

WYCOMBE and SOUTH BUCKS
WILDLIFE NEWS
MAY 2024



The Jubilee River which was the subject of a talk at our May members meeting

Issue 104

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

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All photographs taken by Roger Wilding.

Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Group.

For the purposes of management of the Group, membership information is held on computer.



Wycombe Wildlife Group is a registered charity No.1075175 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.

Resources permitting, helps manage local wildlife sites by undertaking practical conservation work and 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.

Editorial

The task of editing our newsletter can sometimes be easy if there have been talks or outdoor activities to report on. The reporting of wildlife sightings varies but it does tend to rely on a small number of individuals who spend time going on walks and/or spend time observing the wildlife that visits their garden. The number of contributors tends to be fairly small and limited to a small number of regular contributors. It would be good to receive more sightings covering a wider area.

Because the amount of material for each newsletter varies we have decided that our newsletters will continue to be issued 3 times a year but although the target will be to issue them in January, May and September, the issue dates may be delayed in the event of insufficient material being available.

Obituary

We were sorry to hear that Roger Hussey, who had been a member for 15 years, passed away on 11 January aged 94. Although he was a keen naturalist and wildlife photographer, he did not enjoy attending meetings and a stroke had affected his walking and prevented him from driving. He enjoyed reading our newsletters, however, but the contents of the January 2024 issue had been finalised before we learned of his death.

New long distance paths

If you enjoyed the talk on the Highlights of the South West Coast Path and the summary of that talk in the last newsletter, you might be interested to know that a new 87 mile walk called the Tamara Coast to Coast Way has been created along the Cornwall/Devon border. This new path, together with the existing South West Coast Path along the north and south coasts of Cornwall, provides a 387 mile circular walk around that county.

A much bigger long distance footpath challenge will be the King Charles III England Coast Path with its target end of 2024 completion date. The Welsh Coast Path has been a great success and I am sure the England Coast Path will also prove popular. A much bigger challenge would be to create a coastal path around Scotland. Having read an article about the difficulties faced by an experienced long distance walker's attempt to walk around that coast, much of which has no existing paths at all. I was not surprised to read a progress report which mentioned that the walker concerned has suffered a number of what could have been very serious falls, but as far as I know he is still determined to continue with his ambitious project.

Whilst on the subject of round walks, the plan to publish a Round Sands Walk on the WWG website has not yet been achieved, as I have not yet had time to produce a route map for the walk.

I am planning to include a series of walks in forthcoming events programmes covering the five sections of the existing Round Wycombe Walk, details of which are on the WWG website. The first of these walks will take place on Saturday 15 June and will cover from Kingsmead to Burroughs Grove. There are bus connections from the town centre to the starting point and back from the finishing point of the walk.

The December 2023 members meeting and its relevance to our Group's current review of how we can continue to meet its charitable aims

The speaker at our members meeting at St Thomas' Church Hall, Holtspur on 15th December was John Tyler. John's talks are always interesting and well received which is why we have asked him to give us some of them more than once. On this occasion, we asked John to give us a talk on his list which he has never given to us entitled "Making Space for Wildlife", as we felt that the content of this talk would be very relevant to the current review of our Group's activities to find new ways of continuing to meet its charitable aims. One of these aims requires us to undertake tasks that conserve the environment, mainly using volunteers, for the benefit of the public.

When our group was formed over 30 years ago, we had plenty of support for our programme of practical conservation tasks on local sites, and we received several awards for our achievements. Although our Group no longer has the manpower resources to enable it to undertake a programme of practical conservation tasks, we hope to encourage individual members, who are able to do so, to support conservation work organised by other groups, encourage our members to manage their own gardens for the benefit of wildlife and take opportunities to support initiatives to improve the local environment by removing litter and keeping grass verges and hedgerows managed in ways that benefit the public and wildlife.

John's talk was well received and its content will make a valuable contribution to our Group's discussions, as it covered the management of grass and hedges in our gardens, how other habitats such as ponds, log piles, and compost heaps benefit wildlife, and the value of leaving a few stinging nettles in places where they will not be a nuisance.

We were advised to grow plants which are suitable to the soil in our gardens, which may be acidic, alkaline or neutral, heavy or light and rich or poor. Although soil can be changed on a small scale to grow individual species, it is far easier to introduce plants that will thrive in the existing soil and light and shade conditions. Care should be taken to avoid introducing species which are likely to become invasive and, when planting Bluebells in a wildflower garden, to avoid introducing the non-native Spanish Bluebells which will hybridise with and soon dominate any native Bluebells present.

John discussed ponds and their contribution to wildlife conservation. He said that creating a pond and maintaining it in a suitable condition would in most cases result in amphibians finding it and taking up residence if it is suitable for their needs. We were advised to avoid using tap water and collect rainwater in a water butt for topping up the water level in a pond. He added that there should be no need to introduce wildlife species to a newly created pond as they should come to a pond that meets their needs. Frogs are the most likely amphibians to appear, mate and produce large quantities of spawn. Toads prefer larger and deeper ponds, and you may be lucky enough to attract newts. Ponds with shallow edges will enable birds to bathe and drink, but larger ponds may attract ducks and herons which you might not be pleased to see as they might eat the smaller wildlife present. Ponds also provide an opportunity to introduce a wide range of wetland plant species which will need to be managed to prevent the dominant species taking over. John suggested that wetland plants should be grown in baskets at the back of a pond covered by around 9 inches of water. Some of the many plant species which grow alongside ponds and streams such as Purple Loosestrife and Ragged Robin can be planted alongside a garden pond to add greater interest. Small mammals such as hedgehogs can easily fall into ponds, so avoid overhanging slabs around the pond edges and create slopes where any animals that fall in can easily climb out again. Plants with tall stems or leaves can help emerging

dragonflies and damselflies to prepare themselves for flight. Having a variation in the depth of a garden pond helps to ensure that wildlife can survive if the pond freezes over in a cold winter. Avoid breaking the ice if a pond freezes over and melt it by standing a container holding hot water on the ice to open up a few ice-free areas.

John referred to the value of trees, hedges and ivy. Obviously the size of the garden is an important factor when considering the value of existing mature trees and their condition and, when deciding to leave a tree seedling that appears, or to plant a new tree in your garden, take account of its likely future growth and impact. The value of Ivy was mentioned, but it was pointed out that it needs support but does not harm a tree that it is attached to. Its berries provide food and the plant provides good cover for garden boundaries as well as a valuable safe nesting habitat for birds.



Compost bins not only provide an environmentally-friendly way of disposing of garden waste, but save the need to buy large quantities of compost for most planting tasks. Compost heaps do tend to be used by wildlife for creating homes or laying eggs, so care needs to be taken when digging out compost for garden use. When cutting down trees, or removing thick branches from them, consider creating a log pile, ideally with cavities which can be used by wildlife, including hedgehogs and other small mammals, for shelter or to create a home. Beetles might make use of old stacked logs and you may find fungi growing on the wood as it starts to rot down.



Finding ways of attracting bees to your garden will not only help with the pollination of crops, flowering plants and shrubs, but will help with the control of insect pests. Erecting bee homes with hollow tubes for masonry bees or a large bird box for the use of tree bumblebees or possibly even feral honey bees, will help with the pollination of garden plants. The choice of plants in your garden can make a big difference to the number of bees visiting and pollinating the shrubs and other flowering plants. Heathers are particularly good for attracting beneficial insects, but some heather species will only thrive in acidic soils.

Even if you do not have enough space for any of the above, you probably have a lawn. Although many people manage a lawn by frequent cutting during the growing season and attempt to prevent their green patch being invaded by weeds by either digging them out or by using weedkillers, there is an increasing trend of leaving lawns uncut for longer periods during the peak flowering period so that the wildflowers can be enjoyed and their numbers can increase. If you have a large garden, you could create a permanent wildflower meadow with a cutting regime that involves cutting some areas in the autumn and retaining some areas left uncut overwinter. Wildlife can also benefit from delaying the removal of leaves from some of the meadow areas until the Spring.

Our thanks go to John for his interesting and informative talk and we hope that it will encourage our members to do their best to ensure that their gardens are managed in ways that are wildlife-friendly. It is appreciated that not all our members have gardens or, if they have, are no longer able to put the ideas set out above into practice. Where members already carry out some of the actions set out above, or decide to implement some of the ideas, I would be interested to receive ongoing feedback on the results as this could be included as a regular feature in our newsletter.

Roger

Insects of Bucks - a talk by Martin Harvey on 15 March 2024

The speaker at our members meeting on Friday 15 March, which was held in Hughenden Valley Village Hall, was Martin Harvey who had agreed to give us a talk on the "Insects of Bucks".

I was very much looking forward to attending this talk but on the day it was delivered I was in Stoke Mandeville Hospital recovering from an emergency strangulated hernia operation, and Paul Bowyer who booked the speaker was unable to write up the talk for the newsletter because he was responsible for organising the refreshments at the meeting, an important task which unfortunately results in him missing a part of the talks at our meetings.

Fortunately WWG member Amanda Green attended the meeting and did her best to make notes of Martin's talk, in the dark. She then typed a copy of her notes which she emailed to me hoping they would help me to produce a report on the talk for the newsletter. I know from my own experience how difficult it is to make notes in the dark, but I am pleased to say that Amanda's notes provided sufficient information for me to produce an article on Martin's talk covering many of the invertebrate species he referred to. As well as being very grateful to Martin for agreeing to give this talk to our Group, we must also express our thanks to Amanda for providing sufficient information to produce this report, a task which would have been impossible without her contribution.

Martin gave the talk in his capacity as one of the leaders of BIG (the Buckinghamshire Invertebrate Group). Until recently, public contact with the Group was managed by The Bucks

and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre, but BIG is now run as an independent organisation, although it continues to pass its species records to the Records Centre. BIG welcomes anyone with an interest in invertebrates to become a member of that group, take part in its events programme and receive copies of its newsletters.

Amanda's notes showed that Martin's talk covered a wide range of invertebrates, many of which were not what their name or appearance suggested they were. For example, the Blunt Thorn Nomad looks like a wasp but is in fact a bee, which lays its eggs in a solitary bee nest. The Acorn Weevil is in fact a beetle, whereas the subject of another photo of what looked like a green beetle on a yellow flower was in fact a species of weevil. Despite its name, the Red-tailed Mason Bee likes nesting not in masonry, but in empty snail shells. A micro moth called the Lichen Tortrix, which can be found in Oak woodland, gets its name from its appearance and not from its food plant or habitat.

The Kite-tailed Robber-fly gets its name from the projecting tail on the last segment of the male, resembling a kite's tail. There are nearly 30 species of Robber Fly in the UK and they are often called Assassin Flies, as they ambush their prey and inject a paralysing saliva which enables them to suck out the body fluids of their victims.

The Fan bearing Wood Borer is a beetle similar to a furniture beetle but has antennae that are far more ornate. The adults eat very little but the larvae feed on the sap of recently felled timber after creating damaging tunnels in the wood.

The Dotted Bee fly has black dots on its wings and the female has white dots on her rear. Although this insect is a fly, it resembles a bee and searches for solitary bee nests in sandy soil. Some of the soil is picked up and stored by the fly ready to coat her eggs which she then fires into a solitary bee's nest.

The Daffodil Dung Fly (*Norellia spinipes*) is a small orangey-coloured fly with long legs which makes it look more like a stilt fly than a dung fly.

There are around 350 species of Crane Fly in the UK. Although they are harmless to humans and animals, their eggs develop into leatherjackets which can cause serious damage to lawns. The Comb-horn Crane fly which is found in broadleaved woodland is a spectacular and scary-looking insect to see, due to its size of about 4 cm, extremely long legs and the striking yellow-black pattern on the body. The larvae live in dead or diseased wood. Adult males have comb-shaped antennae. These craneflies are totally harmless and the pointed rear of the female is simply designed for laying eggs and not for stinging. The striking colour is meant to scare off birds.

Fortunately, not all invertebrates are as complicated as some of those referred to in the talk, when it comes to identifying them. If you want to widen your knowledge of invertebrate species or are more interested in butterflies, dragonflies and other less complicated invertebrates, you will find the BIG reports interesting reading and you may want to attend some of the events which BIG organises. The contact point for further information about BIG and how to become involved is the BIG website.

Our thanks go to Martin Harvey for giving this interesting talk to WWG which I am sure will have widened the knowledge of those who attended as well as my own when writing this report based on Amanda's notes.

Roger

The Jubilee River - a talk by Brian Clews

Brian's talk at St Thomas Church Hall at Holtspur on Friday 26 April covered a successful 5 year flood prevention project undertaken by the Environment Agency and officially opened in July 2002 by the Duke of York. The scheme provided many wildlife conservation benefits, the full potential for which is now unlikely to be achieved due to a lack of the necessary on-going funding.

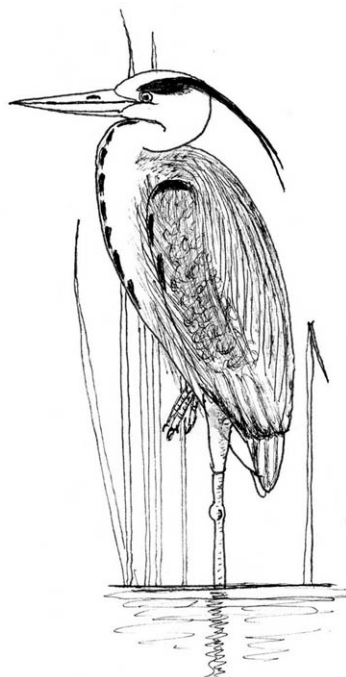
The creation of the Jubilee River was the result of a study undertaken by the Environment Agency in consultation with other relevant organisations to reduce the risk of flooding of low lying land in the area around Maidenhead, Eton and Windsor. The scheme involved the creation of another wide channel which would reduce the level of water in the Thames and consequent flooding problems when the Thames water level was high. This stage of the project was very successful and provided an extensive area of public accessible land supporting a wide range of fauna and flora.

Having said that he could easily talk for four hours on the Jubilee River, Brian said he would limit the scope of the talk to cover the reason for its creation, the wildlife it currently supports and the effects of a lack of resources, both financial and staffing, on the on-going support for the maintenance of the river, its flood prevention schemes and proposals for promoting its educational and natural history value. Even if the Jubilee River fails to meet all of its identified benefits, at least the river will remain and continue to provide a feature which the public can enjoy whether they are walking, cycling, using a wheelchair, riding a horse or fishing.

Having explained the reasons why the project cannot be funded to the level needed to continue to fulfil its original objectives, the following list of some of the fauna recorded along the Jubilee River and photographed by Brian shows how valuable this area is for conservation purposes.

Birds

Reed warbler
Sedge warbler
Bittern
Bearded Reedling (Bearded Tit)
Short-eared Owl
Little ringed Plover
Redshank
Lapwing (In very large numbers)
Golden Plover
Snipe
Oyster Catcher
Coot
Curlew Sandpiper
Black-tailed Godwit
Ruff
Wood Sandpiper
Gadwall
Teal
Garganey
Red-crested Pochard
Mallard
Little Egrets (becoming common)
Heron



Fish

Pike
Bullhead
Tench

Mammals

Badger
Mink
Otter
Water Shrew
Water Vole
Beaver
Fox



Butterflies

Orange Tip
Essex Skipper
Small Skipper
Brown Argus

Reptiles

Grass Snake

Insects

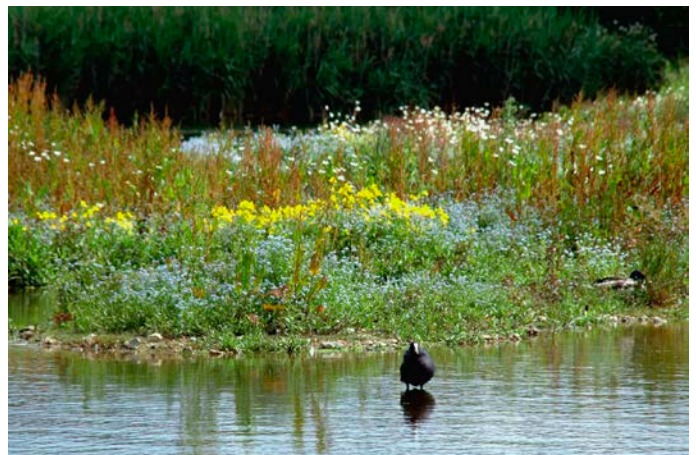
Roesel's Bush-cricket
Azure Damselfly

Although the grasslands alongside the Jubilee River support a wide range of trees, shrubs and wildflowers, the talk did not have sufficient time to cover these but Brian did say that the area known as the Jubilee Wetlands had lost a lot of its former floral interest as the water level between the board walks within this area, which was one of the highlights of the Jubilee River when it was created, had vegetated over due to lack of management. New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) had become established on some of the islands and needed regular spraying to keep it under control.

Thought had been given to forming a friends group but there is currently no funding or staff support available. Proposals to create a study area had also been dropped due to a lack of funding.

Our thanks go to Brian for giving us such an informative and interesting talk. Whilst it is very disappointing that financial constraints are going to prevent the Jubilee River from achieving its full potential as an educational resource, the river and its surroundings continue to

provide a large and valuable area which is open to all and provides large areas of flower-rich grassland which I am sure are very much appreciated by the inhabitants of the nearby towns of Maidenhead, Slough, Eton and Windsor as well as the many visitors from further afield.



Moth trapping at Flackwell Heath

On the morning of Saturday 11 May, Paul and Karen arranged an event in their garden for members who were interested in seeing the results of their moth trapping undertaken the previous night. Daytime viewing of the previous night's trapping has proved quite popular and has tended to increase the member support for the moth trapping events. Arranging a viewing session the following morning enables those attending to sit down and enjoy a cuppa and a cake (or two) and examine the moths after they have been identified and placed in viewing containers from which they will be released after dark the evening after they were trapped. Although it was a nice day for sitting in the garden and looking at the moths, only three WWG members turned up to this event by the time two of us who had arrived early left around 11.20am after an interesting and enjoyable visit. One other member arrived shortly before two of us left to catch the bus back to High Wycombe which only runs hourly.

Only 16 moth species were trapped on this occasion. Although the previous evening had been warm, there was no cloud cover and Paul informed us that the temperature had cooled off considerably as darkness fell. The species recorded were as follows:-

Oak Hook-tip (top photo)
Shuttle-shaped Dart
Treble Lines
Brimstone Moth
Willow Beauty
Common Marbled Carpet
Light Brocade
Maiden's Blush (bottom photo)
Rustic shoulder-knot
Tachystola acroxantha
Light Brown Apple Moth
Incurvaria masculella
Yellow-barred Brindle
Pale Mottled Willow
Oak-tree Pug
Common Plume



Wildlife sightings reported in January to April 2024

9th January

Song thrushes singing on Tom Burts Hill for a couple of weeks

15th January

Male Robin feeding female in a Deeds Grove garden

18th January

Great Tit “sawing” and Collared Dove on nest in a Deeds Grove garden.

3rd February

Pale Brindled Beauty moth seen on the wall of a pharmacy in Penn.

15th February

First Brimstone butterfly in a Deeds Grove garden

27th February

5 Siskins on a feeder in a Tylers Green garden

20th March

Chiffchaff “chiffchaffing” in a Deeds Grove garden.
First Peacock and Comma in a Deeds Grove garden

8th April

First Holly Blue in a Deeds Grove garden

10th April

First Queen Wasp in a Deeds Grove garden

12th April

First Speckled Wood over a Deeds Grove garden.

19th April

First Orange Tip and Small White in a Deeds Grove garden.

Bees in the garden

As this article is appearing in a wildlife group newsletter, it is unlikely that anyone reading it would disagree that we should take steps to encourage as many bees as possible to visit our gardens. Bees contribute a lot to the success of our garden plants and any vegetable and fruit that we grow. Both honey bees and other bee species undertake this beneficial work for us whilst carrying out their own tasks, so any steps we can take to encourage them into our gardens will benefit both them and us.

We have always had lots of bees in our garden and have had nests created by solitary bees in grassland, by bees using hollow tubes in boxes attached to walls and by honey bees visiting the garden and species of bumblebee, including tree bumblebees, taking up residence in large nest boxes and in compost heaps. We were surprised, however, when a swarm of hive bees took up residence in a medium size nest box fixed to one of our large conifer trees. At first we assumed they were tree bumblebees but we soon realised that our visitors were in fact feral hive bees. We contacted a beekeeper to see if a swarm from the box that had settled high up on the loose outer branches of one of our conifer trees could be taken away, but it proved impossible to place a long enough ladder against the outer branches of the tree to reach the swarm and remove it safely.

Because of the limited space within the bird box, the colony needed to swarm frequently and on no occasion did they swarm in a location from where the swarm could be collected safely. Although the bees survived their first winter in the bird box hive, the winter before last proved too cold for the bees and they failed to appear in the following Spring. I took the nest box hive down and opened it up and photographed the interior showing the honeycomb and honey that the bees had produced for their use through the winter. We miss having the bees and, having seen an advertisement for the sale of a large bird box, I purchased one which I intend to place on the side of our garden shed. On the advice of John Tyler, I will be placing the former bird box hive containing the unused honey nearby, as bees have been known to rob unoccupied nests of honey. John provided me with copies of lots of research papers relating to feral honey bees which prove that they are becoming more common in the UK.



The photo on the left shows the honeycomb and honey left by the feral honey bees that failed to overwinter in 2022/23. The photo on the right shows the nest box, designed for the use of large garden bird species, which I am planning to erect on the side of our garden shed on the opposite side to where a small empty nest box has become a bumblebee home this year.

Contacting Wycombe Wildlife Group

Wycombe Wildlife Group can be contacted by visiting its website www.wycombewildlife.org.uk and sending us an email via the "Contact Us" page.

As well as for general enquiries, this email can be used to send us details of interesting local wildlife sightings for inclusion in the newsletter we circulate 3 times a year, giving us the species, date and location of the sighting and any associated information likely to be of interest to our members.

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

Lloyds, 27-31 White Hart Street,
High Wycombe, HP11 2HL
Sort code 30 99 50 Account number: 69994368
Account name: Wycombe Wildlife Group

Payment details

Amount of payment: £6.00 Six pounds
Frequency: Annually

From:

Number of payments:

Signature

Until further notice

Date

OR Payment by cheque or cash

I enclose cheque/cash for £7.00,
payable to Wycombe Wildlife Group.