

**WYCOMBE
 and
 SOUTH BUCKS**

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**JANUARY
 2014**

Issue 73

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**SILVER
 ANNIVERSARY
 ISSUE**

Two plant species that grow in profusion between the Cock Lane cemetery and Gomm's Wood. (see articles on pages 45 and 46.)



Above: Crosswort (*Cruciata laevipes*)

Below: Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*)



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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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.

Chairman's Chat

In late 1988, local organisations and individuals known to have an interest in wildlife, were approached by English Nature (now Natural England) and invited to attend a meeting to discuss the proposed formation of an urban wildlife group in High Wycombe. One of the organisations approached was the High Wycombe Society, and its then Secretary, the late Jack Scruton, rang me and asked if I would like to attend the meeting. The late Maurice Young who was planning to attend on behalf of BBOWT (then BBONT), had also asked me if I was interested in attending, but he only remembered that he had promised to pass on the details of the meeting, when I turned up.

The formation of an urban wildlife group in Wycombe was agreed, and monthly planning meetings were held to get the new group off the ground. Amazing progress was made in the first few months: the group's interim aims were agreed, a membership leaflet, logo, and survey forms were designed, an initial programme of conservation tasks was drawn up, insurance cover arranged, and plenty of publicity arranged. All these actions had been completed before the new group was officially launched with a walk around the Rye and Keep Hill on Sunday 23rd April 1989, attended by around 100 people.

April 2014 is the Silver Anniversary of our Group, which was renamed Wycombe Wildlife Group in 1997, allowing us to extend our interests into the rural areas around High Wycombe. In this issue of Wycombe Wildlife News, we look back over the past 25 years and list some of the milestones in our history. This will bring back memories for our longer serving members, including those of us who have been involved right from the start. The list includes some very successful events and activities, which we would find hard to organise again without a lot of additional resources. It also indicates the key activities, which have stood the test of time, and remain the core functions of WWG today. It also shows that we have spent 25 years trying to complete one important task.

Being actively involved in the current practical management tasks undertaken by WWG members as part of the Revive the Wye volunteer effort, I find it interesting to note that the first, and a number of the other early site management tasks undertaken in the first few years of our Group's life, involved working in the river Wye, planting marginal vegetation, removing litter, and undertaking tasks with the National Rivers Authority (now the Environment Agency) to improve the quality and habitats of the river.

Even more important than looking back and reminiscing about the past, is the need to look forward and consider what needs to be done to ensure WWG remains fit for purpose, and able to continue to meet its charitable aims in the future. Our history shows that we have been able to adapt as necessary in the past, but is the Group in a position to continue to adapt to cope with whatever the future holds for us? It is no use waiting to see. We need to be proactive and take steps to ensure we are better prepared to deal with on-going changes.

I hope that those receiving and reading this newsletter before Christmas, have a happy one, and hope that all those reading it after the festive season had a good Christmas. I wish you all a Happy New Year.

Roger Wilding



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.

New members

We welcome the following new members to Wycombe Wildlife Group:

Belinda and John Catton

Looking back at 25 years of WWG

Our Group was launched in April 1989 (as Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group). The launch event took the form of a public wildlife walk, and was attended by around 100 people. Wildlife walks have continued to be a regular feature of WWG events programmes.

WWG's first conservation task took place in 1989 (marginal planting along the Wye at Knaves Beech). Site management tasks have been undertaken at Chairborough LNR since 1989, and at Sheepridge Nature Reserve and at Cock Lane cemetery and on adjoining land, since 1992. Unfortunately these tasks attract little member support at present. We no longer have the resources to undertake tasks such as pond restoration, hedgerow creation, footpath renovation and step building, although examples of such work undertaken by WWG in the past can still be seen.

Plans to identify and map Wycombe's wildlife were first discussed in 1989. When first reported in our newsletter, it was admitted that it sounded a daunting task, and, in fact, it has never been completed. There have been plenty of opportunities over the years for members to improve their identification skills to assist with survey tasks. In recent times, we have started to put data on our website, relating to local sites of wildlife interest.

The first issue of Wycombe Wildlife News was published in 1990, and it has been published three times a year since then. Our newsletter was the overall winner of the Star Newsletter Awards in 1995. The first e-mail version of the newsletter was produced in 2013.

The first wildlife talk at a WWG members meeting took place in 1990. Such talks have remained an on-going feature of WWG programmes.

Our first public wildlife survey was held in 1991 (on hedgehogs). Later surveys were organised covering garden ponds, mistletoe, muntjac deer, hedgerows, and bluebells.

In 1991, WWG was awarded first prize in WDC's Environmental Awards for our work at Chairborough LNR. We were highly commended for the Sheepridge Nature Reserve project in 1992, and our demonstration wildlife garden at West Wycombe won a runner-up award in 1994.

A 24-hour Wildlife Watch marathon was held in 1991, with 60 participants. Further marathons were held in 1992 and 1997.



Irenke York led the WWG team that managed the demonstration wildlife garden, created at West Wycombe Garden Centre in 1993.

In 1991, Wycombe Bat Week was organised in conjunction with WDC. Launched by a very young-looking Chris Packham, a total of around 1,700 people attended the various events. A large number of bat boxes were put up around Wycombe District, and a bat hibernaculum was created in a former air raid shelter and a gun turret at Booker Air Park.

Wildlife gardening advice has been a feature of our newsletter since 1991. Giving advice to schools on wildlife habitat creation took place on a regular basis in the 1990s, but since then, such advice has only been provided on a reactive basis. Wildlife gardening advisory leaflets were first issued by WWG in 1993, and these have been revised as necessary, and supplies are still available for use as needed.

With core funding grant from WDC, the Countryside Centre opened at Bassetsbury Manor in 1992. The Centre provided office space for our Group, which we shared with the local BTCV team - now known as TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) and with the WDC Rangers). The Centre later transferred to the WDC depot at King's Mead, until it ceased to be financially viable. The WDC core funding also enabled WWG to recruit graduate project officers. Varying numbers up to five at a time were appointed, but when the core funding from WDC ceased, the scheme could no longer be funded.

A wildlife garden was created in the grounds of Wycombe Museum in 1992 and a demonstration wildlife garden opened at West Wycombe Garden Centre in 1993. In the 1990s, a number of members regularly opened their wildlife gardens to the public. A wildflower garden was created in the walled garden at Hughenden Manor in 2006, at the request of the National Trust. This is still maintained by WWG. In 2008, a very successful wildlife gardening exhibition was held at the Environment Centre on Holywell Mead.

Our first public wildlife garden competition was held in 1993, and repeated in 1995. Similar competitions were held for schools, followed by a wildlife art competition in 1996, and a wildlife poetry and photography competition in 1997.

Moth trapping events have been held on a regular basis in members' gardens, on nature reserves and other suitable locations, since 1996.

In 1997, a wildlife allotment was developed by WWG at Bassetsbury Lane. Its use by WWG ceased at the request of WDC in 2010.

WWG members have enjoyed occasional visits to places of wildlife interest further afield, including Barnes Wetland Centre, Wisley RHS Garden, and a nature reserve at Christchurch. The highlight was in 2007, when we visited Highgrove.



In 2005, the Wycombe Wildlife Family Group was launched to replace the former Wycombe Wildlife Watch, which had been formed in 1989, at the same time as the Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group. Unfortunately, the Family Group had to be discontinued in 2010, due to a lack of support.

In 2009, Revive the Wye was launched, as a partnership incorporating the Chiltern Society, High Wycombe Society, WDC, the Chilterns Conservation Board, and the Environment Agency, as well as WWG. This project is now going from strength to strength.

Following a few occasional joint meetings, joint event programmes with BBOWT (South Bucks) commenced in the autumn of 2009. Since May 2013, all the events, including the meetings held in Holtspur, have been undertaken in the name of Wycombe Wildlife Group.



Visits arranged for WWG members have included two to Road Farm near Great Missenden, and to the garden at Highgrove.

Looking forward

The previous article shows that WWG has achieved a great deal in its first 25 years, and that its history is both interesting and varied. There have been many times in the past when change has become necessary for our Group, and we have always coped. Some of our past achievements were only possible, however, because of financial and/or manpower resources available to us at the time.

At the last WWG Executive Committee meeting, the trustees agreed a new priority strategy for planning the long-term future of the Group. This activity, which will be co-ordinated by James Donald, our Vice-Chairman, will have the following primary objectives:

- a) To identify and meet with people willing to help take the Group forward to discuss, develop, and implement plans for practical long-term support.
- b) To develop and implement a succession plan for the Trustee Board, and

- c) To develop and implement a volunteer recruitment and retention plan.

Just as our launch walk in April 1989 attracted a lot of interest, we expect that our Silver Anniversary Walk on 27th April 2014 will also raise awareness of, and enthusiasm for, local wildlife. It will give us a great opportunity to welcome "new blood" to our Group, with the prospect of them taking it forward for another 25 years.

High Wycombe Society has kindly agreed to open Pann Mill as a base for our event. **Now we need your help on the day as well!** There is still some planning to do but, amongst other things, we'll need 'walk leaders', and members in attendance to man a small display and talk about our Group. Please get in touch with the Chairman now to offer your support. (See back page for contact details). We'll be in touch with you, well ahead of the event, to agree your part in making the day a great success.

A talk with a difference



The talk at the first of our current series of indoor meetings, which took place at Trinity United Reformed Church, High Wycombe, on Monday 12th September, was about the use of macro techniques for wildlife photography, particularly of invertebrates. Those who attended were certainly not disappointed, and were treated to lots of wonderful close-up photographs of flies, mayflies, hoverflies, bees, wasps, ants, spiders, beetles, woodlice, and millipedes, as well as a few flowers. All of the photographs were of a quality that most of us would be unable to match. Ron Pilcher, the photographer who gave the talk, described himself as a keen amateur, but his photographs were certainly of a professional standard.

This was very much a talk with a difference, however. As well as seeing a wide range of interesting wildlife photographs, Ron spent time showing us his photographic equipment, and describing some of the techniques he uses to get such good results. Ron covered the use of macro and close up lenses, extension tubes, bellows and reversing rings, various methods of using flashguns both on-camera and off-camera and ways to diffuse the light emitted by flashguns, especially important when photographing insects such as beetles with shiny, reflective bodies.

One of the most fascinating methods for overcoming depth of field problems described, was the use of stacking software. This involves taking multiple shots of the subject, each taken a fraction of a millimetre apart, and then using specially designed software, which selects the sharp point of each exposure (the number of which can vary between just a handful to several hundred) and condensing them to produce a single image where every part of the subject is in focus. A focusing rack, or a special slider, mounted on a firm tripod, and a shutter release cable, are essential for taking the photographs to be used in the stacking process. It was clear that this process not only involves a need for very specialist kit, but plenty of time and patience, together with a level of skill that would need to be developed before getting results anywhere near as good as those we saw during the talk.

Ron distributed copies of a handout he had produced about the equipment and techniques described in this talk. He also sent a .pdf version by email for forwarding to anyone else wanting a copy. Several persons attending the talk did request copies and these were distributed. Several comments were also received about how interesting the talk was, one member saying it was one of the most informative talks he had been to.

Fungus foray at Holtspur Bank LNR

A manageable number of people turned up for the 2013 fungus foray at Holtspur Bank on 6th October, 2013, unlike in 2012 when the massive turnout for the event made the task of leading it very hectic for Penny Cullington from Bucks Fungus Group who led both that foray and the 2013 one for The Friends of Holtspur Bank. The total number of fungi species found during the 2013 foray was just under 50, a similar number to the previous year's total, although the latest foray has added 30 additional species to the site's list.

Nearly 80% of the species found on the 2013 foray were Basidiomycetes and, of these, around 70% were species with gills. All of the Ascomycetes found were very common species, mostly ones found on wood but two (*Phacidium multivalve* and *Trochila ilicina*) are only found on dead holly leaves, and one (*Rhopoglyphus filicinus*) is only found on the dead stems of bracken.

The highlight of this year's foray was finding *Leucoagaricus sericifer*, a species first recorded in Britain in 1951, and for which there are only 58 records. This sighting is the first record for Buckinghamshire. Penny's photograph of the fungus is included below.



The diversity of fungi fruiting bodies



Fungi magic - a drop of water changes the dry fruiting body of the rare Barometer Earthstar (*Astraeus hygrometricus*) into the damp earthstar on the right.



This was the subject of Roger Wilding's talk entitled "Fascinating Fungi" which he gave at the October meeting held at St Thomas' Hall, Holtspur on Friday 11th October 2013. Roger pointed out at the start of his talk, that he would only be illustrating around 120 of the 14,500 or so species of fungus recorded in Britain, and would be restricting the talk to just two of the phyla within the Fungi Kingdom (one of three kingdoms in which fungi are now included). The phyla covered were the Basidiomycetes (spore droppers) and the Ascomycetes (spore shooters).

Most of the talk dealt with Basidiomycetes, many of which have a mushroom-shaped fruiting body with a cap, the underside of which has a spore-bearing surface of either gills, pores, teeth or folds, from which the spores drop as the fruiting body matures. This phylum also contains bracket fungi, stomach fungi, so called because their spores develop inside the fruiting body, and other groups including rusts and smuts. In this section of the talk, we were shown examples of the wide range of shapes and colours to be seen when looking at just the species with mushroom-shaped fruit bodies. Mention was also made of the unusual smells and texture that are characteristic of some species. A selection of photographs of waxcaps (*Hygrocybe* species) and brittlegills (*Russula* species), illustrated the wide colour variation within some genera. Three photographs of the Parrot Waxcap (*Hygrocybe psittacina*) were shown to illustrate that this species may produce a dark green, a bright yellow, or a mixed green and yellow fruiting body. It was pointed out that whilst some species of fungi are good to eat, and a few are deadly poisonous, the majority are either not worth eating, or unsuitable to eat. As well as giving some facts about the poisons contained in certain species of fungi and their effects, Roger mentioned a book produced by Kew on the subject, which contains some interesting information about the possible effects on the human body of compounds found in some species of fungi that are widely eaten. The fact that fungi are very good at extracting minerals from the substrate they are growing on, also means they may absorb toxic

chemicals from polluted soil, or toxins from a poisonous host, e.g. where Chicken of the Woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*) is growing on a Yew tree. The fact that eating Common Inkcap (*Coprinus atramentarius*), when alcohol is, or has been, recently consumed, will cause alarming symptoms, was also mentioned.

Although the talk made no mention of "magic mushrooms", we did see a bit of mushroom magic. At the beginning of the talk, Roger passed round a fungus, which had dried out and rolled up into a round ball, pointing out that he had just sprinkled a small amount of water onto it. During the interval, he invited the audience to have another look at the fungus, which had by then opened up into an earthstar. This particular species was the rare Barometer Earthstar (*Astraeus hygrometricus*). It can be dried out and refreshed many times in this way, presumably enabling the fruiting body to be blown around easily when dry to spread its spores wider.

The latter part of the talk covered some of the more common Ascomycetes, concentrating on the wide diversity in this phylum, which includes cup fungi (some of which are bright red, one which resembles a piece of discarded orange peel, and one found only on Sycamore leaves), the honeycomb-like morels, the distorted saddle-shaped *Helvellas* and various clubs such as the black Dead Man's Fingers (*Xylaria polymorpha*) and the black and white Candlesnuff Fungus (*Xylaria hypoxylon*), the aptly-named hard and black King Alfred's Cakes (*Daldinia concentrica*), and the jelly like Jellybaby (*Leotia lubrica*). Some of the Ascomycetes are found on dung: Roger said it always causes amusement to passers-by when he kneels down to photograph them. He showed us a photograph of the very rare Nail Fungus (*Poronia punctata*) that is only found on the dung of wild horses, mainly in the New Forest, where they have not received any veterinary treatment. Roger added with a smile that, if anyone was interested in studying fungi on dung, Kew had produced a book on the subject.

Roger finished his talk with a brief mention of slime moulds, saying that these organisms, which are separated from true fungi and included in the Protozoa Kingdom, are just as fascinating as true fungi, and that the diversity of the fruiting body of a single slime mould species can vary far more than is the case with true fungi. He tabled an illustrated

article in the 2008 Bucks Fungus Group (BFG) newsletter to illustrate this point. (This article can be viewed on the BFG website www.bucksfungusgroup.org.uk by clicking on "Past Newsletters" followed by "BFG Newsletter number 9 2008" and looking at pages 26 and 27.

The fascinating story of the cell

On Monday 11th November 2013 at Trinity United Reformed Church in High Wycombe, Angus Idle gave us a talk, which described the history of man's knowledge of cells, the basic building blocks of all life on earth. This talk had originally been programmed to take place in January 2013, but it had been cancelled at short notice because of adverse weather conditions.

All forms of life on Earth contain cells: not just animals and plants but also fungi, bacteria and more primitive organisms in other kingdoms. Estimates on the number of cells needed to make up the human body vary quite widely but the number is likely to be in excess of 100 trillion. Every part of the human body, including the brain, muscles, and all the individual organs, requires cells, all of which are designed to perform specified functions. Cells are constantly dying and need to be replaced.

It is generally thought that all life on Earth had its origin in a single cell, which was formed by a chemical process, which occurred billions of years ago. (Fossilised cells a billion years old have been found in rocks over 500 million years old.) This theory is based on the original single cell evolving into millions of species. Darwin put forward this view in his "Origin of Species" and in a later letter expressed the view that all life started with chemistry: science seems to confirm that he was correct on both counts.

Man would have been incapable of observing cells before the invention of magnifying lenses. Roger Bacon experimented with lenses for vision correction in 1268, and, in 1270, Marco Polo described the use of spectacles during his travels in the East. By 1609/10, Galileo was able to view Jupiter's moons for the first time. The first references to cells, however, only date from the second half of the 17th century. Primitive forms of life and cells were observed under a simple but powerful lens developed by a Dutch draper Antonie van Leeuwenhook. In 1674, the latter sent detailed drawings of the results of his observations to The

Royal Society of London, but no one else had a microscope powerful enough to get the same results. Eventually, Robert Hooke, the leading authority on microscopy in England, who had made mention of cells in the first book on microscopy in 1664, managed to confirm Van Leeuwenhook's findings, and the latter was made a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1680. Van Leeuwenhook continued to improve his range of microscopes, and extended his research into blood cells and bodily fluids.

Further progress on the science of cells was then delayed for nearly two hundred years by the widely held belief that life was the result of spontaneous generation. This was an incorrect hypothesis that non-living things were capable of producing new life, resulting, for example, in mice originating from corn, and maggots originating from rotting meat. Although, nowadays, it is difficult for us to understand how such beliefs could fail to have been disproved much earlier, it fell to French scientist Louis Pasteur to convince the world in 1862 that the theory of spontaneous generation was wrong. His experiments proved, beyond doubt, that new life only occurred on non-living material as a result of contamination from the air or dust.

In 1830, Scottish botanist Robert Brown was the first to confirm that each individual plant cell had a single nucleus. A chance discussion between German scientists Theodor Schwann, who had been undertaking animal cell research, and Matthias Schleiden, who had been undertaking plant cell research, revealed that they had produced the same results. Both had proved that cells divide to create new cells. Although it was accepted that both animal and plant cells behaved in the same way, no one had yet correctly identified what triggered the action to create new cells. It was research work on combating diseases that established that individual cells were controlled by the DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) molecule in the cell's nucleus.

In 1953, James Watson and Francis Crick worked out the “secret of life”, describing the double helix shaped pattern of the DNA structure with its chains containing phosphate and the sugar deoxyribose linked by hydrogen bonds of A = adenine and T = thymine, and C = cytosine and G = guanine pairs. When split, the double helix reformed in each new cell. It took a further 10 years to decipher the genetic code, however. Watson and Crick’s success did owe a lot to earlier work by Rosalind Franklin, who managed to take x-ray diffraction photographs of DNA, and produce an analysis of the data. Copies of her findings were passed to Watson and Crick without her knowledge.

The DNA molecule within the cell’s nucleus holds all the information needed to make a new cell. Every cell in the human body contains some 3.4 billion letters of DNA code and all cells contain the same information whatever their purpose. When a cell divides, an identical copy of the DNA is passed on, but in order to make sure the new cell meets the purpose for which it is required, the DNA is passed to a RNA molecule from where it is forwarded to the ribosome outside the nucleus for amino acids to be synthesised to form the required proteins. The new protein is passed back to the RNA to become part of the new divided cell. Cells need to produce protein in this way thousands of times a minute to stay alive.

Before a cell divides, chromosomes, resembling little rods, are formed in the nucleus. These

contain the information relating to hereditary characters (genes). This information is copied to the new nucleus as the cell divides. Research by Theodor Boveri in the 1880s, and by Thomas Hunt Morgan in the 1920s, contributed much to our present-day knowledge of genetics.

By the 1970s, control of individual cells proved possible, and biotechnology has since enabled transgenic cells containing the DNA of more than one species to be created. This practice is known as gene splicing. Splicing human insulin and bacteria DNA has enabled the mass production of insulin for medical use to take place, and adding sugar to bacteria cells has produced diesel oil.

Following the refreshment break, the remainder of the meeting took the form of a question and answer session on matters arising from Angus’ talk. Inevitably, the questions included ones relating to how did life on earth commence, and, if all life started from a single cell, how could that have been created? Although there are many scientific theories on such issues, Angus was very careful not to commit himself to accepting any particular one, on the basis that, however you consider creation commenced, there has to be a reason for the original creation of life as we know it, or for the creation of the pre-existing conditions or materials needed for such life.

Our thanks go to Angus for giving us this interesting and thought-provoking talk.

Revive the Wye update

As Indian Balsam, the Revive the Wye (RTW) volunteers’ main enemy, retreated in September to regroup in spring, all those who joined the fight against this invasive annual plant this year can give themselves a pat on the back. Every plant seen upstream of the eastern end of King’s Mead was attacked in 2013, and it is hoped that, as a result, the number of plants appearing in 2014 will be a lot less. We would still expect to find large quantities at Kings Mead, because of the large population there, and the fact that 2013 was the first year that the site had been targeted for balsam removal. The plan for 2014 is to tackle the balsam downstream of King’s Mead, but this may prove difficult, especially if the river flows as fast and deep there as it did in 2013.

A total of 19 RTW tasks took place in 2013, all within the four month period from June to

September. About half of these took place at King’s Mead, the others being undertaken at various locations along the river between Desborough Recreation Ground and King’s Mead. Some of the tasks involved litter clearance, which unlike the balsam problem can never be eliminated. Nine of this year’s tasks were undertaken by corporate volunteers from local companies, two were undertaken by the Chiltern Rangers’ Green Thursday Group, one involved the use of volunteers from the Environment Centre, two were undertaken by RTW volunteers and five by WWG volunteers (supplemented in one case by volunteers from Earthworks Conservation Volunteers). The amount of time contributed by volunteers during the four month period must have totaled around 700 manhours.

Site maintenance update

The Group's site maintenance tasks did not all go as smoothly as usual this autumn. With the Revive the Wye tasks taking priority up to the end of August, plans were made to make a start on WWG's autumn grassland cutting work in September. A combination of factors, including a brushcutter problem, resulted in some of the tasks at Cock Lane being started much later than usual. The wet period which followed, resulted in piles of cut material almost turning into compost before they could be burnt: this resulted in several days of smoky bonfires.

The annual visit to Cock Lane by Earthworks Conservation Volunteers took place on 26th October. That event went very well, and was enjoyed by all those attending. As well as the usual baked potatoes, removed from the bonfire at lunchtime, we enjoyed baked bananas, which had also been cooked in foil.

The brushcutter problem turned out to be a minor one, only needing a simple adjustment, but the repair centre I took it to for checking were busy, and took over three weeks to even look at it. In the meantime, I managed to do some glade cutting on

the Chairborough Nature Reserve, using one of the Chiltern Rangers' brushcutters. WWG member Derek Sawyer borrowed a brushcutter and did all the annual cutting of the glades below the cemetery at Cock Lane, leaving me with just the banks there, and in the cemetery, to deal with when the brushcutter I use was back in running order.

The wildflower garden at Hughenden Manor has had a couple of end of year visits to remove the excessive growth of the dominant species in order to maintain the garden's biodiversity in the coming year. Now that the National Trust keep the walled garden open throughout most of the year, the need to maintain the wildlife garden's value as a natural habitat over winter needs to be balanced very carefully with the need to ensure that visitors like what they see, and want to create something similar in their own garden. Another factor is that, unless the garden has some management in the autumn, there is no way that the relatively small plot can continue to support up to 80 or more species of plant. I have suggested to the National Trust that perhaps WWG could hold an event in the walled garden during the coming year, at which visitors could learn more about the wildflowers to be seen there, and their wildlife benefits.

Wildlife gardening in winter

It is generally agreed that wildlife gardens should be disturbed as little as possible in winter. There are of course some tasks that need to continue to be undertaken in the interests of the wildlife resident in or visiting the garden.

The most important task is to ensure that birds have enough food to survive the winter. Although, at the time of writing this article, there is a surplus of natural food in the wild, it is important to provide some supplementary food for birds on a regular basis, so they know where to come when natural supplies become short or difficult to access. As at other times of the year, bird-feeding areas need to be kept clean to reduce the spread of disease. Compaction of food in feeders can cause mould to develop, so it is good practice to give the contents a shake from time to time. If scraps of food are put out for the birds, it is good practice to remove uneaten items at the end of the day to discourage rats.

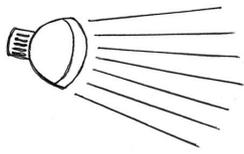
Don't forget that water is just as important to wildlife as food. In frosty weather, it is a good idea to empty birdbaths after dark, and refill them in the morning. Garden ponds can freeze over in winter, and this can cause a build-up of gasses under the ice. The best way of overcoming this problem is to

place a saucepan of boiling water on the ice to melt a round hole: this can take some time, and several refills will be needed, if the ice is thick.

Remember to put up bird boxes well before the start of the nesting season, as this is more likely to result in the boxes being used. If a box has been used, it should be taken down, and thoroughly cleaned, before being put up again for re-use.

Winter is a good time to reflect on the value of your garden to wildlife, and to consider improvements that could be made during the coming year. You could consider whether or not you have a suitable location for a hedgehog box, or a home for overwintering beneficial insects. You could consider planting more shrubs and/or herbaceous plants, which will attract pollinating and other beneficial insects, particularly early in the year. You could review your pond to see if it could be made more wildlife friendly. Your decisions could become New Year Wildlife Resolutions. If you do make any unusual wildlife resolutions, please let us know so that we can pass your ideas on to others.

Finally, don't forget that WWG can provide free advisory leaflets covering a range of wildlife gardening subjects, on request.



Spotlight on:- Gomm's Wood Local Nature Reserve

Gomm's Wood is a 30-acre site on the eastern side of the northern end of the Micklefield Valley. The wood looks over Micklefield towards Highfield and Hangingcroft Woods on the west side of the valley, and looks north over King's Wood, a very large wood which extends to Tylers Green, Totteridge and Terriers.

The Chepping Wycombe Parish Council cemetery car park, at the northern end of the single-track section of Cock Lane, provides a convenient place to park when visiting Gomm's Wood. It is well worth walking through the cemetery to look at the wildflowers growing on the banks, which are managed by Wycombe Wildlife Group to maintain the floral diversity. Between the cemetery and Gomm's Wood, there is an area of land on the downhill slope to the west, which also belongs to Chepping Wycombe Parish Council. Over a number of years, Wycombe Wildlife Group has gradually cleared some of the scrub on this area to create chalk grassland glades. Again, this is an interesting place to look for wildflowers.

Gomm's Wood became a Local Wildlife Site in 2008, and a Local Nature Reserve in 2010. The wood is owned by Wycombe District Council and is managed by the Chiltern Rangers Community Interest Company. The site is managed to maintain a diversity of habitats, including both mature and young woodland, scrub, chalk grassland glades, hazel coppice and a large meadow. As a result of good management, this reserve has a wide range of fauna and flora. Micklefield Bank, the large meadow on the western side of the wood, has one of the largest populations of orchids within High Wycombe.

We plan to include an evening wildflower walk, starting from the Cock Lane cemetery car park, in our summer events programme. WWG plant surveys, undertaken between 2007 and 2011, listed 121 species within the cemetery and adjacent land and 162 species within Gomm's Wood and adjacent grassland. There is of course plenty of other wildlife to see on this reserve, including birds, butterflies, mammals and invertebrates.

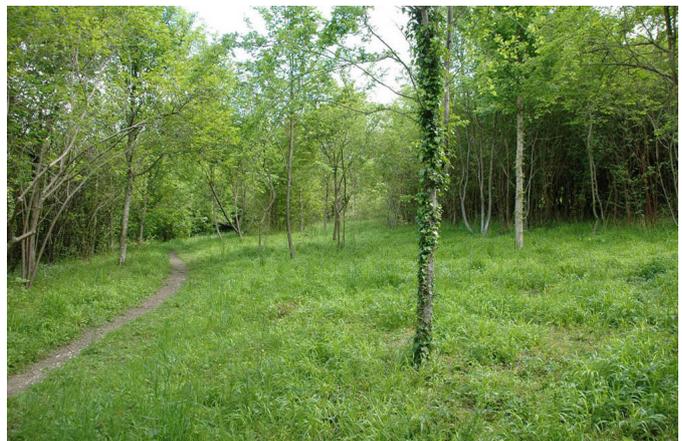


Above: Looking south from the top of Micklefield Valley, with Gomm's Wood on the left.

Below: The butterfly ride in Gomm's Wood, a good place to look for wildflowers, as well as butterflies, at the appropriate time of the year.



Below: Part of an area of land below Cock Lane cemetery which has been cleared of some of the scrub cover by WWG to create chalk grassland.



Wildlife observations - Aug to Nov 2013

This item has been a feature of our newsletter since 1990, although it was headed "Did you see?" for many years. It has been moved to the penultimate page for this issue due to the large number of sightings submitted for a Downley member's garden and its surroundings.

If we receive reports of sightings from more members, we might reserve this page for future wildlife observations.

2/8/13	Ringlet and Commas	Shaftesbury Street garden
3/8/13	Bats & Hedgehogs (1 adult, 2 juveniles)	Shaftesbury Street garden
4/8/13	Peacock, Gatekeeper & Meadow Brown	Downley garden
6/8/13	Peacock & Small Skipper	Downley garden
7/8/13	5 Peacocks, Large and Small Whites, 5 Gatekeepers, Meadow Brown & Comma	Downley garden
8/8/13	12 Peacocks, Large Whites, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown & 2 Commas	Downley garden
10/8/13	Peacock, Large White, Gatekeeper & Small Tortoiseshell	Downley garden
11/8/13	Peacock, Large & Small White, Gatekeeper, Small Tortoiseshell, Meadow Brown & Green-veined White	Downley garden
14/8/13	Peacock, Large & Small White, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown & Green-veined White	Downley garden
16/8/13	Peacock, Large & Small White, Small Tortoiseshell & Green-veined White	Downley garden
19/8/13	Peacock, Small White, 4 Small Tortoiseshells & Green-veined White	Downley garden
20/8/13	Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Gatekeeper & Brimstone	Downley garden
24/8/13	Family of Starlings constantly on window feeder	Deeds Grove garden
25/8/13	Peacock, Brimstone, Red Admiral & Meadow Brown	Downley garden
27/8/13	Peacock, 5 Small Tortoiseshells, Brimstone, Small & Green-veined White	Downley garden
28/8/13	Peacock, 5 Small Tortoiseshells, 2 Brimstones, Small White & Gatekeeper	Downley garden
30/8/13	Small Tortoiseshell, Brimstone, Small White & Green-veined White	Downley garden
31/8/13	Small Tortoiseshell, Small White & Brimstone	Downley garden
31/8/13	Jay disturbing Tawny Owl in tree	Deeds Grove garden
1/9/13	Small Tortoiseshell & Small White	Downley garden
3/9/13	Speckled Wood & Small White	Downley garden
4/9/13	7spot Ladybird	Downley garden
5/9/13	Small White & Meadow Brown	Downley garden
7/9/13	Small White and a Fox (after dark)	Downley garden
8/9/13	Hummingbird Hawkmoth	Carver Hill garden
8/9/13	Roe deer (family group of 4)	Downley field
10/9/13	Small Tortoiseshell & Small White	Downley garden
17/9/13	Roe deer (family group of 4)	Downley field
20/9/13	Comma, Small White & Brimstone	Downley garden
23/9/13	Long-tailed Tits & Chaffinch	Downley garden
23/9/13	Roe deer (family group of 4)	Downley field
24/9/13	2 Red Admirals, Frog (in a bucket half full of water - a lucky rescue)	Downley garden
25/9/13	2 Red Admirals, Comma & Brimstone	Downley garden
25/9/13	Brimstone	Shaftesbury St garden
29/9/13	Comma	Downley garden
23/10/13	Brimstone	Shaftesbury Street garden
26/11/13	Blackbirds singing full song	Deeds Grove garden
27/11/13	Song thrushes singing	Deeds Grove garden

Future WWG activities

A copy of Wycombe Wildlife Group's programme of talks and other events, up to the end of April 2014, has been circulated to those on our e-mail distribution list and the information is also available on the WWG website. A copy of the programme is also being circulated with this newsletter.

We have started to plan our activities for the summer months, when we expect to arrange a butterfly walk at Bradenham, an evening wildflower walk from the Cock Lane car park at Tylers Green, and some moth trapping opportunities. We also intend to continue the former BBOWT (South Bucks) traditions of holding an open day at Munday Dean to view the Green-winged Orchids, and of including the walks around Holtspur Bank, organised by The Friends of Holtspur Bank, in the programme.

Suggestions for future talks and other events are always welcome. All suggestions received will be considered by the WWG Programme Planning Committee, the current members of which are Derek Bourne, Paul Bowyer, Belinda Catton, John Hoar, Caroline Kay, and Roger Wilding.

Joining Wycombe Wildlife Group

To join our Group, please complete a copy of the form on the right 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.



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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.