

**WYCOMBE
 and
 SOUTH BUCKS**

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**MAY
 2014**

Issue 74

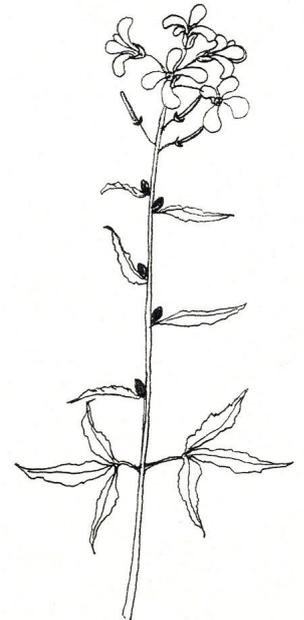
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Two Hedgehog sightings reported from a riverside town garden (see Wildlife observations on page 59).

Coralroot (*Cardamine bulbifera*), one of the plant species seen on the Silver Anniversary walks.



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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Printed by : Greens, Lincoln Road, High Wycombe

**COPY DATE FOR THE
 NEXT ISSUE**

**Tuesday 5th August
 2014**

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

Our Silver Anniversary event to commemorate the launch of our Group in April 1989 took place on Sunday 27th April, 2014, and we were pleased with the way it went. I am grateful to the WWG members who helped both in advance and on the day to make sure everything went in accordance with all the prior planning, and to those in other organisations who supported our event in various ways, including helping to publicise it widely. Nearly 50 people supported our river and woodland walks during the day, including Matthew Ellis (who took on the role of co-ordinator for our Group when it was formed) and his wife Sandra, who came all the way from North Wales to join us for part of the day.

In the last newsletter we looked back at the achievements and milestones in the development of WWG over the past 25 years. Our display stand in the gardens of Pann Mill on 27th April provided us with an opportunity to illustrate some of those past activities. The most important thing now, however, is for WWG to look forward and consider what needs to be done to ensure our Group remains fit for purpose, and able to continue to meet its charitable aims in the future. We need to be proactive and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that this intention is put into practice.

We need to continue to attract more members, make them welcome, and find out how they can contribute to our future. Succession planning is an important issue for our Group and this requires action by the members, as well as by the trustees, because the latter who act as the Group's Executive Committee, can only be appointed by the former.

Roger Wilding

New member

We welcome the following new member to Wycombe Wildlife Group:
Babs Spence

Looking forward

In September 2013, Wycombe Wildlife Group's Executive Committee agreed a strategy for planning the long-term future of the Group. The primary objectives of the strategy are (a) to identify and meet with people willing to help take the Group forward, to discuss 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.

In order to plan for the long-term future of our Group, there is no doubt that we have to attract a core of new and enthusiastic members willing to organise and carry out activities, within the charitable aims of our Group, that appeal to local people and make them want to come along and join us. Although, with additional resources, there might be opportunities to repeat some of the activities that have been a success in the past, new blood can bring fresh ideas for activities, and come up with new ways of doing things.

We have always liaised with other local organisations with similar aims to our Group, but there is still plenty of scope for increasing our communication with other organisations and arranging more joint activities.

Our Silver Anniversary provided an opportunity to promote and stimulate an interest in WWG. If it achieved nothing else, it brought our existence to the attention of a lot more people, which we hope will attract some new members who will be able to help us achieve our aims. Even if the event only makes a small contribution to our future, it has provided a foundation on which we can build.



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.

Silver Anniversary event on 27th April 2014



Left: Nearly time for the start of the morning river walk

Right: On the afternoon woodland walk in Keep Hill Wood



We celebrated our Group's Silver Anniversary with a display in Margaret's Garden in the grounds of Pann Mill, showing some of the achievements over the past 25 years, and referring to some of our ideas for taking the Group forward. The display was open from 11am until 5pm. The very unfavourable weather forecast for the whole day kept most visitors to the Rye away, but we were pleased with the level of support we had for each of our planned walks.

A river walk followed by a woodland walk, each planned to take around a hour, started at 11.30am and the walks were repeated in the afternoon starting at 2.30pm. Several members had volunteered to help lead the walks, so that, if necessary, we could split up into smaller groups. This didn't prove necessary, but it helped having assistant leaders who could answer questions and identify plants and birds seen or heard during the walks.

Following the river downstream from Pann Mill to the former Rye Mill and on to Bassestsbury Mill, we were able to point out some of the riverside flora, mention the recent improvements to the river margins and discuss a number of river management issues. Mention was made of the former mill sites seen on the walk, and other historical points of interest relating to the Rye and its environs were covered. A number of environmental issues relating to the Dyke were mentioned and the improvements to the wetland habitats below the Holywell Mead waterfall were explained.

The route of the woodland walk through part of Keep Hill Wood was carefully chosen to cover a range of habitats within the wood, whilst avoiding any steep paths either going up to the top of the wood or coming down again. A reasonable number of woodland flora species were seen, the most interesting being Spurge-laurel (*Daphne laureola*) and Coralroot (*Cardamine bulbifera*). Towards the end of the woodland walk, a patch of Crosswort (*Cruciata laevipes*) was pointed out, explaining that this locally uncommon species had been reintroduced by Wycombe Wildlife Group in advance of the walk. The species had been seen on the Group's launch walk 25 years ago, but had disappeared from the site, almost certainly having been shaded out by other more vigorous species.

After admiring the views looking down on the improved Holywell Mead wetland area, the guided walk returned to Pann Mill via Wendover Way. Here we saw the planted rafts, fishing platforms and marginal planting undertaken by the Environment Agency, and the Mare's-tail (*Hippuris vulgaris*), which provides cover for the fish introduced into the Dyke. We listened to the birdsong, pointed out some interesting plants and kept an eye open for the reddish-coloured Grey Squirrels, which are regularly seen where the Wendover Way footpath runs alongside the fence of the Wycombe Abbey school grounds. Everyone taking part seemed to enjoy the walks, and we hope that some will decide to join the Group or support some of our future events.



Left: Spurge-laurel (*Daphne laureola*)
This uncommon species was seen on the walk in Keep Hill Wood.

Right: Crosswort (*Cruciata laevipes*)
This species, which was seen on the Group's launch walk in 1989, had disappeared from Keep Hill Wood, but had been reintroduced in advance of the Silver Anniversary walk as close as possible to its original site.



In the forests of Borneo

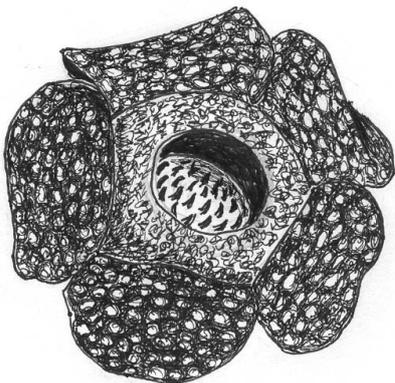
At our meeting in Holtspur on Friday, 13th December 2013, John Tyler gave us a talk about the wildlife and inhabitants of Borneo. The talk started with some background information about Borneo, the third largest island in the world and about twice the size of Germany. Although a large part of the island (Kalimantan) is within Indonesia, the northern part, consisting of Sarawak and Sabah, is within Malaysia. The independent sultanate of Brunei is on the north coast.

The majority of Borneo was, until relatively recently, mainly covered by very ancient rainforests, which due to their age, and location within the tropics, support some of the richest biodiversity on earth. No-one really knows the full extent of the island's flora and fauna, as new species are still being discovered. It is thought that there are around 15,000 plant species, including over 5,000 species of fern. The forest is in a state of permanent twilight, because of the dense shade provided by the tall trees, which only allow around 2% of the sunlight to reach the ground. Many of the plants, including ferns and orchids, are epiphytes. The flowers of *Rafflesia arnoldii*, a unique plant only found in the rainforests of this region, are the largest in the world, up to around three feet across. This parasitic plant is unusual in having no visible leaves, roots or stem. It gives off an extremely repulsive odour, which actually attracts its pollinators. Some 50 species of carnivorous pitcher plants (*Nepenthes* spp) grow in the rainforest, and these feed on insects and sometimes even larger creatures. Their prey gets trapped in the digestive fluid contents of the open pitchers, where they slowly dissolve to provide the nutrients needed by the plants. We were told that the pitchers are also habitats for species that have evolved to be able to survive there and share the pitcher plants' food supply. We were shown a photograph of a *Heliconia* with extremely colourful bracts, which hide the actual flowers. Whereas the majority of plants in this genus rely on hummingbirds for pollination, the absence of the latter in Borneo

results in the plants being pollinated by bats. Some of the richest areas for flora are on the mountains, where there is more variation in the habitats, the plant cover becoming shorter as the altitude rises. Mount Kinabalu, at 13,455ft, the highest mountain in SE Asia, has many species, which are only found on this one mountain.

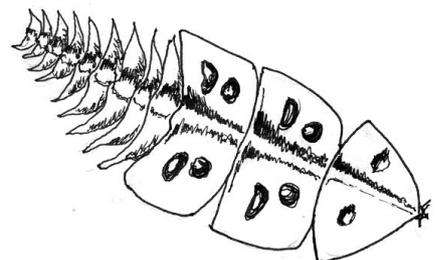
John informed us that Borneo also has a staggering biodiversity of insects, with some 1,000 species of butterfly and an estimated 50,000 moths. We saw some excellent pictures of beetles, including a species of longhorn beetle, a net winged beetle, and a trilobite beetle. The female of the latter remains in the larval stage, and is able to lay eggs without going through a pupal stage. We saw two examples of how camouflage protects species from predators, a grasshopper resembling a fallen leaf, and a frog, the shape of which we were only able to make out when it was outlined by John's laser pointer. The frog's camouflage is so good, that the species has evolved to have white feet, which it can use to signal its presence to a potential mate. When showing us a picture of a cicada, we were told this is one of the noisiest insects in the world, and that they can switch off their ears, so that their noise only annoys others.

In the second half of the talk, we were introduced to the human population of Borneo. We learnt that there have been people living on the island for 40,000 years, and that they have always had a great respect for their land, believing that spirits lived in the trees and mountains. Their way of life has remained sustainable for thousands of years, with small-scale fishing, and the use of natural materials to meet their everyday needs. Although rarely practiced today, headhunting was widespread in the past, with the natives cutting off the heads of their enemies during tribal warfare. The trophies were then dried and hung up to decorate their homes. Apparently these dried heads were treated with great respect, in the belief that they brought good health.



Left: *Rafflesia arnoldii* - the largest flowers in the world, measuring around three feet across.

Right: Trilobite beetle



Rattan, from tall palm trees growing in the forests, is still harvested and used for making ropes and ladders. Such ladders are used to collect birds' nests for export for use in birds' nest soup. We were shown photographs showing the collectors at work, on their home made ladders, a couple of hundred feet in the air in huge underground caverns full of fruit bats. The floor of the caves is covered with a thick layer of bat droppings, which has built up over the years. This layer of droppings is full of beetle larvae, with the surface completely covered by the black adult beetles. The theory is that if a nest collector falls off his ladder, the mixture of droppings, beetles and larvae will provide a soft landing: the fact is that deaths resulting from falls are not uncommon. Hearing that the swiftlet nests collected are either white ones made by the birds' saliva, or black ones containing the birds' droppings and feathers as well as saliva, I made a mental note to avoid being tempted to order birds' nest soup when eating in a Chinese restaurant. As the collectors are paid over £1,000 a kilo for the nests, I would imagine very little ends up in a bowl of soup you get in a restaurant. In any case, only the expensive high-end restaurants sell genuine birds' nest soup: in most cases, the birds' nest is made from pasta to look like a birds' nest.

This excellent talk did finish on a rather depressing issue, as John referred to the rapid loss of Borneo's rich and diverse habitats, as a result of huge areas of forest being felled for timber and

farming. The cleared land only supports farming for a short time, as the soil level is only thin and is soon washed away by rain, into rivers, which lose their fish as a result. The creation of plantations for the production of palm oil, to meet a worldwide demand for the many products manufactured from this oil, is also causing widespread habitat destruction across Borneo.

Amongst the fauna threatened by habitat destruction, are the two species of orang-utan, one found only in Sumatra, and one only in Borneo. Adult orang-utans are often shot when they stray onto farmland, and their babies fetch good prices when sold to cater for the demand for this species as pets. As the young remain with their mother for a long time, the mothers are often shot in order to catch the babies. Fortunately there are sanctuaries that have been set up to protect the species and to reintroduce rescued pets into the wild.

Our thanks go to John for giving us a wider appreciation of the value of Borneo for wildlife, and for the thought-provoking end to his talk. Large-scale de-forestation is of course a worldwide problem and needs action by governments at an international level. We can all do our bit to help, however, by supporting organisations working hard to prevent de-forestation, and by avoiding buying products produced using unsustainable resources, including those with palm oil as an ingredient.

Alien landings in our area

In early December 2013, reports started to come to WWG about an alien invasion in our area. Landings in the Hughenden valley were the first to be reported, and when these were mentioned at the December members' meeting, it became clear that this was not just a single sighting, but one affecting a wider area within South Bucks. Sightings from Flackwell Heath, Amersham and Beaconsfield were reported at the meeting, and subsequent reports were received from Great Missenden, Tylers Green and Chesham. The aliens concerned were Ring-necked Parakeets (*Psittacula krameri*), a species originating from India, but now found in many parts of the world as a result of introductions and escapes. The first reported sighting in the UK was in Kent in 1969, and the species has gradually spread, particularly within Kent, Sussex and Surrey. This colourful, but very noisy, bird has become quite common along the Thames Valley, and is regularly seen (or heard) in Marlow. They are not normally seen, in our area, away from the Thames, so, at a time when suitable food supplies were abundant almost everywhere, there is no obvious reason for them to have moved into this new territory.



Although it is interesting to see this colourful bird, especially as it will visit garden bird tables and feeders, it is unlikely to be welcomed as a permanent resident on our patch, because of the potential future threats it poses to native bird populations and fruit crops, if the population of the species continues to increase. There have been no real problems to date, but the latest estimate of the number of breeding pairs in this country is 8,600 (in 2012). By coming to Britain, these alien invaders have become the most northerly breeding parrot population in the world.

Water, water everywhere (including some you wouldn't want to drink)



In early 2014, there was a continuous stream flowing from near Saunderton Station to West Wycombe, with floods at both ends.

Whilst the recent very severe flooding in parts of the country was headline news, our local area has not escaped the effects of the wettest winter on record. Exceptional amounts of water in the Thames caused flooding in Marlow resulting in the Thames Path, Higginson Park and some properties being flooded, and Wycombe Wildlife Group's planned bird walk around Spade Oak Lake Nature Reserve having to be cancelled. The wet winter also topped up the chalk aquifers in the Chilterns, and for the second year running the winterbourne stretches of our local chalk streams have risen from sources much further upstream than usual: this year the streams have been flowing with a stronger flow than in 2013.

In early 2013, the Wye was flowing from near Inver Farm along Bottom Road between West Wycombe and Radnage, whereas in March 2014, the stream was flowing along Grange Farm Road, west of Bennett End. The Hughenden Stream, which had a continuous flow from Warrendene Road in the Hughenden valley just south of the crossroads near Lower Warren Farm, produced more water than the underground pipes through the residential areas could cope with, resulting in a mix of pure spring water and sewerage which had to be pumped into the Hughenden Stream as a temporary solution.

Perhaps the most interesting result of the high flows has been the appearance of a new tributary of the Wye, which, in the absence of any other name I will refer to as the Saunderton Stream. This has had a continuous flow all the way from near Saunderton Station to West Wycombe, causing a flood, requiring the use of sandbags and the installation of pumping equipment at Saunderton, and a flood across the A40 near the Pedestal at West Wycombe.

Wycombe District's other chalk stream, the Hambleton Brook (or Hamble), which flows into the Thames at Mill End near Hambleton Lock, was flowing from the Turville end of Watery Lane in early 2013, but this year it has been flowing along the road through Turville, having risen from springs in the roadside woods west of the village.

Although we feel very sorry for those people whose properties have been affected by flooding, the chalk stream flooding is an indication that our local chalk streams are acting as they should following a very wet season. A fast winter flow improves the quality of a chalk stream by removing silt from the riverbed gravels, benefiting both the fauna and flora. These occasional happenings also act as a reminder that the flood plain of our chalk streams covers the whole winterbourne section of each stream, even where it may remain dry for ten years or more at a time.

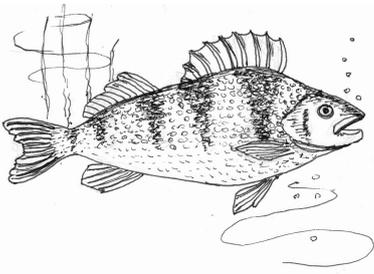
Fish of the Wye

Tom Sherwood, the Environment Agency's Fisheries Officer for the catchment area which includes the Wye, agreed to come along to our member's meeting on 20th January to talk to us about fish in our local river, and about some of the work the Environment Agency has been undertaking to improve our local watercourses for fish.

Tom explained that the Agency currently employs around 10,000 people, although this number is expected to be reduced considerably as a result of further expected Government cuts. The Agency is responsible for a wide range of matters including flood defence and pollution control, as well as fisheries management. He explained that the Wye

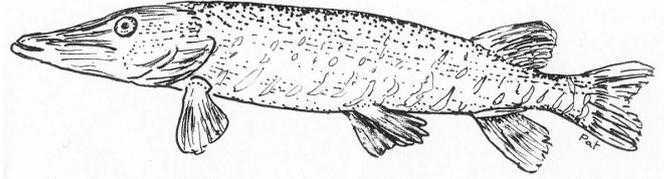
has long been famous for its Brown Trout, adding that the trout introduced to the rivers in New Zealand originated from eggs taken from fish in the Wye.

Data on fish populations is collected and maintained to help monitor the state of the river. Such surveys are usually undertaken by electrofishing, which temporarily stuns all the fish in the survey location, enabling them to be netted, identified, measured and aged (by taking a scale sample) before they are returned to the river. These surveys are undertaken at the same time of year, and in the same locations, to provide comparative data for assessing changes in species composition and density.



Left: Perch
Right: Pike

Both of these species are found in the Dyke.



The survey sites along the Wye are at Desborough Recreation Ground, Pann Mill, Wycombe Marsh Retail Park, Kingsmead, Boundary Park, Knaves Beech, Wooburn Park, Brookbank (alongside Slate Meadow) at Cores End, and at Claytons Meadow Recreation Ground (off Furlong Road, Bourne End). The survey results at these sites have been very varied, with very few fish being found at some sites, and one site dominated by Roach. Increased numbers of fish were recorded following the habitat enhancement work undertaken at Wooburn Park.

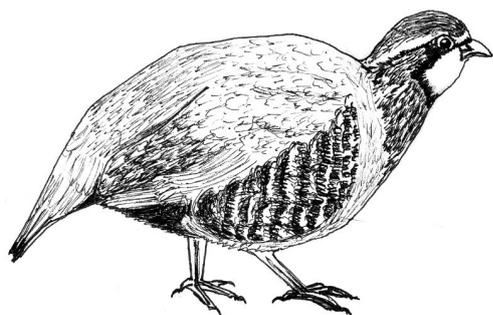
We were informed that the most common fish species in the Wye are Brown Trout and Bullhead, and that these were most plentiful in the middle and lower reaches of the river, and in the Dyke. The most reliable location for seeing Brown Trout is at the back of the fire station in High Wycombe, where the river emerges from the town centre culvert. The species is in fact common throughout most of Britain and in most of Europe, in rivers where the water quality is good, and there is a high oxygen level and a relatively low water temperature. In the Wye, Brown Trout usually spawn in December in gravelly shallow water. They tend to move upstream to selected spawning grounds, where the female will flick her tail around to make a depression in the gravel to lay her eggs. Brown Trout live for 6 to 8 years and can grow up to 10lb. The Bullhead likes clear, shallow water with a good gravel riverbed, and rich feeding potential. This species spawns in March, the eggs being attached to plant stems and guarded by the male until they hatch. This species lives up to four years, growing to 3 or 4 inches in length. Sticklebacks are found all along the Wye, and Perch, Chubb, Dace and Eels occur in small numbers. Most of the Pike and Roach are in the Dyke, where Carp and Tench are also found.

Tom referred to the problems affecting the Wye and the Dyke as a habitat for fish. Many of these arise because much of the Wye is in an urban location where, for years, it has suffered from habitat degradation (as a result of past industrial use), channel modification (incorporating hard bank engineering), pollution, and water abstraction. Although the river is far cleaner today than in the past, road run-off, chemical spills, and occasional problems related to the discharge of treated sewerage, still occur. Tom pointed out that under EU legislation, our Government is required to ensure that

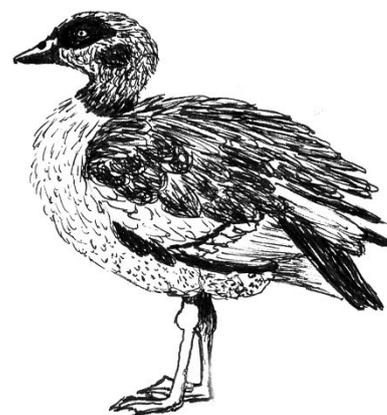
all our waterbodies reach good ecological status by 2027. To achieve this, there will need to be a determined effort to improve the natural habitats along our watercourses, including more marginal planting, using large woody debris and flow deflectors to create a greater range of habitats for fish and water invertebrates, and improving the gravel river beds. Flow deflectors have been introduced at Kingsmead, Boundary Park and Wooburn, and a number of volunteers were given training in their installation during Rivers Week in 2013. The Dyke, which has been used for fishing for about 100 years has been slowly silting up for decades, due mainly to the slow flow in this watercourse. Mare's-tail (*Hippuris vulgaris*) was the dominant plant here, but most was removed by dredging some 10 years ago. The Dyke, with its large population of ducks and swans, is now virtually barren of plant life, resulting in the development of algae on the surface of the water. Not all the problems affecting fish populations are due to the actions of man, however. Fish are one of the main sources of food for Herons, Cormorants, Pike and Signal Crayfish. The Dyke has a large population of the latter, and some are very big specimens. All of these factors may have contributed to the fish losses, which have occurred in the Dyke, where restocking with thousands of young Roach, Rudd, Perch and Tench has taken place in the last couple of years. Although the Mare's-tail has grown back at the boathouse end of the Dyke, where it is now only cut to provide a channel for the boats, recolonisation along to the eastern end of the Dyke is very slow, being kept in check by the ducks and swans, which feed on the young growth of the plants. At one time, the swan population was controlled by a dominant male that claimed the whole of the Dyke as territory for himself and his mate, but the current lack of a dominant male has resulted in up to 50 swans at a time being present on the Dyke. The Environment Agency installed the floating reed islands on the Dyke, and introduced some marginal planting to provide refuges for the fish, and it is hoped that other similar measures can be taken in the future, subject to the necessary resources being available.

Our thanks go to Tom Sherwood for his very interesting and informative talk. Tom has played a major role in improving the quality of our local river, and we hope that the Environment Agency will continue to have the resources to keep up their good work.

Birds of Little Marlow



Left: Red-legged Partridge



Right: Egyptian Goose

On Friday, 14th February, Phil Horwood came along to our meeting at Holtspur and gave us an excellent talk on the birds of Little Marlow. His comprehensive coverage included both the common birds and the many unexpected species that have been recorded in the Little Marlow area. Most of the birds referred to were illustrated by very good photographs taken by Phil.

After describing the various habitats around the Spade Oak Lake and nearby areas, Phil's talk started with coverage of ducks, swans and geese seen there. Nearly 20 species of duck, four species of swan and eight species of goose got a mention. The ducks included Shoveller, Pintail, Shelduck, Ruddy Shelduck, Ferruginous Duck, Pochard, Red-crested Pochard, Goldeneye, Smew, Merganser, Red-headed Merganser, Gadwall and Teal, and the geese included Barnacle, Brent, Bar-headed, Pink-footed and Egyptian Geese. We heard that even a Snow Goose has put in an appearance at Spade Oak. A number of other very rare visitors to Little Marlow were mentioned during the talk, including Slavonian Grebe, Great Northern Diver, Ruff, Turtle Dove, Woodcock and Avocet.

Lapwings are seen mainly in the winter months, Sand Martins, Swallows then Swifts arrive as spring progresses, and Curlews often drop in on May evenings. Snipe and Redshank are seen regularly, and Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Oystercatchers, Jack Snipe, Corncrake and Golden Plovers appear occasionally. Little-ringed Plovers breed at Little Marlow and, as well as the Common Terns, which nest on the rafts on the lake, Arctic Terns occasionally pass through. Most of the common species of gull are seen around the area.

The common birds of prey are regularly seen at Little Marlow, and we learnt that Hobby, Merlin, Goshawk, Peregrine Falcon and Osprey have all been recorded there. Most common bird species will be seen or heard in the hedgerows and trees around the area, and species such as Blackcap, Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Tree Creeper, Willow, Sedge

and Reed Warblers, Jay, all three species of woodpecker, Whitethroat and Chiffchaff are often present. Spotted Flycatchers can be seen near the sewerage treatment works, and Pied Flycatchers have been recorded passing through. Siskins are often seen in the alders, especially in winter. Redpolls tend to be seen around the car park. Linnets are not common but, if present, are likely to be in the hedge alongside the railway, where Bullfinches can also be found. Kingfishers, Herons, and Little Egret are regularly seen alongside the lake: the Herons, along with Cormorants, breed on the island. Reed Buntings nest on the ground amongst the reeds. In addition to the Pied and Grey Wagtails, which are seen regularly, the Yellow Wagtail has been recorded.

Yellowhammers are decreasing in the area, but the occasional one may be seen. Redwings and Fieldfares are usually seen in winter. Although Pheasants and Red-legged Partridges are fairly common around the Little Marlow area, the only Grey Partridges still found in the area are limited to a few in the nearby Sheepridge area.

The talk finished with a mention of the Ring-necked Parakeet. Phil told us he had seen them on a feeder in his garden at Marlow, and had seen a flock of around 150 at Cookham. He added that the numbers are increasing and they are becoming more widespread.

Phil's talk was very well received by those who braved the weather to attend. The attendance was lower than normal, almost certainly due to the weather, unless the fact that it was held on Valentine's Day kept people away.

Unfortunately, due to severe local flooding, the follow-up walk around Spade Oak Nature Reserve, planned for Wednesday 19th February, had to be cancelled. We plan to set another date for the walk in February next year, and hope that nature doesn't interfere with our arrangements again then.

Wycombe's environment centres - past, present and future

At our March members' meeting, on Monday 17th March, Frances Alexander spoke about four Wycombe Environment Centres, the first on Holywell Mead from 2002 to 2010, the one in use on the day of the talk, a new temporary replacement for which lease signing was imminent, and finally a fourth more permanent centre.

Wycombe's first Environment Centre, which opened within the swimming pool complex on Holywell Mead in 2002, following several years of planning with support from both Wycombe Wildlife Group and BBOWT, achieved a great deal in its lifespan of just over seven years, promoting environmental issues. Its location and good parking facilities made it an ideal place for environmental groups such as ours to meet. Displays, themed trails, events for children, and an observation beehive were just some of the activities providing interest for visitors.

Unfortunately when the lease came up for renewal, the higher charges were unaffordable, and the Centre had to close in 2010. Frances Alexander was determined to ensure that Wycombe continued to have an environment centre, and by 2012 she had managed to rent the Wye River Studios, an empty building alongside the Wye in West Wycombe Road, just a short way above where the river enters the town centre culvert. With the help of a new trustee board and plenty of volunteers, Frances managed to get an effective replacement centre up and running in quite a short time. All the waste ground around the building (including an area from which contractors had to remove asbestos) and the riverbanks, were landscaped and turned into gardens, and there was no shortage of volunteers to undertake all this work. WWG provided a couple of leaders for a river clearance task, to explain the health and safety issues involved, and to supervise the volunteers in their first task. Frances said in her talk, that this river task had been very much enjoyed by those who took part, and that the number of bags of rubbish stacked up for disposal at the end of the day showed how necessary the task had been.

In her talk, Frances mentioned that the total number of volunteer hours worked in the last financial year was over 8,000, and that some £50,000 in donations and grants had been received. With such a level of support, and with many of the activities planned for the Wye River Studios centre reaching fruition, the continuing success of the centre looked assured. Then came the day when the owner decided to convert the building into a block of flats. This second unavoidable closure of a thriving environment centre in our town would have disheartened most people,

but Frances, with her usual drive and determination, saw it as yet another challenge, and immediately started to look for a suitable location for a third environment centre.

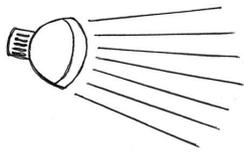
By the date of her talk, arrangements were in hand for the third centre to be located in the Pink Barn, a fairly small vacant building behind the Curry Centre in Easton Street, but a lease had not been signed. In any case, the building would only be suited to short-term use until a larger, more permanent location could be found. At the time of writing this article, the packing prior to the move from the Wye River Studios had more or less been completed, so by the time you read this article, work to make the Pink Barn premises ready for use will have started.

We hope Frances Alexander is able to get the Pink Barn centre into use in a reasonably short time, so that she can devote her time and effort into the negotiations for Centre No.4. Frances told us that she would very much like to be able to arrange to make use of the original High Wycombe Station building, which dates from the time when the only rail connection with London was via Bourne End. This listed building, located between the current station's entrance and exit roads, was designed by Brunel, but is at present a bit of an eyesore. If it was possible to get the use of this building, Frances would hope to attract funding to cover the costs of making it fit for purpose, and turn the current eyesore into an attractive building with an environment-friendly use.

We are grateful to Frances Alexander for her talk, and interested to hear how much can be achieved with drive and enthusiasm, a strong trustee board, and plenty of active volunteers. We wish Frances all the best with her plans to ensure that Wycombe continues to have a thriving environmental centre fulfilling the important role of promoting the many environmental issues, which are of concern to us all.

Editor's note:

It was a great pity that so few of our members and other regular supporters attended this talk about the on-going determination of the Environment Centre's trustees to continue to maintain a hub for promoting the whole range of environmental issues in Wycombe, despite all the setbacks they have experienced. Wycombe Wildlife Group is a group member of the Centre and will continue to support the efforts being made.



Spotlight on:- Highfield and Hangingcroft Woods Local Wildlife Site

In the last issue, when we turned the spotlight on Gomm's Wood, we mentioned Highfield and Hangingcroft Woods, which were on the opposite side of the top end of the Micklefield valley. This time we will cross over and have a look at what these two woods have to offer.

Although Highfield and Hangingcroft Woods are separate woods, only a boundary bank separates them: this is not easy to spot unless you know where to look. Both woods are owned by Wycombe District Council, and a single Local Wildlife Site designation dating from 2010 covers the two woods. Together, they occupy 22 acres of land that has escaped both past agricultural use and the intensive residential development that replaced all the former farmland within the Micklefield area many years ago.

The woods are now managed for Wycombe District Council by the Chiltern Rangers Community Interest Company. They are ancient woods, as the numerous Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) plants to be seen in the woods make clear to anyone visiting the woods in spring. Initial plant surveys, undertaken as part of WWG's project to record what can be found in our local sites of wildlife interest, have recorded a total of 115 species to date.

There are about a dozen gates providing public access to these woods from the surrounding housing areas, and, within the woods, there are plenty of paths and numerous flights of steps to help visitors to negotiate these hanging woods safely. Once in these woods, you could easily spend at least a couple of hours following the various paths and getting plenty of exercise climbing the steps, whilst enjoying the natural history on offer. Glades which have been created at the NW end of the woods support grassland plant species, and a range of shrubs around the glades provide opportunities to see a range of butterflies and birds.

An environmentally-friendly way of visiting both Highfield and Hangingcroft Woods, and Gomm's Wood on the opposite side of the valley, is to catch a No.32 bus (which runs every 15 minutes) from the town centre to the top end of the Micklefield valley. It is then only a short walk to the left to enter Highfield and Hangingcroft Woods, and a short walk to the right to enter Gomm's Wood. For a much longer continuous woodland walk, both Highfield and Hangingcroft Woods and Gomm's Wood join up with Kings Wood, offering 186 additional acres of woodland to enjoy. We will turn the spotlight on King's Wood in the next newsletter.



Above: View of Highfield and Hangingcroft Woods from Gomm's Wood, with King's Wood in the background.

Below: Views inside Highfield and Hangingcroft Woods.



Wildlife observations - December 2013 to March 2014

The following wildlife observations were reported to Wycombe Wildlife Group. The list includes some sightings in late November (which were received too late for inclusion in the last newsletter) as one was of a hedgehog in a High Wycombe town garden, and we have not received any reports of hedgehog sightings for some time.

04/11	Blackcap & Green Woodpecker	Downley garden
05/11	Roe Deer in field at end of garden	Downley
06/11	"	"
13/11	Hedgehog in garden	Shaftesbury St
08/12	15 Ring-necked Parakeets	Hughenden valley
(See article on page 53 for more local undated sightings of this species)		
09/12	Siskins and juvenile Starling	Deeds Grove garden
	Fieldfares and Redwings	Marlow
13/12	Lots of Blackbird, Song Thrush and Mistle Thrush song & 2 Kingfishers	The Rye
10/01	Bumblebee on heathers	Deeds Grove garden
19/01	"	"
13/01	Kingfisher skimming along stream at bottom of garden	Shaftesbury St
17/01	Blackbirds and Thrushes singing	Deeds Grove garden
	Robins paired up	"
19/01	Red Kite knocked over bird table close to house whilst trying to remove a lump of fat tied to table	Deeds Grove garden
23/01	Blackbirds, Thrushes, Dunnocks, Wren, Robin, Chaffinch and Great Tit singing	Deeds Grove garden
24/01	Bullfinches in garden	"
31/01	6 Little Egrets	4 separate locations between King's Mead and the Rye
		Downley
16/02	Brimstone	Two locations in the Frieth and Moor End area
28/02	First reported frogspawn	Fennells Wood
		Deeds Grove garden
28/02	Red-legged Partridge	Hughenden Park
04/03	Blue Tit nesting	Downley & Deeds Grove gardens
09/03	Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Brimstone	Shaftesbury St garden
10/03	7-spot Ladybird	Deeds Grove garden
12/03	Unidentified vole caught by cat	By Rye Dyke
13/03	Comma	Deeds Grove garden
14/03	Swans building and Blackcap singing	Hughenden Park
15/03	Chiffchaff	"
16/03	Blackthorn in flower	Downley garden
	Brimstones, Peacock and Comma	Shaftesbury St
16/03	Peacock butterfly	Deeds Grove garden
18/03	Hedgehog in garden	Deeds Grove garden
20/03	Queen wasp	Deeds Grove garden
25/03	Blackbird feeding young	Deeds Grove garden
31/03	Wild Cherry in flower & 2-spot Ladybird	Downley garden



Above: Siskin

Below: Little Egret



Making your membership subscription go further

James Donald, our Treasurer, thanks members who acted on his request to take one or more of a range of actions aimed at keeping membership rates low and making our funds go further. These included providing an email address so we can keep you informed about the Group's events, opting to receive the newsletter and programme by email, and paying your subscription by standing order (saving you £1 a year compared with paying by cash or cheque).

James also pointed out that if you are a UK tax payer, meet the requirements of the declaration and let us know that you wish to Gift Aid your donation, a further 25% can be reclaimed from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. A new Gift Aid form was sent out for completion by those able and wishing to Gift Aid their subscriptions, to make sure our records are up to date and meet current requirements.

We've had a good response but if you haven't got round to it yet, please do so if you can – it really will make your subscription go further.

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.