

This excellent photograph of a rare fungus species was taken by a Wycombe Wildlife Group member whilst walking in Burnham Beeches. (See page 35 to find out what it is.)

Issue 88

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COPY DATE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE

Monday 8th April 2019

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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Chairman's Chat

I hope you all had a good Christmas and are looking forward to 2019, whatever it has in store.

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 and around 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, organising 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.

Last year we experienced some late wintery conditions followed by a long period of drought and some hot summer weather, all of which adversely affected both our gardens and the countryside. The rain in late autumn seems to have helped put things to rights, however, and it resulted in an unusual late fungus season lasting well into December. As you see from the wildlife observations in this newsletter, the unusual recent weather has even resulted in some birds and flowers thinking that Spring 2019 has come early.

Our programme of indoor meetings prior to the AGM contains some really interesting talks, including some on unusual subjects and some by high profile speakers. Our planned walks this year are mainly local, because some of our members have said that our recent walks have been rather long. We are repeating part of the walk that we arranged last year to see the rare Green Hellebore, which grows near West Wycombe and flowers in early March, as only two of us braved the melting snow to see it last year. Other short local walks will include traditional favourite locations such as Spade Oak Lake and the area by and near the Thames on the west side of Marlow, as well as visits to locations of interest adjacent to the route of our Group's Round Wycombe Walk.

With our 30th AGM coming up in May, I hope members will give serious consideration to the point I made in the last newsletter that we need some members to be elected to the Executive Committee, who would be prepared to take on the role of Chairman, possibly following a year of acting as Vice Chairman. By the date of the forthcoming AGM, I will have been the Chairman for 16 years. During its first 3 years, our Group was run by a Co-ordinator, an ecologist with previous experience of running a wildlife group. Our first Chairman then served served for 8 years and my predecessor served for 3 years. Whilst I don't consider that I have yet reached the stage of becoming incompetent, I would like to hand over the Chairman's role well before that happens. In any case, my length of service as Chairman is excessively long and it is in the interests of WWG for appropriate actions to be taken at this coming AGM to enable the Executive Committee to be able to appoint a new Chairman within the existing terms of our Group's Constitution without the need for further AGM agreement.

Whilst I am quite happy to continue to stand for re-election to the Executive Committee and continue to undertake other WWG support roles, I really do think a change of Chairman is overdue.

Roger Wilding

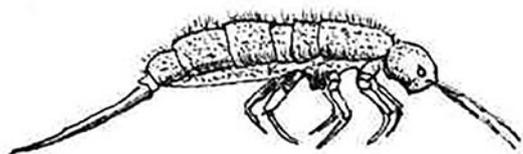
Leaf litter - the world beneath your feet

It was a pity that the attendance level for this talk by Martin Woolner on 17th September was lower than normal, because it was so interesting, and I am sure that everyone was fascinated by the fantastic views of the creatures inhabiting the leaf litter brought along to the meeting and projected onto the screen via the speaker's microscope.

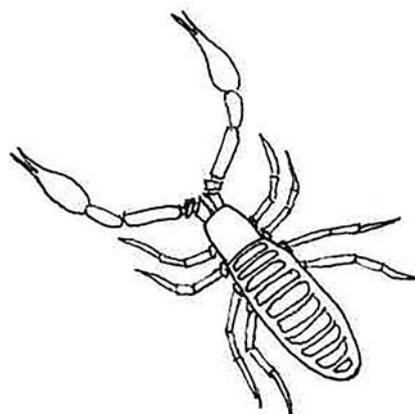
Martin Woolner started his talk by telling us about his background working experience in entomology and, since retirement, his 18 years of voluntary work at Burnham Beeches. Most of the latter has involved undertaking surveys of leaf litter invertebrates.

As with a lot of invertebrate survey work, identification to species level is only possible by killing the specimen needing to be identified. Martin explained that this is justified, as the resulting data helps to take decisions on the most appropriate management action to benefit the survival of the species concerned. Without detailed survey results, the presence of individual species and increases and decreases in their population cannot be assessed.

During the remainder of the first half of the talk, Martin showed us pictures of, and talked about, the main groups of invertebrates commonly found in leaf litter, including Beetles, Springtails, Millipedes, Centipedes, Woodlice, Spiders, Harvestmen and Pseudoscorpions.



Springtail



Pseudoscorpion

We learnt that there are about 250 species of Springtail, over 60 species of Centipede and over 70 species of Millipede in the UK and that Springtails can jump an amazing 80 times their own height.

After the break we were able to sit and watch some of these creatures as their appearance was captured by the microscope and projected onto the screen.

There is no doubt in my mind that this fascinating opportunity to observe invertebrates that we regularly walk over without seeing, will come to mind on our future woodland walks.

Wetland Wildlife

We were pleased to welcome back John Tyler to give us another of his enjoyable and informative talks on 12th October. On this occasion John gave us his talk on Wetland Wildlife, covering both fauna and flora that have evolved to enable them to live in wetland habitats, in some cases for only a part of their life cycle. We also heard how introduced alien species can have a serious adverse effect on our wetland areas.

John described tadpoles as modified fish, as they have gills which enable them to live in water until they reach the stage when they can leave the water and live on land as adult newts, frogs and toads until they need to return to the water to breed. The larvae of dragonflies and damselflies also have gills allowing them to live in water until they are ready to climb out of the water and produce wings enabling them to hunt as flying insects, the females needing to return to water to deposit their eggs during or after mating. The larvae of Mayflies and other riverflies also have gills, and develop in streams and ponds, providing food for fish until they are ready to leave the water as winged adults, often emerging in large numbers providing a food source for birds.

Not all creatures found in wetland habitats are fully adapted for their wetland existence, however. The Pond Skater has to rely on the water-resistant hairs on its body and legs to be able to move across the surface of water without drowning. The Water Boatman has evolved to swim with its back in the water, using its long hair-fringed hind legs as oars.

The Cormorant is a bird that needs to dive into water to catch the fish that it lives on. The wings of the Cormorant are not waterproof, however, so it needs to sit on a post or tree branch to dry them and digest its food after catching and eating it. Herons on the other hand catch their prey by standing patiently in shallow water waiting for their prey to come to them, and don't appear to experience digestion problems from swallowing a frog or fish.

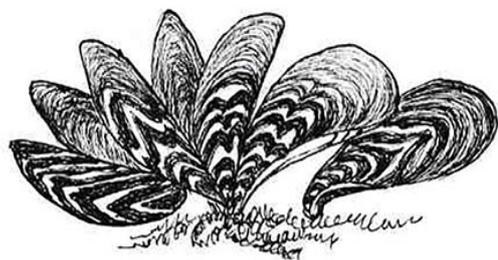
The Daubenton's Bat is often called the Water Bat because it hunts by flying low over water where it finds a plentiful food source.

Wetlands have also been important for man, early settlements often being created near water to provide a source of food and drink. Fish and wildfowl, along with edible plants, met the food

needs of early man, and reeds and sedges were, and still are, harvested to provide roofing for their homes.

John referred to the increasing number of alien species that have been introduced in the UK. One of these, *Crassula helmsii* (a.k.a. New Zealand Pigmyweed or Australian Stonecrop) was thought to be a suitable plant for aquarium use but it soon proved to be both invasive and harmful to our wetland habitats. Although it can be controlled by spraying, this can cause harm to other species, and removing the plant risks spreading it, as even the smallest fragment of the plant left behind, dropped or attached to a boot or shoe can develop into a new plant. Indian Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is another invasive alien which has colonised watercourses throughout most of Britain and is now spreading through damp woodland and along road verges: its spread has been helped by its very successful seed dispersal mechanism which can project the ripe seed a considerable distance. Along river courses, this enables the seed to be washed downstream to form new colonies. The alien species problem is not limited to flora. The Zebra Mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*), which was introduced to the UK, has little natural control and can cause problems affecting ecosystems, boats and underwater pipes used by water treatment plants.

Our thanks go to John for another good talk.



Zebra Mussel

Tree talk by Ted Green

We were delighted when we heard that Ted Green had agreed to give a talk to Wycombe Wildlife Group on 19th November. Ted has been interested in trees for many years and he has received several awards for his services to forestry. He is one of the founder members and is the President of the Ancient Tree Forum. He has been a conservation consultant to the Crown Estate at Windsor for many years, and is still involved there. He was awarded an MBE for his conservation work and he is the Honorary Vice President of the International Tree Federation and a regular speaker at international conferences.

Because the High Wycombe Society had expressed an interest in arranging another joint event with Wycombe Wildlife Group following the joint talk on Swan Upping in 2017, and had suggested that a tree talk would be an ideal subject, this opportunity to arrange a further joint talk was agreed.

Because Ted is such a busy person we were not able to get details in advance of what his talk was going to cover, but we knew from his reputation that we would not be disappointed, and we certainly weren't. Everyone I have spoken to was delighted with the talk and with Ted's interesting way of putting his messages across.

Although I had been aware of Ted Green for many years, I had never had an opportunity to attend one of his talks. His passion for ancient trees became apparent right from the start of his talk and it was interesting to hear his views on the history of our surviving ancient trees and how, as working trees, they have served us through the centuries and should be used as gene banks, reservoirs of disease and pest resistance. Ted Green emphasised his pride in being a layman; he wants everyone to challenge assumptions, saying that all views should be questioned.

Ted also promotes the view that ancient trees should be regarded as historic living monuments. Britain is believed to have the greatest number of ancient trees in northern Europe.

The Ancient Tree Forum seeks to secure the long term future of ecosystems through promoting best management and conservation practice, lobbying governments over their recognition and protection, encouraging research, and increasing our enjoyment of old trees. In Ted's view an oak tree grows for 300 years, spends 300 years resting and a further 300 years in graceful decline.

Ted is particularly interested in the symbiotic relationship between trees and mycorrhizal fungi, but believes we need to know much more about it, and to learn how mycorrhizae are important in the development of a tree. Planting new oaks near ancient oaks benefits both, and Ted is an advocate of planting more trees in the countryside as well as in the urban environment. He also believes that the genes of our old trees can best be preserved by grafting new stock on old trees.

Ted believes that too much is being done to tidy the countryside, and that countryside planting should be done as nature intended. He much prefers the natural order of plant life, and dislikes the neatness man tries to impose upon it. This dislike extends to well manicured lawns and orderly flower beds and he has a strong preference for the use of native plants. One of the main views he put across to us was that the ancient oaks were not woodland trees but part of the woodland pasture where trees lived to an old age because they were regularly pollarded. This results in the tree getting wider over time rather than growing taller, making the tree more productive for timber required for building anything from cottages to ships and cathedrals. We were shown a picture of the section of the Bayeux Tapestry, which clearly shows foresters cutting the timber to build the French invasion fleet. The fact that they are depicted cutting branches above head height shows that the trees concerned were pollards.



Public Domain image

We were told that building HMS Victory many years later required 10,000 pieces of oak. Ted also made the point that the higher number of wars in mainland Europe, and consequent higher demand for timber, was one of the reasons why the UK has around 80% of northern Europe's ancient trees.

The regular pollarding of trees obviously produced large quantities of young wood and as this work was usually carried out in the summer, it was common practice for the branches to be stacked until the lean time in late Winter to early Spring when they were spread out on the ground to provide "green hay" for animals. Recent experiments have shown that horses, ponies, cattle and sheep are happy to feed on this crop, and it is thought that there may be some natural medicinal benefits from this ancient farming practice.

Ted referred to a bronze sculpture of a 900-year-old oak tree from Windsor Great Park that was presented to the Queen by the Ancient Tree Forum. The small bronze tree was created using new scanning and three-dimensional printing technology, which made it possible to scan the oak tree without touching it, and then to produce an exact copy, accurate to the millimetre. He added that he would very much like to create a full-sized sculpture of the tree to be displayed

in a key public place in central London, such as Parliament Square.

One of Ted's key messages from the talk was not to take trees for granted. The UK is blessed with having so many ancient trees, and we need to support those who do their best to look after them. He encouraged us to support the Woodland Trust and the valuable work being done by that organisation to preserve our trees and woodlands. He also recommended a trip to see the 800 year old Ankerwycke Yew near Wraysbury which, it is now considered, probably witnessed the signing of the Magna Carta.



Imran C (Creative Commons photograph)

Bird walk around Dorney Common



The weather forecast for Dorney was not good on Saturday 24th November when Paul had organised a bird walk around Dorney Common. Although it remained overcast and a bit damp underfoot, the rain didn't come, and the walk was enjoyed by 8

members. We met in the car park by Boveney Church and followed the stream around the east side of the Common to the Jubilee River. We then walked upstream along the Jubilee River to the bridge by the Dorney Wetlands and, after looking at the reed beds there, went back across the west side of Dorney Common to Boveney. Paul recorded a total of 34 bird species on the walk, and Derek went home with a bag of *Agaricus* mushrooms for his tea. There was a surprising number of grassland fungi species on Dorney Common but few that any of us could name with any certainty down to species level.

As we found in other locations this year there were still plants bearing flowers much later than normal. The most unusual plant find was Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*). There were several plants of this uncommon deadly poisonous plant, which is in the Nightshade Family, growing fairly close to each other.



Henbane

The bird species seen or heard during the walk were:-

Little Grebe, Great Crested Grebe
Grey Heron
Mute Swan
Greylag Goose, Canada Goose,
Egyptian Goose
Gadwall, Teal, Mallard, Pochard,
Tufted Duck
Red Kite
Moorhen, Coot
Black-headed Gull
Woodpigeon
Kingfisher
Pied Wagtail
Starling
Magpie
Carrion Crow
Dunnock
Cetti's Warbler
Robin
Blackbird
Fieldfare, Redwing
Long-tailed Tit, Blue Tit
Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Goldfinch
Ring-necked Parakeet



East side of Dorney Common

Pollinators and their value

On 14th December John Catton gave us another interesting talk on bees. It was six years since he gave us his earlier bee talk but he informed us that some 90% of his talk would be different to his earlier one.

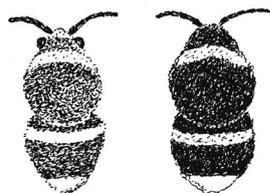
John started his talk with an explanation of the differences between bees and other similar looking insects. Having explained that flies have a single pair of wings whereas bees have two pairs of wings, we were shown a picture of a book on bees which had on the front cover a picture of what certainly resembled a bee but which was in fact a single-winged fly. We soon began to realise that accurate identification of bees and other similar insects required a degree of experience. Whilst there is only one species of honey bee, there are 25 bumblebee species and 220 solitary

bee species in the UK.

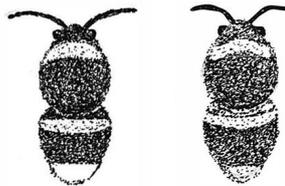
The most common bumblebee species are the White-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus lucorum*), Buff-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*), Red-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus lapidarius*), Garden Bumblebee (*Bombus hortorum*), Tree Bumblebee (*Bombus hypnorum*), Common Carder Bee (*Bombus pascuorum*), and Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*). The Tree Bumblebee, which only arrived in the UK in 2001 has rapidly spread throughout the country and, unlike most bumblebees that nest below or near the ground, it will nest in compost heaps, trees, under the eaves of houses, and in bird boxes.

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Identifying common bumblebee species



B.lucorum



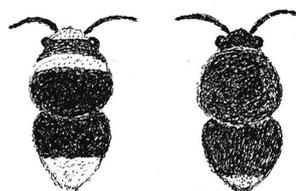
B.terrestris

Workers and queen have a single yellow band at the front of thorax and on the abdomen. Males (left) also have yellow hairs on face and a yellow band at rear of thorax. All have a pure white tail.

Males 15mm, workers 16mm and queen 20mm.

Workers, males and queen have a single yellow band at the front of the thorax and on the abdomen. The workers (left) have a white tail and the queen's banding is orange-yellow in Spring and her tail is a dirty buff colour.

Males 15mm, workers 16mm and queen 20mm.



B.lapidarius

Workers and queen are all black with a red tail. Males (left) also have a red tail and have yellow hairs on face and a yellow band on the front of the thorax.

Males 15mm, workers 14mm and queen 20mm.

B.hortorum



Workers, males and queen have two yellow bands on the thorax, a single yellow band on the abdomen and a pure white tail.

Males 14mm, workers 16mm and queen 18mm.

B.hypnorum



Workers, males and queen are all ginger with a dark abdomen and a white tail.

Males 16mm, workers 14mm and queen 18mm.



B.pascuorum

Ginger colour with black hairs all over.

Males and workers 13mm and queen 17mm.



B.pratorum

Male (left) has a narrow yellow band at rear of thorax and yellow hairs on face.

Workers and queen have a single yellow band on the thorax and sometimes also on the abdomen. All have an orange-red tail.

Males and workers 12mm and queen 16mm.

(continued from previous page)

All bumblebees, apart from the queens, hatch and die in the same year: the queens hibernate in order to produce new bees in the following year. Honey bees survive all year round, although they only leave their hive in the winter when the weather conditions are suitable. They are also the only bees that swarm; this enables a bee colony to divide between May and July in order to create a new colony with a new queen.

Solitary bees are around from March to October and the females create nests in which they lay an egg with a store of food to enable them to reach maturity.

In the second half of his talk, John concentrated on the subject of pollination. He explained that before insects evolved, all plant life relied on wind pollination. Although there are still species that are wind-pollinated, it is an inefficient method, wasting a high percentage of pollen. The first insect pollinators were beetles, but some 130 million years ago bees appeared and began to fulfil the pollination role, the plant providing the bee with pollen whilst the bee cross-pollinates plants of the same species as it moves from flower to flower.

A study undertaken in 2015 estimated that the value of insect pollination to the UK economy was worth £691,000. Although views that, without bees, the human race would not survive, are exaggerated, it is a fact that our diet would become very boring without

them. Hand pollination has been used where bees have become scarce, often as a result of the use of insecticides, which were only intended to deal with pest species, but it is an expensive labour-intensive alternative to the free service provided by bees.

We should not overlook the value of the honey provided by our honey bees. This product is of great value to the human race, having antiseptic properties as well as being used as a food. It is of benefit in dealing with coughs, colds and sore throats and can help control hay fever. In the latter case, it is considered that the use of local honey, produced from the plants that may have been the source of the pollen causing the hay fever, may achieve the best results.

So we need bees and bees need us. We all need to do our best to encourage both honey bees and other bees into our gardens by making the latter as bee friendly as we can.

Our thanks go to John for his very interesting and informative talk.

End of year tweets

Autumn is a fairly quiet time for birds, although a lot of the young tits have stayed around the garden, regularly visiting the nest boxes they were brought up in.

We have a large population of Robins around the garden but not as many Blackbirds as in previous years.

There are more Redwings and Fieldfares around this autumn than in previous years. They have been filling the sky in their loose flocks, flying fairly erratically, changing course as the fancy takes them: we have had quite a few in the garden. The Redwings utter a soft staccato 'chip' sound, and the Fieldfares give a loose chuckle.

Mid November

I saw my very first major Starling murmuration during a visit to Scarborough. Small flocks of 10-20 individuals joined other groups, swirling around over the South Bay in long lines or teardrop shapes, lifting and dropping, lifting and dropping again until they finally dropped onto - not the local scrubland in front of the castle, but onto the penny-in -the-slot arcades, where all the bright lights were shining out. I suppose the arcade roofs provide a warm roosting place for them.

20th December

A pair of Robins are building a nest in the Ivy in our drive! I had noticed them flirting with each other for a few weeks before. I wonder if they will be lucky.

The Blackbirds and a male and female Blackcap are busily tucking into our *Callicarpa* berries.

This is the first time, in 25 years of filling in phenology survey forms, that I have had to write details of Spring sightings with the previous Winter's dates, i.e. Robins building a nest on 20th December, and catkins fully expanded on 29th December.

Hopefully there will be a little more to report in the next issue of the Newsletter.

Frances Wilding

Wildlife observations

Late fruiting fungi

On 1st December a White Saddle (*Helvella crispa*) fungus appeared in the grass under the Beech trees in Deeds Grove alongside the Wendover Arms at the junction of Desborough Avenue and Deeds Grove. This was interesting, as it is a site where I have never seen any fungi grow before. Even more interesting was finding six White Saddles and a couple of Wood Blewits (*Lepista nuda*) there a few days later.

The timing of the main fungus season is always affected by the weather conditions and the dry summer in 2018 certainly resulted in less fungi being around in September. The rain and generally mild conditions later in the year resulted in fungi appearing well into December, however.



White Saddle

A rare fungus find

Having received very few recent sightings, I was very pleased to receive the photograph on the front cover of this newsletter which shows a fungus seen by Wendy and Peter Osborn whilst walking in Burnham Beeches. Wendy thought it was an unusual one and decided to photograph it and Peter showed it to me to see if I could identify it. Although my ability to identify unusual fungi, especially from photos, is somewhat limited, putting a name to this one was very straightforward as the photograph clearly showed that the fruiting body had a volva at the base of the stem which in most cases indicates that it is a species of *Amanita*. This fungus was growing from a split in the trunk of a tree, however, and *Amanita* species do not grow on trees. The only other genus to have a volva is *Volvariella* and within that genus is *Volvariella bombycina* (Silky Rosegill), a rare species which is found in habitats matching where Peter and Wendy found it. Looking at the national fungus records database, there are only just over 330 sightings of this species recorded since 1875, but there were two separate sightings in Burnham Beeches during 2007. If a grid reference can be provided,

this sighting could be submitted (with a copy of the photograph for verification purposes) for inclusion in the national records.

Out of season flowers

Quite a number of wildflower species have been seen this year still in flower much later than their normal flowering time. A Stinking Hellebore (*Helleborus foetidus*) in my garden was bearing flower buds in mid December, which is about a month earlier than the normal earliest flowering period for this plant.

Birds taking advantage of the end of year weather.

Our birds have also been taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the mainly mild end of year weather. Fieldfares and Redwings have appeared in large numbers in our area and many of us will have had them in our gardens. Some birds are starting to behave as if Spring is on the way: I hope they don't experience too many problems if we do get a long period of wintery conditions.

More than bats in the belfry at Little Marlow

A report has been received from Wendy Osborn saying that Little Marlow Parish Church now has 5 pure white doves lodging with the bats in the belfry.

Roger



Event Cancellation Policy Reminder

Members are reminded that Wycombe Wildlife Group has a policy for cancelling events if such action is considered necessary due to adverse weather conditions.

We will only cancel a planned event if the event organiser considers such action is necessary, usually on safety grounds or, in the case of indoor meetings when weather conditions or other circumstances are considered likely to prevent the speaker and/or other members getting to and from the event location.

If it is decided to cancel an indoor meeting, we will notify members who are on our email address list whenever possible.

We would advise anyone planning to attend one of our events, who thinks there is a possibility of it being cancelled, to get in touch with the contact person shown in the events programme to confirm whether or not it is taking place.

Contacting Wycombe Wildlife Group

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Website: www.wycombewildlifegrp.co.uk

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.

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

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.