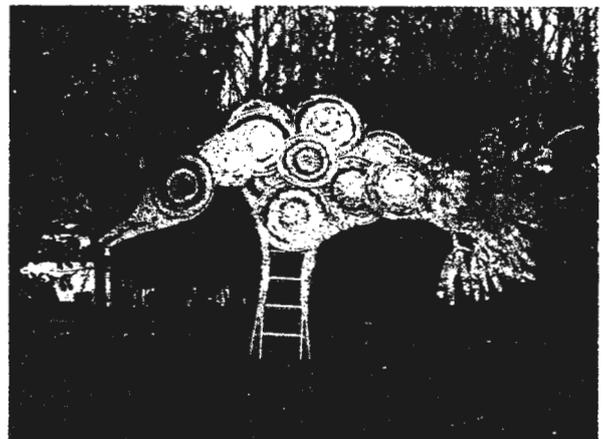
I was also amazed to find out, walking round the site, that the WWT have been involved with the Water Vole Project, and that over 100 Water Voles have been released around the site.

It is amazing to think that this was all created from a disused reservoir and gravel pits right in the middle of a built up area. It is a wonderful tranquil oasis amongst the hubbub of Barnes, and is the largest man-made wetland area in Europe, and a SSSI into the bargain!.

Julie Hopton



*Heron by Ptolemy Elrington.
Made from shopping trolleys
dumped in a canal.*



*Water Bird by Maggi Squire.
Made from plastic bags and
salvaged bike rims.*

*Photographs by
Julie Hopton*

Astronomy - a talk by Angus Idle on Monday 9th November 2009

This latest talk by our learned group member Angus Idle featured his great interest in astronomy. His first point was that his subject did not exclusively concern stars, but also embraced, amongst other celestial subjects, the moon, constellations, planets, asteroids, comets, Messier objects, galaxies and the universe.

Constellations are groups of stars visible from the earth. Names are given to the patterns made by the stars, such as Orion or Leo, although the individual stars may be at varying distances from the earth. The area of the sky, which these patterns occupy, is also referred to as a constellation. To find these areas in the sky, it is necessary to look at a map. The map varies according to one's position on the earth and the time of year. The base line for mapping celestial bodies is called the ecliptic. This is the perceived path the sun takes across the sky during the year, and on the map, this is the line around which the celestial bodies are shown.

Asteroids are small objects orbiting planets within our solar system. Comets are bodies which appear to have a tail because of the effects of solar radiation upon the comet's nucleus. A comet's nucleus may consist of loose collections of ice, dust and small rocky particles. Their size may vary between a few hundred metres and tens of kilometres across.

Planets are those celestial bodies which orbit a sun and have their own gravitational system. Within our own solar system, there are planets that comprise either gas or rock. Those made of gas tend to be the larger. Some of these planets can be seen quite readily from earth. Five can be viewed comparatively easily by the naked eye. Angus told

us that, in Tanzania, the planet Venus (the brightest planet in the sky) was so apparent, that it cast a shadow. Mercury, he said, is best viewed at twilight and is difficult to find. It has a strange orbit, and one side never receives any sunlight. Jupiter, we were told, has a great red spot that can be seen from earth, and has numerous moons. Jupiter is the second brightest planet. Saturn has a number of rings consisting of ice particles, rocks and dust. To view these rings from earth, a pair of binoculars or a telescope is needed. The fifth planet which may be viewed without help is Mars.

Messier objects are other bodies which can be seen in the sky, initially catalogued by a French astronomer called Messier. The objects are indexed using an "M" prefix and include M31 (the Andromeda Galaxy), and M6 (the Butterfly Cluster), an open cluster of stars in the constellation of Sagittarius.

Angus went on to point out some of the incorrect perceptions of celestial bodies. He maintained that the moon was rarely studied carefully and its crescent shape is often illustrated incorrectly in children's books and even on the national flags of many countries. He added that the astrological star signs of the Zodiac are those constellations through which the sun seems to pass during the astronomical year. Only 12 of these signs are used in astrology; Ophiuchus, which is between Sagittarius and Scorpius, is missed out.

Thanks go to Angus for his engaging talk. I hope, during better weather, our Group may have some of his practical instruction on astronomical phenomena during the coming year.

Paul Bowyer

The fascinating world of British spiders

A talk by Martin Woolner at the joint meeting with BBOWT (South Bucks)

Friday 11th December 2009

Martin informed us that there are about 500 species of spider in Britain and that, of these, about 40% are species of Money Spider. The British list of Arachnids, which includes all the Spiders, also incorporates some 2,500 species of Mites and Ticks, 25 Harvestmen, 25 False Scorpions and 2 True Scorpions. In the first part of his talk, Martin mentioned some of the common, as well as some of rare, protected species of Spider, and described

some of the categories such as Jumping Spiders (which do not make webs), Orb-web Spiders, Daddy-long-legs Spiders, and Water Spiders (of which there are only two species in Britain).

The illustrations used for the talk included quite a few photographs taken through a scanning electron microscope, to which Martin had access. These very high magnification images showed parts of the

bodies of Spiders in such detail, we could even see organs, the use of which is currently unknown. Whilst the majority of those interested in natural history are familiar with the Spider's use of a spinneret for making a web, I doubt if many of us were aware that a Spider actually has a number of spinnerets, of varying sizes and shapes, to meet different needs. They can produce either strong or weak threads and a sticky substance, to make some parts of their web suitable for catching prey, and other parts easy to get through without getting caught up. During the interval, there was the opportunity to look at live Spiders under a stereo microscope, either direct through the lens or projected on the screen.

The second half of Martin's talk was devoted mainly to the identification of Spiders, and it became clear that this was not an easy task for anyone without

specialist knowledge and a microscope. The identification of many species involves determining the number of eyes (8 or 6) and studying the layout and appearance of those eyes. We were told that, in some cases, the egg sacs can help to identify a species. At the end of the talk, Martin mentioned the Wasp Spider, a new species in Britain, which first appeared in the SE corner and has started to expand its range. This was particularly interesting, because WWG's Angus Idle, who was present, was able to tell us that he had seen and photographed this species preying on Grasshoppers and Lizards on the Isle of Sheppey.

Our thanks go to Martin for his really interesting talk, which really did broaden our knowledge of British spiders.

Roger Wilding

Editorial comment

Unfortunately, lack of space prevents the inclusion in this issue of a report on Rodney Sims' talk on the BBOWT College Lake nature reserve and the follow up visit to the reserve. It will appear in the next issue in May.

To join Wycombe Wildlife Group please complete the form on the right (or a copy) and send to the Membership Secretary, 73 Carver Hill Rd, High Wycombe, HP11 2UB. Subscription £6 per annum if paid by Standing Order or £7 per annum, if paid by cash or cheque.

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WILDLIFE NOTICE BOARD



Observations



September

11/09 4 Commas - Penn Wood
 25/09 2 Stock Doves - Carrington Road
 27/09 Grey Dagger moth larva - on walk at Frieth
 27/09 15 Red Kites following a plough and swooping for worms - on walk at Frieth

October

12/10 Pied Wagtail - on roof in Amersham Hill Drive
 22/10 Pair of Roe Deer with fawn - in Carver Hill Road garden
 28/10 Painted Lady - Amersham Hill Drive
 End Oct Badger crossing road - Carver Hill Road

November

06/11 Dozens of Fly Agarics - Common Wood
 07/11 Red Admiral - Amersham Hill Drive
 20/11 Tawny Owl calling - Amersham Hill Drive
 23/11 Song Thrush singing - A404 Terriers
 End Nov 60 Parrot and 40 Snowy Waxcaps on lawn - Deeds Grove
 End Nov onwards Redwings - widespread in gardens

December

01/12 Brambling - Carver Hill Road
 02/12 Chiffchaff - in Deeds Grove garden
 03/12 Grey Wagtail - in Deeds Grove garden

Contacts for Wildlife, Conservation & Environmental Groups in Wycombe District

Bassetsbury Group	David Reed	01494 439665
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Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust	(Oxon Office)	01865 775476
Booker Common & Woods Protection Society	Rita Luxton	01494 436807
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	Jane Craven	01296 330033
British Trust for Ornithology (Regional Rep.)	David Lee	01844 347576
Bucks Invertebrate Group	Mike Palmer	01296 624519
Bucks Badger Group	Mike Collard	01494 866908
	Mobile (at any time)	07887 955861
Bucks Bird Club	Neil Foster	01296 748597
Bucks Community Association	Francis Gomme	01844 274865
Bucks County Council Countryside Initiatives Team	Mark Bailey	01296 382389
Bucks Invertebrate Group	c/o BMERC	01296 696012
Butterfly Conservation	Nick Bowles	01442 382278
Chiltern Society	Angus Idle	01494 563673
Chilterns Chalk Streams Officer	Allen Beechey	01844 355502
Chilterns AONB	Steve Rodrick	01844 355505
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Chilterns Countryside Group	Julie Rockell	01628 526828
Chilterns Woodland Officer	John Morris	01844 355503
Downley Common Preservation Society	Bill Thompson	01494 520648
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 Beekeeping Association	Sheila Borwick	01494 739313
High Wycombe Society	Frances Presland	01494 523263
Lane End Conservation Group	Bärbel Cheesewright	01494 882938
Marlow Society	Bob Savidge	01628 891121
National Trust	(Office)	01494 755573
Natural England Conservation Officer	Rebecca Hart	01189 392070
Pann Mill Group	Robert Turner	01494 472981
Prestwood Nature	Tony Marshall	01494 864251
Ramblers Association	John Shipley	01494 862699
Risborough Countryside Group	Francis Gomme	01844 274865
St. Tiggywinkles	Les Stocker	01844 292292
Swan Lifeline	Wendy Hermon	01753 859397
The Environment Centre on Holywell Mead Co-ordinator		01494 511585
Woodland Trust (voluntary speaker)	Michael Hyde	01628 485474
Wycombe District Council Ranger Service	Julie Hopton	01494 421825