



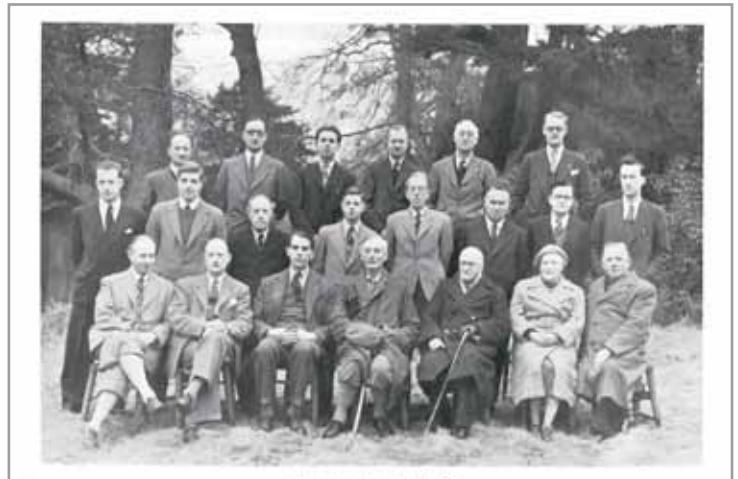
# Wild About Beds

Spring 2017

## Longest-serving BNHS member?

by Heather Webb

I recently witnessed an interesting email discussion among a number of BNHS members and officers, about who was the longest-serving current Society member. Membership Secretary Mary Sheridan seems to have solved the mystery, declaring Wally Champkin the winner, with continuous membership since 1948. Gwen Gribble is close behind Mr Champkin, having joined in 1949. Congratulations to you both, what an incredible record!



Officers of the BNHS Council 1946-52. Photo by F. Jewell Harrison

What struck me most about the discussion however was the fondness with which current members described meeting, talking with and being taught by some of these early members. These founding men and women inspired today's naturalists. They passed on their knowledge, passion and enthusiasm, and helped to develop our current cohort of accomplished Recorders and non-Recorders. Working as I do in another county I've come to realise just how amazing is the expertise we have in Bedfordshire. I'm sure that in another 70 years some of our YounGnats will be speaking of current members with the same affection and reverence which is held for the founders. It's a wonderful legacy, and one of which the BNHS should be proud.

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Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:



The Bedfordshire Natural History Society  
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BedsLife  
[www.bedsbionet.org.uk](http://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 Maulden; the Christmas Members' Evening is held in 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, email [membership@bnhs.org.uk](mailto:membership@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](http://www.bedsbionet.org.uk).

### Editor: Heather Webb

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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 June 2017** please.

**Thank you in anticipation.**

The next Wild About Beds will be published in **June 2017**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

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## Winter 2016 programme highlights

*by Julia Powell*

### Monday 26<sup>th</sup> December, Woburn

It was a fine day for the annual Boxing Day Walk through Woburn Park ably led by our very own Mary Sheridan. There was a good turnout with both regulars and new faces. I do not think there were many additions to the Christmas Bird race but there was a good range of views exchanged on a wide range of subjects.

### Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> January: 'Linnaeus: Putting Order into Nature' talk by Nick Hammond

An excellent presentation and well attended. Nick gave us an interesting view of the life and times of Linnaeus and the legacy he left. For example, he named some species after people he knew and about whom we were informed by Nick rather than being names for features of the plant or animal which is more prevalent today.

### Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, Oxford University Museum of Natural History visit

More than a dozen members met our excellent guide, Chris Jarvis on this visit. He gave us the history of the building while showing us some of the exhibits in the main hall before taking us behind the scenes. We went right up into the attics to get an idea of the atmosphere when, in 1860, there was a significant debate at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science between the Church and scientists of the day on the question of evolution.

### Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February, Walk at Sharpenhoe Clappers

About two weeks before this event, I had an email from Jon Powell telling me that the ranger I was

expecting to lead this walk had emigrated to New Zealand in January! I thankfully accepted Jon's offer to lead instead and we were treated to a most interesting insight into the management options faced by someone in Jon's position as landscape manager for the National Trust in Bedfordshire. Unfortunately, the misty weather did not allow us to enjoy the magnificent views that Sharpenhoe Clappers is famous for and there was not much wildlife in evidence but it was still an enjoyable walk. There was much discussion about management options typified by this example. Do you cut down a hedge by the path to open up the view or leave it to grow to provide shelter for the chalk downland butterflies that favour this site?

### **Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> February, 'Deer Management at Ashridge' talk by Lawrence Trowbridge, Lead Ranger for the NT at Ashridge**

Lawrence started his presentation with explanation of how the various species of deer that may be found locally are an ecological tool, before telling us how the Ashridge deer are being managed. Numbers have increased so much that a specialist team have been employed to cull the deer. It was hoped to reduce the numbers (counted using thermal imaging) to about 600-800 deer. Last winter, 800 deer were culled in a six-week period ending in February but over 1200 deer were counted at the following March census. The venison goes into the food chain and in future, the National Trust hope to supply all their cafes and restaurants with their own venison. (Squirrels and edible dormice numbers are too high too but catering for these is another story.) Members were keen to find out where the venison could be obtained at present.

### **A date for your diary: Christmas Social 2017**

*by Julia Powell*

The venue for this year's Christmas Social has changed. Maulden Village Hall has been booked for **Tuesday December 5<sup>th</sup> 2017**. Members are invited to bring photos and videos of any wildlife encounters from this year. The show starts at 8pm. A contribution to the seasonal refreshments is also welcome.

The BNHS summer programme should be with you now. You will see that the society has been invited to have a stand at some events put on by our partners in wildlife locally. We are only able to do this if I have volunteers to look after the stand. Every event is different — from a small display of artefacts from the nature table to the full show of photos, quizzes, books, leaflets and nature table under the gazebo including transport and setting up/packing away. The events are a good day out and even a few minutes spent on the stand allows others to have a comfort break and enjoy the rest of the event too.

Please let me have your contact details if you would like to participate at these and any other events and I will add you to the very small band of volunteers that I have already. Many Thanks. My email is [Juliapowell800\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:Juliapowell800@gmail.com) or telephone 01582 661328.

The summer programme is complete and shortly Sheila and I will be moving on to the winter one. If you have any ideas about what you would like included, please contact either of us by email or phone or at one of the meetings. We try to incorporate as many members' ideas as possible. (It saves us having to think of our own). We are always on the lookout for new sites to visit. Do not forget that the winter programme runs from the end of September to the end of May so look out now for places that might be worth a visit next spring. please contact either

- Sheila Brooke Tel: 01525 873396, mobile 07905 949901, email: [brooke.se\(at\)btinternet.com](mailto:brooke.se(at)btinternet.com), or
- Julia Powell Tel:01582 661328, mobile 07958 161938, email: [JuliaCPowell800\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:JuliaCPowell800(at)gmail.com).

### **BNHS Safeguarding Policy**

To comply with government policy on the safeguarding of children, young people and vulnerable adults, which states that 'all organisations, including charities, are expected to comply with the government inter-agency statutory guidance – "Working together to safeguard children"', BNHS Council has drawn up a safeguarding policy. This can be found on the BNHS website ([www.bnhs.co.uk/main/html/documents.htm](http://www.bnhs.co.uk/main/html/documents.htm)). This is pertinent to all BNHS events that are attended by any children, young adults and/or vulnerable adults.

### Look out for Fungus Weevils

by Wilf Powell

There are over 600 species of weevil in Britain, with 320 so far recorded in Bedfordshire. Most are very small and difficult to identify without close examination under the microscope. However, there are some very distinctive, larger species that can be readily identified in the field. Among these are a couple of the so-called 'fungus weevils' (Family Anthribidae). Most fungus weevils feed on the fungi that help to break down dead wood (mycophagous) or on the decaying wood itself (xylophagous), their larvae developing in dead and dying tree branches or within fungal fruiting bodies on dead timber.

There are nine British species of fungus weevils, of which six have been recorded in Bedfordshire, including the two largest *Platystomos albinus* (7–10mm) and *Platyrhinus resinosus* (7–13mm). Although distinctive in appearance the adult weevils are often difficult to spot as they tend to sit motionless and drop to the ground if disturbed.

#### ***Platystomos albinus***

This is the rarer of the two species and is nationally scarce, being classified as 'Nationally Scarce Nb', meaning that it has only been recorded in 30 to 100 ten kilometre squares of the national grid. In Bedfordshire, the only recent records are from the grounds of The Lodge (RSPB Sandy). The adult weevil is brown or grey with white patches on the head and at the hind end of the wing cases (elytra). There are also white markings on the legs and on the antennae and a distinct white mark in the middle of each wing case. This weevil shows sexual dimorphism; the male has much longer antennae than the female. If the antennae are laid back along the body they would reach the middle of the wing cases in the male but only the base of the thorax in the female. *Platystomos*



*Platystomos albinus*. Photo by Mark Gurney

*albinus* is associated with dead and dying trees, especially fungus-infected Beech and Alder, where the larvae feed in the decaying wood. It would be useful to know if this weevil occurs anywhere else in the county, so if you are out and about, especially in woodland, take a close look at any dead and dying trees.

#### ***Platyrhinus resinosus* – Scarce Fungus Weevil or Cramp-ball Fungus Weevil**

This weevil has been recorded more widely in Bedfordshire than has *P. albinus*, with recent records from Barton Hills Nature Reserve, Dropshort Marsh Nature Reserve (Toddington), Drover's Spinney (Shefford), Kempston, Ketsoe Row, Lousey Bush Nature Reserve (Eyeworth), Maulden Wood, Northill, Priory Country Park, The Lodge (SRSPB Sandy), Upper Caldecote and Wrest Park. The adult is dark brown to greyish black patterned with small brownish patches and with large ochreous patches on the head and hind end of the wing cases. The larvae develop in fruiting bodies of the fungus *Daldinia concentrica*, commonly known as Cramp Balls or King Alfred's Cakes. These are round and black, occurring on dead wood and almost exclusively on dead and dying Ash trees. With the recent appearance of Ash Dieback disease, caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (= *Chalara fraxinea*), dead and dying ash trees are becoming increasingly common in our countryside. Therefore, it will be interesting to see if there is a consequent increase in the abundance of *P. resinosus* weevils. Ash Dieback was first reported in Britain in 2012 and first detected in Bedfordshire in November 2013. The number of records of *P. resinosus* that have been received by the county weevil recorder since he was appointed in 2010 are: 2010 (0), 2011 (2), 2012



The Scarce Fungus Weevil *Platyrhinus resinosus*. Photo by Mark Gurney



(1), 2013 (0), 2014 (1), 2015 (5) and 23016 (8). Note the increase in records in the last two years. Is this a knock-on effect of Ash Dieback or is it coincidence? Will the number of sightings continue to increase as ash trees continue to die?

If you come across either of these weevils during your excursions to the Bedfordshire countryside could you please take a photo of the beast and send it to the county recorder – [weevils@bnhs.org.uk](mailto:weevils@bnhs.org.uk). Further contact details can be found on the BNHS website.

### Pinpoint BAT: a project designed to increase involvement in recording bats *by Bob Cornes, Bat Recorder*

The Bedfordshire Bat Group is launching a new project this year, with the twin aims of increasing the geographical spread of bat records, and of involving more Bat Group members in collecting records.

Identifying bats in flight is notoriously difficult, and this limits the number and spread of records that can be contributed by less experienced bat observers. Recent developments in bat detectors mean that there is now a high-quality recording bat detector (the Peersonic Bat Recorder) available at a remarkably low price (a little over £250). By using this detector and a hand-held GPS unit, a participant in the project can collect useful bat records regardless of their level of experience. The Bat Recorder automatically makes recordings of bats to its built-in memory, and time stamps each one. A computer program written by Danny Fellman, the Bat Group Chair, will download the recorded sound files and link them to the location data recorded by the hand-held GPS unit. The result is a spreadsheet with a list of recordings, and an accurate grid reference for each one. When analysis of sonograms from the recordings is carried out (either by the person who made the recordings or by someone with more experience), the identifications can be added to the spreadsheet, resulting in a set of accurately geo-referenced bat records ready to be added to the database. Generating a GIS map from the records is relatively easy, and the resulting map can be sent to the volunteer who made the recordings, together with a list of bat species recorded.

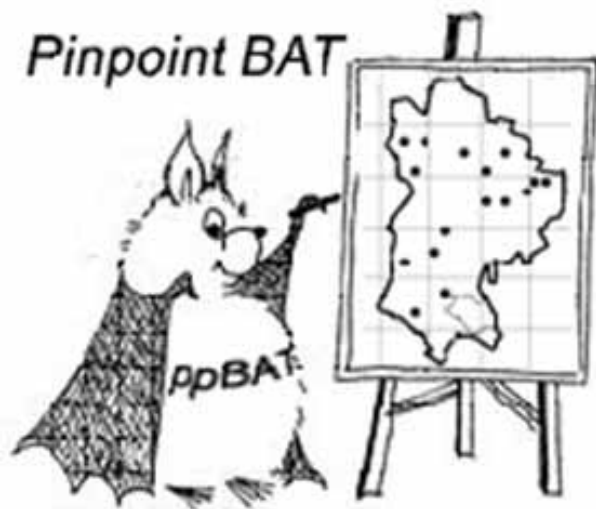


Illustration by Joan Childs

Even a volunteer new to bats can get involved in this process by borrowing a set of equipment, operating the Bat Recorder and GPS in their back garden, on their favourite dog-walking route or even while driving on minor roads with the Bat Recorder attached to a window mount. More experienced volunteers can take the process further by helping with the downloading of data and the analysis of sonograms. All participants will be helping to collect bat records as well as getting feedback about the bat species they have recorded.

The project was made possible by two generous donations last year from Bat Group members Bob Hook and Stephen Mason. They wanted to contribute to the Bat Group's efforts to collect useful bat records and to involve members. Additional funding from the Bat Group has enabled the project to be set up. The equipment will be available for any Bat Group member to borrow for short

periods in order to collect bat recordings from anywhere within the county. More information is available from the Bat Group website at <http://www.bedsbatgroup.org.uk/wordpress/?p=13595>.

For information about the Peersonic Bat Recorder, see <http://peersonic.co.uk/>.



*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.*



PondNet



## PondNet Spawn Survey 2017

### GET INVOLVED NOW!



If you have a local park or garden pond with evidence of breeding frogs and toads, or you spot some spawn while out on a walk; record your findings and contribute to the national spawn survey.

From now until the end of May this year we will be running a new survey to collect important data on the location of ponds with breeding frogs and toads.



We're asking you to look for **frog and toad spawn**, but you can also record the presence of tadpoles, and adult frogs and toads.

You can find information about spawn identification, download a survey form and enter your results on our website:  
<http://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/projects/pondnet/spawnsurvey2017>

Anyone can take part in the survey and it's a great way to begin biological recording whether you're 8 or 80. Our online form is quick and easy to use; you don't need to register, just a few clicks and you're done.

Your sightings will contribute to the national pond database, and we'll share our data freely with your Local Environmental Record Centre and Record Pool, the national database for amphibian and reptile records.

For more information contact:  
Laura Quinlan, Project Administrator  
E: [peoplepondswater@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk](mailto:peoplepondswater@freshwaterhabitats.org.uk)



PondNet is one of three projects within Freshwater Habitats Trust's People, Ponds and Water Project funded by Heritage Lottery Fund, and Thames Water for Wildlife funded by Thames Water.

*Hoopoe has been asked by the editor to remind everyone that **the Christmas Social will be held in Maulden and not Haynes** as indicated in previous issues of Wild About Beds. Also, happy Easter!*





Events Programme Summer 2016

Please check the website [www.bnhs.org.uk](http://www.bnhs.org.uk) or join the BNHS News Group for the latest information.

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

Indoor talks start at 8pm except the AGM which starts at 7:30pm and all are held at Maulden Village Hall, 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](http://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).

**SUNDAY 2<sup>nd</sup> APRIL, MARSTON VALE 8am** 

**BBC walk** in Marston Vale Millennium CP for early migrants and resident species. Meet in car park, TL004417. Entrance fee £2.50 for non-permit holders.

Leader: Bob Hook

**TUESDAY 18<sup>th</sup> APRIL, MAULDEN 8pm**

**Talk 'Dr Martin Lister (1639–1712), pioneer conchologist'** by Peter Topley, Honorary President of the Conchological Society. This talk will relate the fascinating story of Martin Lister, the first 'modern' conchologist and arachnologist, Vice-President of the Royal Society, friend of John Ray and collaborator of Isaac Newton. It will also tell of the family production of his magnum opus, the *Historiae Conchyliorum*, featuring just under one thousand engravings of shells.

**SUNDAY 23<sup>rd</sup> APRIL, PEGSDON 8am** 

**BBC walk** in the morning over Pegsdon Hills for spring migrants. Park and meet in car park of Live and Let Live Inn, Pegsdon, TL121303.

Leader: Jon Palmer

**THURSDAY 27<sup>th</sup> APRIL, FLITWICK 7pm–9:30pm (F)**

**Walk** in Flitwick Manor Park, one of the earliest examples of the planting of an arboretum in Britain, started in 1819 by John Thomas Brooks. A number of his original trees survive in the publicly accessible pinetum, along with others planted up until 1858. These include some of the oldest known plantings outside their natural habitat. Limited parking in local streets. Meet at site entrance TL 03233425, MK45 1HU.

Leader: David Alderman

**SUNDAY 30<sup>th</sup> APRIL, BROOM 7am** 

**BBC walk** around Broom Gravel Pits for spring migrants. Park and meet at end of Kings Road, off High Street, Broom, TL172433.

Leader: John Tomlin



**SATURDAY 6<sup>th</sup> MAY, FLITTON 2pm–4pm. (F)**

**Visit** Flitton Moor to do some pond dipping and explore the nature trail. There should be some early dragonflies and butterflies about too. Meet at the barn at the end of Brook Lane, TL057360, MK45 5EJ.  
Leader: David Sedgley

**SUNDAY 7<sup>th</sup> MAY, MAULDEN WOOD 4:15am** 

**BBC Annual Dawn Chorus** in Maulden Wood. Meet in lay-by at top of Deadman's Hill on A6, TL072394. Hot fried breakfast to follow at 7am, price £3.00. Please order 7 days in advance with John Adams on 01234 381532.  
Leader: Pete Marshall

**SUNDAY 14<sup>th</sup> MAY, LUTON 10:30am–1pm (F)**

**Walk** along Luton's underrated river corridor to look at the habitats and species of the Upper Lea, with the chance of spotting water vole, kingfisher, spring flowers and much more. Free parking at Wardown Museum LU2 7HA, TL088229 or LU2 7HW, TL089228 beside the bowling green. Meet in car park at front of museum.  
Leader: Trevor Tween

**SUNDAY 21<sup>st</sup> MAY, WHIPSNAD 11am (F)**

**Visit** Whipsnade Downs for the Duke of Burgundy, Green Hairstreak, Grizzled and Dingy Skippers for a joint meeting with Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire Butterfly Conservation. Meet at the Bison Hill car park SP999184, LU6 2LA.  
Leader: Greg Herbert

**THURSDAY 25<sup>th</sup> MAY, ST NEOTS 7pm** 

**Walk** around Paxton Pits Nature Reserve, Near St Neots, Cambs for breeding species especially Nightingales. Meet in reserve car park, TL197629, PE19 6ET.  
Leader: Richard Bashford

**SATURDAY 8<sup>th</sup> JUNE, TOTTERNHOE 10:30am (F)**

**Visit** Totternhoe Knolls for chalk downland flowers, spring butterflies and other wildlife. The flowers here last year were spectacular. Meet in the NT car park SP986217, LU6 1QG.  
Leader: Graham Bellamy

**WEDNESDAY 14<sup>th</sup> JUNE, MAULDEN 7–9pm (F)**

**Visit** Duck End NR for the abundant wildlife at this small, varied reserve. The new boardwalk should allow better access. Limited parking at the site in Moor Lane, Maulden TL051374. MK45 2DJ.  
Leader: David Withers

**SATURDAY 24<sup>th</sup> JUNE, FLITWICK 10am–4pm (F) (L)**

**Visit** Flitwick Moor SSSI for the Invertebrate Day joint meeting with Flit Vale Wildlife Trust Local Group recording invertebrates and other wildlife. Meet in car park at end of Folly Lane TL045354, MK45 5BW, off Maulden Road by Folly Farm.  
Leader: Colin Carpenter

**SUNDAY 25<sup>th</sup> JUNE, SANDY 8am** 

**Walk** around RSPB Sandy Lodge Reserve for a variety of birds. Meet in the gatehouse car park, TL191486  
Leader: Graham Goodall

If you wish to know more about any of the events please contact either

Sheila Brooke Tel: 01525 873396 Mobile: 07905 949901 Email: [brooke.se\(at\)btinternet.com](mailto:brooke.se(at)btinternet.com)

Or Julia Powell Tel: 01582 661328 Mobile: 07958 161938 Email: [JuliaCPowell800\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:JuliaCPowell800(at)gmail.com)

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