

**WYCOMBE**



**WILDLIFE GROUP**

**Issue 67**

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**JANUARY  
2012**

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Above: Snow Bunting and Slavonian Grebe - two of the rare birds seen in Buckinghamshire this winter (See page 64)

Below: Ochre Brittlegill (*Russula ochroleuca*) seen in early January (See page 64)



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.

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**Production:** Roger Wilding

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## Editorial - January 2012

### Change

**M**uch has changed since I first came to Wycombe 55 years ago, and I could envy our Webmaster who has moved down to Dorset. (See his article on page 63). Our quiet market town, with its industries based on local wood and paper, has disappeared, the town centre has been remodelled and familiar features gone, and rolling green countryside is now covered with housing to meet the demands of an increased population. Fortunately my personal surroundings have not changed in this way; I still have sweeping views of fields and hedges across to the motorway and beyond on one side, though on the other side, much of the view is blocked. I have seen saplings of surrounding scrub turn into lofty trees, and remnants of Cypress hedging become dominating giants. My back garden, once sunny and open, is now completely enclosed, like a woodland glade.

The Newsletter has also seen changes over the years. It started out, when Wycombe Wildlife Group was first formed in 1989, as a modest six pages, sponsored by Wycombe District Council. It is now double that size, and has become self-financing. It has altered its format, and gone from strength to strength. During all that time, I have remained the newsletter Editor, but now it is time for me, too, to have a change, and I am retiring at the AGM. This is the penultimate edition under my editorship; after only one more issue, I step down. In my last Editorial, I put out a plea for help, with only one reply. Producing a newsletter is multi-tasked, and best undertaken by a team effort. I am sure that, in a Group of over 90 members, there must be some with a few moments to spare occasionally who could take on something to help. Much of the newsletter evolves thanks to those who submit articles and reports, Roger Wilding, who is responsible for its production and typesetting, and those who already help with hand deliveries of the completed newsletters. None of the remaining tasks are arduous but they are vital. So, if you receive a phone call one day, asking if there is anything you can do to help with the newsletter and other tasks that I currently undertake, don't be surprised. Without additional help, some of the perks members have enjoyed over the years may have to cease - yet another change.

My thanks, as always, to all those good friends who have supported me over the past 22 years

Pat Morris

## New members

**W**e welcome the following new members to Wycombe Wildlife Group:-

Derek Sawyer from High Wycombe

James Harris from Bourne End

Mrs W.Osborn from Bourne End

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.

## A change of location

Malcolm Pusey, WWG's webmaster, recently moved from High Wycombe to Dorset. As you will see from the following note he has sent us, he is enjoying his new surroundings very much. In his spare time, he continues to maintain our website, for which we are most grateful.

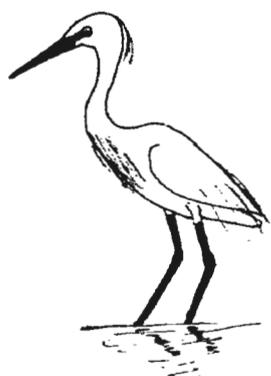
Having lived in High Wycombe for all of my 66 years, I decided to up-sticks and, as the TV programme says, "Escape to the country". The chosen destination was a village in Dorset where I now have the privilege of being within 5 miles of three superb nature reserves, the RSPB reserves at Radipole and Lodmoor and the Dorset Wildlife Trust reserve at Lorton Meadows. The bird life at the RSPB reserves is stunning, from Bearded Tits to Bitterns, Marsh Harriers and Spoonbills, along with a multitude of other species that put in occasional appearances.

The general terrain is one of gently rolling hills, and, with not many woods, there are some spectacular views from the highest points. The

countryside is very agricultural, and just about every field is full of wheat, cattle or sheep.

In the garden, we have had 32 species of bird, so far the best being a Kingfisher, and almost a Little Egret. I can't count the latter, as, unfortunately, it stayed next door where there is a small stream. The most common butterfly appears to be the Red Admiral, with plenty of Whites and Peacocks adorning the Butterfly-bush (*Buddleja davidii*). The springtime can be rather noisy with a rookery nearby, otherwise the only noise is from the cows in the adjacent field, and the church clock striking the hour - oh so much nicer than all those noisy aeroplanes and the traffic of High Wycombe. No regrets!

Malcolm Pusey



Left: Little Egret, seen by Malcolm Pusey in his neighbour's garden since moving to Dorset. They have also been seen on the Rye, Holywell Mead and Kings Mead in High Wycombe.



Right: Goldfinch. Can be attracted into gardens by hanging up nyger seed feeders and by growing Teasels.

## A welcome change

What a welcome change this winter has been so far! A lot of damp, but we have actually seen some sunshine, especially on frosty mornings, and many plants are flowering on cue. Crocuses, Snowdrops, Aconites and Polyanthus have already been reported, there is blossom on ornamental trees, and Rosemary, Sarcococca, Mahonia and *Lonicera fragrantissima* are all in bloom, the latter three giving off wonderful perfume. All good for any insects (and there have been a few) and also for Blackcaps and Tits, which like their nectar. Avian life in the garden has been quiet for much of the winter, but birds are now flocking in. Presumably, the abundant supply of natural food in the open countryside is now dwindling, and they are taking advantage of the seeds supplied by us.

It is a delight to see Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Chaffinch and Bullfinch all on a feeder together. It is good news that Bullfinches are now coming into gardens - it will help their survival - and charms of Goldfinches on nyger seed feeders and Teasels are always a welcome sight. Although berries have been blown off many times in recent gales, Cotoneasters are still laden and should tempt migrant Thrushes, if they are not more attracted by fallen apples lying in the grass nearby!

Pat Morris

### Just a reminder

Please keep your bird feeders clean, and supply fresh water for bathing and drinking, especially in frosty weather.

## First fungi of 2012

January is not a time of the year I would normally go out looking for fungi. In most years you would probably only come across a few old hard brackets and, possibly, a few frost-blackened agarics well past their "sell by date". This year the mild, damp conditions have resulted in fruiting bodies still appearing in the New Year.

Between Christmas and the New Year, I received a phone call from one of our members, Alan Showler, telling me about a fairly rare species of fungus called Bearded Tooth (*Hericium erinaceum*) that had appeared on Naphill Common. Because we had family staying with us at the time, I didn't get an opportunity to visit Naphill Common until early January and, by then, I quite expected the fungus to be past its best. Having located

the beech tree on which it had been seen, I realised that my fears had been groundless. The fungus was still in prime condition and growing on a part of the tree where it could easily be photographed.

Although I didn't have time to spend looking for other fungi, I remember seeing at least a dozen different species whilst crossing Naphill Common to and from the location of the Bearded Tooth. Although many of the fungi I saw were not unusual in view of the favourable conditions, I was very surprised to see a perfect fruiting body of Ochre Brittlegill (*Russula ochroleuca*) appearing in January. This is a very common fungus, but not at this time of year.

Roger Wilding

Bearded Tooth fungus growing on a Beech tree on Naphill Common



## Spotting some winter visitors

Over the last few months, I have been regularly looking at the Buckinghamshire Bird Club web site - [www.bucksbirdclub.co.uk](http://www.bucksbirdclub.co.uk). Here daily postings are made of bird sightings throughout the county. In November, there were reports of a Slavonian Grebe being seen at Little Marlow gravel pit. This is a splendid site for bird watching, and less than two miles from where I live. It took me three visits to Little Marlow to positively identify the bird. Most bird books show the Slavonian Grebe in full breeding plumage, with long orange head plumes, reddish flanks, and white markings when on the wing. In winter, the bird is black and white and a lot harder to spot. The Slavonian Grebe does breed in small numbers in this country, but in the far north east of Scotland. In winter, numbers increase, but sightings are usually near the coast or in river estuaries. On my third attempt to see this species, I took WWG member Karen Roberts, who was able to help in finding and identifying the grebe. She was also able to photograph the bird, which is always a help. The Slavonian Grebe is bigger than the Little Grebe (or Dabchick), but smaller than the Great Crested Grebe. We were lucky to see it swimming close to a number of Great Crested Grebes, which emphasized this characteristic. Discussions with other birders at the site convinced us of its identity.

After Christmas, we ventured north to Startops reservoir near Tring. Daily sightings of a Snow Bunting in this area were posted on the Bucks Bird Club web site. It was still there when we arrived, and very easy to find. A small group of birders gathered together, with telescopes pointing at the water's edge, betrayed its location. Very few Snow Buntings breed in this country, and these are in Scotland, but a lot more visit these islands in winter from their Arctic breeding grounds. Only a few venture inland, so we were lucky to see one. Its mottled, sandy plumage

blended well with the rocky shoreline of the reservoir, and it took some finding if you took your eyes off it. The Snow Bunting seemed oblivious of human presence, and when two boys ran within a few metres of it, shouting whilst chasing their small dog, the bird took no notice. After Startops, we visited Caldecotte Lake in Milton Keynes to see three species of bird reported on the web site. The first, a Great Northern Diver, which had been at the lake for a few weeks, was one of the first birds we saw. This is a large, sleek sea bird with black and white plumage. It rarely breeds in the British Isles, but visits our coasts in winter. I had only seen one before, and that was off the coast of Skye in 1979, so I was delighted to see another relatively close to home. It often dives for fish, swimming a long way under water, so spotting its emergence proved difficult. A male Smew had also been reported, and it was spotted at the southern edge of the lake, but I had to use a telescope to see this small, compact white duck. Only seen in winter in this country, it breeds in Scandinavia and Russia. The third species of bird we sought was a Goosander. There are more populations of this duck in Britain than the other birds mentioned, but it only visits this part of the country in the winter. It has a slender, serrated bill used for catching fish. The female's plumage differs a lot from that of the male; it has a chestnut brown head and a grey and white body, in contrast to the male, which has a green head. We saw a female, although there were reports of a male being at Caldecotte.

I am amazed at how easy it is for me to see relatively rare birds in our area once I have the information that they are here. I am thankful to all the knowledgeable people who can identify these birds.

Paul Bowyer

## The wildlife of Sands Bank Nature Reserve

As you look up from the North Stand at Adams Park while attending, but obviously not watching, either Wasps or Wanderers, you will notice an area of grassland with scrub above the overflow car park and, beyond that, some woodland. This is Sands Bank Nature Reserve.

To the untrained eye, the area probably looks very much like most of the other bits of countryside that we pass, as we travel around High Wycombe and beyond. Sands Bank, however, is a steep sided, and more importantly, a south facing slope, which is surprisingly unusual within the Chilterns.

This makes the site very good for invertebrates with over 30 species of butterflies recorded including Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, White-letter Hairstreak and Chalkhill Blue and this only represents a small number of the invertebrates that are seen. Look on almost any flower and you will find something of interest, even if it is only the flower itself.

Over 100 species of flora have been recorded on the site in only one visit. A wonderful display of Common Spotted and Pyramidal Orchids in late spring and early summer makes way for the Knapweeds and Scabious before the final flush of colour from the autumn leaves of the many scrub and tree species on the site ensures that there is always a splash of colour in all but the winter months.

### What the cat brought in?

The photograph below of a very wet, dead Glis Glis (also known as the Fat or Edible Dormouse) was taken in a back garden in Keep Hill Drive, High Wycombe, and sent in by Clive Hill. This is the second dead specimen found in the garden, which backs onto a large wood, within a period of a few weeks. It is thought that a cat had probably caught and killed them. A live specimen has also been seen running out of one of the houses. This non-native species is currently restricted in the UK to an area between the M25, M1 and M40, having spread slowly following its escape into the wild from Tring Park, where it was introduced in the early 1900s. It can cause damage to young trees in its normal woodland habitat and serious damage if it gets into houses, but it is protected by European legislation.



WWG

Having this wonderful base to the food chain gives those higher up plenty to choose from and encourages a great range of species to feed and breed on the site, including birds such as Bullfinch, Blackcap and Chiffchaff. Herpetofauna, including Slow worm and Common Lizard, and the not quite so welcome Grey Squirrel and Muntjac Deer.

Some of these creatures can appear to be quite elusive but, for some, all you need to do is think about your timing. Lizards are much easier to spot when the temperature isn't too hot or too cold. If it's too cold (below about 12° C) they will still be hiding away and, if it is above about 17° C, they will be actively hunting, making your chances of seeing anything more than a brief glimpse quite slim. In between, they will be basking in an attempt to warm their bodies up, so look out for them on the many ant hills and on, or under, the couple of pieces of corrugated iron that have been left on the site for that very purpose.

Those very same pieces of corrugated iron are also good places to find small mammals in the colder months, with mice, voles and shrews taking advantage of the extra heat that is absorbed from the winter sunshine.

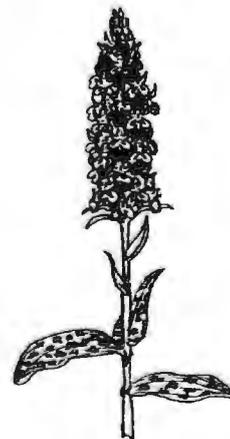
So next time you visit this part of town, whether it be for sporting reasons or not, why not head up the hill and see what you can find.

Tony Speight, WDC Woodland Service

Left: Pyramidal Orchid  
(*Anacamptis pyramidalis*)

Bottom left: Common Spotted-orchid  
(*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*)

Bottom right: Common Lizard  
(*Lacerta vivipara*)



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## All ability path in Kingswood



The all ability path in Kingswood

On Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November, I represented Wycombe Wildlife Group at the Grand Opening of Chepping Wycombe Parish Council's all ability path in Kingswood. This new level, surfaced path starts from the recycling area in Cock Lane and follows a short circular route, returning to Cock Lane by the picnic area next to the Parish Council offices. After Steve Baker, MP had cut the tape at the start of the path, those attending the event walked round the trail and looked at the interpretation boards that been installed at intervals



One of the interpretation boards

along the route. The attendees then adjourned to the Parish Council offices for refreshments.

At the request of the Parish Council, Wycombe Wildlife Group had produced some text and illustrations covering wildlife and conservation for the interpretation boards and, in the press publicity for the Grand Opening, our Group was listed as one of the organisations contributing to the project, in acknowledgement of the above help.

Roger Wilding

## Conservation update

The Earthworks team paid their annual visit to Gomm's Wood on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> October and gave me a welcome hand with some major scrub bashing on the section managed by Wycombe Wildlife Group. As usual, considerable progress was made, and the area has now been opened up on the south side to where a path and flight of steps lead down to the coppiced areas of Gomm's Wood. The areas cleared of scrub in previous years are developing a good chalk grassland flora, and the latest clearance should increase the amount of sunlight getting to the site.

The weather was perfect this year for undertaking the strimming of the Cock Lane Cemetery banks and, for a change, all of the cut material was raked up and burned before it got wet, and before the Earthworks event took place. Some of the grassland areas below the cemetery were also strimmed in advance of the Earthworks visit, and the remainder were cut in November. Again all the cut material was burnt while it was still dry.

A huge amount of major scrub clearance work has been undertaken by the WDC Woodland Service on the Chairborough Nature Reserve in the last year. I have helped by strimming the spring meadow area, some of the existing glades and scallops along the

scrub edge, and I have also cleared an overgrown steep flight of steps and made a start on the restoration of a small wetland area. There is plenty of scope for undertaking small scale tasks on this site, and there is an on-going need for species recording, if anyone feels like giving me a hand.

The small Sheepridge Nature Reserve between the Little Marlow Cemetery at Fern and Sheepridge Lane was getting a bit untidy, so I have done some fairly drastic clearance work there. The area around the pond has been opened up to let in more light, and a part of the site, which will be taken into cemetery use in the near future has also been cleared. The main issue now is to take steps to retain the biodiversity of the reserve as it shrinks. Little Marlow Parish Council has organised a work party on 11<sup>th</sup> February to do some further tidying up, and I have put this event in the WWG programme in case anyone would like to help. I will be there, as I need to establish exactly where the boundary of the extended cemetery will be and when the work will start. According to what is decided, it might prove feasible to relocate some of the existing flora from the area required for the cemetery extension to a location further into the reserve.

Roger Wilding  
Site Management Co-ordinator



WWG's "conservation patch" in Gomm's Wood at the end of 2011



The section "opened up" in earlier years

## Revive the Wye update

The Revive the Wye (RTW) Partnership, consisting of the Chiltern Society, High Wycombe Society, Wycombe Wildlife Group (WWG), Chilterns Conservation Board, Wycombe District Council and the Environment Agency, continues to undertake tasks aimed at improving our local river. By supporting RTW, WWG is helping to meet its charitable aims.

Last year, WWG purchased some waders, which have been used on most of the RTW work parties, and the Group also funded a day's use of Earthworks Conservation Volunteers for Indian Balsam clearance on the Rye. Some of the RTW walks, surveys and tasks have been organised and led by WWG: these events can only be included in the WWG events programme, however, when the detailed arrangements have been finalised in time to meet our programme production deadlines.

RTW likes to involve businesses whose premises are next to, or near to the river, in its activities. A very successful event using volunteers from Citygate, the Volkswagen dealership at the east end of the Rye, took place during the afternoon of Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> September. Unfortunately, on the day of the task, the trash screen in front of the culvert, which takes the Wye under Citygate's yard, had become completely blocked, causing the river level to rise to about four feet above thigh wader height. After a morning's hard labour, RTW volunteers had removed sufficient rubbish from the front of the screen by leaning over the railings above the screen and using a range of suitable long handled tools, to reduce the water level by about four feet. This was just enough for the Citygate volunteers to enter the river and carry out the planned rubbish clearance

and removal of excess vegetation from the river banks on both sides of the culverted section. Citygate has undertaken to continue to manage their section of the river and plan to do some riverside planting there, using suitable native plants.

On Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> October, a large number of students from Bucks New University, supplemented by other volunteers, turned up to tidy the Hughenden Stream and the footpath alongside, near the University Campus off Hughenden Avenue. Unlike an earlier occasion when BNU helped remove rubbish from the stream, the riverbed was completely dry, so the opportunity was taken of cutting back a lot of the overhanging tree branches, brambles and other invasive riverside vegetation.

At the end of October, some of the RTW volunteers helped on a two-day task, organised and led by the Environment Agency, on the stretch of Wycombe Marsh Brook (the Wye's back stream) at the south east corner of Kings Mead. This task involved the installation of a number of features constructed from natural materials to improve the quality of the river. The features included various flow deflectors, made from logs or bundles of hazel sticks, fixed to the riverbed by stakes. These create a mix of fast flowing water, which washes away the silt to leave a clear gravel riverbed, and silted up areas, where plants such as River Water-crowfoot can become established. The result is an improved environment for both fish and the water invertebrates they feed on. A follow-up work party, led by WWG, took place on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> December to put the finishing touches to the task by removing rubbish from that stretch of the river. An amazing amount of alien material was taken out of the river, including some

rusty road signs and a couple of estate agents' "for sale" boards. This stretch of the Wycombe Marsh Brook flows through Chepping Wycombe Parish and Jeff Herschel, the Chairman of the Parish Council, came along during the morning to thank the volunteers for what they were doing. At lunchtime, he returned bearing gifts of hot meat pies, a very welcome pre-Christmas treat. He also brought along a supply of water for hand washing before we ate the pies, an essential health and safety precaution when undertaking river management tasks.

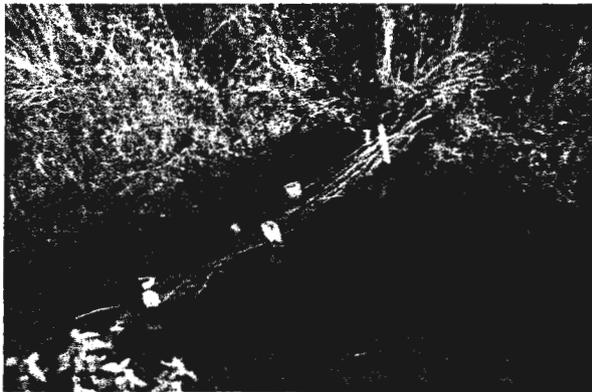
During 2012, it is hoped to start a programme of regular monthly work days on weekdays, supplemented by a Saturday work day every other month. Based on the experience of Indian Balsam clearance work in 2011, we need to target this species from June, the recommended month for dealing with the invasive alien, right through to the time it finishes flowering. We found that even in areas we had removed all the visible plants in June, additional plants continued to germinate, flower and produce seeds. Although this plant is growing along much of the river, it needs to be

eliminated from its furthest location upstream before dealing with plants further down the river, as seed is carried downstream by the river, the reason for this species' rapid colonisation of water courses.

Those who like to walk along the river will be pleased to know that the riverside path between Bowden Lane and the Wycombe Marsh Retail Park has been reopened now that the houses alongside the river on the former sewerage works site have been completed.

If you visit Desborough Recreation Ground you will notice that a fence has been erected around the former furniture factory site by the footbridge at the south east corner prior to development. You will also notice that a strip of land has been left outside the fence alongside the river. This is to preserve the river margin for public riverside access between the Desborough Recreation Ground footbridge and Desborough Park Road following the completion of the development.

Roger Wilding



Flow deflector made by anchoring a bundle of hazel sticks to the riverbed



Flow deflector created by staking a log to the riverbed

## Getting to know grasses

Angus Idle is offering another opportunity to learn how to identify some of the common grass species. As his favourite location for holding grass identification sessions is on the chalk grassland behind his house, he has suggested that, this year, anyone wishing to attend one or more of his evening identification sessions, should contact him by telephone and make suitable arrangements. He is happy to be contacted on 01494 563673 during the period between mid April and mid May for this purpose.

This is an excellent opportunity to study a difficult plant family with the help of an expert in the subject.

## Barn Owls and their habitat - A talk by Dave Short on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2011



**D**ave Short is a volunteer with the Aylesbury Vale Barn Owl Scheme. The scheme is run by volunteers who give up their time to erect and monitor nesting boxes, ring birds, provide advice to farmers and landowners and talk to local communities about the need to take action to help the Barn Owl. The scheme started in 2001, when certain wildlife species were identified as requiring help. The area covered by the scheme includes most of Buckinghamshire to the north of the Chilterns, but excludes Milton Keynes. Funding for these actions includes £50,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, £19,500 from WREN, a non-profit making environmental body, and £7,600 from the Aylesbury Vale Community Chest. Help is also provided by prisoners at H.M.P. Spring Hill, near Grendon Underwood, who have been making the nesting boxes and, in some cases, working on site with volunteers on important nature conservation projects.

Dave told us that, at the start of the project in 2001, there were only one or two pairs of Barn Owls being monitored. Now, with over 500 nest boxes to check, it takes 4 months for 4 working volunteers to complete a thorough survey. In 2010, 28 Barn Owls were ringed and 110 chicks were counted. There are numerous reasons for the decline in the national Barn Owl population. During the twentieth century D.D.T. had been used by farmers to kill vermin. For a lot of birds of prey, this meant that they might be poisoned by eating contaminated animals, or they might lay eggs with soft shells, reducing the numbers of birds which hatch. D.D.T. is now of course, illegal. The loss of suitable habitat is another important factor in the reduction in Barn Owl numbers. The removal of hedgerows and trees, and the reduction in the amount of rough grassland and uncultivated field margins, has significantly lessened the appropriate habitat for Field Voles, which provide the major part of the owls' diet. Farmers are asked to leave strips of rough grassland around arable fields and to leave rank grassland next to rivers, streams and ditches. They are also asked to leave isolated tall trees for the Barn Owl to use as a look out post.

All birds of prey have a history of persecution. The Barn Owl is no exception, being both shot and poisoned by some gamekeepers. To avoid accidental poisoning,

farmers are advised to clear away dead vermin daily so that other wildlife does not eat it. Water troughs can also be a hazard for owls, some being drowned every year. To avoid this, a wooden float can be put in water containers to allow farm animals to drink, but to stop owls drowning. Road accidents also account for deaths of Barn Owls. A large increase in the amount and speed of road traffic, and in the number of main roads, has had a detrimental effect on a lot of wildlife species. It is advised that roadside hedges should be higher than 3 metres so that the owls will fly up and over vehicles, instead of straight into them.

The loss of nesting sites is also a major factor in the decline of the Barn Owl. Farm buildings have been destroyed, and a lot of barns have been converted for human occupation. Dave told us about the building and erection of new nest boxes, designed specifically for Barn Owls. These will differ according to their placement, whether they are in a farm building, in a tree, or on a specially built pole. The Barn Owl does not construct a sophisticated nest, but lays its eggs on crushed owl pellets on a flat surface. It will lay between 3 and 9 eggs, produced intermittently so that birds hatch separately over a period of around 4 to 8 weeks. The survival rate of young birds is determined mostly by the availability of food. This can be significantly affected by weather. Severe winters and wet summers can reduce the amount of small rodents which can be predated. In some years, in favourable conditions, two broods of chicks may be raised successfully. By March 2011, Barn Owls within the scheme had already laid eggs, making the likelihood of further broods possible. Dave told us about how landowners are being encouraged to help in conservation. Grants may be obtained by landowners who enlist in Countryside Stewardship, Woodland Grant and Farm Woodland Schemes. These give money to landowners for leaving uncultivated land at the perimeters of fields, planting trees, and keeping existing wooded areas undeveloped. All these schemes benefit the Barn Owl as well as other wildlife.

Thanks to Dave Short for his enthusiastic presentation, and for all his work as a volunteer within the Barn Owl Scheme.

Paul Bowyer

# The changing world of butterflies

A talk by Jim Asher on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2011

Jim Asher is Vice Chairman of the National Council of Butterfly Conservation. He was Chairman for the Steering Group responsible for the "Millennium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland". He is also Chairman and Records Officer for the Upper Thames branch of Butterfly Conservation. Jim's involvement with butterfly recording and statistical analysis of butterfly data provides the basis for his topic of how butterfly distributions change.

Data about butterflies in this country is gathered by volunteers. From 2005 to 2009, more than 2,300,000 sightings were recorded by an estimated 10,000 people. For recording purposes, the country is divided into 10 kilometre squares. From over 96% of these, there were butterfly records. As well as these nationwide surveys, fixed routes or transects across important butterfly sites are walked once a week through the butterfly flight period to record areas of denser populations. Since the Atlas of 2000, two further documents have been published showing "The State of the U.K.'s Butterflies", in 2005 and in 2009. The accumulated data indicates that the number of butterfly species diminishes as one travels north. There are 4 or 5 species which only occur in the north, but in the south one can find the majority of the country's calcareous geology, which supports a wider variety of butterflies. The population of 72% of British butterfly species declined in the last 10 years, and there was a 54% decline in distributions. These losses can be attributed, to some extent, to the destruction of suitable habitat, and the fragmentation of sites, which leaves butterfly populations isolated. Where sites are targeted for conservation work for butterfly species requiring specialist habitat, there have been increases in populations. Examples of this are the Heath Fritillary and the Silver Spotted Skipper. Some species have been shown to be increasing their range northwards. The most significant of these are the Speckled Wood and the Comma. Sightings of the Comma have moved 140 kilometres northwards in ten years. The Wall is another butterfly which is now recorded further north than before, but further south, in the central area of Britain, numbers have reduced drastically, and now, in the south, it is only a common butterfly in coastal regions.

Jim explained how climatic change may affect butterfly populations and distributions. An increase in the overall temperature in Britain may cause freak weather conditions such as floods, droughts and freak storms. These climatic conditions may wipe out small butterfly colonies. A gradual increase in temperature has implications in various ways. Southern England is Europe's northern limit for the

Silver Spotted Skipper. It lays its eggs on Sheep's Fescue grass near to rabbit scrapes, a place where the sun is at its hottest on the baked soil and surrounding short, sparse grassland. An increase in average temperature of just half a degree since 1976 has increased the number of places where this butterfly can prosper, and existing populations have tended to increase. The Common Blue butterfly is a species which, in southern Britain, is bivoltine, i.e. it is double brooded. From Yorkshire northwards, there tends to be only one brood. The number of broods is thought to be governed by climatic conditions and, subsequently, with increasing temperatures, the range of bivoltine Common Blues is tending to edge northwards. The Mountain Ringlet is Britain's only montane species. It is found at above 500 metres in the Lake District and above 350 metres in Scotland. An increase in temperature will force these butterflies to higher altitudes.

Changes to climate also affects the distribution of butterfly parasitoids and predators. The parasitic fly *Sturmia bella* has colonised Britain since 1998. It lays its eggs on nettles, which are eaten by the caterpillars of the Small Tortoiseshell butterfly. The eggs hatch into larvae, and subsequently eat their hosts. The population of this butterfly species has diminished significantly in recent years. A warmer climate may also help ant species, with which some butterfly species have a symbiotic relationship. These are some of the Blue butterfly species, especially the Large Blue, recently reintroduced to England.

The loss and degradation of land where butterflies prosper, is another major factor in their distribution. The intensification of farming and forestry has contributed significantly to the decline in butterfly populations. On grassland, some species require precise grazing regimes to exist. In woodland, the removal of broadleaf trees, and the decline in practices like coppicing, also upsets the life cycle of some butterfly species, e.g. Wood White and Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary. Butterfly Conservation now considers that a landscape wide approach is required, so that small vulnerable butterfly populations can somehow be connected. This gives butterflies the chance to move into new areas, and to interact with other colonies, which should improve the strength of the population. Locally the Chiltern Ridgeway is seen as a suitable wildlife corridor. Urban gardens are also considered to be important for butterflies, and Jim stressed the need to keep gardens butterfly-friendly by providing suitable nectar plants and habitat.

Paul Bowyer

## Event feedback questionnaire

**A**s agreed at the AGM, your elected trustees discussed, prepared and circulated an event feedback questionnaire with the September issue of Wycombe Wildlife News. The questionnaire listed events that had taken place between January and July 2011, and asked members to rate the events as excellent, good, fair or poor. It also asked for other information, which those responsible for organising the events programme thought would help to match future activities with members' interests, and to identify any common issues that needed to be addressed.

My thanks go to the one member who completed and returned his questionnaire.

Roger Wilding

## Contacting and/or joining Wycombe Wildlife Group

**T**o join Wycombe Wildlife Group, please complete the form on the right (or a copy) and send to the Membership Secretary, 15 Cherrywood Gardens, Flackwell Heath, HP10 9AX. 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:  
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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](http://www.wycombewildlifegrp.co.uk)  
Webmaster: Malcolm Pusey  
malcolm.pusey@o2.co.uk

### Please enrol me as a member of Wycombe Wildlife Group

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

### EITHER Payment by bank standing order

To ..... Bank  
..... 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



<b>August 2011</b>			14/11	12 Skylarks & 7 Yellowhammers	Grange Farm, Hazlemere
03/08	Leaf-cutter bee on garden seat	Downley	14/11	100 Fieldfares and a few Redwings	Chairborough LNR
<b>September 2011</b>			<b>December 2011</b>		
05/09	Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral & Small White	Downley	11/12	Angle Shades moth	In house, Amersham Hill Drive
10/09	100s of Fly Agaric fungi	Common Wood, Penn	21/12	Active 7-spot Ladybird	Deeds Grove garden
22/09	Chiffchaff singing	Ladies Mile, Hazlemere	22/12	Blackbird in full song	Deeds Grove garden
23/09	Small Copper	Hazlemere Rec. Ground	23/12	115 Redwings	Common Wood
27/09	Squashed Hedgehog	A404, Hazlemere	23/12	7 Buzzards & 14 Skylarks	Puttenham Farm
29/09	Small Copper	Hazlemere Rec. Ground	24/12	Bumblebee in garden	Deeds Grove
<b>October 2011</b>			24/12	Water Rail	River Wye near WDC offices
09/10	Hawthorn Shieldbug	Kitchen, Amersham Hill Dr.	26/12	Bumblebee	Tylers Green
22/10	Red Admiral	Garden, Amersham Hill Dr.	30/12	Pigeon -white with pink wings and tail	Amersham Hill Drive
31/10	Red Admiral	Garden, Amersham Hill Dr.	31/12	Bumblebee in garden	Deeds Grove
<b>November 2011</b>					
01/11	Red Admiral	On Ivy, Amersham Hill Dr.			



### 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 Badger Group  
  
 Bucks Bird Club  
 Bucks Community Association  
 Bucks County Council Countryside Initiatives Team  
 Bucks Invertebrate Group  
 Butterfly Conservation  
 Chiltern Society  
 Chilterns AONB  
 Chilterns Chalk Streams Officer  
 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  
 RSPB local group  
 St. Tiggywinkles  
 Swan Lifeline  
 Woodland Trust (voluntary speaker)  
 Wycombe District Council Woodland Service

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