



Birdwatching walk at Marlow on 6th April 2019

Issue 89

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Wycombe Wildlife News is published 3 times a year to promote the Group and wildlife issues, and inform members and the public of its activities.

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Editorial

I have changed the heading of this standard opening item in our newsletter from “Chairman’s Chat” to “Editorial” to avoid the newsletter responsibilities complicating the action to find a new Chairman, a role which I feel it is time that I should give up, having undertaken it for 16 years.

This opening item was entitled “Editorial” from Issue 1 in 1990 until 2012 when Pat Morris decided that she could no longer continue as the newsletter’s editor. No-one else offered to take on the editorial function, so I added it to the newsletter production role which I had taken on when Maurice Young died in 2004. Although I envisaged this would be a temporary measure, I actually enjoy editing and producing the newsletter and am quite happy to continue to do so unless someone else wants to get involved.

As usual, there is no shortage of events to report on. A recent conversation with one of our long standing members, who is no longer able to attend our events, confirmed my view that our newsletter plays an important role in retaining such members. It keeps them informed of the Group’s activities and we hope that they will continue to support us.

We are grateful for the support of all our members but it would be nice to hear from those we rarely see, perhaps recalling their past recollections of the activities they were involved in and letting us have any views they may have on the future of our Group.

Roger Wilding

New members

We are pleased to welcome as new members:-
 Dr Trevor Hussey and Eliza Wheeler

Obituary

It was with great sadness that we received notification of the death of Eric Britnell on 5th April 2019. Eric was one of the founder members of our Group who made a considerable contribution to its early activities. He took a great interest in swans and his articles in our newsletters kept us informed of the swan activity on the Rye Dyke. Eric was also an active member of Swan Lifeline, a swan rescue charity based at Eton, and he often undertook swan rescue tasks. We were aware that he had also helped with the annual Swan Upping event, but only realised the importance of his involvement when those of us who attended his funeral listened to a message received from the Queen’s Swan Marker. It was full of praise for Eric’s work in locating the swan family groups ahead of the swan uppers, and enticing them to locations where the cygnets could be caught easily for examination, and marking where appropriate.

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.

The Wood for the Trees

We were very pleased when Professor Richard Fortey agreed to give a talk to our Group on 21st January to promote his book entitled *The Wood for the Trees*. The book is about a small area within Lambridge Wood near Henley which he purchased in 2011 from the proceeds of one of the BBC4 television series he presented. The previous owner of Lambridge Wood had split the wood into a number of plots of varying sizes to sell to interested buyers. Although Richard was the only naturalist amongst the purchasers, they all had a common interest in preventing the wood being felled and used for housing development.

The area purchased by Richard was one of the smaller plots available, only 4 acres in size, triangular in shape, and bordered by a section of Grim's Dyke on one side and public footpaths on the other two sides. His plot contains over 100 mature Beech trees, 18 Wild Cherry trees, 2 Oaks, some Wych Elms and a small Field Maple.

Richard's book is divided into 12 chapters, each covering a month of the year, starting in April. The book refers to the fauna, flora, fungi and slime moulds he has seen during his detailed exploration of his patch of woodland and elsewhere within Lambridge Wood through the changing seasons. He enlisted a number of experts to help with the identification of taxa that he is not an expert in such as bats, invertebrates and spiders.

The book is not just a catalogue of species sightings, however: it covers the history of Lambridge Wood and the surrounding areas from the days of pre-Roman iron age hillforts, the period when it is considered Grim's Dyke was dug. Analysis of pollen from the section of Grim's Dyke within Lambridge Wood found evidence of arable crops having been grown there, indicating that the earthwork pre-dated the wood. The close connection with nearby Greys Court, the estate which owned Lambridge Wood for centuries from the Norman Conquest until 1922 is covered, as well as the history of Henley and some of the villages and estates in the area.

The history of Henley is linked to Lambridge Wood, as timber products from the wood were shipped to London from the wharfs which lined the river frontage when Henley was a thriving port.

Richard Fortey's talk was very interesting, and we are very grateful to him for agreeing to come along to speak to us. Our thanks also go to Inge Beck for contacting Richard to make arrangements for the talk, and the local branch of Waterstones to organise the book sales on the evening of the talk.

We also need to thank Inge for leading some recent short walks along the public footpaths which pass through Lambridge Wood and some longer walks for those interested in also visiting nearby Greys Court. Those who attended one of Inge's short walks were able to enjoy the Bluebells and the wide range of other wildflower species in bloom when they took place. Those undertaking the longer walks, which incorporated a quick visit to Greys Court, were also able to enjoy its gardens, including the long-established Wisteria which was at its best when the visits took place.

Lesley, Peter and Inge crossing Grim's Dyke in Lambridge Wood



I have now read Richard's book and can certainly recommend it: the contents are so interesting and informative in respect of Henley and the villages around Lambridge Wood, in addition to the coverage of the wood's history and the wide range of fauna, flora, fungi and slime moulds found there. The book mentions that 150 species of moth, over 300 species of fungi, 30 species of spider, and at least 6 bat species have been recorded

in the wood. The rare Yellow Bird's Nest (*Monotropa hypopitys*) grows in Lambridge Wood, which is one of the very few sites where the Ghost Orchid (*Epipogium aphyllum*) has put in an appearance. Although it has not been seen there for over 90 years, there is always the possibility it could reappear there.

Roger Wilding

This photograph of a Ghost Orchid was taken by the late Maurice Young (one of the founder members of our Group) when it last appeared in Hollowhill Wood west of Marlow.

Maurice showed me the location where it was found but not while it was in flower, so I missed the opportunity to see and photograph this rarity.



The work of the Feathers and Fur Falconry Centre - a talk with a difference

Our talk at Holtspur on 8th February was certainly different: it is the first time in our 30 year history that we have had a live bird flying around our audience. For this to be possible, the chairs were arranged in a large circle. This is one way of ensuring the chairs in the front row are filled, although on this occasion sitting in the front row proved popular as it offered an opportunity of having a Barn Owl landing on your outstretched hand.

Sadie Shepherd from the Feathers and Fur Falconry Centre in Berkshire spoke about her 20 years of flying birds, which started at the Bird of Prey Centre in Porlock. After working in Ireland and Africa, she set up the centre in Berkshire ten years ago.

We were introduced to the birds brought along to the meeting, a Kestrel, Buzzard, Peregrine

Falcon and a Barn Owl. Those wanting to have a really close-up view of the Barn Owl needed to be seated in the front row and wear a thick protective glove on whichever hand they were happy for the bird to land on. The Barn Owl was then encouraged to fly across the circle from one hand to another, remaining on each hand long enough for the recipient to get a unique opportunity to study the bird in detail. Before any flying took place, we were told not to attempt to touch or stroke the bird as they like to remain calm and not feel stressed in any way.

Only the Barn Owl was allowed to fly at the meeting but the other species were taken around the circle so that we all had a close up view of each one. Mice and voles provide the main food supply for the Barn Owl and these mammals are swallowed whole, the bones being compressed and regurgitated in the form of pellets.

We heard that the Buzzard population plummeted in the 1960s when Rabbits, their main food supply, became scarce as a result of Myxamotosis, but that there are now around 75,000 breeding pairs in Britain. We were also informed that Buzzards tend to darken as they age, so white and pale-coloured ones are usually young birds.

Kestrel numbers are now falling, mainly due to a lack of suitable nesting sites. Erecting Kestrel

nest boxes can help to overcome this problem and they may also be used by other species.

Peregrine Falcons are fast becoming an urban bird, nesting on tall buildings from where they can see and rapidly descend to catch the plentiful supply of feral pigeons available. Being capable of attaining diving speeds of over 200 mph, Peregrine Falcons are very successful hunters.

Birdwatching at Spade Oak Lake Nature Reserve

Spade Oak Lake is one of the sites we keep going back to because it is local and there is usually plenty of interesting birdlife to be seen there. The only downside is the slippery muddy condition of the path around the lake in places, especially in the winter months, but with suitable footwear and a reasonable amount of care, it is not much of a problem.

As usual, the walk led by Paul Bowyer, was a great success and the following 43 species were seen or heard during the visit:-

Great Crested Grebe
Cormorant
Heron
Little Egret
Mute Swan
Greylag Goose
Canada Goose
Wigeon
Gadwall
Teal
Mallard
Shoveler
Pochard
Tufted Duck
Red Kite

Buzzard
Kestrel
Red-legged Partridge
Moorhen
Coot
Lapwing
Black-headed Gull
Lesser Black backed Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Herring Gull
Wood Pigeon
Kingfisher
Skylark
Pied Wagtail
Starling

Magpie
Jackdaw
Carrion Crow
Wren
Robin
Blackbird
Song Thrush
Redwing
Long-tailed Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Goldfinch
Egyptian Goose

Thanks go to Paul for another interesting walk and to Brenda Mobbs for sending me a copy of this delightful photo of a couple of Herons that she took on the walk.



Earth Trust River of Life Walk

The Earth Trust is an environmental learning charity which strives to strike a balance between farming, conservation and provision of accessible green spaces for everyone to enjoy.

On Thursday 28th February we joined members of the Risborough Countryside Group for an interesting walk to look at a major rewilding project alongside the Thames at Shillingford near Dorchester in Oxfordshire. Chris Parker, The Earth Trust's Head of Land Management, led the walk along the 2.5km length of Thames frontage covered by the project and explained the changes that had been made to the 35ha of land acquired by the Earth Trust in 2010 following the purchase of North Farm. In partnership with the Environment Agency, a wetland landscape containing 17 ponds, 5 backwaters and 2 reedbeds, together with 20ha of restored grassland and 2ha of wet woodland was created by the end of 2013. Over 5,000 reeds (*Phragmites australis*) and 3,500 trees (including Willow and Alder) have been planted.

The landscape changes are expected to benefit wildlife, including Water Voles, Otters, birds, invertebrates and amphibians, and will link with existing habitats on Earth Trust land to provide a continuous wildlife habitat from the Thames to the

Wittenham Clumps. The project will also have a flood amelioration value.

Surveys of the new backwaters, undertaken by the Environment Agency, have shown that their creation is providing a safe haven for fish fry with 12 of the Thames' 20 fish species being present.

Following the walk, an email was received from Chris Parker saying that he enjoyed taking us round the reserve and that he was very pleased that we asked so many questions and showed great interest in the project.



Early Spring walk at West Wycombe

I have always tended to avoid suggesting very early Spring wildflower walks as the results can be very disappointing. On 7th March last year, however, an early spring walk from West Wycombe to Naphill was arranged to see if the early March flowering Green Hellebore was in flower. The remains of recent heavy snowfalls could still be seen in places which the sun hadn't reached and the ground was very wet where it had. Not surprisingly in the circumstances, only Derek Bourne and I had turned up for that walk, but we had been rewarded with a reasonable show of the plants we had hoped to see.

The idea of a follow-up visit to the Green Hellebore colony in 2019 at the same time of year was discussed and agreed by the Programme Planning Committee but it was decided to restrict it to a circular walk of around 3 miles from West Wycombe. It was expected that

the early Spring would ensure that we were not disappointed, and this proved right: we estimated that this year the colony contained around 300 plants, many of which were in full flower.



Ladybirds, longhorns and other beetles

We were pleased to welcome back Martin Harvey on 18th March to give us another talk. Martin's involvement with WWG goes back many years to when he led invertebrate identification walks in locations such as Sands Bank in the early years of our Group. Over the years he has given a number of interesting talks to us.

Martin informed us that there are over 4,000 species of beetle in Britain and said that they can be found in all sorts of habitats. Some species are pests and some eat pests. Their development is similar to butterflies in that they start as an egg, become a larva and pupate before they become an adult.

Most of the Weevils have a long snout and Longhorn Beetles are identified by their long horns.

Some beetles look dangerous but none pose a risk to humans. Stag beetles with their large antlers may look fierce, and the Devil's Coach Horse is a ferocious predator of other invertebrates.

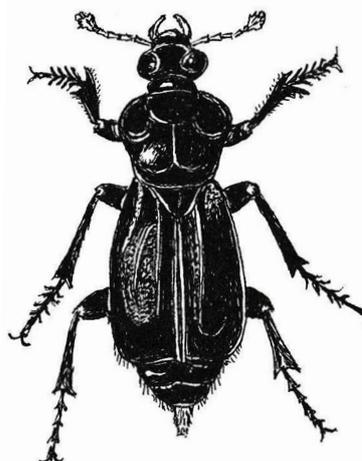


Devil's coach horse
(*Ocyrops olens*)

22-32mm in length

Burying or Sexton Beetles feed on dead bodies of small mammals and, by digging under the dead bodies, they are able to bury them and lay their eggs there so that their

young can develop where there is a food supply which is shared by the adults who stay to look after their young.



Sexton or Burying
Beetle (*Nicrophorus
humator*)

18-26mm in length

In the second half of his talk, Martin concentrated on Ladybirds, which should be regarded as gardeners' friends, as most species eat aphids. The Harlequin Ladybird, which has spread rapidly across the UK since its arrival, has reduced the numbers of some species but none have become extinct as a result of the arrival of this alien species. Martin added that the 2-spot Ladybird has suffered most from the spread of the Harlequin.

Martin recommended the publication "Field Guide to the Ladybirds of Britain and Ireland" as a useful reference book for identifying ladybird species.

At the end of his talk, Martin mentioned BIG (Bucks Invertebrate Group) which organises field trips which are notified to those who sign up to receive the information from BMERC (Bucks and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre). Beginners are made welcome on these events but they do need to inform the leader that they will be attending.

Our thanks go to Martin for another interesting and informative talk.

Birdwatching round walk from Marlow

A birdwatching round walk from Marlow took place on Saturday 6th April. The route went upstream along the Thames from Higginson Park to just before Temple Lock where a footpath leads back to Marlow via Lower Pound Lane. A large lake has been created in the field on the left of this return path and it is starting to attract wetland bird species.

When Frances and I arrived slightly early in Higginson Park for the start of the walk, I said that I could see one person waiting, but it turned out to be Steve Redgrave's statue which was the agreed meeting point for the walk. We were soon joined by others, however, and ended up with a total of 10.

The walk was jointly led by Paul and Frances but, as usually happens on such walks, the group kept splitting up as participants stopped to look through their binoculars at birds they had spotted, or to look at the wildflowers growing alongside the path, which included Summer Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*).

Both Paul and Frances produced separate lists of the birds they had seen or heard and, after adding Kingfisher (which was seen by Michael and Irenke on their return to Higginson Park), the final total of species seen or heard totalled 43.



Summer Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*)

Bird species recorded on the Marlow walk

Blackbird	Great crested grebe	Mute swan
Blackcap	Great tit	Nuthatch
Blackheaded gull	Greenfinch	Pheasant
Blue tit	Green woodpecker	Red kite
Bullfinch	Grey heron	Ring-necked parakeet
Buzzard	Greylag goose	Robin
Canada goose	House sparrow	Skylark
Chaffinch	Jackdaw	Song thrush
Chifchaff	Kingfisher	Starling
Carrion crow	Lapwing	Stock dove
Coot	Longtailed tit	Tufted duck
Cormorant	Magpie	Woodpigeon
Dunnock	Mallard	Wren
Egyptian goose	Mistle thrush	
Goldfinch	Moorhen	

A Wildlife Photographic Tour

The speaker at our meeting at Holtspur on 12th April 2019 was Tom Way, a well-known professional fine art wildlife photographer who has received awards in various international competitions, including European Wildlife Photographer of the Year.

Tom told us that having developed a passion for wildlife and photography he wanted to travel for the rest of his life photographing wildlife. He set up a wildlife photography business 7 years ago, initially undertaking most of his photography in the UK. As his business developed he was able to fund overseas trips and now 95% of his work is abroad, and he specialises in large mammals. Tom added that he would like to do more work in the UK but the overseas work generates more income.

During his talk we were treated to some of the wonderful pictures he has taken, but we also learnt of the effort that has to be put into the taking of such photographs. We learnt that to photograph some of the large apes such as Mountain Gorillas usually involves an exhausting trek through swamps and up steep jungle-covered slopes just to get to the places where the animals can be found. We also heard about two of the dangerous occurrences during his photo shoots. One was facing a charging lion, and the other was when the boat he was in was lifted up by an angry Hippopotamus, resulting in a new uninsured expensive camera being tipped into the water. These experiences would be enough to make most people have second thoughts about being a wildlife photographer.

As well as the physical endurance and occasional dangers involved, we heard about the patience needed to undertake wildlife photography. Tom explained that he usually knew in advance what he wanted to achieve in relation to photographing a

particular species. When planning to take photographs of a particular species of Penguin, he wanted them to be coming in from the sea facing his camera. Day after day, however, the birds came out of the sea at different locations along a very long beach. Each day he positioned himself at different locations until at last the day came when the birds came in right in front of his camera. On another occasion when photographing Elephants, he wanted to take a photograph of a baby Elephant walking next to its parent. The problem was taking the photo when the view of the baby wasn't obstructed by one of the adult's legs. By walking alongside the Elephants, the opportunity to take the required photograph eventually came and Tom got the shot he wanted. When photographing Blue Whales in the Indian Ocean, Tom's requirement was to be in the right position at the right time to get a photograph of the waterfall effect only seen when the Whale surfaces and the water falls from the end of its tail back into the sea. After many failed attempts, he managed to get the shot he wanted.

This talk catered not only for those who wanted to see high quality photographs of wildlife, but also provided helpful tips which would benefit all of us who take photographs of wildlife or indeed any subjects which are affected by the different natural lighting conditions at various times of day. It became very clear, however, that to achieve high quality photographs of wildlife requires an extremely high level of skill, experience and patience, plus a lot of luck.

Tom's talk was enjoyed by those who attended and, when those present were asked if they would like Tom to give us another talk in the future, there was an immediate enthusiastic show of hands.

Garden tweets (Jan - Apr 2019)

January

On January 17th about 7am, two Foxes were chasing each other around the garden and screaming. I think this is mating time for Foxes, so perhaps that explains their behaviour.

There has been a Blackcap feasting on our Bramley apples that we had put out on the lawn.

A song like that of a Golden Oriole coming from our Golden Leylandii tree stopped me in my tracks - then a Starling appeared.

In late January it is dark when I give the birds their first feed (I feed the birds before I feed the humans). The Blackbird always causes our security light to come on but the Robin does not. Far from retreating, they both wait under the bright light.

February

A Crow has been having a good splash around in the birdbath near the window. He doesn't seem to be in the least worried by my watching him.

March

One of our pair of Collared Doves was waiting patiently on the top of the bird feeder, when suddenly a female Sparrowhawk came right over my head where I was gardening and pinned the Collared Dove down at ground level. A great deal of feathers were shed. I could not interfere, as I imagine the Sparrowhawk had babies of her own, and I didn't know what injuries the Collared Dove had sustained. The Sparrowhawk is a regular visitor and the garden goes completely quiet after her visit as all the other birds dive for cover.

April

28th I heard a Willow Warbler's sweet descending song coming from one of our Cherry Plum trees. I usually hear one each Spring. It does not stay, unfortunately.

30th There was the chattering song of a Reed Warbler coming from our hedge this morning. That too moves on after spending the day in our garden.

As I am writing this article, Jackdaws are coming in to roost in the large trees at the top our garden and a Pipistrelle Bat is flitting around.

More tweets next time.

Frances Wilding

Wildlife observations

24th February 2019

2 male Brimstone butterflies and a Small Tortoiseshell seen in a Deeds Grove garden

25th February 2019

4 Great Crested Grebes fighting over territory on the Thames at Marlow

2nd March 2019

2 Red-legged Partridges in a Deeds Grove garden

27th April 2019

30-40 Swallows skimming low over new lake

south west of Marlow

29th April 2019

Coralroot Bittercress and Spring Beauty seen on The Rye

2nd May 2019

Common Newt seen in a Deeds Grove garden

4th May 2019

Mixed flocks of 200+ Swallows, House Martins, Swifts and Sand Martins over the new lake and surrounding area south west of Marlow

The 30th Anniversary AGM on 21st May 2019

The theme of this year's AGM was looking back and looking forward. As usual, the business meeting was kept as brief as possible, although it lasted longer than usual because some important issues relating to our Group's future needed to be raised.

Roger Wilding pointed out that he had occupied the role of Chairman for the last 16 years, adding that he felt it was time for a change. He also pointed out that our Webmaster had said that he would like someone else to take over that role, and James Donald had said that he wishes to give up the Treasurer role at the end of the current financial year. Although our Constitution states that it is the responsibility of the Executive Committee (EC) to decide after each AGM who will undertake the officer roles for the period up to the next AGM, none of the other existing members of the EC are willing to take on the role of Chairman. It was explained that we needed the members to appoint someone new to the EC who would be willing to take on the Chairman role, or possibly to act as Vice Chairman for a year with a view to taking on the Chairman role when he or she feels ready to do so.

The Treasurer outlined decisions that had been taken by the EC to purchase some new display and sound and vision equipment to overcome identified needs in relation to our indoor meetings.

Following Derek Bourne's update on local wildlife sightings, a cake provided to mark the Group's 30th Anniversary was cut and enjoyed during the short refreshment break. Roger then gave a presentation looking back at the development of our Group since it was formed 30 years ago. He finished by seeking members' views on how they would like to see WWG move forward in the future. Mention was made of the recent project which had resulted in copies of all our newsletters being available to view and download from the WWG website.

This action has provided a comprehensive history of our Group for all to see.

It had been planned to give two other presentations at the AGM but there was insufficient time available to do this. One was intended to show examples of some of the slides used by the late Maurice Young, who used to give regular talks to our Group, to illustrate some of the subjects he covered. WWG has written permission from Maurice's family to use the scanned slides, so it was planned to use some of them to create a series of presentations on topics such as orchids, other flora, local wildlife, lichens and plant galls, so that we have a selection of presentations which can be used at meetings where it has not proved possible to book a speaker, where a speaker fails to turn up or has to cancel at short notice, or at a meeting such as the AGM where there is no admission fee to cover the cost of an outside speaker.

It was suggested and agreed that both this and the other presentation relating to the 25 mile Round Wycombe Walk should be shown at a forthcoming members' meeting. It was pointed out that few of our members will want to walk 25 miles, but it was explained that using bus services from and to High Wycombe town centre, the walk can be broken down into a series of short linear walks of around 3 miles.

The EC will meet as soon as possible to consider the issues on which views were expressed by members at the AGM, and to decide how our Group should continue to operate in the light of the failure to both identify a potential replacement Chairman and to appoint additional Executive Committee members.

Looking forward

Our May to August events programme provides plenty of opportunities to get to know our local countryside better. We are fortunate to have so many locations within easy reach where we can enjoy the countryside and what it has to offer, and the number of local public footpaths is so great that there are bound to be some that even those who have lived locally all their life may never have walked. Many of the local areas of interest are on the route of our planned Round Wycombe Walk, and there are many others adjacent to the Walk which are worth visiting. Some of these feature in our new programme and others will be included in future programmes.

We are already planning our next series of indoor meetings which will commence in September and, to date, speakers have been booked to show a film covering a wildlife conservation issue of international importance and to give a talk on the history of Greenham Common and the birdlife it supports. A talk entitled "Why I love the Chilterns" by the Editor of the Chiltern Society magazine has also been arranged, plus talks by a local wildflower expert, a bird vet and an introduction to field botany by a former Head of Education at Cambridge University Botanic Gardens.

At this year's AGM, we sought members' views on a number of issues which will need to be addressed by the Executive Committee.

Contacting Wycombe Wildlife Group

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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:

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Until further notice

Signature

Date

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I enclose cheque/cash for £7.00,
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