



Wild About Beds

Winter 2017/18

Orchards East launched in Bedfordshire

from Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire



Red admiral *Vanessa atalanta* in a north Bedfordshire orchard.
Photo by Karen Jackson

Everyone loves an orchard - like ancient woods or hedges, orchards lie at a fascinating interface of history and natural history; of nature and culture. Whether bright with blossom in spring or fruit laden in late summer, they have a strong aesthetic appeal.

Orchards East is a new initiative based at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, a collaborative venture with a range of partners across six counties of eastern England (Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire). The scheme is recording and researching old orchards, conserving existing examples and creating new ones, as well as providing people with practical skills (grafting,

pruning etc.) to ensure that orchards can be maintained in the future.

In Bedfordshire, Orchards East is working with the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre, which has recently completed the creation of a digital map of all the orchards which existed in the county in the early 20th century, showing more than 2,000. Bedfordshire once had a thriving fruit-growing industry that embraced not only apples but other fruit, including 'Aylesbury prunes', a variety of cooking plum. Most of these orchards have since disappeared and, while new ones were planted in the twentieth century, many have since gone.

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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 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.

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.

Editor: Heather Webb

The Wildlife Trust, Priory Country Park, Barkers Lane Bedford MK41 9DJ.

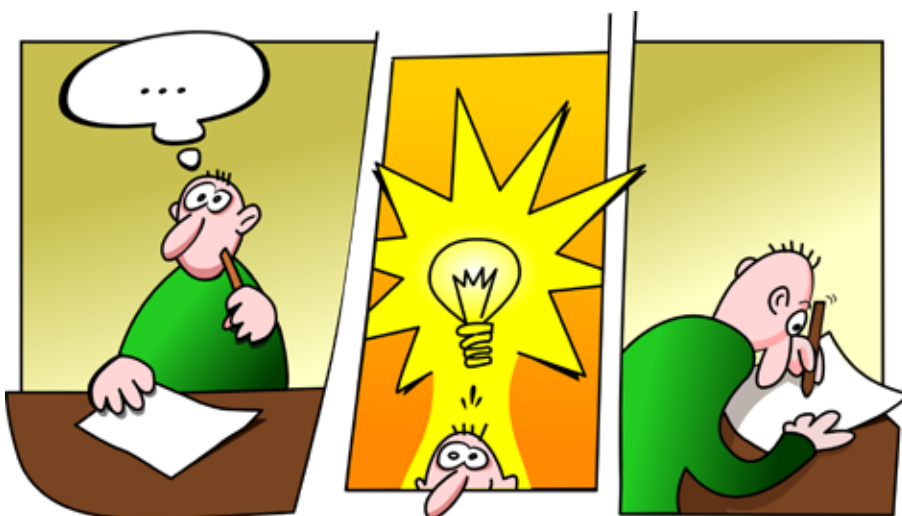
Email: newsletter@bnhs.org.uk.

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 2018** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next Wild About Beds will be published in **March 2018**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

February Half term 2018



The BNHS will have representation at Rushmere Country Park on Wednesday 14th February. We are planning a display for the Visitor Atrium and maybe have some activities in the Classroom. Should the weather be kind, there will also be a self-guided Wildlife Safari.

We are looking for ideas to support these activities. Please let Sheila Brooke or Julia Powell (contact details in the programme) know if you have anything to suggest. Although we are also looking for people to be there on the day, if you have a promising idea but cannot help out on the day please contact us anyway.

Thanks, Julia and Sheila

Where Did They Come From?

by Helen Muir-Howie, BNHS Reptile & Amphibian Recorder

It is about 120 years since Bedford became aware of the presence of midwife toads (*Alytes obstetricans*) in the area of town where the station now stands. Back then the station was further down Midland Road and a nursery was on the land. The owners of the nursery assumed the original invaders which had set up a colony had been imported from France in a shipment of plants and this has been the accepted origin ever since. The theory was backed up in the 1990's by Julia Wycherley who was an expert in the call signatures of amphibians. She thought our midwife toads had a 'French accent'.

Recently a PhD student from Imperial College did a DNA test on some midwife toads from a colony in Cambridge and these turned out to be of Spanish origin.



Midwife toad *Alytes obstetricans*. Photo by Gilles San Martin



Male midwife toad *Alytes obstetricans* carrying eggs. Photo by Laurent Lebois

This poses some questions. Did the Cambridge colony come from Bedford or was it the result of another introduction from animals bought through the pet trade? How many of the other colonies around the country originated in Bedford? If not, where did these others come from and are they all the same species?

If funding can be secured there is a plan to swab individuals from the Bedford colony to look at their DNA profile to see if they are French, Spanish or some other nationality and then, if funding allows, swab individuals from other locations such as St Albans and High Wycombe to track their origins too.

Obviously this relies on money being available, but if the work goes ahead I will report the results when I get them.



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.

Autumn Highlights 2017

by Julia Powell

Starting with our most recent event on Monday November 27th, a dozen people made the journey into London to visit the library at London Zoo. This is free to any member of the public; Zoo volunteers can take out 2 books and Fellows of both ZSL and the Royal Entomological Society can take out 6 books for 2 months. The Assistant Curator, Emma spent over an hour showing us some very special books she had selected. This included a fabulous book of paintings by Edward Lear, another of bird paintings by John Gould, a collection of watercolours from the very early days of the zoo and year books from the early days of both London and Whipsnade Zoos. The latter recorded 12 orchid species being planted at Whipsnade in January 1935! I wonder if any are included in our Wild Orchid book. Although fragile, we could handle all the dozen books or so on show except perhaps for the oldest book in the collection dating from the 16th century. I do not think anyone was a fluent Latin reader and there were no illustrations, so we left that to one side.

The November talk was given by Peter Sutton who travelled all the way from neighbouring Flitwick to tell us about Grasshoppers, Crickets and their allies accompanied by a lot of stunning close-up photographs. Questions were varied including one member asking if Peter could identify a red grasshopper seen on holiday over 20 years ago. No photographic evidence was provided though!!

Our last event in the month of October with a very entertaining and lively talk by Derek Niemann based around his latest book "A Tale of Trees: the battle to save Britain's ancient woodland" copies of which were on sale signed by the author.

Apple Day at Bromham Mill was held on the middle Sunday in October. It didn't rain although when our little gang of volunteers arrived, we were not expected. However, we were not turned away and were allowed to pick any unoccupied spot we liked. (Just around the corner from the bar and very near a major pathway.) Just the place to generate a lot of interest in the stand so the little communication difficulty at the beginning was rapidly overcome and everyone enjoyed a good day out.

Another good day out was spent in Swiss Garden the previous Sunday. There was a very good turnout including people from the Invertebrate Group. Staff at Swiss Garden had put up a gazebo for us in a lovely spot with tables and chairs too. These were all well occupied over the lunch time break and a lot of BNHS business was conducted over tea and sandwiches. There was steady interest at the Nature Table with lots of families taking part in the quiz too. Thank you to Alan Outen for securing free entry for everyone and making all the other arrangements.

Hoopoe and the editor would like to wish everyone a very happy Christmas





Events Programme Winter 2017/18

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

In severe weather, the leaders may cancel the event if conditions are unsuitable. Please check the website early on the day or contact Sheila or Julia.

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 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).

TUESDAY 16th JANUARY, MAULDEN

Talk 'One moth, ten thousand researchers: the story of Conker Tree Science' by Michael Pocock, ecologist at the Biological Records Centre at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. The impact of *Cameraria ohridella*, a leaf-mining moth on horse-chestnut trees, means it is one of the most noticeable non-native invertebrates in Britain. The moth is remarkable in so many ways: it was discovered as new to science in the 1980s, spread rapidly across Europe and first established in Britain in 2002. From 2010 it has been the subject of a 'citizen science' project, encouraging people to record its damage and rear its parasitoids, making new scientific discoveries. Setting 'citizen science' in the long history of biological recording, Dr Pocock will describe how knowledge gained from this tiny moth via 'citizen science' helps us support tree health and biodiversity monitoring. He undertakes research on interactions between different species, and how these form complex ecological networks, and he supports biological monitoring, increasingly developing methods to allow more people to engage with nature and contribute to real science through 'citizen science'.

MONDAY 29th JANUARY, LUTON 10:30am

Visit Wardown House Museum situated in the beautiful landscaped Wardown Park. The house was formerly the home of the Scargill family, then a military hospital and is now a museum and gallery. Glimpse an insight into a wealthy family home, including the natural history collection, during the Victorian period. Meet in entrance. Please book with Sheila Brooke by January 23rd on 01525 873396 or [brooke.se\(at\)btinternet.com](mailto:brooke.se(at)btinternet.com).

TUESDAY 30th JANUARY, MAULDEN 

BBC talk 'The Magic of Spurn' by Lizzie Bruce, FSBO Committee Member. Find out why Spurn Bird Observatory claims to be the UK's mainland migration hotspot.

WEDNESDAY 14th FEBRUARY, HEATH & REACH 11am - 3pm (F)

Visit the BNHS stand in the Visitor Centre, Rushmere CP to see the Nature Table, owl pellet dissection, displays, quizzes and more. Take part in the Wildlife safari (weather permitting). Park in the Rushmere car park, SP912284, LU7 0EB. Parking £3.00 (coins only). Leader: Julia Powell.

TUESDAY 20th FEBRUARY, MAULDEN

Talk 'Wildlife Crime - How You Can Make A Difference' by a member of Birders Against Wildlife Crime.

This is a group of volunteers who believe that we can all do something to help combat wildlife crime, by being 'eyes in the field'. People like us are skilled observers that actively seek out areas that the general public do not often visit and have with us powerful optics and many have a camera/smart phone. So we are in a good position to spot wildlife crime. They will explain their '3Rs' and other campaigns (including Hen Harrier Day) and will want to know what concerns you have about the state of our wildlife today.

SUNDAY 25th FEBRUARY, HARROLD 8:30am

BBC walk in Harrold-Odell CP for local wildfowl. Meet in the car park on Carlton Road, Harrold, MK43 7DS, SP957567. Leader: Richard Bashford.

SUNDAY 11th MARCH, TRING 10:30am (F)

Walk around College Lake formerly a quarry, a BBOWT reserve with chalk grassland, woodland, scrub and hedgerows as well as marsh and open water. Introductory talk by a ranger followed by a self-guided walk. Entrance and parking on the left of the B4388 250m north of the canal bridge at Bulbourne. HP23 5QG, SP935140. Leader: Sheila Brooke.

TUESDAY 20th MARCH, MAULDEN 7:30pm

BNHS Annual General Meeting. After a short AGM, the Officers and Recorders will present their annual reports. **PLEASE NOTE START TIME.**

TUESDAY 27th MARCH, MAULDEN

BBC talk 'Reclaiming South Georgia' by Prof Tony Martin, Team Leader of the 6 year programme to eradicate rats on this UK Overseas Territory.

WEDNESDAY 28th MARCH, TOTTERNHOE 10:30am

Walk on Totternhoe Knolls to find wintergreen Man Orchids (illustrated in Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire, copies of which are still available) and migrating birds. We will also look at the management of the site and the new grazing regime now that different grazing compartments have been set up to accommodate the flock of 25 Herdwicks brought in from the Lake District. Park in the NT Car Park SP986217, LU6 1QU. Leader: Richard Knock.

WEDNESDAY 11th APRIL, THERFIELD HEATH 10:30am (F)

Walk on Therfield Heath where there is a large colony of Pasque Flowers and other spring chalk grassland wildlife on this SSSI site. Approach Royston on A505 until round about at TL333403. Take Royston exit road. Turn first right up the hill and take car park on right at TL336401. Meet in the car park which is only a short walk away from the Heath. Leader: Graham Bellamy.

TUESDAY 17th APRIL, MAULDEN

Talk 'Genetic Engineering-what is it and do we need it?' by Peter Lillford CBE, visiting Professor at the School of Engineering, Birmingham. An explanation of the basic science and how it developed focussing on work with plants although Peter is willing to discuss human and animal experiments. He is a Fellow of the International Academy of Food Science and Technology, Royal Society of Chemistry, Institute of Food Science and Technology and Royal Society of Arts and has won several prestigious awards in the arena for Food Science.

SUNDAY 22nd APRIL, PEGSDON 8am

BBC Morning walk over Pegsdon Hills for spring migrants. Park and meet in car park of Live and Let Live Inn, Pegsdon, TL121303. Finish around 11.00am. Leader: Jon Palmer.

SUNDAY 29th APRIL, BROOM 7am

BBC Early morning birding around Broom Gravel Pits for spring migrants. Park and meet at end of Kings Road, off High Street, Broom, TL172433. Finish by 12.00 noon. Leader: Stefan Baltruschat.

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

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: The BNHS thanks all who have kindly given permission to visit and to hold field meetings on their properties.

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