



Wild About Beds

The Bedfordshire Natural History Society Newsletter
February 2024



Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* preening in the River Great Ouse at Bromham.

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The Bedfordshire Natural History Society www.bnhs.org.uk

Registered Charity Number 268659

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 **Kath Hindley**, Honorary Membership Secretary, Tel: 01525 841256, 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: Nick Hammond

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 2023** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next Wild About Beds will be published in **April 2024**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

Note from the Editor

This newsletter is shorter and later than usual, for which I apologise. Being shorter, however, it does emphasise two important meetings in the next two months. One, a talk by David Athowe on Biofluorescence, is by Zoom, which means you don't have to leave home. The other is great opportunity to learn about varied aspects of Bedfordshire's natural history from our expert Recorders, which includes the AGM (please see page 5).

Last autumn Bedfordshire lost an influential naturalist and conservationist when Nancy Dawson died in the autumn. A full tribute will be featured in the next newsletter, but before Nancy's death we received a letter from a member about the encouragement she received some years ago. It would be great to be able to include any reminiscences you have in this tribute. Please send reminiscences of Nancy to me at newsletter@bnhs.org.uk by 5th March – maximum of 250 words please.

Nick

Autumn Highlights 2023



Hygrocybe reidii, one of the fungi found in Stockgrove Park on 19th November 2023

1st October Stockwood Park

An interesting BNHS Sunday morning walk around Stockwood Park guided by Sam and supported by Luke. The weather was humid and dry. The Oak and Sweet Chestnut Trees were magnificent and the latter laden with spiky nuts. A big bank of flowering Ivy provided good views of many insects. We discovered the pond on the far side of the park and later examined the WW2 pill box on the road edge before checking a piece of scrubby land outside Kidney Wood.

John Pitts.

19th November Stockgrove Park

The weather forecast wasn't too promising for the meeting at Stockgrove Park but although overcast, it didn't start raining until we were on the home straight. The meeting was led by Keith and Pat Cavanagh from the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Fungus Group, with 8 other Fungus Group members and quite a few guests from the Beds Natural History Society. There was initial disappointment when we didn't find the Herald of Winter (*Hygrophorus hypothejus*) in its usual place under the conifers up the hill from the car park, but there were plenty of other things around. *Lepista flaccida* (Tawny Funnel) was out in force, but although we did see *Clitocybe nebularis* (Clouded Funnel) it was not in such profusion.



Difficult to pick out among decaying leaves is Earthfans *Thelephora terrestris*, one of the species of fungi found in Stockgrove Park.

Other “regulars” were there, fortunately - *Hapalopilus nidulans* (Cinnamon Bracket) which turns purple, temporarily, when in contact with ammonia, and *Helvella crispa* (White Saddle), both by the track running along the eastern side of the lake; and *Amanita junquillea* [previously *A. gemmata*] (Jewelled Amanita) under the pines on high ground. Although rare, in recent years at least we have always found it here, and as it’s a chunky, light-coloured toadstool it is easy to spot, so that could come in useful because this year we also found Earthfans (*Thelephora terrestris*) nearby, which we don’t often see. Maybe that’s because they are difficult to spot, looking very like dead leaves rather than being rare, so having the showy Amanitas nearby could be handy.

The highlight for me was a few tiny toadstools growing on a spruce cone - not at the time when it was handed to me, but later when I looked at them microscopically and found out they were not what I had thought, but the rather more unusual (“... occasional but widespread ...” according to the BMS Checklist) *Strobilurus esculentus* (Sprucecone cap). Our meeting was rounded off by welcome bacon baps from the cafe as usual.
Pat Cavanagh (abridged Julia Powell).

Indoor and Zoom Meetings February and March 2023

Tuesday 20th February, Zoom opens at 7:45pm

Biofluorescence: A hidden world of communication by David Atthowe.

Biofluorescence is the ability of certain organisms to reflect light in a different colour than the one they absorbed. It is an incredibly widespread phenomenon that can be found in almost every kingdom of life. Join me for a journey through this little-researched area of the natural world as we explore Biofluorescence in the U.K. and beyond in a range of organisms.

Biography

Over the past 15 years, I have had the privilege of exploring various ways of connecting with the natural world. Through practising forest bathing, leading expeditions around the world, landscape and macro photography, permaculture design, and food forest design I have gained a deeper appreciation for the wonders of nature. I have walked more than 10,000km across 6 different countries for various causes through my organisation Nomadic Lion, all under the banner of sharing joy and happiness with all. I am a Forest Therapy Hub qualified Forest Bathing Guide and Forest Therapy Practitioner. I also work as a project manager for a Norfolk-based charity Pathmakers, encouraging people to get out into the Norfolk countryside, and organising an annual walking festival called Walk Norfolk. In 2022 I came across Biofluorescence in a TED Talk about Praying Mantis and have dedicated the last year to nose-diving as deep as possible into this fascinating, yet little-studied area of the natural world.

Tuesday 19th March, Maulden 7:30pm; **NOTE START TIME- doors open 7pm**

BNHS AGM and RECORDERS SHOW After a short AGM, the Officers and Recorders will present their annual reports. A wonderful way to find out about the up, downs and new arrivals of wildlife in our county. Also hints about what might be coming our way.

A Reminiscence of Nancy Dawson from a new member

Jean Young

Our Membership Secretary, Kath Hindley, received this lovely letter from Jean Young, a new member, who learned about BNHS from Sheila Brooke at a meeting in Oxford.

Hello Kathryn,

We used to live in Ickwell (1996-2011) and knew Nancy Dawson as I used to help her out with the plant sales for the Wildlife Trust. As she started to introduce me to some of the wonderful insects and their life-histories she had mentioned to me that I might be interested to join the Beds Natural History society. Unfortunately I never got round to taking up her advice while we lived there and it is only since we've moved to Worcestershire and I have got well and truly into the world of entomology over the last 8 years and have become a biological recorder that I have realise what a wonderful opportunity I missed.

Especially as I have become rather fond of the rather small, neglected and under-recorded creatures and it was while I think searching for some information on *Stomaphis* aphids and their relationships with ants, as we have some that I've been studying, that I came across your website and saw that you had been making special efforts to look at many of the under-recorded creatures. I thought I'd join and get chance to see your publications. I believe you used to have annual meetings, hopefully if you have one this year I may be able to come over and join you depending on when it is!

Kind Regards

Jean (and Andy) Young

Kath replied and suggested that Jean might share some more of her reminiscences of the redoubtable Nancy Dawson, who was such a big influence on natural history and conservation in our county. Here is Jean's contribution.

I have many happy memories of time spent with Nancy, and her freezer! I was aware that she used the odd specimen that she had prepared for educational purposes when she did talks or walks or to pass on to the museum. When I came across an immaculate but dead sparrowhawk halfway down our garden I knew where to take it, and that was my first contribution to Nancy's collection.

Over the following years I passed on various dead birds that were window casualties despite the stickers we had on the windows to try and avoid such occurrence. Sadly, this included a Great Spotted Woodpecker and a Spotted Flycatcher. My final contribution was a Tawny Owl collected on the road near Shuttleworth early one evening. It had been standing in shock in the middle of the road, amongst the traffic. Despite a swift trip to the vet with the owl on my lap, unfortunately it didn't make it, but at least it lived on in Nancy's collection. Although it was a sad situation, it was incredible to see it close-up, appreciating the beautiful feathers and how their seemed to be no weight in the bird at all.

Nancy's freezer was a treasure trove of species that you didn't normally get chance to have a close-up look at. My freezer hasn't been put to such good use, although it has housed the odd shrew and bat! I do however collect entomological specimens that I come across that have expired through natural causes and they provide a fascinating insight into their anatomy.

I also met another of your members, Richard Revels, when Nancy mentioned that he was interested in photographing Spotted Flycatchers. We had them nesting in our climbing hydrangea for many years until they were ousted by a thrush which took residence before the flycatchers returned. Richard managed to get some lovely photos and we were quite proud that it was Richard's photo of one of 'our' flycatchers with prey which featured in some of the RSPB literature.