

West Oxfordshire Field Club



www.thefieldclub.org.uk

Newsletter No. 108 Autumn 2018

EDITORIAL

As I write, the first frost of autumn has just evaporated into the ether, but the spider webs on the few patches of grass that survive from summer are still jewelled with dew. Already the Spindles are crimson-purple, and red berries and yellow tints are appearing in the hedgerows. But the roadside verges are relatively barren, summer having arrived early and dramatically, many wild flowers blooming and setting seed over a month early, so there are only scattered flower-heads of Yarrow, the fading blue stars of Chicory, various yellow composites and perky pale yellow patches of Common Toadflax to cheer the driver. Along the Oxford canal at Thrupp and draped over the A40 hedges between Cassington and Oxford, Hops sprawl in great profusion.

Spring ended strangely. Two blasts from the 'Beast of the East' caused temperatures to plummet, eliminating many insects that had only just emerged from winter pupae or hibernation. This, together with the low temperatures, led to many failures of early-nesting birds. In some local villages Swallows, House Martins and Swifts did not arrive until mid-summer, if at all. There were very few insects around. When the garden birds had established their territories and finished their courting, the usual quiet early summer period for birdsong was quite eerie – utter silence and hardly a bird in the sky. Normally at this time the chattering of Swallows and martins on the wing and their warning cries as the occasional Hobby or other bird of prey

appeared, compensate for the loss of more musical song.

While the 'Beast of the East' delayed spring, summer roared in early, so for several weeks the countryside was ablaze with flowers of many species – I don't remember such glorious profusion before. The Club's trip to the Gower Peninsula in early June found 154 species.

The Big Butterfly Count showed that numbers of many butterfly species were boosted by the hot weather. In both gardens and countryside, Cabbage Whites seem to have had a bumper year. However, there have been fewer Painted Ladies, Commas and Red Admirals, and the Small Tortoiseshell has continued its puzzling decline, while the almost extinct Large Blue has had its most successful year on record. The caterpillars of this species feed on stinging nettles, so it's certainly not due to a lack of food. The limestone and chalk grasslands have been teeming with butterflies, and the Club had a splendid trip to Lardon Chase to see them. We were particularly taken with the stunning beauty of the Adonis Blues, and were lucky enough to see 21 of them. The Club's annual moth trap caught a record (for us) 97 moth species. However, there are fears that the drought may have reduced the food supply for the caterpillars of many species of butterflies and moths. In other species the adults seem to have emerged earlier, coinciding with the early blooms. It remains to be seen whether numbers of the

scarcer species will be drastically reduced, as they were after the long, hot, dry summer of 1976.

With the return of rain, slugs have become more visible – and I was delighted to be visited by at least one Hedgehog – the first for several years. For many years my garden was almost slug free, thanks to the efforts of a single huge toad. It lived under an Ivy-covered pile of stones in a sheltered corner. After many years, a particularly severe winter (or perhaps old age) took it away, but it was soon replaced by a much smaller frog, which made good inroads into the slugs and grew fast and fat. It loved a shower – as soon as I took the hose out, it would sit in the middle of

the patio, nose pointed to the sky, so that the water could cascade down its body. Sadly, I lost it to a very large Grass Snake, and since then the mollusc population has flourished, and the hostas resemble green doilies.

The days are growing shorter, but we can look forward to our annual fungus foray, the winter talks, a three-day trip to Norfolk for birding and, of course, the Christmas dinner. We thank the members and generous outside leaders help us explore the countryside, and the speakers who enlighten our indoor meetings. And, of course, those excellent ladies of Shilton, who provide the food for our summer party.

Jill Bailey

YOUR NEWSLETTER

I am most grateful to all those who sent in reports, many of you before I had even asked for them. As our reporters become ever more diligent and the species lists continue to grow, I have tried to prune them to the most interesting species, while putting a full species list of every trip on the web site, and there will be paper copies at the winter meetings. In these, NF means the plant was seen but not flowering, FR means it was in fruit only.

Please can you let me have your reports of walks and other Club outings newsletter, by the first week of April 2018 for the Spring newsletter, and any April 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

Dawn Chorus at Minster Lovell and Crawley 4 May 2018

At just before 4.00am, eight of us met up in the car park at the top of the lane to the church and ruins. It was coldish with no wind, and the sky was clear, with the moon shining and stars glittering. A little later on, a low band of mist lay over the water meadows when we reached them.

As we assembled, those with keen hearing picked up singing Skylarks, just pipping the usual calling Tawny Owls for first on the list. Although we paused occasionally to listen, no bird sounds were heard during our leisurely walk down towards the church, and it wasn't until we reached the ruins that distant Pheasants and Red-legged Partridges were heard. Crossing the water meadow towards the wooden footbridge over the river, preceded by a Moorhen and a Wood Pigeon, the main dawn chorus began with Robins, Blackbirds, Song Thrushes and Wrens joining in. We'd just crossed the bridge when

someone glimpsed a Barn Owl, presumably the one seen here in previous years, quartering the meadow below the mist. On entering the mixed woodland beyond the river, Blackcaps, Willow Warblers, a Goldcrest and tit species were heard. Surprisingly, little was heard while crossing the meadows towards Maggots Grove, however, but as we neared the escarpment a singing Common Whitethroat was encountered in some dog rose briars. A Chiffchaff and a Marsh Tit were heard as we climbed the path through the wood, and as we crossed Dry Lane another Common Whitethroat was performing its parachuting song-flight above one of the hedges.

Near Crawley, in Roger Townsend's flower meadow, a buck Roe Deer was alerted when we looked through the gate. On reaching the river bridge, we all peered over the parapet walls looking for the usual Grey Wagtail, and we

weren't disappointed, because an adult was feeding two just-fledged young ones sitting on some rocks.

Passing through the village, we added some of the usual garden species such as Chaffinch, Dunnock, Goldfinch, Collared Dove and Starling to the list. Overhead, several Swallows, a Red

Kite and a Cormorant caught our eye, and in the river valley two Buzzards. Along the bridleway on the way to the cars, a Lesser Whitethroat and a Green Woodpecker were among the few species encountered - this year it was disappointing that there were no Yellowhammers where we usually see them!

List of bird species logged, with the time the first of each was encountered:

04.03: Skylark	04.57: Coal tit	06.25: Goldfinch
04.05: Tawny owl	04.58: Blackcap	06.25: Starling
04.18: Pheasant	04.59: Goldcrest	06.26: Buzzard
04.19: Red-legged partridge	05.05: Rook	06.26: Blue tit
04.20: Wood pigeon	05.12: Jackdaw	06.29: Mallard
04.25: Moorhen	05.17: Common whitethroat	06.34: House sparrow
04.25: Robin	05.24: Chiffchaff	06.43: Long-tailed tit
04.26: Blackbird	05.28: Marsh tit	06.50: Red kite
04.27: Song thrush	05.40: Magpie	06.55: Cormorant
04.28: Carrion crow	05.59: Chaffinch	07.00: Lesser whitethroat
04.38: Wren	06.07: Dunnock	07.12: Feral pigeon
04.49: Barn owl	06.09: Swallow	07.18: Green woodpecker
04.50 Willow warbler	06.12: Grey wagtail	
04.55: Great tit	06.20: Collared dove	

Mammal species seen:

Rabbit
Hare
Muntjac deer
Roe deer

David Rolfe

Langley's Lane Meadow and Standlake Common 17 May 2018

This part of the Windrush floodplain has been transformed into a mosaic of lakes by mineral extraction. Our guide was Lucy Kennery from the Lower Windrush Valley Project, which aims to improve the landscape and biodiversity of the area. Langley's Lane Meadow SSSI is a rare remnant of wildflower-rich calcareous meadow that has never been improved by fertiliser, ploughing or re-seeding. The management regime includes grazing by sheep in autumn to prevent shrubs moving in. When we visited, the meadow was vibrant with Buttercups and Green-winged Orchids, dotted with Ox-eye Daisies. Swifts were wheeling overhead, and a Blackcap was singing in the hedgerow. In one corner we found a badger sett.



Langleys lane meadow



Green winged orchid

Standlake Common Nature Reserve is a small former gravel pit, now flooded, with an extensive area of reedbed and willow scrub. Two bird hides look out over the site, and we had good views of a variety of birds, including Lapwing, Redshank, Great Crested Grebe and a pair of Canada Geese with goslings.

Plant species seen:

Green-winged Orchid
Ox-eye Daisy
Red Clover
Meadow Buttercup
Bulbous Buttercup

Cowslip
Yellow Rattle
Glaucous sedge
Dandelion
Quaking grass

Redshank
Fairy Flax
Field Woodrush

Jill Bailey

Birds seen or heard:

Robin
Blackcap
Willow Warbler
Whitethroat
Wood Pigeon

Blackbird
Lapwing
Mallard + 3 young
Canada Geese + gosling
Redshank

Swan
Coot
Cormorant
Great Crested Grebe
Swift

David Rolfe

Field Trip to the Gower Peninsula 3-6 June 2018

For me this trip can be summarised as 'Choughs before breakfast, a paddle before dinner and Silver-Ys in the evening'.

From Sunday 3 to Wednesday 6 June fourteen members of the club assembled in Rhossili, at the very tip of the Gower Peninsula, for a (mainly) botanical and entomological trip led by Peter Creed. Peter needs no introduction and he had previously led a club trip to the Gower some ten, or more, years ago.

We stayed in an hotel which advertised 'possibly the best view in Wales' and I don't think that they were far wrong: in one direction a broad grassy area on the cliff-top led along Worm's Head to the Worm – a craggy island accessible on foot for only a couple of hours either side of low tide; in another direction there was a view over Rhossili bay and a near-perfect 4 km long sandy beach. We were lucky with the weather: it was sunny and warm, even hot, for two out of the three days. (That was before this year's summer weather had stopped being a novelty!)

The cliff-top area between the Rhossili and the Worm is owned by the National Trust who are reinstating traditional crop rotation in some small fields and flower meadows. A walk through these at dusk after dinner on the first evening revealed a hedge bank full of Red Campion swarming with more Silver-Ys than you could shake the proverbial stick at. Choughs could be found on the cliff-tops in the mornings before breakfast and Kestrels hovered all day in the up-draughts by the cliffs.

On the Monday Peter took us to the Whiteford Burrows National Nature Reserve, an area of saltmarsh and sand dunes on the northwest side of the Gower. The entrance to the NNR was through an avenue of Monterey Pines and a fair number of warblers, including Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler, were heard as well as a Cuckoo. There were many insects on the dunes including Yellow Shell moths and several species of bee. The most fascinating of these were the Sand (or Mining) bees which would simply disappear into the sand whilst one watched – and fast, too! The damp edges of the salt marsh were a riot of Yellow Flag irises and one small area of shallow pools was alive with blue male Broad-bodied Chasers patrolling up and down looking for (brown) females. It had been a hot day with a lot to look at (always tiring!) and we were disappointed to find that the tea shop in Cwm Ivy was closed when we returned to the car park. Nevertheless, Peter's sharp eyes spotted another on the way back and some of us enjoyed an excellent cream tea. It was still warm when we got back to Rhossili and there was nothing for it – at least for Sue and me – except to go for a paddle. Very refreshing it was, too, despite the couple of hundred steps down to the beach and back up again.



'Front porch' of Mason Wasp burrow

The following morning was cloudy and cool when we set off for Port Eynon where we walked west along the cliffs for a couple of miles towards Overton Nature Reserve. There was plenty to see: a couple of Gannets were splashing into the harbour and there was a spectacular show of yellow Rock-roses and purple Bloody Cranesbill on the cliffs. Other species included Hoary Rock-rose, the very small Buckshorn Plantain and some Early Purple orchids. A sandy bank in a small bay was the home to Mining Bees and Mason Wasps, which build tunnel-like 'front porches' at the entrances to their nest holes. Two (unrelated) types of Samphire were found growing on some rocks; a pair of brownish birds, obviously raptors, high up on the crags above were tentatively identified as juvenile Peregrines. Peter had hoped to find Spiked Speedwell and some of us followed him along a rather precipitous path to look for it but we were out of luck. We were, however, rewarded with a number of Small Blue and Brown Argus butterflies, several grasshoppers and crickets, and the rather slug-like nymphs of Bloody-nosed beetles. Back in Port Eynon we found several Pyramidal Orchids growing on a scruffy bank behind the litter bins at the public conveniences, which shows, I suppose, that you can find interesting things at your own convenience. Before supper we had time to walk along the Worm's Head with a telescope and watch a dozen or more seals basking on the rocks of the Worm.

On the Wednesday morning we all met in the car park at Oxwich Bay and set off into Oxwich NNR, which is mainly sand dunes and was fairly hard walking, especially since it was rather hot, but worth it for the flora and insect fauna. There were lots of Southern and Early Marsh Orchids as well as Pyramidals and Twayblades, and eventually some Bee Orchids. To my mind the most unexpected find was Wintergreen (round-leaved, I think) which is a plant I normally associate with northern woods. Another interesting, but small, plant was Variegated Horsetail, smaller than the common Horsetail and with black rings at intervals up the stem. Birds were mainly represented by Stonechats, but insect life was plentiful, in particular Sandpit Bees, Robber Flies and Silver Stiletto Flies, so named because their abdomens are shaped like stilettos. Eventually we found something that Peter had been on the lookout for: a Gold-fringed Mason Bee. The female lays her eggs in an empty snail shell and

then, in this case, fills the entrance with grass. Leaving the dunes we went to look at the saltmarsh at the eastern end of Oxwich Bay but it was rather dry and turned out to be unproductive. Walking back along the beach between the dunes and the sea we found some Sand Wasps as well as 'Sea' species of various plants. A few Dunlins scuttled along the water's edge but apart from a jellyfish (species unknown) and some Sandhoppers there wasn't a lot to see; in any case by this time we were rather more focused on the ice cream hut at the end of the beach. After a snack and an ice cream the group dispersed and headed back home mid-afternoon. It was a lovely evening and Sue and I stopped at Kenfig NNR near Port Talbot, which was well worth the visit despite the view, dramatic in its own way, of the steel works in the distance. The reserve is a vast area of dune slacks with a very good flora. There were masses of Meadow Thistles (almost without spines and with drooping flower heads), Twayblades in profusion and many examples of a striking brick-red subspecies of Early Marsh Orchid. We stopped there for only a couple of hours but you could easily spend an entire day there.



Round-leaved wintergreen

Altogether this was another fascinating trip and our thanks must go to Peter for leading it and sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm with us, and also to Brenda for keeping the comprehensive species list – I have been able to mention only those few which I remembered!

John Cobb

Greenham and Cookham Common, Berkshire 10 June 2018

It was an overcast morning with little breeze when three of us met up in the Control Tower car park. This site, owned by West Berkshire Council and managed by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, is 500 hectares of heathland, grassland and ancient woodland. So, because it's such a huge area, we walked just a small part of it, eastwards onto Crookham Common. It is popular with many dog walkers, joggers and cyclists, but because of its size they are not obtrusive.

In the car park, before we set off on the walk, Goldfinches were flitting here and there, and a Garden Warbler sang from a bush. We firstly walked down the line of the former runway, now grassland flanked by lots of Gorse. A Skylark sang over-head, and Linnets and Stonechats flitted about, settling from time-to-time on the tops of the shrubs, as they always do. In such a large area, it was difficult to spot some of the more distant singing birds, however, when we reached

an open area of short grass we heard a Woodlark's song from the direction of some of the surrounding Gorse bushes. Eventually, one was seen on the ground not far ahead of us. It then flew to the bushes, where it perched and sang for some time, providing good views so that the notable parts of its plumage clinched identification. Sue was also able to obtain passable recordings of its song.

We then made our way to an area of small pools in an extensive shrubby area, where two more Woodlarks were singing. One of them was eventually spotted on the top of a clump of Gorse from where it sang, occasionally visiting a small area of disturbed ground, which may have been purposely cleared as a foraging area for this species. A Hobby was seen swooping down to catch dragonflies over the pools and a Little Egret lingered there. On the way back to the cars, a 'cronking' Raven flew over and several singing Blackcaps were heard.

Bird Species seen/heard:

Blackbird	Goldfinch	Little Egret	Starling
Blackcap	Great Tit	Magpie	Stonechat
Blue Tit	Greenfinch	Mute Swan	Swift
Buzzard	Hobby	Raven	Willow Warbler
Carrion Crow	House Martin	Red Kite	Woodlark
Chaffinch	Jackdaw	Robin	Woodpigeon
Collared Dove	Lapwing	Rook	Wren
Garden Warbler	Linnet	Skylark	

David Rolfe

Withymead Nature Reserve 17 June 2018

On 17 June 2018 six club members met at the Withymead Nature Reserve between Goring-on-Thames and South Stoke. This tiny 23-acre reserve Oxfordshire owes its very existence to a local nature hero, the late Mrs Anne Carpmael. Mrs Carpmael lived in the house on the estate for nearly 60 years and before her death set up a Trust to preserve the area as a nature reserve that everyone could enjoy. The site comprises a tree-lined length of riverbank, reed-fen and woodland areas. The site is accessible via maintained paths and boardwalks and includes three hides from which to unobtrusively and comfortably watch the wildlife.

The current wardens, Roger and Sue Wyatt, welcomed us to what proved to be a very interesting and productive visit in terms of species seen. We started at the Visitor Centre where there is a hibernaculum for reptiles and a pond. The contents of the moth trap from the previous night were examined. We also met a Yellow-necked Mouse!.

On entering the main reserve there is a derelict cottage which is gradually returning to nature. We saw what remains of the Saunders Boat Yard with its slipway and boat sheds. Sam Saunders



Slow Worm Photo by Mary Elford

was born in 1857 at The Swan in Streatley and built boats by the River Thames like his father

and grandfather before him. He established the Springfield Works at Withymead in 1882. In 1910, Sam moved to the Isle of Wight and in 1912 he built his first flying boat. The business flourished, adding power racing boats, gun boats, air ship gondoliers, lifeboats and aircraft to the repertoire. Sam died in 1933 but his remarkable legacy has flourished in various reincarnations and mergers: as the British Hovercraft Corporation it was later taken over by Westland in 1959 and in 1994 by GKN Aerospace. Quite a story!

We visited all accessible parts of the site – the



3rd instar Puss Moth larva Photo by Mary Elford

reserve is most famous for the display of Loddon Lilies (*Leucojum aestivum*), but these were long. They are related to Snowdrops and are quite common along parts of the Thames although nationally scarce. Some seeds were over-gathered, so it will be interesting to see the results, if any!

A raised lookout with a seat enabled us to see over land owned by Christ Church College and managed by Withymead. This is home to over 100 Corn Buntings during the winter months, and

Muntjac and Roe Deer. The reeds are cut every 5 years to reduce build-up of nutrients.

We would like to thank Sue and Roger for such a stimulating morning. We were so impressed by

their knowledge and enthusiasm and we all agreed that a return visit would be very welcome. Also thank you, Brenda for your meticulously compiled species list.

Mary Elford

selected species seen are shown below:

Plants

Meadow Rue	Yellow Loosestrife (NF)	Stinking Iris
Greater Pond Sedge	Water Dock	Stinking Iris
Marsh Valerian	Remote Sedge	Wavy Bittercress
Loddon Lily (lge seed pods)	Yorkshire Fog	Monkshood
Skullcap	Hemlock Water-dropwort	Pale Willowherb
Fen Bedstraw	Wood Forget-me-not	Creeping Jenny (NF)

Birds

Cetti's Warbler	Reed Warbler
Reed Bunting	Sedge Warbler

Insects

Clouded Border	Treble Lines	Marbled Minor
Buff Ermine	The Flame	Ingrailed Clay
Peppered Moth	Heart and Dart	Round-winged Muslin
Poplar Hawkmoth	Large Nutmeg	Bagworm moth larva
Burnished Brass	Hebrew Character	
Poplar Grey	Elephant Hawkmoth	

Other animals:

Wood Mouse (young) trapped overnight	Smooth or Common Newt (adults and young)
Yellow-necked Mouse in trap	Grass Snake (young)
Slowworm (re-growing tail) from under tin sheet	

Brenda Betteridge

Glow-worms at Swinbrook 27 June 2018

11 members and visitors joined me in Swinbrook on a warm, sunny evening for a pleasant stroll in the area to see what wild flowers and birds were about, followed by a drink in the Swan and some bat detecting at the bridge, then a visit to the churchyard to look for glow worms. Glow worms have quite a long season, with the first glowing females being reported to the UK Glow Worms website in May, going on until August or even later. For glow worm hunters, mid-June to mid-July seems to be most productive, but the problem with earlier dates is that it gets dark so late – not everyone wants to go out at 11 o'clock

Plant species seen:

Hogweed	Ribwort Plantain	Field Rose
Giant Hogweed	White Campion	Yellow Vetchling
Common Knapweed	Birdsfoot Trefoil	Hemlock
Hop Trefoil	Scarlet pimpernel	Creeping Thistle
Yellow Rattle	Self-heal	Thyme
Yarrow	Meadow Cranesbill	Restharrow
Field Madder	Greater Knapweed	Perforate St John's Wort
Hedge Mustard	Rosebay Willowherb	Hedge Bedstraw

at night!

Despite the bright moonlight, 7 glowing females were seen in the Churchyard. Seeing a glow worm is a wonderful experience – I am always amazed by how bright the female's light is. As the larvae eat snails, I wish I had some in my garden, which in a normal summer is snail central. It will be interesting to see if the exceptionally hot and dry weather this summer will have any effect on adult glow worm numbers next year, as the larvae are vulnerable to drying out in hot weather.

Toadflax	Agrimony	
Butterflies seen:		
Small Tortoiseshell	Marbled White	Ringlet
Birds seen or heard:		
Yellowhammer	Song Thrush	Grey Wagtail
Chaffinch	Blackcap	Swifts
Pheasant	Chiffchaff	Wren

And 7 glowing female Glow Worms

Sue Morton

Moth Morning at Asthall Leigh 7 July 2018

On the evening of 6 July, Ken Betteridge helped Gavin Hageman, Julian Howe and me set four moth traps – three in the adjacent quarry and one in the garden.

We are very grateful to Julian for all his help in identifying the moths and compiling the list, especially the many micro-moths that had flown in. In all, we had 97 species of moths.

When we arrived in the morning, we had a bumper haul! We suspect that there would have been even more moths had we come at dawn but nevertheless we were very happy with the result.

As usual we enjoyed coffee and bacon sandwiches in Ken and Brenda's lovely garden and we thank them for their generous hospitality.



Small Scallop Moth photo by Mary Elford



Garden Tiger Moth photo by Mary Elford

Full species list on web site

Julian Howe and Mary Elford

Lardon Chase 4 August 2018

A total of eight WOFC members visited Lardon Chase on 4 August. This is a National Trust property accessed from the B4009 close to Streatley, opposite Goring by the river Thames, a small section of which is visible from the upper slopes of the chase. The area is part of the North

Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

This visit was primarily to see butterflies, the target species being second brood Adonis Blue, Chalkhill Blue and Small Blue (second brood). We did not see any of the latter, despite there being a first brood earlier in the year.



Adonis Blue

The temperature was in the upper 20s Celsius, so after checking our water supplies and donning our sun hats we entered the reserve. The longer grass on the upper slope yielded just a few Common Blues and Meadow Browns, but once we were half way down the hill, it was obvious that there was plenty of butterfly activity. On our route we saw 36 Common Blues, 22 Meadow Browns, 21 Adonis Blues (all male) 40 Chalkhill Blues, 3 Small Whites, 4 Brown Argus, 2 Small Heath and a single Small Copper. Surprisingly, we did not spot a single Ringlet – this is almost



Male Chalkhill Blue

certainly due to the hot summer cutting short their season by a week or two. Many species have emerged early this year, resulting in a short, hot flying season.

The number of Common Blues and Chalkhill Blues seen reflects the good season these species are already having elsewhere in the Upper Thames region. There were plenty of Adonis Blues in the first brood at Lardon Chase, and also at Yoesden Bank, Buckinghamshire this year. This is very encouraging for Lardon Chase, as emergence had only started a few days before our visit. Those members who had not seen an Adonis Blue before were particularly pleased to see the characteristic iridescent blue colour of the male's wings. As in the case of the Large Blue, Adonis Blue caterpillars are tended by ants. They feed on Horseshoe Vetch, which is also a nectar source for the adults, along with marjoram, which is plentiful at Lardon Chase.

In addition to the butterflies there were plenty of micro-moths, particularly grass moths, but in the absence of an expert we were not able to identify any of them



Brown Argus

Text and photos by Malcolm Brownsword

Species seen:

Common Blue
Meadow Brown
Adonis Blue

Chalk Hill Blue
Small White
Brown Argus

Small Heath
Small Copper

Malcolm Brownsword

Plant species seen:

Black Bryony
Agrimony
Self-heal
Marjoram
Bird's-foot Trefoil
Lady's Bedstraw

Small Scabious
St John's Wort (sp. not known)
Yellow-wort
Lesser Quaking Grass
Stemless Thistle
Harebell

Centaury
Restharrow
Ragwort
Kidney Vetch (FR)
Wild Carrot

Jill Bailey

Bats by the River Windrush 31 August 2018

Fifteen of us, including young William, the bright, bubbly and enthusiastic six-year-old grandson of Joan Lilly, met at the Woodford Road car park in Witney at 20.00 p.m. I was pleasantly surprised that so many people had turned up given that the weather has been so bad the previous year. This year the weather forecast had been much better and we were blessed with perfect conditions for bat detecting.

I gave a short introduction to bats and bat detecting and played some bat call recordings from my phone as examples of what to listen for when using the bat detector. The group were divided into pairs and each pair was issued with a bat detector which had been kindly loaned to me by BBOWT.

The early emerging bats (Noctule, Leisler and Serotine) are expected to fly at or close to sunset so we set some of the bat detectors to 25Khz to detect them should they appear but none were detected. At about 20.15 pm we walked down the road and continued walking down towards the Puck Lane to Mill Street, where we crossed over.

wooden bridges over the River Windrush. After the group arrived at the main wooden bridge over the river, there was a brief crackle on one of the bat detectors set at 45 kHz which was the call of a Common Pipistrelle bat, our most common bat. By 9 p.m. we had detected lots of Pipistrelle bats (Common and Soprano) – the bridge was absolutely buzzing with feeding bats. Young William seemed to be very interested and excited by the process – he would run up to me proclaiming “I detected a bat, I detected a bat” as well as asking me some very intelligent questions for one of his age. Many bats were spotted as they flew past us over the bridge and some people did spot flying moths which along with all the midges and flies demonstrated that there were plenty of insects flying around for the bats to feed on as they fatten up for the winter hibernation. By about 21.30 p.m. everyone had detected and seen lots of bats and had their fill, so we called it a night

Gavin Hageman

Geology Walk at Stanton Harcourt

Four club members joined geologist Lesley Dunlop and her daughter, Katt, for a rewarding walk in the Stanton Harcourt area.

As ever, Lesley provided us with detailed information sheets to take home for further reading.

We started by looking at the exterior of Stanton Harcourt church, where Lesley pointed out strips of local gravel conglomerate amongst the limestones. We then walked down a lane which led to the River Thames although we didn't go that far. Lesley pointed out a dip in the road to a lower level, evidence of the River Thames Terrace Deposits of which there are 4 in this area out of 14 overall. In prehistory the river was very wide, covering a huge area compared to today. We then walked down a road which took us through the remains of an RAF airfield from WW2. It had been a transit point for Winston Churchill and a starting place for bomber raids on Germany. Most of the airstrips are gone, but remnants of buildings remain.

We walked towards Dix Pit, one of many gravel workings in the area which came to an end in 1978. The remains of over 1000 mammoths, forest elephants, bison, horses, lions, etc. from 200,000 years ago were uncovered in this area

by the Hanson Mammoth Project. There is also evidence of human settlement in the Stanton Harcourt region from the Neolithic and Bronze ages, through to the Iron Age and Roman times. Lesley then took us to the Devil's Quoits, a Neolithic stone circle (henge) dating from 4,900-4,600 years ago – an impressive site.

It was so named from ancient folklore - the devil was playing a game of quoits one Sunday on top of Wytham Hill but was chastised by God for doing so on a day of rest. He threw away his pieces and where one quoit fell, the henge now stands.

The Devil's Quoits were restored between 2002 and 2008, with stones being uprighted and the surrounding earthworks rebuilt.

The earthworks were restored to their approximate condition at the beginning of Roman times, when the ditch began to be filled with plough soil and the bank was eroding. This was to ensure the preservation of the remaining Neolithic and Bronze Age deposits in the ditch. Using imported soil, the bank was built up to 2 metres high, which is only around half its original height.

Several of the standing stones had been unearthed during the archaeological excavations, buried in the ditch or within stone holes. Others had been encountered during topsoil stripping and quarrying operations. These were all re-erected in what may have been their original positions, considering the fact that the largest uprights appear to have been near the two entrances to the circle. Twenty spaces remained,

and these were filled with modern conglomerate blocks sourced from a nearby quarry at Gill Mill.

On the way back to the village, we enjoyed picking and eating very ripe and plentiful blackberries in the warm September sunshine. Many thanks to Lesley for another excellent geology walk.



Mary Elford

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Red Kite in Central Witney 19 June 2018

I was cycling up the Burford Road in Witney in the late morning when opposite Springfield Park an adult red kite rose from the grass verge, dropping a dead hedgehog from its claws. It was

no more than 12-15 feet from me. This is a major road and very busy. It shows how used to people kites have become – even when not being artificially fed by households.

Alison Weaver

Hedgehog Rescue in Witney 31 August 2018

We were returning in the dark from Gavin Hageman's bat walk when I heard a scrabbling just over a wall amongst the undergrowth of the little copse by the children's playground (near the multi-storey car park). What was making this noise? Walking into the copse I found a young hedgehog with its head firmly jammed in a lidded ice-cream cardboard / plastic cup. My solution was to hold the beaker upside down near the ground and gently shake him out – quite a bit of effort. He was quite unharmed. Good deed for the day!

Alison Weaver