

WYCOMBE

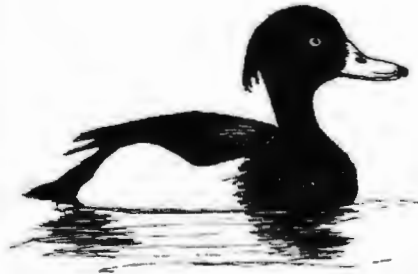


WILDLIFE GROUP

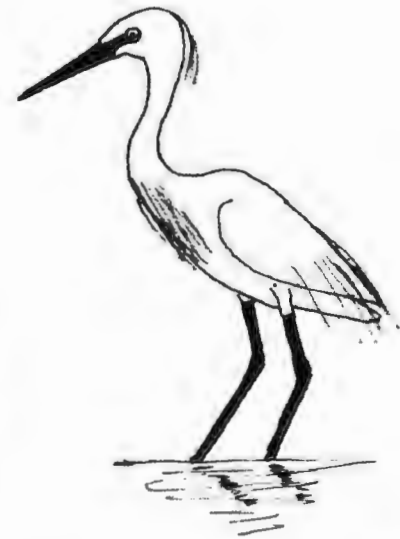
Issue 62

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MAY
2010



Tufted Duck (left) gets a couple of mentions in this issue of Wycombe Wildlife News.



Little Egret (above) has been seen at Kings Mead. (See observations on Page 12).

- WILDLIFE AT LITTLE MARLOW WALK
- BIRDS ON THE RYE - JAN TO MAR 2010
- BURNHAM BEECHES TALK AND VISIT
- A HOLE IN THE GROUND TALK
- BUTTERFLY IDENTIFICATION TALK (PART 2 OF REPORT)
- WETLAND FLORA TALK
- WHAT WAS IT?
- FROM THE KITCHEN WINDOW
- IF WINTER COMES, CAN SPRING BE FAR BEHIND?
- ARE WE CHANGING OUR BIRDS?
- THE FAMILY GROUP CLOSES
- WWG CONTACT & MEMBERSHIP DETAILS
- WILDLIFE OBSERVATIONS
- LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS

Oblong-leaved Sundew (Drosera intermedia) (below) has been found at Burnham Beeches. (See Page 4).



See page 11 for our contact details

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.

Co-operates with other groups with similar aims.

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 and Pat Morris

Printed by : Design & Print, Wycombe District Council

Printed on environmentally friendly paper

COPY DATE

Friday, 23rd July 2010

Registered Charity No : 1075175

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Editorial - The Group moves on

Well, it has happened! At the end of March, the Environment Centre on Holywell Mead finally closed its doors to the public, and became yet another victim of the credit crunch. Lack of funding, and insufficient volunteer support, meant that the Centre could no longer continue. For Wycombe Wildlife Group, it means the loss of its "home", and that it has had to seek other, more expensive, venues in which to hold its events.

However, all may not be permanently lost, for Wycombe District Council may use the whole Holywell Mead site as a "Community Leisure Facility" with the Environment Centre building becoming available for public hire. So Wycombe Wildlife Group may be able to use its old "home" once again for meetings, if the cost is affordable. In its community leisure facility role, the accommodation would no longer be the ideal focus of habitat study it was. Environmental issues can be studied anywhere, and, indeed, I understand a new base is being sought for this purpose, but will the varied wildlife areas found around the former Environmental Centre be found elsewhere in Wycombe?

Other news is more cheering. James Donald, who was our Membership Secretary, agreed to fill the role of Treasurer, left vacant by the sad death of Peter Hazzard. Paul Bowyer and Karen Roberts will be taking over the Membership Secretary duties. Paul is also taking on the role of organising the Group's outdoor activities. So despite the closure of the Environment Centre, the Group moves on.

Pat Morris

New members

We welcome the following new members and look forward to seeing them at future events:

Marion Hart
Sally Raine

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.

Wildlife at Little Marlow walk - February 27th 2010

Little Marlow Gravel Pit is a major bird watching site within Buckinghamshire. It is well observed, and more than 160 bird species have been recorded in the area. Its attraction is mainly water birds, but the surrounding bushes, trees and fields add to the variety of species that can be seen.

At the end of February, there are still overwintering wildfowl on the lake, as well as flocks of smaller birds to be found in the surrounding vegetation. It is a little too early in the year for passage migrants, and some months before any summer visitors appear.

A large number of people turned up in the Spade Oak car park for this walk. It began to rain as we started off along the path around the lake, so our heads were looking down, rather than up searching for birds. Although a few Redwings were seen on the fields to the east of the lake, visibility was not very good at this stage, and only the common water birds were noted. These included Coot, Moorhen, Mallard, Great Crested Grebe and Heron. Smaller birds could be heard in the trees but, at this stage, they could not be identified. As we skirted the southern part of the lake, the clouds cleared and, by using a telescope, many wildfowl species could be seen on and near the gravel spit, which is where most birds congregate on the lake. Numerous Shoveller, Pochard, and Tufted Duck were seen, and a few Teal, Gadwall and Wigeon. Also, in this area, there were lots of Lapwings, their colours glinting in the sun. Greylag and Canada Geese could also be seen, as well as an Egyptian Goose, probably an escapee from a local collection. There are always large numbers of gulls at Little Marlow, and three different species were identified amongst the day's congregation - Black-headed, Common and Lesser Black-backed. Also seen were Shelduck and a number of Cormorants, which roost on the lake's island.

We continued our walk along the western side of the lake, and the smaller birds in the undergrowth and in the trees were now identifiable, because the sun had come out. Great Tit, Blue Tit, Blackbird, Chaffinch and Robin were seen, and a Wren was first heard, and then spotted, in the reed beds at the edge of the lake.

As we left the lake side and headed for the footpath which leads back to the car park, we saw more species in the gardens of the few houses that we passed. There were Greenfinches, Dunnocks, Magpies and a Pheasant, which was feeding on bird food supplied by a householder. The walk back to the car park should perhaps have revealed more bird species amongst this lightly wooded area, but someone did see a Sparrowhawk and Jackdaws, and Carrion Crows could be heard and seen in the surrounding fields.

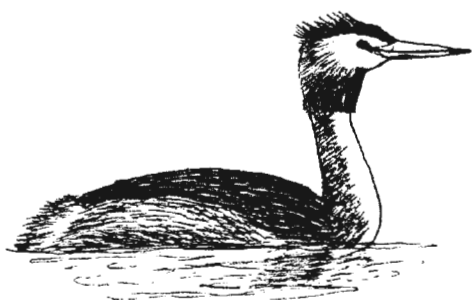
When we arrived back at the car park, I realised that we had not seen a Swan and a number of other species that I would have expected, so I walked down to the River Thames. Here there were a large number of Mute Swans on the river, being fed. I also saw a few Pied Wagtails and small flocks of Long-tailed Tits and Goldfinches feeding in the trees. There were still some notable absentees from my species list, but these could be seen on another visit.

Little Marlow is nearly always a good place to visit for birds. It offers a large variety of some of our commoner species and, at times, spectacular sights of large flocks. Thanks to John Hoar for organising and leading the walk.

Paul Bowyer

Editor's note

The talk, scheduled for 11th January, which should have preceded this walk, had to be cancelled, due to bad weather. It will now take place at 8pm on Monday 10th May at St Francis Church Hall, Terriers.



Great Crested Grebe



Shoveller

Birds on the Rye - Jan to Mar 2010 (recorded by Roy Barkes)

	<u>Jan 18</u>	<u>Feb 22</u>	<u>Mar 11</u>		<u>Jan 18</u>	<u>Feb 22</u>	<u>Mar 11</u>
Mute swan	31	36	42	Robin	8	6	7
Mallard	187	223	231	Nuthatch	2	2	4
Tufted duck	18	27	23	Long-tailed Tit	4	5	31
Coot	26	34	31	Blue tit	9	8	17
Moorhen	19	24	23	Great tit	4	2	5
Little grebe	5	6	6	Coal tit			2
Grey heron			1	Wren		4	3
Kingfisher		1		Goldcrest	2		2
Cormorant		1		Chaffinch	12	6	18
Canada goose		3		Greenfinch	4		2
Black headed gull	265	240	235	Bullfinch		1	
Lesser black backed gull	19	8	16	Pied Wagtail	3	12	2
Common gull	3	4	1	Grey Wagtail		2	
Herring gull	4	8	5	Great spotted Woodpecker	2	1	2
Mistle thrush	14	8	6	Carrion Crow	9	4	12
Song thrush	3	1	4	Jackdaw	18	12	4
Blackbird	12	14	14				

Burnham Beeches talk - 12th February 2010

The talk at Holtspur on Burnham Beeches by Senior Ranger Kevin Davies, covered the history of this important wildlife site, from its purchase by the City of London as a public open space to its present National Nature Reserve status. The 1100 acre reserve comprises semi ancient woodland with ancient Beech pollards, heathland, wood pasture, ponds and valley mire. Birch is a problem on the dry heathland but, like the *Rhododendron ponticum* on the site, it is controlled. Cows and Exmoor ponies are being used to graze where possible, the ponies bring good for controlling regrowth in the mire area. Pigs have been used for wood pasture grazing, but there are none permanently on site at present. Pollarded trees live about 5 times as long as those not pollarded, so, as

well as Beech, other species are now being pollarded. This action is usually restricted to about half of the top growth in any one year to prevent the tree from dying, although some trees are deliberately pollarded badly to create additional dead standing timber.

The relocation of the café and toilets near the Victory Cross car park has kept most of the visitors to this central area, leaving the majority of the reserve relatively undisturbed.

Thanks to Kevin for his talk – a good introduction to the follow-up guided walk around the reserve.

Roger Wilding

Burnham Beeches visit- 6th March 2010

(This was a follow-up to the talk on 12th February- both events organised by BBOWT)

Blessed with a fine morning, some 25 members of BBOWT and WWG assembled for a guided walk around a small part of Burnham Beeches National Nature Reserve. Our leader, an Assistant Ranger for the reserve, which is owned and managed by the City of London, was able to show us representative areas of each of the important habitats to be found there and tell us about the management needed for each.

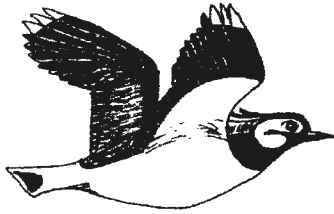
Burnham Beeches is known for its dead-wood habitats, which are necessary for the survival of a number of rare fungi, bryophytes, beetles and other things. As surveys continue, the reserve is fast becoming recognised as one of the most important in the country. Because of its age, these habitats have existed continuously, and maintaining them is very important. Ancient beech pollards are another example, and the oldest of these are now dying back. There are few middle-aged specimens, so much

research has been done on how to pollard (not as easy as you might think!). The results are now much better than they were.

From trees we moved to ponds, admiring the Mandarin ducks and drakes, as we did so. On to the heathland, a very fine example - here, surprisingly, was a splendid stand of Junipers. From here we moved on to the bog area, with its boardwalk (although the latter was closed for the amphibian and reptile breeding season). A success story here - it had been hoped that the improvements to the bog would result in the return of the long-lost Sundew. It did, but not in the area prepared for it, but in a wheeltrack close by.

Our thanks to Hannah Rose, our guide for the morning, for a most interesting walk.

Alan Showler



Lapwing

A Hole in the Ground

A talk by Rodney Sims at the Environment Centre on 14th September 2009

(We were unable to include this report in our last issue due to a lack of space)

The title 'A hole in the ground' referred to the original state of the disused chalk quarry, which has become one of BBOWT's foremost nature reserves, College Lake.

In his talk, Rodney traced the history of the reserve's development, in which he had been heavily involved. His first interest in the site was in 1984 when he read about the remains of a mammoth being discovered on the site. The quarry had been worked for a long time, and had been significant to palaeontologists, even before the last world war, because this area marked the extent of the ice flows during the last Ice Age. As working stopped, more interest was shown in the geological features that the quarrying had exposed. Rodney volunteered at this point to help with the geological investigation, which included sorting the contents of 200 boxes containing bones found on the site, as well as further excavation of the site. Since this time, the exposed chalk cliffs have been studied and 29 layers of rock have been identified.

The original plan, when the chalk excavations had finished, was to return the site to agricultural land. Castle Cement were persuaded to opt for a wildlife reserve instead. Under the leadership of BBOWT's Graham Atkins, a plan was formulated to develop a diverse reserve, which incorporated a deep lake and agricultural land. By 1991, 30,000 trees and shrubs had been planted, islands had been created in the lake, shingle beaches developed and floating nesting rafts introduced. A lot of ingenuity had to be used to achieve this, as funds were not plentiful. Discarded materials were used to build the nesting rafts, and a bird hide was made from an old builder's hut and placed close to the lake. These developments have been hindered at times. Two major landslips occurred that have blocked drainage channels, rabbit fences have had to be erected to protect vegetation, and the foot and

mouth outbreak all provided challenges to the team of volunteers.

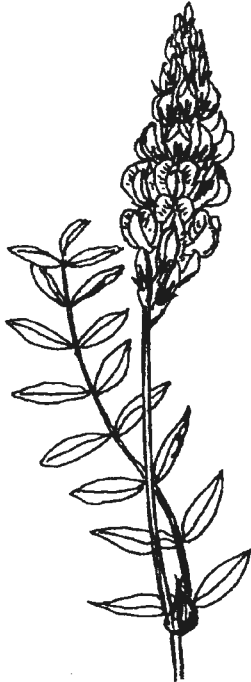
Rodney told us about the "Arable Weed Project". A large area has been devoted to growing annual wild flowers that flourished when crops were grown in traditional ways. The fields are grazed after cropping by sheep. Another project, devoted to dragonflies, involved providing ponds and ditches that added to the lake itself, increasing the variety of habitats suitable for dragonflies and damselflies. The main project at College Lake is the provision of educational facilities. There is a building housing some of the geological finds from the reserve, another is a museum of farming and wildlife and, in another, there are displays about the reserve's history and development. We were also told about the new visitor centre due to open in 2010.

During Rodney's talk, we were shown a lot of slides showing some of the flora and fauna which benefit from College Lake's wide range of habitats. Fungi included White Saddle and Hairy Earthtongue, and butterflies and moths included Green and White Letter Hairstreaks, and Leopard and Small Elephant Hawk moths. Some of the birds shown were Ringed Plover, Great crested Grebe and Lapwing and, amongst the wildflowers shown, were Sainfoin, Clustered Bellflower, Meadow Clay and White and Marsh Helleborines. Whatever one's interest in wildlife, a visit to College Lake will provide a worthwhile experience.

Thank you Rodney for providing an insight into how much time and effort has been devoted to creating such a fine nature reserve.

Paul Bowyer

The follow-up visit to College Lake on Saturday 17th October provided an opportunity to enjoy a guided walk around this wonderful reserve.



Sainfoin



Hairy Earthtongue
(*Trichoglossum hirsutum*)

Butterfly identification

This second part of the report on the talk by Nick Bowles on May 11th 2009 covers species seen during the summer. (Part 1 of the report was included in Issue 60.)

During Spring, there may be some confusion between the Dingy and Grizzled Skippers. The undersides of the Dingy are completely brown, whilst the Grizzled has well defined speckled markings. Later in the year, there are greater problems trying to differentiate between Small and Essex Skippers. The Essex has a black underside to the tips of its antennae, whereas on the Small they are brown or orange. The Large Skipper may fly at the same time as the Essex and Small, but can be distinguished by an orange and brown pattern on the upperside of its wings. The Silver spotted Skipper may be identified by the silver spotted pattern on the underside of its wings.

The Black and White-letter Hairstreaks provide another difficult problem in butterfly identification. Bucks is one of the few counties where Black Hairstreaks can be found, so practice is required. The underside of the White-letter has a continuous black line at the base of the hind wing, whereas the Black has a series of black blobs. The Brown Hairstreak is more likely to be confused with butterflies within the Brown family, but can be distinguished by its pointed wings and orange patches on the uppersides of its forewings.

Brown butterflies in Bucks include the Ringlet, which has no orange markings, but has a series of rings or ocelli on the underside of its wings. In contrast, the Meadow Brown is orange/brown with one eyespot on the underside of its wings, with a single white dot within it. The Gatekeeper appears more orange, and has a similar mark to the Meadow Brown, but with 2 white dots within the eyespot. The Small Heath is another species with a false eye marking on the underside of its wings. Its wings are always kept shut when at rest.

The Small Copper is not a member of the Brown family, but it could be confused with them because of

its colour. It has an orange forewing and a contrasting brown hindwing, with an orange band across its base. The orange forewing shines through to the undersides of its wings. Another orange/brown butterfly is the Duke of Burgundy, which has delicate orange spots on the upper side of its wings, and a series of silver marks on the undersides, which also have a broken white fringe.

There are two of the larger species of Fritillary in our area, the Dark Green and the Silver Washed. Both are large, orange butterflies with brown spots. The Dark Green has slightly concave wings and, on the underside of its wings, has dark green patches and silver spots. The Silver Washed has pointed wing tips and a sheen of silvery stripes across a lighter green background on the undersides of its wings.

The Brown Argus and the female Common Blue are also orange/brown butterflies, and it is difficult to differentiate between them. On the underside of the hind wing, the Brown Argus has 2 spots, which line up to form a colon. The female Common Blue has a more irregular pattern of spots, and often has blue diffused around the upper side of its body. The male blue butterflies may also cause identification problems. The Common Blue has a violet tinge to the upper sides of its wings, the Chalkhill is a paler blue, and the Adonis has a vivid colour, which is unmistakable. The Adonis also has a black and white chequered fringe. The Holly Blue flies a lot higher than the other blues; the female has black tips to the upper sides of its wings, and the underside is silvery blue with streaked black spots. The Small Blue has dark upper sides to its wings, with only a hint of blue. The undersides are pale and silvery, with a few small black spots. Only the Purple Hairstreak may be confused with the blues, but this has an iridescent purple marking on the upper side of its wings and pointed tail at the base of its hind wing.

Paul Bowyer



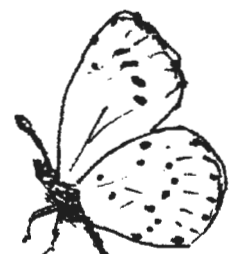
Ringlet is dark brown, with white borders to wings, which have a series of eye-spots on undersides.



Meadow Brown is orange/brown, with a broad pale band on hindwing. Has single white dot in eye-spot.



Gatekeeper is more orange, and smaller, than Meadow Brown. Has Y-shaped pale band on hindwing, and 2 dots within eye-spot.



Holly Blue - the black spots on its blue underwings distinguish it from other blues of this size.

Wetland flora

A talk by Roger Wilding at the Environment Centre on 8th March 2010

Roger introduced his subject by listing types of wetland environments with which plants are associated. These included bogs, marshes, the margins of rivers, canals and lakes, ponds and other wet or damp habitats. These categories formed the basis of his talk. Each habitat was considered in turn, with an explanation of how its physical conditions effect ecological differences and, subsequently, the variation in flora.

Upland bogs, Roger pointed out, have few nutrients and are usually acidic. Subsequently, the flora is limited to specialist plants. There are around 30 species of Sphagnum moss which grow in specific types of bog and, indeed, are responsible for their creation and development. In some cases, the moss can blanket deep water to such a thickness, that it can be walked on. Insectivorous plants such as Sundews and Common Butterwort thrive in bogs because they offset the lack of nutrients by consuming small insects. Tussock grasses, rushes and sedges (including Cottongrass spp.) are also characteristic plants of bogs. Bog Asphodel, which stores its food supply in a bulb, can be found in large numbers in some bogs, and Pitcherplants, alien insectivorous plants from North America, have been introduced in others. The rare Great Sundew can be found in New Forest bogs, and, on the wetter areas of heathland, Heather is replaced by Crossed-leaved Heath as the dominant plant.

Roger spoke about the flora associated with river banks, pointing out that upland rivers tend to be cold and fast-flowing, with few nutrients and little oxygen for plants to grow. The sediments stripped away from the banks, and the oxygen collected as the water splashes over rocks, help plants to become established further downstream. Mosses, lichens and ferns become established in damp shady gorges and in wet woodland, but it is the fertile lowland river banks that support the largest range of plant species. Purple-loosestrife, Gypsywort, Water Figwort, Water Mint and Monkeyflower are some of the many colourful flowers found there. Many other plants, which are not restricted to wet locations, such as Hemp-agrimony, Great Willowherb and Small Teasel also thrive on the river banks. Flooding regularly occurs on flat river plains,

whereas the upper stretches of chalk streams may dry up completely for long periods of time. As rivers approach the sea, they may be subject to tidal influences, and the banks may be denuded of plantlife, leaving just wet mud.

Canals are similar habitats to lowland rivers, but they normally have slow-flowing water. As with rivers, the bankside vegetation can be affected by the wash caused by boats. Disused canals can support plants across the whole width of the watercourse, but plants are often shaded out, when bankside trees are not managed. Sedges such as the Greater Tussock-sedge, Water-cress, and umbellifers such as Hemlock Water-dropwort, Hemlock and Fool's Water-cress can often be found alongside canals, as well as in other marginal habitats.

Wet meadows may be found alongside lowland rivers, and the plants growing there must be capable of withstanding periodic flooding. Such meadows can be found alongside the upper reaches of the Thames and around the River Ray. Plants typical of such places are Ragged-Robin, Cuckooflower and Marsh-marigold. In upland areas, Globeflower tends to replace Marsh-marigold.

Marshes and fens are habitats where plants are regularly being inundated with water and, again, there are many plants associated with such places. Cholsey Marsh, alongside the Thames, is a reserve where Summer Snowflake can be seen. Grass-of-Pamassus can sometimes be seen at Parsonage Moor in Oxfordshire, although it is more common in the North. The Bulrush, or Reed-mace, is associated with reed swamps but where Alders or Willows become established in such wetland habitats, natural succession can result in the development of wet woodland known as Alder or Willow Carr. Species such as Royal Fern, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil and Devil's-bit Scabious are often found in fens and, in East Anglia, Marsh Fern and Milk-parsley may be found. Drainage ditches in fens often contain interesting plants such as Marsh Pea, Water-soldier and Greater Bladderwort. The latter is carnivorous, catching small water invertebrates by means of underwater bladders.

(continued on next page)



Common Butterwort (left) and Great Sundew (right) are both carnivorous plants found in acid bogs. They obtain nutrients by consuming small insects.



Wetland flora talk (continued)

Roger continued his talk by telling us about plants found around lakes and ponds. The native White and Yellow Water-lilies are both common, as is Bogbean. Mare's-tail can be seen locally growing in the Dyke on the Rye.

Ponds do seem to suffer from vigorous, introduced plant species, which can become invasive and crowd out less vigorous native species. New Zealand Pigmyweed and Indian Balsam cause the most problems in our wetland areas, but other species such as Parrot's-feather and Canadian Waterweed are causing problems. Other problems in rivers, lakes and ponds are occurring as a result of excessive nutrients entering watercourses from agricultural and

road run-off. The subsequent excessive growth in algae can smother other plants.

The last wetland habitat covered in Roger's talk was saltmarsh. This habitat develops close to the sea and is home to plants which have fleshy leaves and deep roots to enable them to tolerate the salt deposited by the incoming tides. Amongst the plants found in saltmarshes are Sea-purslane, Golden-samphire, Sea Wormwood and Dittander.

Roger's talk was a comprehensive study of his subject, with lots of photographic examples, and references to local areas where some of the plants could be found. The planned walk along the Jubilee River will be just as informative. Please try to attend. Thank you Roger for a captivating evening.

Paul Bowyer



Grass-of-Parnassus (left) is on the species list for the BBOWT Parsonage Moor reserve, but it is more common in the north of the UK.

Beech Fern (right) is a rare fern found in wet woodland on acid soils, normally on the banks of streams with its roots reaching the water. Despite its name, It does not grow in beechwoods.



Nest boxes

Wild creatures are great opportunists, and don't always use objects for the purposes for which they are intended. Birds, especially Robins, are well-known for nesting in strange places, such as old kettles, the pocket of a gardening jacket hanging in a shed, and even car engines. I had a Robin, which, unobserved by me, had entered my utility room and used an old children's sand bucket on the windowsill to build its nest. Ideal from the safety-from-predators point of view, but a problem when we wanted to go on holiday and had to leave the window open so the bird could complete rearing its young in our absence. Another, more surprising nest in my garden, was built by a Wren in a bat box. The box was 3 metres up on a north-facing wall, with an entrance slit at the bottom at the back – ideal for bats (which never used it). The Wren somehow constructed its nest inside and reared its young quite successfully, landing on the house wall to gain entrance each time. My latest discovery is a lovely little nest in my bee box. Not constructed by bees, (who had ignored the shallow saucer of enticing

syrup just within, and the soft kapok in the second chamber), but by a mouse. Unobserved by me, (not surprisingly, because it was placed under a hedge, out of view), a mouse had built itself a nest, a lovely soft ball of woven grass and kapok, and lined with a few dead leaves. It must have passed a very comfortable winter in there.

For nesting solitary bees, it is best to place their tube/hollow stem-filled boxes facing south so their larvae can benefit from the warmth of the sun. For hibernation, insect boxes are better facing north, so that they can remain cool and undisturbed during the winter months. These boxes are generally filled with loose materials, such as bark mulch, dried grass, or dead leaves, but don't be surprised if any of your helpful artefacts are not used for the purpose for which they were intended. Our wildlife has always found its own solutions in the struggle for survival.

Pat Morris

What was it?

On March 16th, while walking in Common Wood, I spotted a small brown butterfly (or so I thought) crossing my path, low, near the ground, and disappearing into the brambles. But what was it? Not the right habitat or time for the rare Duke of Burgundy, too early for any Skippers. Indeed too early for any butterfly of that colouration and size. So I consulted our butterfly guru, Paul Bowyer, but he had no idea, and referred me to the Butterfly Conservation web site.

Then Roy Barks reported having seen 8 small dark butterflies, about the size of a Hairstreak, flying around the tops of the Silver Birches, just off the main chalk path in Common Wood. This was the day after my sighting, so I contacted Paul Bowyer again, and bingo!. He knew at once what they were. The fact that they were flying around the tops of the Silver Birches gave him the essential clue - Orange Underwing moths! Both 16th and 17th March were warm, sunny Spring-like days - ideal conditions for these day-flying

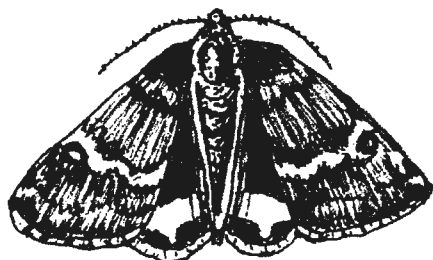
moths, hence the fact that we saw them. Silver Birch catkins are the larval food, which explains why the moths were flying up among the branches.

Paul failed to find the Orange Underwing moth on a subsequent visit to Finemere Wood (on April 5th) where he had seen them before. The weather conditions at Finemere Wood were not ideal, however, being cool and overcast. Still, there is a new dot on the map for this moth at Common Wood.

Footnote

There is also a Light Orange Underwing - impossible to distinguish from its Orange Underwing cousin without capture and close examination - but since its foodplant is Aspen, and the Aspen grove at Common Wood is some distance away from where our Orange Underwings were spotted, we have assumed we have made the correct identification.

Pat Morris



Orange Underwing (Archiearis parthenias)

Wing length: 16-19mm

Flight time: March to April

Where and when seen: around the tops of Birch trees, when it is warm and sunny.

Larval food: Birch catkins

From the kitchen window with Phil Page

The Red Kites are coming, the Red Kites are coming! Well, they've been flying over and occasionally dropping down into the gardens here for some time now, and I think they may have been nesting nearby in Little Tinkers Wood.

But recently they have become a little bolder. One spent some time perched at the top of my neighbour's Wild Cherry tree just a few weeks back, and, more recently, there were three dropping into a Scots Pine two gardens away. I wondered if they were looking for a nest site, but imagine that they would be too close to the houses, as all the gardens are less than 100 feet long.

The Greater-spotted Woodpeckers have been coming regularly during the winter for the blocks of lard (with new added insects), and I've seen the female too. Last summer there were two males visiting.

Great, Blue, Long-tailed, and Coat Tits have all been turning up during the cold weather, along with Chaffinches, Goldfinches, a pair of Fieldfares and a Redwing. There have also been a few Dunnocks and House Sparrows and the occasional Blackcap and Bullfinch. In the middle of March, I saw the first Bumblebees and a male Brimstone butterfly in my garden.

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

(Shelley)

With the coldest Winter months for 30 years (December 2009 - March 2010), it was to be expected that this year's Spring would be delayed. And so it was, with the first Snowdrops reckoned to be at least a fortnight later than usual, and all the other early Spring bulbs similarly behindhand. But when they came, what a display they made. With the Snowdrops putting on the best show for years, and Crocuses, Winter Aconities, and Anemones providing sheets of colour in the flower beds - what a spectacle! Now in April, they have been rapidly replaced by eye-catching Daffodils, and the progress of the year moves on: "Pussy" Willow, yellow with pollen, and Cherry Plum (also extremely late), cautiously producing its blossom, this year along with its leaves. (It usually blossoms on bare branches). Forsythia - out before the Cherry Plum for once - Bumblebees are busy!

Frogspawn this year, along with the parent Frogs, did not arrive in garden ponds till mid March, 4-6 weeks later than in some years, with early butterflies coaxed out by sudden Spring-like temperatures. I have recorded Brimstones early in February in

previous years, not mid-March.

As for birds, the prolonged snow and ice has brought them into gardens in great variety and good numbers. Though not unknown in gardens, a splendid male Pheasant unexpectedly appeared in mine, and spent half an hour or so picking up bird seed, before vanishing once again. It always amazes me how accepting of an unusual visitor the regular customers are - Chaffinches, Bramblings, Greenfinches were all unfazed by his presence. How do they know they are safe when there is a stranger around? Now in April, nesting activity is very much in evidence, with a Robin and a Dunnock both tugging out huge beakfuls of dog hair from an old nut feeder on my terrace, and lining their nests ready for eggs. It all goes to show that Nature moves on, whatever the weather, and that if Winter comes, Spring is never far behind.

In this case we can now look forward to Summer.

Let's hope for a good one!

Pat Morris



Male Pheasant at bird feeder. The seed tray is caged to prevent Woodpigeons eating seeds intended for smaller birds, but it doesn't stop Squirrels getting in.

(Photograph by Pat Morris).

Are we changing our birds?

In the May 2009 issue of Wycombe Wildlife News, I asked whether our feeding of garden birds was changing their behaviour. (See "Twenty years of wildlife recording".) The Daily Telegraph has now reported that, according to information published in the journal "Current Biology", German scientists have discovered that encouraging birds to overwinter in Britain, by feeding them, could be changing their morphology. The Blackcaps, so many of us have noted feeding in our gardens this past Winter, will have migrated from Germany, while other German birds still fly to the Mediterranean. Those making the briefer flight (300 miles) to England have developed shorter, stubbier wings, but longer, more slender beaks than those that make the 600-mile journey further south. The more

rounded wings are more suited to the shorter journey, and the longer bill shape enables them to benefit more easily from the food provided on our bird tables (in my case up to 5 Blackcaps at once on a Starling fat feeder, or on seeds) whereas those in southern countries have to forage for larger fruit and berries in the countryside, and so retain the stouter beaks. Both the Mediterranean and British birds still go back to Germany to breed, however, but I wonder how much longer they will bother?

My numerous Blackcaps certainly seemed to vanish by 27th March, though I saw one on 1st April on the fat feeder. Whether he is a German loiterer, or a new arrival, I don't yet know.

Pat Morris

The Family Group closes

The Family Group has closed, due to lack of support. In spite of an excellent programme of activities, in which families could take part, only the children of the leaders turned up. After a promotional exercise in July, when numerous leaflets were handed out, not a single new attendee was forthcoming. This lack of interest did not warrant the Family Group continuing, and so, regrettably, it has closed.

Grateful thanks go to Julie, Wendy, Peter, Martha and Will, for all the hard work they put in over the years, to provide fun and interesting activities for the young families of Wycombe.

Notice

Extra help is always welcome, if only an hour or so now and then. If you would like to offer help of any kind, contact the Chairman or speak to any of the Group's trustees.

Contacting and/or joining Wycombe Wildlife Group

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.

WWG Contact Details

Postal correspondence should be addressed to:
Chairman, Wycombe Wildlife Group,
c/o 129 Deeds Grove, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP12 3PA

Chairman & Site Management Co-ordinator:
Roger Wilding 01494 438374

Newsletter Editor: Pat Morris 01494 529484
roymorris@freeuk.com

Membership Secretary: Paul Bowyer/ Karen Roberts
(Membership enquiries to Paul: 01628 526225)

Treasurer: James Donald 01494 637877

Biological surveys: Angus Idle 01494 563673
angusjanet@yahoo.co.uk

Website: www.wycombewildlifegrp.co.uk
Webmaster: Malcolm Pusey
mac@mpusey.freemove.co.uk

Please enrol me as a member of Wycombe Wildlife Group

Name:.....
Address.....
.....
Telephone:..... Email.....

EITHER Payment by bank standing order

ToBank
.....Branch
Address.....
.....

NEW standing order instruction:

Account to be debited (your account details)

Sort code: Account number:

Account name:

Beneficiary bank and payee details

HSBC 1 Corn Market High Wycombe HP11 2AY
Sort Code: 402417 Account number: 92116685
Account name: Wycombe Wildlife Group
Ref:

Payment details

Amount of payment: £6.00 Six pounds

Frequency: Annually

From:

Number of payments: Until further notice

Signature Date

OR Payment by cheque or cash

I enclose cheque/cash for £7.00, payable to Wycombe Wildlife Group.



WILDLIFE NOTICE BOARD



Observations



January	
01/01	Otter - after dark, in snow in Oxford Road, High Wycombe
08/01	Little Egret, Great crested Grebe and Green Sandpiper - River Wye at Kings Mead
12/01	57 Redwings and 14 Fieldfares in garden - Tylers Green
15/01	7 Lesser Redpolls on nyger seed in garden - Tylers Green
15/01	38 Chaffinches in garden - Tylers Green
31/01	2 Blue Tits entering nest box - Flackwell Heath
Daily for	
3 weeks	Male Bullfinch in garden- Tylers Green
Daily	1-3 Blackcaps and 1-4 Bramblings in garden -Amersham Hill Drive
February	
Daily	2-5 Blackcaps & 1-4 Bramblings in garden- Amersham Hill Drive
09/02	3 Roe Deer - Carver Hill area

27/02	First Frog - Deeds Grove
March	
01/03	First Brimstone - Chairborough LNR
01/03	2 Ravens flying overhead - Deeds Grove
06/03	Male Pheasant in garden- Amersham Hill Drive
06/03	Redwing bathing in pond - Amersham Hill Drive
14/03	Honey Bee - Hughenden
14/03	Seven-spot Ladybird in garden- Amersham Hill Drive
14/03	Mouse in bird feeder - Amersham Hill Drive
14/03	12 Frogs and frogspawn - Amersham Hill Drive
15/03	39 Frogs and frogspawn - Amersham Hill Drive
15/03	First Peacock in garden - Amersham Hill Drive
17/03	8 Orange Underwing moths- Common Wood
17/03	Chiffchaff (migrant) singing - Tom Burt's Hill
18/03	First Comma and Queen Wasp - Deeds Grove
30/03	Sallow in bloom- Amersham Hill Drive

Contacts for Wildlife, Conservation & Environmental Groups in Wycombe District



Bassetsbury Group
 Bat queries
 Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust
 Booker Common & Woods Protection Society
 British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
 British Trust for Ornithology (Regional Rep.)
 Bucks Invertebrate Group
 Bucks Badger Group

Bucks Bird Club
 Bucks Community Association
 Bucks County Council Countryside Initiatives Team
 Bucks Invertebrate Group
 Butterfly Conservation
 Chiltern Society
 Chilterns Chalk Streams Officer
 Chilterns AONB
 Chilterns Conservation Board (Activities and Education)
 Chilterns Countryside Group
 Chilterns Woodland Officer
 Downley Common Preservation Society
 Frieth Natural History Society
 Grange Action Group
 High Wycombe Beekeeping Association
 High Wycombe Society
 Lane End Conservation Group
 Marlow Society
 National Trust
 Natural England Conservation Officer
 Pann Mill Group
 Prestwood Nature
 Ramblers Association
 Risborough Countryside Group
 St. Tiggywinkles
 Swan Lifeline
 Woodland Trust (voluntary speaker)
 Wycombe District Council Ranger Service

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 WDC Rangers 01494 421824
 (Oxon Office) 01865 775476
 Rita Luxton 01494 436807
 Jane Craven 01296 330033
 David Lee 01844 347576
 Mike Palmer 01296 624519
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