



Wild About Beds

Winter 2015/16

Mayhem among the marquees

by Julia Powell

BNHS was invited to have a stand once again at the Greensand Trust Christmas Fair at Rushmere Country Park on December 6th. En route we had a phone call to say proceedings would be slightly delayed. Meeting up with the other intrepid BNHS volunteers we adjourned to the café for a late breakfast. High winds had prevented the erection of the marquees with GST organisers having already been let down by the contractors who did not show up at all. GST staff and volunteers battled manfully (and womanfully) to erect their own smaller marquees and we eventually found a home



Rushmere Country Park. Photo by Lies/flickr

in a gazebo on the green and were able to put out a limited amount of the display. However the weather improved from then on and the event was well patronised by local people with a lot of interest shown particularly in our special guest, Taz the ferret brought by Helen Muir-Howie and her daughter, Fiona.

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Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:



The Bedfordshire Natural History Society
www.bnhs.org.uk
 Registered charity number 268659



BedsLife
www.bedsbionet.org.uk

The BNHS

The BNHS was formed in 1946, its main function to record the fauna and flora of the county. It has over twenty active Recorders who cover many branches of natural history study and whose annual reports are published in the *Bedfordshire Naturalist* journal.

Members receive a quarterly newsletter, *Wild About Beds*, and programmes of meetings. These meetings include field meetings to Bedfordshire sites and occasionally farther afield. During the winter months, there are illustrated lectures normally held in Elstow, Haynes, Toddington and Maulden.

The Society depends on annual subscriptions which are devoted to its working, as all offices are honorary. Membership is open to anyone, whether resident in the county or not. If you would like to join the Society, please contact **Mary Sheridan**, Honorary Membership Secretary, 28 Chestnut Hill, Linslade, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 2TR. Tel: 01525 378245, www.bnhs.org.uk.

BedsLife

BedsLife - Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Partnership is a consortium of government and non-governmental agencies dedicated to promoting the maintenance and enhancement of Bedfordshire's biodiversity. The Partnership oversees the implementation and monitoring of the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Action Plan, which can be found online at www.bedsbionet.org.uk.

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Your comments/notes on anything that you have observed in the field, on the road or in a past *Wild About Beds* issue are welcome/essential for continuity. Please do send articles to me either as an attachment via email or through the post. Pictures are always welcome; material required by **15 March 2016** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next *Wild About Beds* will be published in **March 2016**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

BNHS Conference 2016

Following the success of the 2014 Conference the steering group have now started planning for another conference in 2016. The theme for this will be loosely linked to the greensand to tie in with another local initiative: Secrets of the Sands (see <http://bedsrcc.org.uk/rural/secrets-of-the-sands/>). We are planning to have two presentations on Coleoptera, two on Hymenoptera, two on Diptera and one on Spiders in order to broaden into other invertebrates. (We are already thinking ahead to future conferences!). We do try to target groups for which there is available literature/online support etc. such that they are reasonably accessible to those with some existing natural history appreciation and knowledge as well as groups which we think have potential popular appeal if people can find out more about them.

Several of our target specialist speakers have already accepted and it promises to be another good day. The venue will be as for the last conference i.e. The Forest Centre, Millenium Country Park, Marston Moretaine and this is already booked for **Saturday 5th November** so you can look forward to an exciting day as well as fireworks in the evening!

Further details including the full list of speakers will be in the next issue of *Wild About Beds*.

Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire: a review in British Wildlife



Wild Orchids received a glowing review by Peter Marren in the August 2015 issue of *British Wildlife* (p.456). Here it is reproduced in its entirety:

Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire
Richard Revels, Chris Boon and Graham Bellamy
Bedfordshire Natural History Society 2015
156pp, colour-illustrated
ISBN 978-0-9506521-9-1 £20 + £3.75 p&p hbk

Why would anyone want to publish a book about a small group of wild flowers in a small, agricultural county that not many people would choose for their holidays? Well, one reason is that Bedfordshire is surprisingly rich in wild orchids, with nearly half the British species – 27 in all – and mostly in publicly accessible sites. It also contains the longest continually monitored wild-orchid population in the world: the Autumn Lady's-tresses at Knocking Hoe. The best reason, however, is that Bedfordshire has three enthusiasts who have managed to cover orchids in unusual detail. Chris Boon has recorded and monitored them at the close-up scale of a single kilometre. Graham Bellamy has looked after them in nature reserves for decades. And Richard Revels not only knows them all intimately but has produced the best sequence of orchid pictures that I have ever seen. He has managed to image not only the flowers, but also habitat shots, insect pollinators, young plants, seeding plants, variations and hybrids and even, in some cases, seeds – and all of the highest quality. This is a superb production, beautifully printed, perfectly pitched, well presented and thoroughly reliable. This is English local botany at its very best.

Peter Marren



Bedfordshire is an important county for Musk Orchids. Richard Revels

Going, Going, Gone

Now we have a vinyl banner with the new society logo, I need a home for the old banner. I know that a lot of hard work went into the making of the old one, much of it being sewn by hand. But I do not have the space for it. So unless someone comes forward to offer it a new home it will be disposed of by the end of January. Please contact me if you want it. [Juliapowell800\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:Juliapowell800@gmail.com) or 01582 661328.

Recording Micro-moths in Bedfordshire

by David Manning

The first documented record is by J.C. Dale of larvae of a plume moth, *Pterophorus galactodactyla*, at Clapham Park Wood in 1820. Dr. Walter Gifford Nash recorded in the early 1900s, and supplied records to C.G. Barrett who compiled the Lepidoptera section of *The Victoria County History for Bedfordshire*. This mentioned twenty five species of micro-moths. In the next fifty years only fifty three species were added. J.C.F. Fryer recorded eight species, mostly at Whipsnade Heath, between 1922 and 1939. Colonel S.H. Kershaw recorded twenty eight species between 1935 and 1955, mainly in his garden at Aspley Guise. By 1971 eighty-two species had been recorded in the county.

I started recording in 1973, and Terence Hollingworth recorded from 1978 to 1986 when he left the county. The first two volumes of *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* were published in 1976 and 1985, with the leaf-mining moths comprehensively covered by Colonel A.M. Emmet. In 1984 and 1985 Colonel Emmet visited us and helped us record leaf-mining micro-moths adding many species to the county list.

Since 1985 the publication of new books has meant that the recording of micro-moths has become more practical. All groups are now well covered, and many more people are now recording.

Encouraged by Barry Dickerson, the recorder for Huntingdonshire (VC31), I began dissecting difficult species in 1992, starting with historical pinned specimens. More recently, the arrival of the Internet and digital cameras have made the exchange and confirmation of records far simpler.

The number of micro-moths recorded in the county is now over nine hundred. The list has reached this total as follows: 100 species – 1974, 200-1976, 300-1978, 400-1982, 500-1984, 600-1985, 700-1991, 800-2003, 900-2014.

My thirtieth annual report to the Bedfordshire Natural History Society will list new species recorded during 2015. After this I will retire as Micro-moth Recorder, and be replaced by Andy Banthorpe.

Remarkable lichens in Bedford Cemetery (Foster Hill Road)

by Mark Powell

A small group assembled in Bedford Cemetery on Saturday 24th October and, despite the damp weather, managed to see a number of the remarkable lichens present.

Lichens are curious dual organisms, a symbiotic association between a fungus and an alga. Although the alga can often live successfully on its own, the fungus cannot survive without incorporating algal cells into its tissues. In some ways lichens are incredibly hardy – a specimen of the common orange lichen (*Xanthoria elegans*) spent a year and half outside the International Space Station subject to the high vacuum of space, bombarded with cosmic rays and subject to extremes of temperature. On its return to Earth it was revived. On the other hand lichens can sometimes be very sensitive to environmental factors. Much of the Midlands area of England became a 'lichen desert' due to high levels of atmospheric sulphur dioxide pollution from the Industrial Revolution through until the 1970s. The level of sulphur dioxide has now fallen below the level where it is a limiting factor for lichens and we are in the middle of a spectacular (but mainly unnoticed) recolonisation. Some of the lichens involved in these new communities are species that were unknown before the 1980s. *Bacidia neosquamulosa* is present on the base of an ash tree in Bedford Cemetery; it was described as new to science in 1999 and has become frequent across Western Europe in the past decade or so.



Gravestones can support a range of lichen species. This one had the rare *Anaptychia ciliaris* subsp. *ciliaris*. Photo by Julia Powell

Close to the chapel there is a wonderful old chest tomb capped with a large sandstone slab. This supports *Buellia badia* and *Stereocaulon pileatum* where they were originally found new for Bedfordshire. *B. badia* has subsequently been found on chemically-treated fencing timber, a substratum which supports a community similar to that of metal-rich rock.

An oak branch in the cemetery supports a community of yellow lichens comprising several species which are favoured by the modern atmospheric pollution regime – that of compounds of nitrogen which arise from burning fossil fuels and the use of chemical fertilisers on a landscape scale.

Candelariella reflexa used to be a feature of the 'canine zone' of tree trunks (the lower part visited by urinating dogs) but the landscape is now so nutrient enriched that this species now thrives on branches; in Bedford Cemetery it grows with *Candelaria concolor* (from a largely subtropical genus which may be spreading north due to global warming) and *Xanthoria ulophyllodes* (its first recorded occurrence in Bedfordshire).

The vast majority of the conspicuous lichens present in Bedford Cemetery are common species which, nevertheless, create attractive patterns of colour on the gravestones. Many interesting features can be observed on gravestones such as the vertical stripe of vigorous lichen species stimulated by bird droppings and the poorly recorded basal zone of sandstone gravestones where mineral salts are drawn up from the soil modifying the species present.

The rarest lichen was saved until last. *Anaptychia ciliaris* subsp. *ciliaris* (whose lobes have an appearance likened to eagle's claws) occurs on just one of the gravestones. There is an old record for this lichen from Woburn Park but it was feared that this species, which has drastically declined across lowland England, was long extinct in Bedfordshire. To reflect the fact that *A. ciliaris* subsp. *ciliaris* has declined so rapidly its British conservation status was upgraded from Vulnerable to Endangered in 2012.



The rare *Anaptychia ciliaris* subsp. *ciliaris* on a gravestone at Foster Hill Road Cemetery, Bedford. Photo by Julia Powell

Help Wanted

Since the programme was printed, the Society has been invited to have a presence at several more events by our partners in the area. I would welcome offers from more people to help at any of these events or any others that occur during the year. Please email me your details and I will circulate that group first when help is needed. [Juliacpowell800\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:Juliacpowell800(at)gmail.com)

11th February – Teachers' Professional Development Day at Whipsnade Zoo 10am – 4:15pm. We will be offering the nature table to support teachers in their nature study classes.

6th March and **30th October** Give Nature a Home Discovery Day RSPB Sandy – further details to follow. Quizzes, the photographic display and the nature table will all be on show.



Please note: to reduce the risk of email spam being sent to contributors and others, '(at)' appears in email addresses in place of '@' in this newsletter. -Ed.

Notes on winter active Early Bumblebee, *Bombus pratorum* (Linnaeus, 1761) in Wilden (TL0954)

by Andrew Green

It is known that in recent years Buff-tailed Bumblebee, *Bombus terrestris* (Linnaeus, 1758) has adapted to a trend towards warmer winters by continuing to be active throughout winter in the south of England. However, for Early Bumblebee to be active is rare, or at least not well recorded.

This November I have been recording this species in my Wilden garden on a daily basis at temperatures as low as 5C. Perhaps it is not extraordinary for them to be nectaring, but these individuals are both nectar and pollen gathering. Winter flowering Mahonia is the preferred nectar source and is the only flower that these bees visit on cold days. However, on the milder days pollen is gathered from Mahonia, *Lonicera fragrantissima* and *Clematis cirrhosa*. I have Choisya and heather in flower but these have not been visited by the Early Bumblebees. The bees seem undeterred by high winds, light rain or low light levels. On cold days they tend to concentrate on nectar only, but on the milder days there is an even split between nectar feeding and pollen collecting bees.

It would be interesting to know whether this is an old queen that has kept her brood going longer than normal, or a new queen that has begun her nest early in response to the mild weather. If the nest is successful in producing more queens and males before the hard frosts of January and February, then this may result in an increase in nest numbers in 2016. However, if resources are too limited for queen production, and especially if the nest has been started by a new queen, then a nest failure later on may mean fewer nests in 2016.

Date	Quantity	Plant resource	Temp (C)	Activity
08 Nov 2015	2	Mahonia	13	nectar & pollen
19 Nov 2015	2	Mahonia	9	nectar only
21 Nov 2015	1	Mahonia	5	nectar only
25 Nov 2015	7	Mahonia, Clematis, White Dead-nettle	8	nectar & pollen
26 Nov 2015	10	Mahonia, Clematis, Lonicera	11	nectar & pollen
27 Nov 2015	10	Mahonia, Clematis, Lonicera	13	nectar & pollen
28 Nov 2015	2	Mahonia	6	nectar only
29 Nov 2015	6	Mahonia	11	nectar & pollen



Early Bumblebee *Bombus pratorum*. Photo by Andrew Green



Early Bumblebee *Bombus pratorum*. Photo by Andrew Green



Events Programme Winter 2015/16

Changes to the programme will be published on the website www.bnhs.org.uk or the BNHS News Group.

In bad weather, the leaders may cancel the event if conditions are unsuitable. Please check early on the day.

All indoor talks start at 8pm except the AGM which starts at 7:30pm and all are held at Maulden Village Hall (MVH), grid reference TL048380, post code MK45 2DP.

Parking is free.

Visitors are encouraged.

A small charge is requested for refreshments at the talks and possibly on other occasions too.

Donations are always welcome.

For field meetings, please wear stout footwear and warm clothing, bring a hat, water and sun cream if it is hot. OS Landranger Numbers 152, 153, 165 & 166 cover Bedfordshire.

REGRETTABLY NO DOGS ARE ALLOWED and children under 16 years must be accompanied by a responsible adult.

Unfortunately some trips will not be suitable for wheelchair users and pushchairs. Please contact the leader in advance if you have any concerns about accessibility.

Please check the web site www.bnhs.org.uk or join the BNHS News Group for the latest information.

(F) Particularly suitable for families and young people.

(L) Bring a picnic lunch for all day events.



Meetings organised by the ornithological section, the Bedfordshire Bird Club (BBC).

SATURDAY 26th December, WOBURN 9.30am–12.30pm (F)

Join us and bring the family for our annual **Boxing Day Walk through Woburn Park** and walk off some of the excesses of the holiday period ready for another day. Meet at the Woburn Village car park, opposite the church in Park Street, SP950331, MK17 9PG.

Leader: Mary Sheridan

MONDAY 11th January, LONDON, 11am

Please note you have to book your place for this BEFORE Christmas.

Visit the Grant Museum of Zoology. Visit the only remaining university zoology museum in London. The collection includes a Quagga skeleton and Dodo bones. There are 2300 slides of micro-organisms and a collection of Blashka glass models of invertebrates. *Numbers are limited: please contact Julia Powell on 01582 661328 by Tuesday 22nd December to book your place when full details will be given.*

TUESDAY 19th January, MAULDEN 8pm

Talk "An Unassuming County – The Making Of The Bedfordshire Countryside" by Brian Kerr, soil scientist and visiting Fellow at Cranfield University. He will talk about his recently published book of the same title in which he applies his knowledge of the environment to unravelling the landscape history of Bedfordshire. At MVH.

TUESDAY 26th January, MAULDEN 8pm 

BBC talk "Birds' interaction with the landscape – BTO research at global to local scales" by Dr Andy Clements, Director, British Trust for Ornithology. At MVH.

SATURDAY 6th February, MAULDENWOOD 10am–12.30pm (F)

Owl pellet dissection at the Working Woodland Centre, Greensand Trust. A great hands-on experience even if slightly gruesome. On display will be some preserved examples of what owls might eat. Children must be 8 years old or over and all children must be accompanied by a responsible adult. See the Nature Table and photographic display too. Booking advisable – contact Julia Powell 01582 661328. WW Centre

off the A6 at Deadman's Hill layby, TL072394, MK43 3QT.

Leader: Mick McCarrick.

TUESDAY 16th February, MAULDEN 8pm

Talk "Foresight from hindsight, the Rothamsted Insect Survey" by Dr Richard Harrington. Rothamsted is the oldest agricultural research establishment in the world and is famous for its longterm field experiments. The Rothamsted Insect Survey follows in this tradition and for more than 50 years it has been monitoring aphids, moths and other insects using networks of suctiontraps and lightraps. The networks provide the longest runs in the world of standardised data on terrestrial invertebrates. The data are used for studies spanning the full spectrum of fundamental to applied science, from gaining basic understanding of population dynamics to putting that understanding into practice for pest control and conservation. Richard will chart the surprising history of the Rothamsted Insect Survey, then outline its key achievements and its future plans and prospects. Richard gained his PhD through work at the Natural History Museum on aphids. He joined Rothamsted in 1979 and spent his entire career with the Rothamsted Insect Survey, retiring as its Head in May 2015. In 2010 he purchased an aphid preserved in Baltic amber for £20 on eBay. On being unable to identify it he passed it to taxonomists who found it to be undescribed. He feels it appropriate to have an old fossil named after him.

At MVH.

SATURDAY 5th March, MAULDEN WOOD 10.30am–12.30pm (F)

Identify winter twigs on trees, especially Sessile Oak and Wild Service trees. During the walk in Maulden Wood, a selection of winter twigs will be collected, and identified in the hand where possible. The general characteristics of the tree species will also be taken into account such as overall shape, growth habit, bark colour and texture and twig and branch shape etc. For species that cannot be determined straight away, then hand lenses and flora keys will be used to aid identification. Meet in the layby at top of Deadman's Hill on A6, TL072394, MK43 3QT.

Leader: Colin Carpenter. Tel 07751 356049.

TUESDAY 15th March, MAULDEN 7.30pm *Please note the start time*

BNHS Annual General Meeting. After a short AGM, the Officers and Recorders will present their annual reports.

At MVH.

TUESDAY 29th March, MAULDEN 8pm

BBC talk "The Wild World of Corvids: understanding behaviour and cognition" by Dr Gabrielle Davidson, based on Gabrielle's original research into the sophisticated intelligence of our members of the crow family. At MVH.

SATURDAY 16th April, HARROLD 2–4pm (F)

Pond dipping at Harrold Odell Country Park. There will also be quizzes, the nature table and a photographic display. Meet at the visitor centre car park, SP956566, MK43 7DS.

Leader: Sheila Brooke. 07905 949901.

SUNDAY 17th April, PEGSDON 8am

Morning bird walk over Pegsdon Hills for spring migrants. Park and meet in car park of Live and Let Live Inn, Pegsdon, TL121303.

Leader: Jon Palmer.

If you wish to know more about any of the events please contact either Sheila Brooke [brooke.se\(at\)btinternet.com](mailto:brooke.se(at)btinternet.com) 01525 873396

Or Julia Powell [JuliaCPowell80\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:JuliaCPowell80(at)gmail.com) 01582 661328

Christmas Hoopoe wishes everyone a safe and happy holiday season.

Photo by John Pitts

