

West Oxfordshire Field Club

www.thefieldclub.org.uk



Newsletter No. 103 Spring 2016

EDITORIAL

In contrast to last spring's editorial, which was written after a lazy lunch-hour in the garden, this one follows a trip to Somerset during which snow fell on the Cotswolds. But overall it has been a record-breaking warm winter. Recently I have seen more foxes on the roads around dusk and later than for some time. The cubs are well-grown by now, and their parents must spend a lot of time hunting for them. I also had a burst of hedgehog 'signs' on the lawn a couple of weeks ago. No obvious toad run this year, but they have had plenty of wet nights to choose from. I have on occasion collected up to 80 toads in a bucket in just three hours to protect them from night drivers. Standing beside the road peering into the darkness on a cool but humid night, I could actually hear them coming – croaks approaching in the darkness, heading for the local gravel pit. Nothing to compare with the cacophony that occurs in a rainforest following the first rains of the rainy season. One pool I visited in Australia had no fewer than 12 species of frogs and toads calling at once, and you could hear them half a mile away. Close up it was so deafening that you had to move away after 20 minutes, ears ringing as if you had been close to the speakers at a disco. The volume these tiny frogs were capable of using their inflatable throat pouches was astonishing.

Spotting my first swallow of the season returning across the Cotswolds reminded me of another first – the first collared dove to visit my childhood garden in the late 1950s. I was so excited to see one. Now they are so common that their repetitive calls become annoying. Since arriving (naturally) from the Continent in 1956, their number has now reached 230,000 pairs in the British Isles. The changing climate will bring more new species from the south, like the elegant little white egret, now residing here.

Then there are the deliberate introductions, such as white-tailed sea eagles in Scotland, and red kites in the Chilterns – now a common sight above the garden and along the M40. To have one swoop low unexpectedly in front of the car windscreen can be quite alarming – the wingspan is not far short of 6 feet. Sadly, the last golden eagle, the predatory bird with the largest wingspan in England, is thought to have died, leaving a new record-holder, the eagle owl, brought to extinction here several thousand years ago. The source of this returnee is unknown, but it is an impressive bird, looking every bit the ferocious predator. The RSPB is unhappy about its return, fearing for its work attempting to boost the hen harrier population, which the owl occasionally attacks. The eagle owl is not a bird to be trifled with – friends living in the vicinity of a nest warn to keep clear of the bird, as it

apparently has a temper to match its looks. I would not fancy the chances of pet rabbits and kittens if it became too common.

Some of our more familiar birds are still declining. According to Martin Harper, conservation director of the RSPB, our puffins and turtle doves now face the same level of extinction threat as the African elephant, and are now more endangered than humpback whales. I was surprised to see that even oystercatchers and lapwings have now been added to the 'near-threatened' list.

The Club has been out birding this winter, with a grand total of 83 species seen on the trip to Morecambe in October, and 66 species at Slimbridge on a cold but sunny February day. There was also a trip to Wilstone Reservoir and College Lake, and in January we revisited Over Norton Park and Walk Farms to see the farmland birds attracted by the stewardship scheme there with its many different feeding areas. Corn bunting, reed bunting, yellowhammer, brambling, tree sparrow and mistle thrush were among the more interesting species seen. A trip to Otmoor in April saw some early migrants returning – sand and house martins, swallows and chiffchaffs.

We have also followed the changing pattern of plants and fungi through the seasons, and now the first brimstone and small tortoiseshell butterflies are among us, and bees of all sorts are in the garden. We hope this summer will see better fortunes for our butterflies. Butterfly Conservation's State of the UK's Butterflies 2015 shows that over the last 40 years 76% of

resident and regular migrant butterflies have declined, including some of the commonest species – the gatekeeper has declined by 40% in just the last 10 years. The main causes appear to be the intensification of agriculture and changes in woodland management, leading to reduction and fragmentation of breeding habitat, but the butterflies are also significantly affected by pesticides and by climate change. Even so, determined efforts at conservation are paying off, especially by restoring breeding habitat in series of linked sites. In SE England nearly 1000 volunteers have been involved in bringing the Duke of Burgundy back from the brink, including in the Painswick Valleys in Gloucestershire, where the large blue has also successfully been reintroduced.

The mild weather has led to a mixture of winter and spring wildflowers – celandines were out in early January, daffodils lasted for up to two months before fading, and coexisted with snowdrops, crocuses, primroses, cowslips, bluebells and cherry blossom. We look forward to greater riches on our summer excursions, and to that gem of spring, the dawn chorus.

While it is important to remember the needs of conservation, and to contribute where possible, it is even more important never to forget the great natural world out there, to revel in its splendour and diversity, to celebrate the remarkable changing of the seasons, to be humbled by the power of the elements in storm, wind and flood, and to feel a part of the great plan. The Field Club embraces both, offering a chance to learn about the natural world and to get out and explore it... and to share it.

Jill Bailey

Views expressed by contributors to this newsletter are not necessarily those of West Oxfordshire Field Club

YOUR NEWSLETTER

A big thank you to everyone who contributed to this newsletter, and especially those who had to try more than once to get emails through. They are welcome souvenirs of our much-loved outings, and also help to attract new members.

Please can you let me have your reports of walks and other Club outings, including any September reports that did not make it into this newsletter, by the first week of September

2016 for the Autumn newsletter, and any September reports as soon as possible afterwards. My e-mail address is j.bailey@ecofeatures.co.uk. E-mailed flora and fauna lists in a single column, not in a table or spaced with tabs, please. If this is not convenient, please post handwritten or printed reports to the address given on your programme.

Jill Bailey (Newsletter Editor)

REPORTS OF FIELD MEETINGS

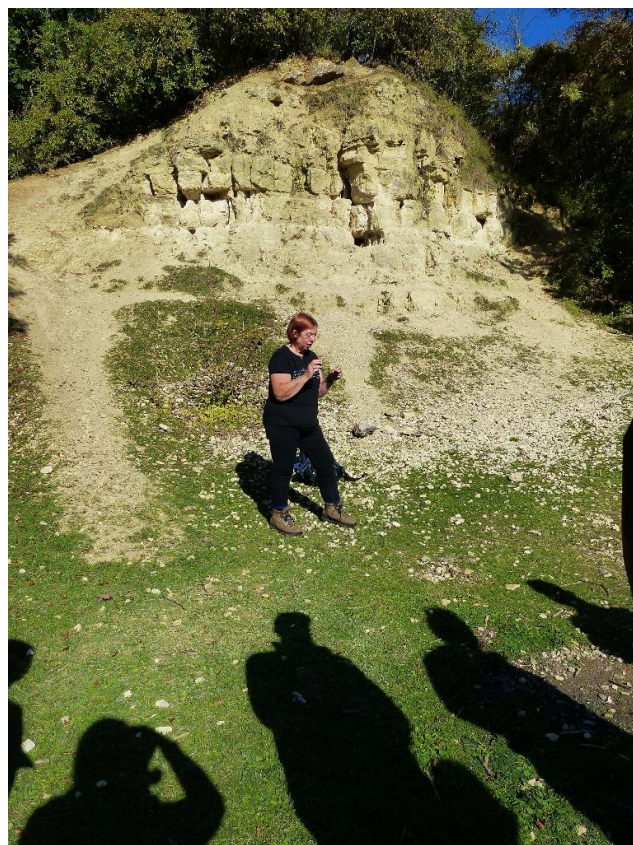
Geology walk at Kirtlington Quarry 27 September 2015

On a glorious September Sunday morning eleven members and three visitors met up with our leader, Lesley Dunlop, at Kirtlington Quarry, well known to geologists as an SSSI owing to the wide variety of fossils found there in past years. Since 1997 the quarry and woodlands adjacent to the Oxford Canal have been designated as a local Nature Reserve, with a lease agreement between the quarry owners and the District Council. Steps up to raised board walks have been provided to enable visitors to examine the exposed quarry face at several levels.

Disappointingly few good quality fossils remain to be found now, but at the time when the quarry was working many shell and bone fossils were discovered, which are now on show in the OU Museum of Natural History.

The rocks exposed in the quarry were probably laid down in the shallow water of a coastal environment. Evidence for this was provided by the presence of fossil wood,

freshwater algae and crustaceans, dinosaur bones and rare mammal fossils, indicating the proximity of land.



Historical records indicate that Fullers Earth (a volcanic ash, used for fulling wool) was quarried at Kirtlington in the early 17th seventeenth century, and the limestone was also quarried as a local building stone. But in the twentieth century clay and limestone from the quarry became important

ingredients for the cement industry, and with the quarry's proximity to the Oxford canal it was well placed for supplying the markets both to the north and the south.

Picture by Mary Elford

Margaret Arnold

Fungus Foray in Bernwood Forest 18 October 2015

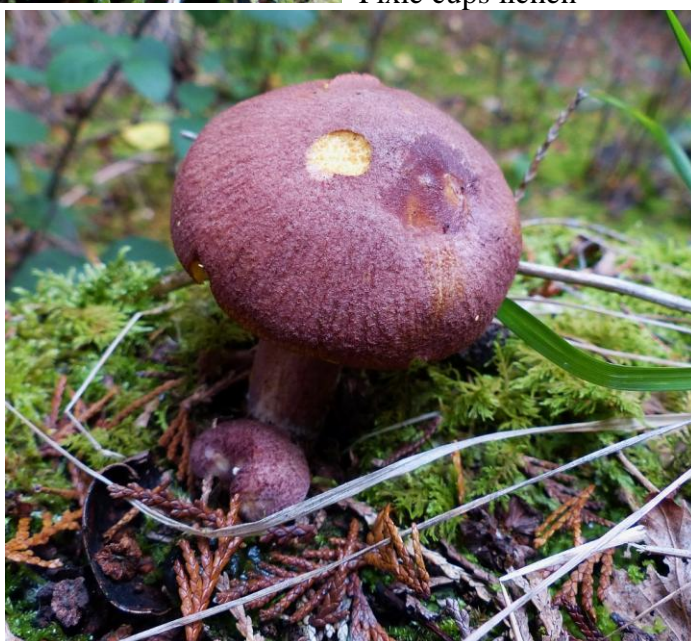
On October 18th 2015 about a dozen people joined Peter Creed on our annual Fungus Foray, this year in Bernwood Forest. The forest is very popular with dog walkers so in his introductory remarks, Peter included a health and safety warning about dog waste not picked up by the owners. Nevertheless, we had a very fruitful morning examining and sometimes tasting the diverse range of fungi to be found. We saw several people gathering fungi for eating. Here is Alison Weaver's extensive list of species seen:

Fungi and lichens

White Saddle	Soapy Night	Ochre Brittlecap
Orange Bonnet	Buttercap	Bay Bolete
Sulphur Knight	Blue Conifer Bracket	Wood Blewit
Lilac Fibrecap	Tawny Funnel Cap	Fruity Brittlegill
Common Puffball	The Blusher	Cortinarius Anomalous
False Death Cap	Honey Fungus	Yellow Club
Clouded Funnel	Orange Milk Cap	Yellowdrop Milkcap
Turkey Tail	Agaricus Silvaticus	Plums and Custard
Yellow Stag's Horn	Blackening Brittle cap	Rosy Bonnet
Parachute fungus	False Chanterelle	Felt Saddle
Russula Nigricans	Penny Bun* (Alison's lunch)	Pixie Cups (lichen)
Hedgehog Fungus	Charcoal Burner	
Slimy Milk Cap	False Saffron Milk Cap	



Pixie cups lichen



Plums and custard

Plant species noted:

Devil's Bit Scabious
Red Clover
Ragwort

Birds:

Green Woodpecker
Jay (heard)

Mary Elford

Trip to Morecambe 23 - 26 October 2015

On Friday 23rd October thirteen of us set out for Leighton Moss and Morecambe Bay and we met up at Martin Mere Wetland Centre for 1 pm lunch on the way.

This is always a good place to visit in the Autumn and we had great views of Pink-footed geese from the United Utilities Hide, a large group on the ground and squadrons more flying in during our three hour visit.

Their numbers are in excess of 10,000 birds and they winter in the United Kingdom travelling from Iceland and Greenland. Up to 70 Whooper Swans have arrived from Iceland together with many wintering ducks. We had a distant view of a Kingfisher sitting for a while on a fence post and a Marsh Harrier flew over. Large numbers of Lapwings and small numbers of Ruff were showing well.

It was time to move on at 4 pm and we headed north for another hour and a half to our hotel, The Clifton, on Morecambe sea front where we were booked in for Bed & Breakfast for the next three nights. We were booked in at 7.30 pm for dinner at the Clarendon Hotel, a five minute stroll along the promenade.

Saturday was forecast to be a wet start as we met for breakfast and there was a fine view of the sea nearing high tide and pushing a large group of Oyster Catchers and Curlew ever closer. We headed up the promenade in our cars after breakfast stopping to scan the few remaining rocks and groynes for various birds which were waiting for the water to recede again. High tide is, of course, the best time to see the birds as Morecambe Bay is as much as seven miles wide and the whole expanse of mud and sand is exposed at low tide giving the birds rich feeding grounds but allowing them to spread out over an enormous area.

On our way to Leighton Moss we called in at Warton Crag, an impressive disused quarry with a high cliff face offering nesting and roosting spaces for a huge number of Jackdaws plus two roosting Peregrine Falcons which gave us good views through

the telescopes. The expected Ravens were not showing this time.

Leighton Moss was not far on and we spent the day exploring the Reserve for delights such as, Great Egrets, Otters, Bearded Reedlings, a large group of Black-tailed Godwits, Marsh Tit, Bullfinch and then over the road at the second part of the reserve to the Eric Morecambe Hide for Water Rail, two Kingfishers, Redshank, Greenshank and Spotted Redshank.

The much forecast heavy rain failed to reach us and we only had the odd shower as we returned to our base for the evening. It was the night for putting the clocks back an hour and the next morning was bright with almost the same high tide at breakfast time as the previous day. We watched another flock of Oyster Catchers across the road on the advancing tide line and they had been joined by a Peregrine Falcon eating its breakfast. The Peregrine took off and flew away carrying its prey, which looked like a smallish bird, in its talons.

After breakfast we headed up the coast stopping off at a wonderful viewing point for birds which afforded us good views of Dunlin, Turnstones, Lapwing, Oyster Catchers, Eider Ducks, Ringed Plovers and Great Crested Grebes, among others. Heading up to Hest Bank where we had lunch and spent some time trying to fathom out the workings of a tidal Eel pass built into a flood prevention device. Eels are abundant in this area and make that incredible journey from the Sargasso Sea in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. It is the only sea on earth that has no coastline (a nice bit of trivia!). The rest of the day we

returned to Leighton Moss to feast our eyes on more birds and of course we had an hour less to do it in.

The following morning after another delicious breakfast we booked out of our hotel and as it was a beautiful blue sky morning some of us headed up the coast for some more wonderful bird watching. We called in at Leighton Moss again and picked up on Bittern and good views of the female

Bearded Reedling on the grit trays which are put out for them as they change from insect eating in October to reed seed eating as it helps them grind up and digest their food.

A little further north is a known site for Dipper and Grey Wagtails but we were not successful this time and only picked up on Dab Chick.

We headed for home having clocked up 83 species.

Bird species seen:

Little grebe	Pheasant	Swallow
Great crested grebe	Water rail	Pied/white wagtail
Cormorant	Moorhen	Dunnock
Bittern	Coot	Robin
Little egret	Oystercatcher	Blackbird
Grey heron	Ringed plover	Song thrush
Mute swan	Golden plover	Redwing
Whooper swan	Lapwing	Cetti's warbler
Pink-footed goose	Knot	Bearded tit
Greylag goose	Dunlin	Long-tailed tit
Canada goose	Ruff	Marsh tit
Great Egret	Snipe	Coal tit
Shelduck	Black-tailed godwit	Blue tit
Wigeon	Curlew	Great tit
Gadwall	Spotted redshank	Nuthatch
Teal	Redshank	Jay
Mallard	Greenshank	Magpie
Pintail	Turnstone	Jackdaw
Shoveler	Black-headed gull	Rook
Pochard	Common gull	Carrion crow
Eider	Lesser black-backed gull	Starling
Red-breasted merganser	Herring gull	House sparrow
Goosander	Great black-backed gull	Chaffinch
Marsh harrier	Stock dove	Greenfinch
Sparrowhawk	Woodpigeon	Goldfinch
Buzzard	Collared dove	Bullfinch
Kestrel	Kingfisher	Reed bunting
Peregrine	Sand martin	

David Roberts

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's Chedworth Reserve 14 November 2015

It was raining as just two of us travelled to the Roman Villa to meet up for the walk, but fortunately ceased upon our arrival there and then resumed during the drive home. We walked through the woodland on the reserve path along the track of the former Cheltenham to Cirencester railway, where it passes along high embankments and through deep cuttings in the Oolitic limestone of the Middle Jurassic geological period.

Interesting fossils can be found in the scree, and in the cliff sides the surprising extent of growth of the roots of nearby trees is visible. We firstly made our way southwards along

the path as far as the northern entrance of the tunnel through the hill above Chedworth village. Most of the trees had lost their leaves in the preceding windy weeks, and there was little in the way of bird sounds. We admired the masses of moss and liverwort species growing alongside the track as we made our way back towards the Villa, and then beyond, northwards, as far as two trees on the edge of the reserve, each completely covered in silvery-grey lichen from the bases of their trunks to the ends of their twigs. It had been a surprisingly enjoyable walk given the wet autumn weather.

David Rolfe

WOFC trip to Wilstone Reservoir and College Lake 6 December 2015

It was dull and breezy when two of us met up with three RSPB members at Wilstone Reservoir, two other WOFC members having gone directly to College Lake. Visibility was surprisingly good, so we had good views of the many wildfowl present. As is usual at this time of year, the most common waterbirds were coots and tufted ducks.

Other species included a little grebe, great-crested grebes, gadwalls and mallards and, in the sheltered areas of water and on the grassy banks, loafing or feeding wigeon, teal and shoveler. A single goldeneye took some time to find among all the other waterbirds, but once spotted, everyone got good views. Small flocks of long-tailed tits, goldfinches and fieldfares moved ahead of us in the hedgerow as we walked along the path to the bird-watching hide. The hide overlooked a shallow area of water where a large mixed

flock of lapwings and golden plovers had congregated. Also here were lots of cormorants and, constantly milling around, noisy black-headed and lesser black-backed gulls. Just in front of the hide, on the muddy banks of a feeder stream, a little egret stepped daintily to and fro showing its bright yellow feet. A small flock of nervous linnets and a couple of flitting meadow pipits were feeding on an area of weed-covered mud.

It was very busy later on at BBOWT's College Lake visitor centre, due to an art exhibition, so we soon started a circuit of the of reserve. However, it was very quiet bird-wise, with only a few of some of the waterbird species present that we'd logged earlier in the day at Wilstone - apart from two common snipe seen by the couple who'd come directly here. So, before leaving for

home, we retired to the centre's tea room for tea and cake.

Birds species seen:

Little grebe	Red kite	Dunnock
Great-crested grebe	Sparrowhawk	Robin
Cormorant	Pheasant	Blackbird
Little egret	Moorhen	Fieldfare
Grey heron	Coot	Redwing
Mute swan	Golden plover	Long-tailed tit
Canada goose	Lapwing	Blue tit
Wigeon	Common snipe	Magpie
Gadwall	Black-headed gull	Jackdaw
Teal	Lesser black-backed gull	Rook
Mallard	Woodpigeon	Carrion crow
Shoveler	Collared dove	House sparrow
Pochard	Meadow pipit	Chaffinch
Tufted duck	Pied wagtail	Goldfinch
Goldeneye	Wren	Linnet

David Rolfe

Over Norton Park and Walk Farms 31 January 2016

14 hardy Field Club members and one guest braved a truly miserable day at the end of January for a return visit to Mike and Sarah Kettlewell's farms at Over Norton, where farmland birds are fed throughout the year. It wasn't easy to pick out individual birds in the gloom, but nevertheless David Rolfe managed to assemble a list of 27 species and we were very impressed by our visit. The farms have been in stewardship schemes for 15 years to increase biodiversity. The bird feeding programme includes millet year-round to help tree sparrows and reed buntings, and from December to May mixed feeding to attract chaffinches, yellowhammers, linnets, skylarks and corn buntings. Our thanks to Mike for his warm welcome and giving us his time. If only more farmers had his commitment to the preservation of farmland birds.

Species list:-

Sparrowhawk	Mistle thrush	Chaffinch
Red-legged partridge	Blue tit	Brambling
Pheasant	Great tit	Greenfinch
Black-headed gull	Nuthatch	Goldfinch
Lesser black-backed gull	Jackdaw	Yellowhammer
Woodpigeon	Rook	Reed bunting
Dunnock	Carrion crow	Linnet
Robin	Starling	
Blackbird	House sparrow	
Redwing	Tree sparrow	

Mary Elford and David Rolfe

Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust 14 February 2016

Thirteen members turned up on a beautiful blue sky but very cold north-east windy day at Slimbridge. Adrian did an amazing 8.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. marathon and clocked up 62 species. Well done, Adrian!

The group list for the day totalled 66 species (White-fronted Goose included Siberian (orange-billed) and Greenland (pink-billed) races):-

Little Grebe	Peregrine	Woodpigeon
Cormorant	Moorhen	Collared Dove
Little Egret	Coot	Kingfisher
Grey Heron	Crane	Pied Wagtail
Mute Swan	Oystercatcher	Duncock
Bewick's Swan	Avocet	Robin
White-fronted Goose	Golden Plover	Blackbird
Greylag Goose	Lapwing	Goldcrest
Canada Goose	Knot	Long-tailed Tit
Barnacle Goose	Dunlin	Coal Tit
Shelduck	Ruff	Blue Tit
Wigeon	Black-tailed Godwit	Great Tit
Gadwall	Bar-tailed Godwit	Magpie
Teal	Curlew	Jackdaw
Mallard	Redshank	Rook
Pintail	Greenshank	Carrion Crow
Shoveler	Green Sandpiper	Starling
Pochard	Black-headed Gull	House Sparrow
Tufted Duck	Common Gull	Chaffinch
Marsh Harrier	Lesser black-backed Gull	Greenfinch
Sparrowhawk	Great black-backed Gull	Goldfinch
Buzzard	Feral Pigeon	Bullfinch

David Roberts

Chipping Norton walk for Signs of Spring 3 April 2016

Spring was definitely in the air as we set off from the Worcester Road car park in Chipping Norton. The sun was shining and the wind had lost its very cold edge. The tiny front gardens we walked past on our way to the church were colourful with spring flowering bulbs and shrubs and the churchyard was awash with daffodils. We took the footpath which comes out by the site where there was once a castle. Then it was uphill all the way to the Banbury

Road, which we followed until we reached the start of the permissive path through the woods on our left. On the verges and under the hedges were some of the common wildflowers which are typically out at this time of year: Hairy Bittercress, Dandelions, Ivy-leaved Speedwell (with a very insignificant little pale blue/mauve flower), Lesser Celandines, Daisies, Sweet Violets (white), Red Deadnettle and Dog's Mercury.

Once on the path which runs through the strip of woodland running parallel to the road the only signs of spring were the bursting buds on the Horse Chestnut and Sycamore trees and the Spanish Bluebells coming into flower. With a thick ground cover of Ivy in the wood there were few other plants. Part way up we stopped to admire the view to Over Norton, from which point we chose to walk along a field margin rather than in the wood. At the end of the field we turned left down a path through more woodland with an understorey of hazel where there were some old lime trees with prolific epicormic growth – a wonderful habitat for birds. From here we could see the hedge in which Mike Kettlewell hangs the feeders for his farmland birds. As we left the woodland we became aware of a Chiffchaff singing – a very definite sign that spring is here.

Leaving a very muddy track we entered a grass field in what was once Over Norton Park. An earlier use of the land here for cultivation is indicated by some ridge and furrow to one side. We crossed wet areas marked out by rushes and rosettes of Marsh Thistles, where springs rise and run down to the little stream. Also in these fields are some old trees which were probably remnants of the parkland. One

old Ash tree had lost its top and all that remained alive was the bottom part of the trunk, which sported big fungal brackets part way up, with a couple of branches. The broken off part of the trunk lay on the ground and had King Alfred's Cakes and Turkey Tail (fruiting bodies of fungi which live on dead wood) growing on it. The only flower we found in the field was the rather insignificant Field Wood-rush.

When we reached the Over Norton Road we decided to take the shorter of the two routes back to the car park as we had taken so long to reach this point. The path we took was along the side of an arable field, then through a recently planted wood, crossing the stream where Celandines made a pretty picture growing on the bank overhanging the water. By the bridge were just two flowers of Coltsfoot. Tony and Alison saw a Comma butterfly and two Jays in the wood and we heard a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming. Our circuit was completed when we reached the churchyard again. Thank you, Ken for leading this interesting walk.

I recorded 58 plants which I could identify, 21 of which were in flower (listed below); also Male Fern and Soft Rush.

Flowering plants:

Hairy Bittercress	Sweet Violet (white and mauve)	Cow Parsley
Dandelion	Groundsel	Gooseberry
Ivy-leaved Speedwell	Red Deadnettle	Spanish Bluebell
White Comfrey	Daisy	Field Wood-rush
Field Forget-me-not	Grape Hyacinth (garden variety)	Coltsfoot
Lesser Celandine	Common Field Speedwell	Yellow Archangel (variegated)
Primrose	Dog's Mercury (male only)	Ramsons (in bud)

Birds (mostly heard and not seen):

House Sparrow	Great Tit	Reed Bunting
Chaffinch	Song Thrush	Chiffchaff
Nuthatch	Yellowhammer	Dunnock

Wren
Buzzard

Wood Pigeon
Canada Goose

Jay
Great Spotted Woodpecker

Mammals:

Rabbit
Grey Squirrel

Insects:

Seven-spot Ladybird
Comma butterfly

Brenda Betteridge

The following report was omitted from the Autumn 2015 newsletter:

Walk at the RSPB's Otmoor Reserve on 11th April 2015

13 of us turned up for this walk on a windy and damp morning, which became brighter as the morning progressed. Songbirds were a lot quieter here than they had been a couple of mornings earlier, no doubt influenced by the weather. However, in the car park we were greeted by singing chiffchaff, robin, dunnock, wren and chaffinch. As we made our way along the path from the cars, in the adjacent Closes field we saw lots of breeding lapwings, heard our first of several redshank calling and a singing skylark. On reaching the bird feeders suspended from a couple of small hawthorn trees, we saw blue and great tits and chaffinches feeding aloft, with dunnocks and pheasants taking advantage of any bits and pieces of seed falling to the ground. The elevated bridleway provides a good view of the very large Greenaways field, and while we were scanning over it several wildfowl species were feeding on the pools and many hirundines

high above them were catching aerial prey. In the distance, towards Charlton-on-Otmoor church tower, 3 buzzards were soaring. Later on, as we approached the path to the bird-watching hide, spectacular numbers of linnets, chaffinches and reed buntings were feeding on spread grain provided through a farming stewardship subsidy. From inside the hide, lots more feeding birds could be seen on the path beyond it. Also from the hide, a little egret could be seen stepping daintily here and there through one of the shallow pools. When we reached the reed-bed screens, most of us saw one of the pair of marsh harriers present, which eventually went on to breed on the site. On the walk back to the cars one keen-eyed member of our party spotted a common lizard sunbathing on the side of a fence post. After a few seconds, it slipped quickly into a convenient vertical crack in the post.

Birds seen or heard:

Little grebe
Great crested grebe
Little egret
Grey heron
Mute swan
Greylag goose

Canada goose
Wigeon
Gadwall
Teal
Mallard
Shoveler

Pochard
Tufted duck
Red kite
Marsh harrier
Buzzard
Kestrel

Pheasant
Moorhen
Coot
Lapwing
Snipe
Curlew
Redshank
Black-headed gull
Wood pigeon
Green woodpecker
Skylark

Sand martin
Swallow
House martin
Wren
Dunnock
Robin
Blackbird
Song thrush
Blackcap
Chiffchaff
Blue tit

Great tit
Magpie
Jackdaw
Rook
Carriion crow
Chaffinch
Greenfinch
Goldfinch
Linnet
Reed bunting

David Rolfe

MEMBER'S CONTRIBUTIONS

In Defence of the Black Rat

The Black Rat (*Rattus rattus*) originated in India and arrived in the UK with the Romans some 2000 years ago. Some say the fleas carried by the black rat brought back from the Crusades during the Middle Ages were the source of the 1348-53 Black Death that killed three million people in England, more than half the population at the time. Originating in China, the Brown Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) arrived in the U K in 1730 from the Baltic, and quickly displaced the smaller Black Rat.

I highly commend the efforts made by organisations and individuals in eradicating the Brown Rat from the islands of Handa, Canna and Ailsa Craig, thus protecting the breeding seabird populations from predation. However, I fail to understand why the RSPB is spending

over £1 million in a scheme to remove the Black Rat from the Shiant, their last UK stronghold, in order to protect the resident Puffins (*Fratercula arctica*), which are showing no significant signs of decline. Those of you who watched the recent programmes on BBC4 about our declining seabird populations will be aware that the threat to the food supply is the greatest concern for our seabirds, with the possible exception of the Gannet (*Sula bassana*). The RSPB is endeavouring to eradicate a species from our islands is closer to qualifying as a native than the Brown Rat, on a par with the Rabbit, which was also brought here by the Romans. Is this really what conservation is all about? Control, yes – but not eradication!

Graham J Wren

OBITUARIES

John Brucker 1929–2016

One of our esteemed vice-presidents has died at the age of 85. For many years he led us on walks, especially for birdwatching in Blenheim, then afterwards for an enjoyable pub lunch with his wife, Vivienne. He was an eminent ornithologist, being County Recorder for 22 years, and editing the County Bird Report. He also wrote more than 70 columns for the Oxford Times, contributing the fees to a Conservation and Ringing fund set up by the OOS. John joined the OOS at the young age of 14, and later was its President from 1975 to 1978. He was very active as an adviser and motivator of conservation projects, especially those at Stratfield Brake, St Mary's Fields, Kidlington, and Woodstock Meadows.



Colin Hayes

Old members will remember Colin, who has died at the relatively early age of 67, and his wife Isabelle. He was a first class naturalist and often won our Members' Night quiz.

and finally...



....spring has arrived!

