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MAY  
2012

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Registered Charity No : 1075175



Pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*) (above). This deep violet-purple flowered plant can be found near Ivinghoe Beacon on the Ridgeway Trail, as can the yellow-flowered Field Fleawort (*Tephrosia integrifolia*) (right).



Hart's-tongue (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*) - a common native fern of moist shady locations, often found on banks, walls and in woods.



Quite a number of these ferns were seen alongside the Wye between Desborough Avenue and Victoria Street during a recent Revive the Wye task.



**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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**Editorial May 2012- Getting on with the job**

On 20<sup>th</sup> April 2012, a freak storm hit Wycombe, and hailstones 6-7mm across rained down. Birds hastily took cover. The squall lasted only about ten minutes, but it was long enough for the ground to be covered with a thick white sheet, like snow. As soon as the storm was over, a Robin was back, collecting beakfuls of fat (not easy for a Robin's beak), something which it had been doing before the hail started. It was getting on with the job of feeding its young, vital for their survival. This story illustrates the determination of wildlife in general to survive whatever is thrown at it. Two exceptionally cold spells, at the end of January and beginning of February, appeared to have killed a lot of plants, but in the record warm spell which followed, with the help of welcome showers, most of them emerged at last, and impressive shows of blossom resulted. The Blackthorn hedges, in fields adjacent to Hazlemere Recreation Ground, have been spectacular, and no doubt members could name other flowers and shrubs which have done just as well.

Although this is my last Editorial, and I am relinquishing many of the tasks I have carried out for Wycombe Wildlife Group over the 23 years I have been a member, other stalwarts within Wycombe Wildlife Group will continue to get on with the job. Although no-one has offered yet to take on the full responsibility for any of the publicity, newsletter and programme-related roles I have performed, the offers of help we have received, and still hope to receive, for carrying out many of the vital component tasks, will make an important contribution to the Group's survival. We are not a Wildlife Group for nothing - we are also determined to survive.

Once again, my grateful thanks to all those who have supported me personally over the years. I have appreciated their help tremendously, and could not have done all that I have, without them.

Pat Morris

On behalf of all members of Wycombe Wildlife Group, and others who regularly read copies of our newsletter, I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Pat Morris for all the effort she has put into the task of editing Wycombe Wildlife News for so many years. Pat wrote her first Editorial for Issue No 1 in January 1990, and in this, our 68th issue, she has still managed to come up with something new to say, just as she has done for the last 22 years. Although I will carry on producing the newsletter, as I have done since Maurice Young, who produced the first 45 issues, passed away, not having Pat's decisions on the content of each newsletter, and her efforts to ensure sufficient material has been available for each issue, will take some getting used to. Still, as Pat has said above, others will get on with the job. Can I ask those contributing material for publication in the newsletter, to send their items to me from now on, ideally by email if possible. I will do my best to keep up the standards that have been set under Pat's editorship.

Roger Wilding

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.

## Meeting our charitable aims

**B**eing a Registered Charity, Wycombe Wildlife Group has a formal constitution which sets out its charitable aims. These are to conserve the environment, mainly using volunteers, for the benefit of the public, and to educate the public in the principles of conservation. Ensuring the Group's activities and expenditure continues to meet these aims is the responsibility of the trustees elected each year by the members at the AGM, which is held in May.

The trustees usually meet four times a year and minutes of these Executive Committee meetings are retained, with policy decisions being recorded on the relevant strategy documents which cover each of the main elements of the Group's activities. The strategy documents are reviewed once a year, along with the Group's priorities.

During 2011/12, using project monies we had received from the Waitrose Community Matters Scheme, we set out to promote wildlife areas in school grounds and to support the Revive the Wye Project, which is being run by a partnership of organisations, including WWG. We revised and reprinted our wildlife gardening advisory leaflets and are about to forward copies to member schools, together with an offer to provide bird boxes and other animal homes for use in the school grounds.

Our decision to use some of the Waitrose funding to support the Revive the Wye Project has proved very worthwhile. WWG has purchased 6 pairs of waders, which have been used for the river tasks,

and we funded the use of a team from Earthworks Conservation Volunteers to help deal with the invasive Indian Balsam alongside the Rye. It has been very encouraging to have some of our members helping with the river-related practical tasks. Support for the Revive the Wye Project will continue into 2012/13, as the trustees have agreed that the remaining restricted funds will probably be used for that purpose.

There is also another priority task we have been planning during the last financial year, and which will be actively progressed from 2012/13 onwards. This is to record the flora and fauna found in our local woods and open spaces, where there is public access, and publish the results on the Group's website in .pdf format for each site. When the information is updated for a site, a replacement document will be put on the website. The initial data put on the website is likely to only contain plant data, but records of birds and butterflies seen will be added as sufficient information becomes available. Clearly this is an ambitious and long term project, but one which will make a valuable contribution to meeting our Group's charitable aims.

Our May to August 2012 programme includes a survey walk at Sands Bank. This has been included as a trial event to involve members in the species recording project. Please support us with this project if you can - you don't need to be an expert to help.

Roger Wilding

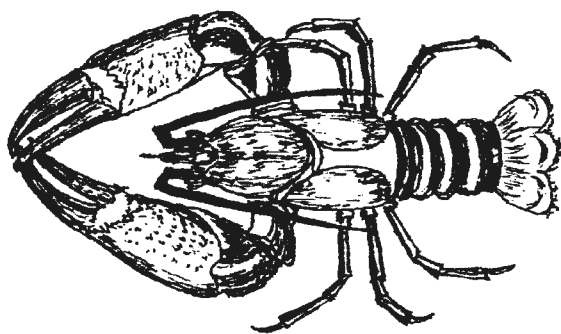
Sands Bank Local Nature Reserve, where the Group will be undertaking a survey walk on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> June



## Revive the Wye task - 27<sup>th</sup> March 2012

*Mission: To boldly go where no man had ventured for some while – upstream from Desborough Avenue to Victoria Street, a distance of some 200 yards, to investigate and remove various items of rubbish.*

This section of the Wye flows between various small industrial units, and suffers from discarded rubbish, as well as litter, much of which is probably thrown in out of working hours. Starting by the Desborough Avenue bridge, the first task was collecting up a huge amount of Pitta bread, some on the bank, some in the water, and some trapped on the ledges of the bridge. As the breads were left in one piece, they wouldn't have been of any use to the water fowl so, presumably, it was the rats which benefited. Other items found here included a massive bone, a few broken chairs, a road works cone, drinks cans and bottles, miscellaneous iron and steel things, but best of all an ornate gold coloured metal tea set complete with teapot, cups and tray. We decided it possibly wasn't gold plate and put it in a black sack. We filled several sacks quite quickly and moved upstream a few yards to lift out a set of car tyres and a hi-fi amplifier, all of which had to be carried about 100 yards to the agreed rubbish collection point. In this section we saw the only wild creature seen that morning, a Signal Crayfish.



### Footnote

The numbers taking part in work parties cleaning up this part of the Wye, where the stream is fairly narrow and there are no banks to work from, has to be restricted to 2 or 3 people to ensure safe working. A couple of days after the task had been undertaken, someone phoned Wycombe District Council to report that some "pot" plants had been dumped in the river bed by the Desborough Avenue bridge. I was informed of this and walked down to have a look. On my arrival, I saw the area had been taped off by the police as a crime scene, and an officer was trying to establish when the plant roots had been dumped there. A few days after that, I was walking by and saw that the blue tape had been removed but that the plant roots were still sitting on the stream bed. Presumably either forensic examination had established that the plants were not *Cannabis sativa* or that, if they were, there was no need to remove the root balls, as this annual species would not regrow.

The owners of a business came out to see what we were doing, and one started to reminisce about playing by the river during the war when he was a lad. Evidently, there was what he described as a munitions dump near to where the present BP garage stands, and he and his schoolmates used to light fires and throw on any bullets which they found! He told us that he often has to clear up his yard in the morning, as it gets used at night by locals who park there while entertaining their "girlfriends".

Moving on, there were now dozens of beer, wine and spirit bottles, and small cigar tins to pick out. The banks are in a poor condition here, and it looked as if some buildings might be in danger too, due to erosion. But as I stood in the river and looked downstream, I noticed that the trees and shrubs hid the scruffy buildings, and the view might have looked the same a century before.

We were approaching the Victoria Street bridge now. With more light reaching the banks, several plant species were seen growing on the riverside walls, including Yellow Corydalis (coming into flower), Water Figwort, and Hart's-tongue fern. There is quite a lot of rubbish by the next bridge upstream, so a forthcoming task will be to clean up the stream between Victoria Street and Oakridge Road bridges.

Harry Wheate

The Signal Crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*), an alien species introduced from America, is now the common species of crayfish found in our rivers. The native White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) has become very rare as a result of crayfish plague, a fungus disease carried and spread by the alien American species. The latter suffers no ill effects from the disease, unless put under stress.

Roger Wilding

## Bassetsbury Lane Allotments

Members may have read letters in the Bucks Free Press (News p23 April 20<sup>th</sup> 2012) in support of turning Bassetsbury Lane Allotments into a nature reserve or a recreational area. Here Lorna Cassidy writes in support of continuing to maintain the area

as an allotment site, where, creating her own nature reserve on the allotment she has managed there for many years, has given her so much pleasure.

Pat Morris

## Re-creating Memory Lane

**W**hen I was a child, I was brought up in Holtspur, an outlying part of Beaconsfield at the top of White Hill. No doubt it was called that when the embankment was created out of chalk. Our garden, however, was clay with flint, the same sort of stuff I am finding as I dig up the nettles and other more deep-rooted plants on the Bassetsbury Lane Allotments.

I allow Blackberries to flourish, as they did along Broad Lane, Holtspur, as I trotted beside my brother, who was being pushed along in his pram. I asked questions about the plants I saw. "That's Shepherd's-purse, that's "Yellow Bedstraw" my minder Olf (Mrs Rolf) used to say. Remembering all this after all these years of growing trees and hedgerow plants, I suppose I want to see them again. A year or so ago I went to find "Olf's ally" - her cottage and the common where I played, but I only found very smart houses and no sign of the

common. Broad Lane now bridges the M40 Motorway. There are gravel pits and, further along, Pitchers Farm is all barn conversions, and the great Elms that used to surround it, of course, are gone. Perhaps I am trying to re-create this childhood landscape in my allotment with paths, overgrown hedges and the wild flowers that come up anyway, but it is essential that it is part of a wide open space where other people "Dig for Victory", as we were taught to do during the War, have huts and bits of garden furniture to relax in and listen to the birds, and net their vegetables against the Badgers and deer that creep up in the night. But now Wycombe District Council say the land is contaminated and they cannot insure it. Some members, however, are on our side and the threat of more building on this land is much more serious and needs to be resisted.

Lorna Cassidy



Whatever the future holds for this site, it is important for its natural history interest to be retained. Lorna's photograph of the site after snow shows it can be attractive all year round. Perhaps its future needs to be considered along with that of adjoining areas such as the Funges Meadow nature reserve, the former railway embankment and the nearby wetland areas that will remain following the completion of the housing development on the former sewerage treatment works.

Roger Wilding

A slow worm was found under old carpeting on Lorna's allotment, and the Tree Bumblebee has been recorded in the area. Roger Wilding carried out a plant survey on Lorna's allotment plot six years ago and listed 100 species. Although he found Lady's Bedstraw (the yellow Bedstraw mentioned in Lorna's article), his list didn't include the very common Shepherd's-purse, although it would be surprising if it didn't grow somewhere on the allotments site. Lorna had excellent Runner Bean crops on her allotment before the Council discovered contamination, and your Editor, as well as Lorna, has eaten both these, and Blackberries, from the site, and we are both still alive!

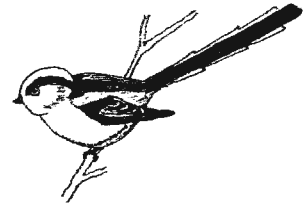
Pat Morris

Lorna has informed us that she is opening her studio and wildlife garden at 1 Hampden Road, High Wycombe from 2-4pm on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and 24<sup>th</sup> June.

## Predators and prey in the garden



Although Jays usually come into gardens for fruit and nuts, they are opportunists and will predate nests in their hunt for food. Finding a Long-tailed Tit's nest is an opportunity they would not want to miss.



Roger and I have quite a number of "big" birds that visit our garden quite frequently. Predators include Magpies, Crows, Jays and Sparrowhawks. Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls and Red Kites come when I put the occasional bird casualty or suitable titbit out. It is always a huge thrill when several kites swoop onto our lawn: the first signs of their arrival are their shadows across the window. Occasionally they misjudge and have to make another attempt.

One other predator is the Heron. We have mixed feelings when we see this bird in the garden. We love to watch it moving around our pond and surrounding wetland vegetation, but feel sorry for the inevitable Frog and frogspawn losses.

Recently a Magpie and Crow simultaneously attacked a spot in our Irish Yew tree, and the lucky Crow went off with an egg, the contents dripping from its beak. Not so lucky were the Chaffinches that had nested there.

For some time we had watched a pair of Long-tailed Tits prospecting for a nest site around our variegated

Bamboo. Each time we walked up the garden there had been a warning given by these tiny birds. Then one day, a Jay coming to the nearby peanut feeder was alerted to the alarm call and went to have a look. The calls got louder and I had to go up and clap my hands to scare the Jay away. I found the nest deep in the Bamboo, woven into several stems, a beautifully constructed dome made up of lichen bound together with spiders' silk. As I knew the Jay would come back, Roger and I covered the whole of the top of the Bamboo with a layer of fleece, pegged to the surrounding shrubs, and went back indoors. It was not long before the Long-tailed Tits were back, frisking from shrub to shrub, peering at the canopy, scolding, and holding their long tails erect. Since then, they have calmed down and now seem to accept the impromptu roof over their home. It is unlikely they will desert their nest now, as so much hard work has gone into it. We look forward to the final thrill – that of having up to ten little balls of fluff lined up side by side on a nearby twig. Although we realise we are interfering with nature, we wouldn't want a predator to get them. It is a privilege to give these delightful little birds a helping hand.

Frances Wilding

## Outside the dining room window (with apologies to Phil Space)

On 5th February 2012, with record low temperatures and snow on the ground, more than 100 Redwings passed through the garden in waves, attracted by the bumper crop of Cotoneaster berries on a tree at the side of the house. It was a thrilling sight, but, needless to say, they had stripped the tree within 24 hours, and were seen no more. There were also four Fieldfares. Usually the Woodpigeons have devoured this fruit before the migrants arrive, but on this occasion the visitors got there first. I normally spot one or two Bramblings or Siskins each winter, but this year they did not extend this far into Wycombe. However, I did have from one to three Blackcaps, which arrived during that intensely cold period in February, and fed on the fat bars hung out for them. They stayed until the end of March. Once the intense cold weather had passed, and the "May in March" temperatures started, birds began to nest. I had hung up a feeder filled with combings from my dog's fur, and I was amused to spot a Dunnock

busily pulling out the hairs and carrying them away. It had so many in its beak, it could hardly see. Blue Tits, a Great Tit and a Robin also took these hairs, so there must have been some very cosy nests around. Whether the nestlings survived the rain and heavy storms of the following month is another matter.

My most recent bird experience occurred when two Red Kites swooped down past my shoulder and took up raw fish I had just placed on the bird table. My dog was standing beside me. No doubt the Kites knew that if they weren't quick enough, the Magpie would get there first, and take away their prize. It shows how much the Kites observe, as they circle the sky above, knowing both my habits and the probable consequence, and also how unafraid of humans they are becoming.

Pat Morris

## Messages in Stone - A Talk by Graham Hickman

**G**raham Hickman works for British Petroleum as a senior geologist and is an active member of the Bucks Earth Heritage Group.

The first part of Graham's talk concerned the work of this group in the conservation of important geological sites within our county. In the same way that many natural history groups try to conserve "biodiversity", the B.E.H.G. aims to conserve and record "geodiversity". Sites of geological significance are under threat from landfill, re-landscaping and major construction work on roads and buildings. The exposed geology of some sites is no longer apparent, reducing our ability to study, record, and enjoy our environment. Geological factors, it was pointed out, underpin the distribution of flora, fauna and human settlement.

The second part of Graham's talk concerned the surface features of the geology of Bucks. He talked about each geological age in turn. For each age, he showed us a diagram of how the earth's continents were positioned at the time with the current shape of Britain superimposed over the map. We were also shown pictures of how the landscape of this area might have looked during each period, with typical

flora and fauna of the time. Photographs of exposed rock strata within our region illustrated each geological period, and rock samples were on display to enhance the overall picture.

The last part of Graham's talk was about the concealed geology of Bucks. Data about this has been acquired from geological surveys of the area and from bore holes, which have been drilled in some cases to find coal, gas or water. Graham showed us photographs of local land features to indicate how the underlying geology of the area determines the rise and fall of the landscape. I found this the most fascinating part of the talk, as inclines in roads I have driven along for years were explained in geological terms.

Thanks to Graham for an enthralling talk. For a detailed account of the geology of the area refer to the Bucks Earth Heritage Group's web site [www.bucksgeology.org.uk](http://www.bucksgeology.org.uk). This site also has details of the group's events and some recommendations for sites of geological interest to visit.

Paul Bowyer

## Some ups and downs of farming and wildlife

**O**ur speaker at the meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012 at Trinity URC was David Knight from Road Farm near Great Missenden. The farm, which has sheep, cattle and arable crops, has been managed under the "Countryside Stewardship Scheme" since 1993, when David's father entered into an "Entry Level" agreement. In 2007, the farm moved to the "Higher Level" scheme. These schemes provide grants for farmers and other landowners in return for effective environmental land management. In this way it is hoped to preserve the traditional character of the rural landscape, including any notable historical features.

David explained that the entry level scheme covered activities such as rotational hedge cutting and leaving unimproved margins around arable fields, whereas the higher level scheme offered a wide range of options aimed at benefiting wildlife conservation. Under the latter scheme, the landowner is able to choose feasible options, but he is then responsible for achieving the required results. On Road Farm the uncultivated field margins are 6 metres wide, and hedges are trimmed on a 2 year

cycle. Hedge gaps are filled and standard trees are grown. David also has an unharvested arable strip of barley. It was stressed that conforming to "Countryside Stewardship" agreements involves some cost and a lot of hard work.

We were informed that the farm supports large numbers of traditional farmland birds including Fieldfares, Redwings, Yellowhammers, Skylarks, owls and Red-legged Partridges. There are good numbers of small rodents: shrews, Field Voles and, significantly, Harvest Mice are amongst them. The farm's semi improved rough grassland, now managed solely for conservation purposes, has Clustered Bellflowers, Pyramidal Orchids and Bee Orchids. Glow worms can also be found on the grassland. David is so pleased with the results of his grassland management, that he has rented an area of adjacent grassland from a neighbour. This additional area has a wider range of plant species, and David aims to increase the number of species on his own grassland by seed dispersal.

(continued on next page)



Many arable weeds have become rare because of changing farming practices, but on farms, such as Road Farm, which are under Countryside Stewardship, species such as Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*) (left) and Venus's-looking-glass (*Legousia hybrida*) (right) may still be found.



One of the "Countryside Stewardship" options implemented at Road Farm is "Low input spring cereal", which demands planting low seed densities but allowing underplanting of grass seed. Sparsely planted arable fields allow the free movement of birds and mammals, and Brown Hares are regularly seen on the farm. David has created some skylark plots, which are triangular in shape rather than the usual oblong plots, which many farms leave unsown as a refuge for nesting birds. The unusual shape of David's plots result from his decision to leave the areas which are missed when the tractor needs to turn when ploughing: this achieves a wildlife benefit whilst saving time and effort. The rare Venus's-looking-glass and Dwarf Spurge grow among the common arable weeds in a field of sparsely-sown cereals. Although this weedy area receives a few unkind comments from neighbouring farmers, David is prepared to put up with a degree of untidiness as it provides plenty of natural food for the numerous birds that visit the field. Another option being considered for the development of the farm is the utilisation of rain water run-off from a gully to create a pond, and some wetland to benefit the wildlife found locally. "Countryside Stewardship" provides for farms "Promoting public access and understanding of the countryside". "Care farming" is an option that David is considering for his farm. This agreement provides benefits for farms taking part in educational visits which give therapeutic involvement for "vulnerable groups of people". Tasks for those taking part may include growing vegetables and working with livestock.

David felt that he could not give a talk on farming and wildlife without raising the controversial subject of bovine TB. Although, like his audience, he has no wish to see badgers culled, he showed us some very worrying statistics showing the rapid rise in the number of cattle having to be slaughtered as a result of the disease, and he explained the subsequent problems faced by the

farms where cattle had been tested and found to be TB positive. This growing problem, which affects all taxpayers as well as farmers, certainly has to be solved, and we all hope this can be achieved by a combination of vaccination and preventing badgers from coming into contact with cattle and their feeding areas.

Road Farm has some 17<sup>th</sup> century barns, which are rapidly approaching the stage when they are in danger of collapse. Rather than sell the barns to a developer for conversion into dwellings, which he has been advised to do, David is planning to seek grant aid to restore the barns for on-going farm use. This task is not without its environmental problems, as the restoration work would have to avoid disturbance to Long-eared bats and a colony of wild bees.

Like other local landowners, David is concerned about HS2, which will pass along the opposite side of the valley from Road Farm, and whilst the line will be in a cutting, he expects the noise of passing trains to adversely affect the current peace and quiet on the farm.

The talk was well received and I am sure everyone would agree that David is doing a wonderful job of combining his farming practices with the conservation of the natural environment. It was certainly very clear from the talk, that Road Farm is not being managed under Countryside Stewardship just for the Government subsidies, but because David believes this is the way that farming should be undertaken, and he gets satisfaction and enjoyment from the results of his efforts.

Thank you David for such an interesting talk, and we look forward to the follow-up visit to Road Farm on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> April.

Paul Bowyer



## Visit to Road Farm

On 21<sup>st</sup> April 2012, 23 members of WWG and BBOWT met at Road Farm, a mixed arable and pastoral farm which has been part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme for almost 20 years. Working with Natural England, the objective is the preservation and enhancement of the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the enjoyment of people and for the economic prosperity it brings. Road Farm has been worked by the Knight family for the past 50 years and it was David Knight who took us on a guided walk around his farm. He explained that satisfactory food production depends on the avoidance of high populations of harmful plant or animal species, but he strives to welcome as wide a range of wildlife as possible within the limits of effective farm production.

The first stop was to see the listed barns which are to be restored so that they can be used for educational visits and farming. I hope they will also continue to provide homes for birds and bats as they do now. We then moved down the farm road to where it crosses the railway and David explained that the verges provide an excellent wildlife corridor. He hopes that 'his' harvest mice, in particular, use it to colonise other farms!

On our walk around, David showed us where he had left "unharvested fertiliser-free conservation headland strips" and "over-wintered stubble followed by low input spring cereal" which leave food for birds during the winter and encourage rare arable plants. During the spring and summer he leaves "fallow plots for ground nesting birds". We saw two fields that used to grow cereals which are now "reverting to rough chalk grassland". One field was cleared in 1993, then seeded with chalk

grasses and wild flowers, and is now managed with some sheep grazing but no fertilisers or sprays. It favours insects, birds like Skylarks, and perhaps forms a buffer for Hares and other wildlife while farming operations are under way in nearby arable fields. A small area of "species rich chalk grassland" is being managed to preserve its wildlife and encourage it to spread to the adjacent field described above.

David pointed out that around the arable fields are "six metre margins", sown with grass mixtures but with no fertiliser or general weedkillers applied. They encourage wildflowers and small creatures that survive along hedgerows, and provide hunting grounds for hawks and owls. Hedge trimming is done during winter months and is limited to twice in five years. Steps are taken at all times to ensure cultivation does not interfere with hedge roots. In some areas "pollen and nectar strips" are created to provide food for butterflies and bumblebees.

David is keen to engage with the wider community and, with the help of local cub scouts, bird and bat boxes have been made to provide refuges for the rarer species including Barn Owls and Long-eared Bats. One of two personal highlights on the walk was the distant view of a nest box, complete with sightings, with the aid of binoculars, of a Barn Owl within. The other was walking through the farm's "site of ancient woodland", which was beautifully carpeted with native Bluebells.

Our grateful thanks go to David Knight, both for leading the walk around his farm and for his earlier talk to us.

James Donald

Photographs taken on the visit to Road Farm



## Ridgeway Trail and Ridgeway Link talk

Roger Wilding saved the day on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2012, stepping in when the intended speaker was unwell, and giving an excellent talk on the Ridgeway Trail and Ridgeway Link. The oldest road in Britain, the Ridgeway originally ran from Dorset to Norfolk but today's long distance trail runs for 87 miles from Overton Hill in Wiltshire to Ivinghoe Beacon in Buckinghamshire, travelling through the North Wessex Downs AONB and the Chilterns AONB. The Ridgeway Link extends the trail onto Dunstable Downs in Bedfordshire, finishing at the new National Trust Visitor Centre. Roger walked the Ridgeway Trail in a series of one-day walks between February and August 2009, and walked the Ridgeway Link in June 2010, accessing all the walks by public transport.

The Trail passes through several nature reserves – Fyfield Down NNR, Aston Rowant NNR, Chinnor Hill, Brush Hill, Grangelands & Pulpit Hill, Coombe Hill, Bacombe Hill and Aldbury Nowers. Short diversions off the Trail lead to many others. Roger's talk included wonderful illustrations of some of the flowers and other wildlife to be seen along the way. Some of the plants mentioned and illustrated were: Lords- and-ladies, Red Bartsia, Musk Mallow, Clustered Bellflower, Harebell, Soapwort, Silverweed, Wall-rue, Burnt Orchid, Red Hemp-nettle, Wild Parsnip, Monkey Lady Orchid hybrid (on a diversion to Hartslock), Duke of Argyll's Teaplant, Watercress, Fool's Watercress, Common Fleabane, Marsh Woundwort, Tufted Vetch, Nettle-leaved



Red Hemp-nettle (*Galeopsis angustifolia*) was seen at the edge of an arable field on the Berkshire Downs section of the Ridgeway Trail.

Bellflower, Wild Basil, Black Nightshade, Black Bindweed, Snowdrop, Winter Aconite, Violets, Musk Orchid, Pasqueflower, Horseshoe Vetch, Wild Mignonette, Wild Thyme, Common Rock-rose and Field Fleawort. There were also pictures of butterflies, moths, galls and of course Red Kites.

Man has inevitably had an impact along the way and Roger covered many examples: ancient features such as Avebury Stone Circle, Silbury Hill, Wayland's Smithy (long barrow) and Grim's Ditch; hill forts at Barbury, Liddington, Uffington, Pulpit Hill and Ivinghoe; chalk features such as Hackpen and Uffington White Horses, Watlington White Mark and Whiteleaf Cross; and buildings including Avebury Manor, Swyncombe Church, the Boer War Memorial on Coombe Hill, Chequers and Pitstone Windmill.

If your feet are itching to get going the website [www.nationaltrail.co.uk/Ridgeway](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/Ridgeway) provides lots of useful information. It also provides statistics on the furniture on the trail – not tables and chairs but signposts (281 holding 966 individual signs), waymark posts (107), other signs (85), map information boards (14), kissing gates (78), bridlegates (15), other gates (8), stiles (12), steps (266 in 12 locations), water taps and troughs (5) and hitching rails (4).

Jane Bailey

Wayland's Smithy is one of the oldest, and one of the most impressive, ancient monuments on the Ridgeway Trail. It is about 5,000 years old, pre-dating Stonehenge by a thousand years.



## Starlings and House Sparrows

Here are my records of how many Starlings and House Sparrows I have recorded in the past in my garden. I looked at the greatest numbers in December 1990, 2000 and 2010, i.e. at 10 year intervals.

<u>Starlings</u>	<u>House Sparrows</u>
55 (17 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1990)	29 (8 <sup>th</sup> Dec 1990)
15 (10 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2000)	14 (3 <sup>rd</sup> Dec 2000)
11 (19 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2010)	None

This past winter, just one or two Starlings at a time have visited their fat bar. House Sparrows were not seen, though they are occasionally spotted in the trees. I hear them chirping in neighbouring gardens, but I don't know what makes them shun my feeders.

Pat Morris

## 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, 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:  
Wycombe Wildlife Group,  
c/o 129 Deeds Grove, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP12 3PA

Chairman, Site Management Co-ordinator and newsletter production:  
Roger Wilding 01494 438374  
w.w.group@btopenworld.com

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

Treasurer: James Donald 01494 637877

Biological surveys: Angus Idle 01494 563673  
eidyllion61@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



### January 2012

01/01	1st Bumblebee	Deeds Grove
10/01	16 Song Thrushes singing	Common Wood
	30 Rooks over garden	Deeds Grove
11/01	9 Bullfinches	Grange Farm
13/01	3 large Bumblebees	Tylers Green
26/01	1st Hazel catkins in flower	Hazlemere

### February 2012

04/02	100+ Redwings on Cotoneaster berries	Amersham Hill Drive
08/02	1st Blackcap (M)	Amersham Hill Drive
12/02	Goldcrest, Blackcap (F)	Downley
18-19/02	Goldcrest	Downley
20/02	1st 7-spot Ladybird	
	Blackcap in full song	
	5 Greenfinches	Deeds Grove
21-22/02	2 Blackcaps (M&F)	Amersham Hill Drive
28/02	1st frogspawn	Deeds Grove
28/02	Peacock butterfly	Deeds Grove

### March 2012

01/03	1st Brimstone (M)	Downley
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02/03	Great Spotted Woodpeckers (pair)	Downley
05/03	13 Yellowhammers & 8 Skylarks	Grange Farm
	6 Great Spotted Woodpeckers	Wellesbourne Sch site
21/03	1st Chiffchaffs singing	Ladies Mile, Hazlemere
23/03	4 Pipistrelle bats	Tylers Green
24/03	3 Buzzards over garden	Downley
25/03	1st Red Admiral	Amersham Hill Drive
26/03	1st Bee-fly	Tylers Green
26/03	1st Small Tortoiseshell	Hazlemere Rec Ground
27/03	Signal Crayfish in Wye	Near Desborough Ave
	1st Holly Blue & Queen Wasp	Deeds Grove
31/03	Skylarks singing	Grange Farm
31/03	Dormouse	Common Wood

### April 2012

01/04	1st tadpoles in pond	Amersham Hill Drive and Deeds Grove
	Scarce Tissue moth	Amersham Hill Drive
	Comma, Orange Tip & Bluebells	Hughenden
03/04	2 pairs of Lapwings & 9 Skylarks	Puttenham Farm
07/04	Coal Tit on feeder	Deeds Grove
24/04	Orange Tip (F)	Downley
	1st Swift	Deeds Grove
26/04	Hedgehog in garden	Shaftesbury Street



### Contacts for Wildlife, Conservation & Environmental Groups in Wycombe District

Bassetsbury Group	David Reed	01494 439665
Bat queries	WDC Rangers	01494 421824
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.)	Roger Warren	01491 638691
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 382431
Butterfly Conservation	Nick Bowles	01442 382278
Chiltern Society	Angus Idle	01494 563673
Chilterns AONB	Steve Rodrick	01844 355505
Chilterns Chalk Streams Officer	Allen Beechey	01844 355502
Chilterns Conservation Board (Activities and Education)	Cathy Rose	01844 355506
Chilterns Countryside Group	Julie Rockell	01628 526828
Chilterns Woodland Officer	John Morris	01844 355503
Downley Common Preservation Society	Bill Thompson	01494 520648
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
RSPB local group	George Noble	01491 682563
St. Tiggywinkles	Les Stocker	01844 292292
Swan Lifeline	Wendy Hermon	01753 859397
Woodland Trust (voluntary speaker)	Michael Hyde	01628 485474
Wycombe District Council Woodland Service	John Shaw	01494 421825

