



# Muntjac

Summer 2010

## The Muntjac by any other name...

Would it still read as sweet?

Some folks think 'yes', and perhaps even a bit sweeter. When the BNHS newsletter was named, the Muntjac was likely a novel and apparently harmless Bedfordshire resident. One of the oldest known deer species, it is of course not native here but rather to south east Asia. There are 12 Muntjac species. 'Ours' is Reeves's Muntjac, which escaped from Woburn Park sometime in the early 1900s. This is why it is so common around Bedfordshire.

Unfortunately while the Muntjac (the critter that is, not the newsletter!) has been making its home in our countryside, it has also been wreaking havoc. Our woodlands — ancient woodlands in particular — are suffering because of the Muntjac's feeding habits. English woodlands have for centuries been managed by humans. Coppicing is an ancient practice whereby trees are cropped close to the ground every few years. Once cut, the trees sprout new growth which was used for thatching spars, tool handles, hedgelaying stakes and other items. Coppicing opens up the woodland canopy and lets in sunlight. This creates lush plant growth, including the carpets of bluebells we see in spring. However Muntjac can't resist the young tree shoots. They eat the regrowth so our woods can't regenerate, and many are now declining.

For this reason there has been much talk in recent years about changing our newsletter's name. But to what? This is where we'd like your help. If you could give our newsletter a new name, what would it be? Or would you change it at all? The Muntjac is your newsletter, so tell us your thoughts! Please send suggestions to [muntjac@bnhs.org.uk](mailto:muntjac@bnhs.org.uk).



Literary triumph or woodland enemy?  
Photo by Peter J Dean

## In this 155<sup>th</sup> issue:

### Contents

Whither the 'nature table'?	2
Letter from the Editor	3
Postage woes	3
Respect your elders!	4
News from the record centre	5
Critters, canoes and torrential rain	6

### Contents

Distressed damsons, imperilled prunes	8
Motorbikes & nature don't mix!	9
The Global Naturalist	10
In Focus	11
Upcoming events	12
Nature nuggets	12

Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:



The Bedfordshire Natural History Society  
[www.bnhs.org.uk](http://www.bnhs.org.uk)  
Registered charity number 268659



BedsLife  
[www.bedsbionet.org.uk](http://www.bedsbionet.org.uk)

## The BNHS

The BNHS was formed in 1946, its main function to record the fauna and flora of the county. It has over twenty active Recorders who cover many branches of natural history study and whose annual reports are published in the *Bedfordshire Naturalist* journal.

Members receive a quarterly newsletter, The Muntjac, 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 Elstow, Haynes, Toddington and 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, Linlade, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 2TR. Tel: 01525 378245, [www.bnhs.org.uk](http://www.bnhs.org.uk).

## BedsLife

BedsLife - Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Partnership is a consortium of government and non-governmental agencies dedicated to promoting the maintenance and enhancement of Bedfordshire's biodiversity. The Partnership oversees the implementation and monitoring of the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Action Plan, which can be found online at [www.bedsbionet.org.uk](http://www.bedsbionet.org.uk).

### Editor: Heather Webb

Central Bedfordshire Council, Technology House, 239 Ampthill Road, Bedford, MK42 9BD.  
Tel: 0300 0300 6025, email: [muntjac@bnhs.org.uk](mailto:muntjac@bnhs.org.uk).

Your comments/notes on anything that you have observed in the field, on the road or in a past Muntjac 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 September 2010** please.

**Thank you in anticipation.**

The next Muntjac will be published in **September 2010**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society

## Bring back the classroom 'nature table'!

by Alexis Pym

The Youth Working Group is making a request to schools: bring back the nature table! Do you remember when you used to come into the classroom and find a table at the back with a bird skeleton, some bark and random treasures from the school grounds? The real value in learning from these objects is clear.

It has been a busy year for the Youth Working Group with four newsletters going out to our youth members and our links with schools strengthening at secondary and primary levels.

Our other request is that if anyone has wildlife identification guides or ecology books that can be used as prizes for schools involved in partnerships with the Bedfordshire Natural History Society. Or maybe you know a company who would like to sponsor some books?

Please contact Erika Pratt on 01525 378101 or [erika.pratt@greensandtrust.org](mailto:erika.pratt@greensandtrust.org).



---

## From the Editor's desk

My name is Heather Webb and I am a weedaholic.

With every rain it seems another species emerges determined to strangle, smother or otherwise wipe out my garden. First it was the dandelions, then the cleavers. Then the nettles (I don't care how good the soup is, I hate the blighters, and having grown up in a nettle-free zone I'm not sensitised to them). Then came the garlic mustard (yes I know, the Orange Tip, my neighbour still has tons of the stuff so don't worry). And now the bindweed. Sigh.

I can't help it. I'll go out to hang the laundry and come back inside three hours later wondering where the time has gone. A single leaf is all it takes. The merest whiff of that 'cleaver smell' sends me into a frenzy of pulling. One glimpse of that little red bindweed stalk with its curled leaves makes my blood boil. I'm even getting what my archaeologist friends call the 'crescent of shame': that patch of sunburn one gets between the bottom of one's shirt and the top of one's trousers. I'm sure all the bending over is doing wonders for my yoga practice.

Armed with thick rubber gloves the other day, I was pulling the ocean of nettles beside my wheelie bin when I suddenly realised I'd gone native. I've become a proper English homeowner. This is my first garden and on the one hand I want it to be somewhat 'wild', in the spirit of my work. On the other hand, I can't stop pottering, pulling and moaning with the neighbours about the cold, the heat, there being too much rain or not enough of it.

A few years ago I got in trouble with one of my grad school tutors for suggesting that ecological restoration in Britain is simply gardening on a bigger scale. When I'm weeding I'm really making value judgements about different species. Forget-me-nots can stay, garlic mustard has to go; buttercups..? We'll see. I think we do much the same thing with restoration. We'll put a bit of heathland here, enlarge a channel to make some reedbed there, but say bye-bye to the conifers in that woodland.

In North America restoration is much more cut and dry. Everything gets returned to 'pre-European settlement' condition. But the English landscape is largely made by humans. There *is* no 'pre-European settlement' condition, or not in any useful sense. And so value judgements must be made. What do we want, and where, and more interestingly I think, why? Why, for example, do we 'need' to thin the willow growing in this or that marshy place? Why not let the habitat do what it wants, which is apparently to make more willow? If we're patient we'll see that it'll start making something else. But we're not patient, so we start weeding and gardening.

Is our approach to ecological restoration not the same as our approach to our own gardens? I think it is. Is this a bad thing? I doubt it. But as an outsider (of sorts) I think it's an interesting thing, and one that makes both the English people and English landscape what they are.

And now if you'll excuse me I think there's a bindweed shoot heading for my Hydrangea...

## The other economic crisis

Will anyone who is sending specimens for identification to Recorders please ensure that they put adequate postage on the package. Be aware that anything that is more than 'wafer thin' constitutes a large letter which is more expensive than First Class postage. Larger packages will of course cost more but even the smallest specimen tube is too thick to qualify as an ordinary First Class mailing. Underpaid postage incurs not only the excess but a £1 handling charge and has to be collected from the nearest sorting office.

Last year I had to make 31 trips to Shefford to collect underpaid packages of fungi etc. (from all over Britain not just BNHS mailings) and this was at a cost to me of £34.10.

Thank you

Alan Outen



## Respecting our Elders!!

by Alan Outen

Elder is a very common and familiar native shrub or small tree in our countryside.

All too often I find Elder is regarded as a tree weed rather than an important resource of biodiversity. For over 30 years I have been stressing to conservation bodies, woodland managers etc. in this area the importance of this plant. When I was working at Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre I spent a lot of time convincing landowners and land managers that Elder was ecologically valuable and should be retained where possible!



Elder *Sambucus nigra*. Photo by David Alexander

In recent months I have visited a number of sites in Bedfordshire where old Elders have recently been removed or cut back, to the detriment of their associated lower plant flora and probably also invertebrates, as well as the loss of the berries for the birds. At one such site there were good old Elders with some epiphytic lichens and mosses on them. However, not only were these trees being cut back at the time I was there, but it was evident from older cut branches and trunks that this is likely to be an annual management thus never giving the really interesting species (that could occupy this habitat) the chance to establish. At this particular site the most interesting find I made was the microfungus *Lichenoconium xanthoriae* which was new to the county. This species parasitises the lichen *Xanthoria parietina* causing the fruiting bodies (apothecia) to turn black. It is considered as uncommon but is easily overlooked unless specialist mycologists or lichenologists notice it. Here the lichen was growing on an old Elder tree though unfortunately the particular branch had been cut off that same day!



*Auricularia auricula-judae*. Photo by Joy

The importance of Elder as a host for epiphytic mosses, liverworts and lichens (especially in south east England) cannot be over-emphasised. As sulphur dioxide levels in the region are falling we are seeing a reappearance of some of the epiphytic species that have not been seen in this area for up to 130 years. Interesting species of mosses such as *Cryphaea heteromalla*, *Orthotrichum* and *Ulotia* spp etc. as well as liverworts such as *Frullania dilatata*, *Ptilidium pulcherrimum* and *Metzgeria* spp. are making dramatic recoveries whilst other epiphytic species such as the minute liverworts *Cololejeunea minutissima* and *Microlejeunea ulicina* have recently been added to the Beds County list for the first time. These are good indicators of cleaner air but it is very unfortunate if at the same time as these species are making a comeback suitable microhabitats are being destroyed!

Although it has remarkably few associated fungi (259 species on the Mycological Society database whereas Beech has 3500) Elder is the principal host for Jew's Ear (also known as Judas's Ear and Jelly Ear) *Auricularia auricula-judae*. Whilst this is a very common species the white colour form (*var lactea*) is much less frequently encountered.

The berries of Elder are a very valuable food resource for many birds whilst the flowers attract many insects, especially hoverflies. Elder leaves are used as food plants by the larvae of some Lepidoptera species including Brown-tail, Buff Ermine, Dot Moth, Emperor Moth, The Engrailed, Swallow-tailed Moth, V-Pug and the Pyralid *Phylactaenia coronata*. Elder is resistant to rabbit grazing and it provides nesting opportunities for Blackbirds, Song Thrush, Chaffinches and Bullfinches. Old hollow Elder may also occasionally have breeding tits.

In past centuries the Elder tree was believed to ward off evil influences and give protection from witches. Its branches were hung in doorways of houses, cowsheds and buried in graves. It was considered very unlucky to make a cradle out of Elder wood. There were very strong superstitions about not cutting down the Elder as to do so would release the spirit of the 'Elder Mother' who would come and take revenge. To avoid this if an Elder tree had to be cut down it would be done whilst singing or chanting a rhyme to the 'Elder Mother'. Nowadays there are no such scruples to protect this plant so please help by spreading the message that it is ecologically important!

Gaining popularity in modern times as a herbal remedy against colds and flu, Elder flowers have been an important folk remedy for centuries. The Roman naturalist Pliny wrote about the therapeutic value of this flowering tree in the first century AD. Native Americans used Elder as a treatment for respiratory infections and constipation as well as an herbal pad for healing wounds.

The Egyptians considered that applying its flowers improved the complexion. The Greeks used a tea from the root as a laxative. Gypsies used Elder flowers as an eye-wash.

Wines, cordials and marmalade have been produced from the berries. In Italy and Germany the umbels of the elderberries are batter coated, fried and then served as a dessert or a sweet lunch with a sugar and cinnamon topping. The flowers are used to produce elderflower cordial. People throughout much of Europe use a similar method to make a syrup which is diluted with water and used as a drink, whilst in the United States, the French elderflower syrup is used to make elderflower marshmallows.

### A Recipe for Elderflower Cordial

#### Ingredients

20 heads of Elder flowers  
1.8kg granulated sugar, or caster sugar  
1.2L water  
2 lemons  
75g Citric Acid

#### Method

1. Shake the Elder flowers to dislodge any lingering insects, and then place in a large bowl.
2. Put the sugar into a pan with the water and bring up to the boil, stirring until the sugar has completely dissolved.
3. While the sugar syrup is heating, pare the zest of the lemons off in wide strips and toss into the bowl with the Elder flowers. Slice the lemons, discard the ends, and add the slices to the bowl. Pour over the boiling syrup, and then stir in the citric acid. Cover with a cloth and then leave at room temperature for 24 hours.
4. Next day, strain the cordial through a sieve lined with muslin (or a new j-cloth rinsed out in boiling water), and pour into thoroughly cleaned glass or plastic bottles. Screw on the lids and store in a cupboard ready to use.

#### To serve

Dilute to taste with still or sparkling water and serve over ice with a sprig of fresh mint floating on top. If you want something more alcoholic try adding a shot of gin or vodka or add to white wine as a spritzer.



Elderflower cordial. Photo by Jeannie

*Editor's note: Don't forget, elderberries make amazing jam also - if you've got the patience to pick enough of them and haven't used all the flowers for cordial, that is!*

## Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre

by Rachel Broomfield

Bedfordshire & Luton  
**Biodiversity  
Recording &  
Monitoring  
Centre**

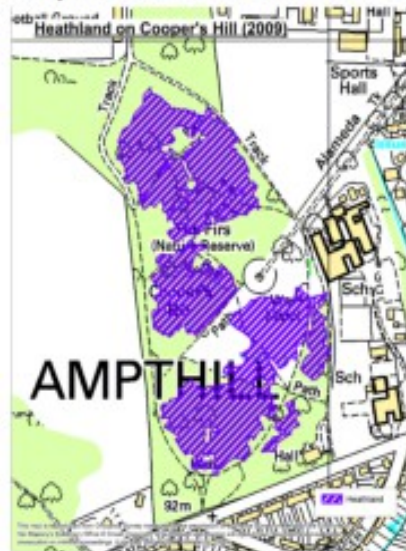


It has been a while since we last provided an update in Muntjac about our activities, and we are aware that there are some developments that you might like to know about. This is our first article of a series, and we are beginning with a brief introduction (for those of you who do not know who we are) and some information about what has been happening.

The Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre (a bit of a mouthful!) is more frequently known as the BRMC and is the Local Record Centre for the county. Our aim is to be the one-stop shop for biodiversity information and we are gathering biological records covering all species and habitats within the county, in order to make them available to those with a need to know.

The BRMC now has three members of staff: Jackie Ulyett who started as a Data Officer at the beginning of 2008 and has recently become the new Centre Manager. Keith Balmer as Network Officer, who has been working for the centre since it started in 2003, and Rachel Broomfield who has been working as a Data Officer since 2007. The BRMC is led by its Steering Group, which includes members of various organisations, including the BNHS, Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Greensand Trust and the local councils. We are based within the Wildlife Trust office in Priory Country Park, Bedford.

We currently hold 910,000 species records in our database. Records are reported by all kinds of people, including BNHS members, ecologists, and the general public. The records are collated and verified by the County Recorders who then pass the data to us to compile and enter into our database to use for a variety of purposes, including consultant reports on planning, site management plans and ecological reporting. We also supply some species information to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) so that our data can be used at the national level. Without these species records, our centre would not exist! Thank you to everyone who sends in their records and thank you to the County Recorders for all the work you do.



\*This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown Copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or criminal proceedings. (Licences 100049028 & 100049029) (2009)

We also hold a database of the wildlife sites found in Bedfordshire. These include statutory sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Nature Reserves, as well as non-statutory sites such as County Wildlife Sites, Local Geological Sites and Roadside Nature Reserves. The centre holds the information from surveys and management of the County Wildlife Sites and works closely with the Wildlife Trust's Wildlife Sites Officer to help maintain the information held for these sites.

The species records and site information are held digitally within our computer based GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping package, allowing us to easily map the data that we hold, creating an interactive database of information. This helps us to perform data searches and produce maps tailored to specific needs, such as habitat coverage and species distribution.

The Centre carries out a variety of work: some are everyday tasks, such as sorting and importing species data into our database and providing data to those requesting information, and some are specific projects. Project work that we have recently undertaken includes mapping heathland habitats across the county, producing maps to assist with Green Infrastructure planning for several parishes in (what was) Mid-Bedfordshire, the development of the photo-archive Bedscape, and extracting species records from some of Natural England's SSSI archive.

So that was a brief overview of who we are and what we do. Our next article will take a look at species recording in more detail. If you would like to find out more about the BRMC you can find us at [www.bedsbionet.org.uk](http://www.bedsbionet.org.uk), or you can email us at [brmc@bedsbionet.org.uk](mailto:brmc@bedsbionet.org.uk).

## Twilight nature watching: Bats and Boats

by Danny Fellman

The idea behind Bats and Boats was to bring environmental education and canoeing together in a public event. Bats ended up being the way of achieving this.



Young Daubenton's bat *Myotis daubentonii*. Photo by Bob Cornes

The idea sprung to life after a chance coming together of the Kempston Outdoor Centre (KOC) run by DSD Leisure, and the Rangers at Priory Country Park, run by Bedford Borough Council. Janet Annetts, KOC Centre Manager, started emailing with me, a Country Park Ranger and Bedfordshire Bat Group member.

The technical issues were discussed at length. It was decided that the only way to find out the answers to so many questions was to give it a go. Two dates were arranged in 2009 to try it out. As we had so many questions to answer and certain fears to allay we restricted the first event to adults only. A small charge was made to try and cover part of the cost of using the equipment and canoe staff costs.

These two trips showed the idea could work, but also highlighted several limitations, some foreseen and others unexpected. Following the lessons learned from the first outing we allowed older children to attend the second trip. We have to admit we didn't see a lot of bats on either of these trips but at least everyone enjoyed the experience and still learned about bats and the river environment.

This year Bats and Boats secured funding from the Harpur Trust and the Bat Conservation Trust, allowing the event to run with more equipment and without cost. The events were structured so families could attend, provided children were over 8 years old. This, combined with the magic word 'FREE', meant the three scheduled dates were over-subscribed after two days of advertising!

The first of the 2010 events was run on June 8<sup>th</sup> and a family with some very excited children got kitted out for the canoes. It had been raining most of the day, so we looked skyward and muttered the famous phrase, 'it's forecast to clear up this evening'. Undeterred we carried our luxury cruisers (two Canadian canoes rafted together for stability) to the water and climbed aboard.



Photo by Danny Fellman

The river was calm and the reflections of the light and trees in the water looked great. The insects buzzed about and we were all set for a good evening's paddle and bat watching. We set off slowly downstream, getting the feel of the boats as we zig-zagged across the river (we don't require people to be able to paddle, and matching younger children and adults for paddling strength is a bit tricky). The 'gentle paddle' soon turned into a frantic rush to find a tree to shelter under as the heavens opened and the rain poured down on us – while the bat detectors remained tightly wrapped up in the dry bag.

## Youth Working Group: we're recruiting!

The BNHS Youth Working Group consists of a small group of members who have met together several times a year to discuss various ways that the Society can encourage our children and young people to 'Wake up to Wildlife!' Activities have included putting together regular newssheets for our younger members, arranging special activities from time to time, and putting our heads together to work out exciting assemblies that some of us have delivered in local schools. We'd love a few more people with enthusiasm to join us on the team. It isn't a huge commitment and you don't have to be a teacher, so please do get in touch with me if you're interested and would like to know more.

Stephen Plummer, 14 Chandos Road, Ampthill, Bedfordshire, MK45 2LD. Tel: 01525 841317; Email: [stephen.r.plummer@ntlworld.com](mailto:stephen.r.plummer@ntlworld.com).

## Are the Damsons in distress or are the Prunes in peril?

by Stephen Halton

Hidden deep in the southern corner of Bedfordshire, under the shadow of the northern Chiltern Hills, lies a secret, remnants of a once busy industry and now largely forgotten in the mists of time and local folklore.

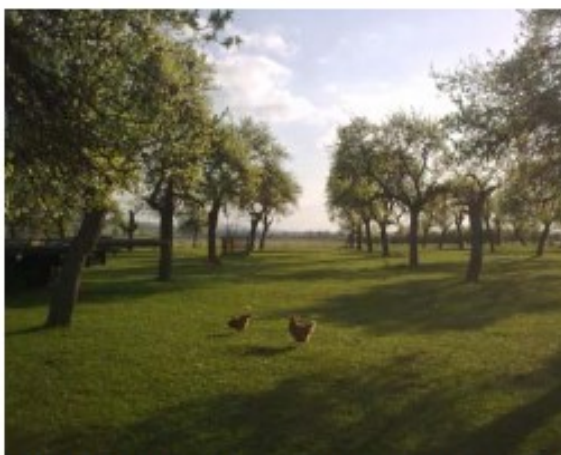
Today, few people have heard of the Aylesbury Prune and even fewer are probably aware of the extent and size of the business and industry supported by the fruit.

The prune (sometimes also called a damson) is a variety of plum (*Prunus domestica*) with a restricted distribution in the local area. The prunes were grown in extensive orchards in the parishes of Totternhoe, Eaton Bray, Edlesborough, Ivinghoe, Weston Turville etc. The tree blossoms early and the fruit develops late into a small, dark reddish-purple plum. The trees crop erratically and can vary annually from hardly any to whole trees and orchards appearing black and overladen with drooping boughs of fruit.



It is not known when the orchards were first established but by the end of the 19th century there were flourishing prune orchards in the Aylesbury Vale area. Orchards and fruit continued to be planted and collected on a large scale until the 1930's. Why this area? One possibility is the shelter from the Chiltern Hills and the suitability of the soils in the area – a mix of chalk, Gault clay and Upper Greensand, all being fed and watered by the springs emerging from the springline of the Chilterns.

What is known however is the scale of the industry and, for such a small area, it was considerable. Uses of the fruit varied from local cottage industry (jams/preserves, pies, puddings, cordials and wines) to large-scale industrial growing and collecting. Inevitably, a strand of folklore and local legend weaves through the story like clematis along a trellis and adds to the flavour. The fruit skins provided a dye (which has recently been experimented with and results in some fairly pale but interesting shades) and legend has it that a mysterious shipment of prune skins were shipped to Germany just prior to WWII – were these really used to dye the uniforms of certain sections of the German Army? Similarly, did the RAF use the skins to dye their own shade of greyish-blue uniforms? Well, judging by the results of the dyeing tests this was very unlikely! Another strand is the use of dyes in the local Luton hat trade – never knowingly proved but probably more likely than moonlight trips by train to the Fatherland!



Photographs exist showing orchards with people collecting fruit into locally-made woven baskets from willow known as skips and supplied by the fruit merchants. Each skip could hold 28lb of fruit and were sent by horse or lorry to local train stations (Stanbridgeford, Stoke Mandeville, Aylesbury and Tring) and thence to towns all over the country. The orchards were also used for grazing stock, particularly the popular, and local, Aylesbury ducks which provide extra profit through the sale of meat and eggs.

By the end of the Second World War prices for the fruit had fallen, costs of collecting the fruit were becoming prohibitive and the orchards were in decline. Another problem was the trees themselves were in decline

due to lack of management (many people away at war) and this accelerated the wholesale grubbing up of trees and orchards across the area. Landscapes subtly altered and the housing demand of the post-war generations caused many more orchards to be demolished and lost as villages spread and land became more valuable.

Damson orchard, Edlesborough. Photos by Erika Pratt



## Issue 155 - June 2010

Today, the orchards are relics of their former glories. A survey carried out by myself in March 2005 identified 47 remaining orchards in the parishes of Totternhoe and Eaton Bray, few are extensive and most vary from individual trees in private gardens to small groups of neglected and decaying trees in field corners and areas of unused ground.

But many of the remaining orchards continue to blossom and hold a beacon for all that has past and to give us hope that we may recognise the value and interest and human work that has gone into creating that which we have not quite lost. In recognition of this I am working, with partner organisations, in setting up a project with local people to record and capture people's memories of the industry, to unravel and celebrate the folklore, to establish a new community orchard where people can plant trees again and learn how to manage and grow those trees, produce a book of prune recipes and look after the wildlife of the orchards (are they really the last habitat of the stag beetle in Bedfordshire?) and to bring orchards once again into the hearts, minds and soul of the community, where they really belong.

For more information on the Aylesbury Prune orchards or the Bedfordshire and Luton Orchard Group (BLOG) please contact me in the Countryside Access Service, Central Bedfordshire Council. Tel: 0300 300 6135. Email: [steve.halton@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:steve.halton@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

NOTES: Two articles well worth reading are 'The Neglected Aylesbury Prune' and 'Gathering the Fruit' by Mary Farnell. *Bucks Countryside* magazine, December 1977 and February 1978.

It is also worth making a visit to the Pitstone Green Museum of Rural Life at Pitstone – an absolute treasure trove of rural life and tools with many artefacts of the prune industry (ladders, skips etc.). Tel: 01582 605464 <http://website.lineone.net/~pitstonemus/>

### Motorbikes and 4x4s on nature reserves and public rights of way

*by Esther Clarke, Reserves Officer, Wildlife Trust for Beds, Cambs, Northants & Peterborough*

We all know what a pain illegal off-road motorbikes and 4x4 vehicles can be and the problems they can cause, not just for wildlife but for people too. And it is true that the authorities and land managers are struggling to find solutions to the problem, particularly when resources are limited and there are higher priorities elsewhere. Bedfordshire Police and a number of conservation and countryside access organisations are trying to work together to pool resources and information in an attempt to combat the problem, particularly at the moment in the south of Bedfordshire.

A number of Operation Meteor days are being run during the summer months at some of the main problem sites, such as Sundon quarry, Houghton Regis quarry, Totternhoe and Sewell, Blows Downs and Barton Hills. Staff and volunteers from The National Trust, the Wildlife Trust, Sustrans and Rights of Way officers will be on hand to help the police by acting as spotters to report sightings of illegal bikes and vehicles so that the police off-road motorbike and 4x4 team and in some cases the police helicopter can be dispatched to try to catch the people involved. Bikes can be confiscated and crushed and individuals cautioned or fined.

You too can help, by reporting any incident of illegal and nuisance vehicle activity that you witness when you are out and about in the Bedfordshire countryside at any time. Although a police officer is unlikely to attend to your particular incident as a result of your call, every report is logged on the system and these logs are analysed on a monthly basis to create maps of hotspot locations. This then helps to target resources and special operations, such as Operation Meteor, in the future. The police need this data to justify their work, even if they know through anecdotal evidence that there is a problem.

So if you see or hear a motorbike or other motor vehicle on a nature reserve or public right of way (that is not a byway open to all traffic) please call Bedfordshire Police on 01234 841212. Be prepared to give them the name of the nearest road as they probably won't know the name of the nature reserve and they don't generally use grid references. Also, any description of riders, drivers, passengers or vehicles may help, but do not put yourself at risk by getting too close or trying to challenge the offenders. If there is an immediate risk to people or property call 999.



Illegal motorcyclist speeding away from the camera. Photo by Esther Clarke

## The Global Naturalist: Canada

by Jennifer Baker

### Cootes to Escarpment Park System: A Conservation Vision

The Hamilton Naturalists' Club (HNC) is one of nine partners developing a long-term conservation vision for the natural lands and green space from the western end of Hamilton to Burlington, Ontario, Canada. Our vision is to link together 1,500 ha (3,700 acres) of natural areas owned and managed by the partners (HNC, Bruce Trail Conservancy, City of Burlington, City of Hamilton, Conservation Halton, Hamilton Conservation Authority, Hamilton Halton Remedial Action Plan, Region of Halton and Royal Botanical Gardens). This globally significant urban park will stretch from Hamilton Harbour, through Cootes Paradise Marsh to a 10 km section of the UNESCO designated Niagara Escarpment. This is much larger than both London's Hyde Park and New York's Central Park. This is a new approach to protecting a unique area – Canada's biodiversity hotspot, a place of stunning natural beauty and one of the country's fastest growing urban regions.



Housing, road and rail line development have fragmented the once connected landscape. By managing the remaining important natural areas as a whole, we can work to restore the connections that are critical for wildlife movement. The area is one of the most botanically rich places in Canada, with nearly a quarter of the country's wild plants growing within its present boundaries. It provides habitat for rare and endangered plant species such as Red mulberry and Water marigold. It's also home to many other rare species including Spicebush swallowtail butterfly, Eastern spring softshell turtle, Hooded warbler and Red-headed woodpecker. The significant ecosystems of this area must be protected to ensure the treasured natural landscapes we enjoy today will exist for future generations.

The park system will be achieved by securing additional lands which provide linkages to existing protected natural areas, protecting natural features on complementary lands that link and support the ecological function of the park system, managing planning and stewardship actions, and restoring degraded areas.

The secondary goal is to facilitate sustainable recreational uses in appropriate locations. Hiking trails and interpretive areas will provide educational opportunities for the public and promote environmental appreciation and understanding. However recreation will be limited to areas where it will not compromise the ecological integrity of the park system or disturb sensitive habitats.

A conservation strategy is the first step in defining a vision for the Cootes to Escarpment Park System. The next steps move the vision to a partnership plan for implementing it. The strategy outlines a series of policies and actions to secure the foundation of the park system over the next decade.

If you would like more information about the Cootes to Escarpment Park System initiative, please contact Jen Baker at [land@hamiltonnature.org](mailto:land@hamiltonnature.org).



In Focus: Searching for the Scarce Chaser, May 25, 2010, Roxton

Photos by John Pitts (save our poor 4 Spot, whose photo was taken by Daniel Schwen). Text by John Pitts

With clouds and a cool breeze, the day didn't look good for any sort of insect. We had no need to worry though as there were masses of damselflies hiding in the nettles and goose grass ready to be photographed and examined by lens. Banded demoiselles fluttered up ahead of us as we waded through thigh high nettles and the occasional carpet moth or Common blue butterflies. At the start we got excited as a chaser was spotted hanging from a dead umbellifer stem but disappointed when the four spots of bog standard 4 Spot chaser were noted.



'You can run, little chasers, but you can't hide, BWAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!'



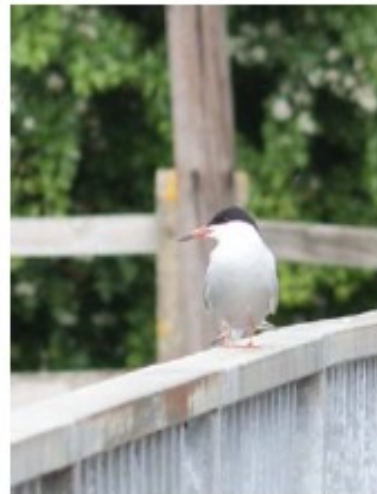
Can I eat this one? No...how 'bout this one? Or this one? Maybe I should have just gone for the egg & chips...



'See anything interesting?'  
'Yes, a Homo sapiens foraging in the grass...I've never seen this particular behaviour before in the wild.'



'Hey, do you mind? A little privacy, please!'



Oll Get a room, you two!

### Nature nuggets

Attention all caddisfly lovers! A **Trichoptera recording scheme** is being run by Dr Ian Wallace at the Liverpool Museum. This is part of a Riverfly recording scheme for caddisflies, mayflies and stoneflies. Do check it out at <http://www.brc.ac.uk/schemes/RRS/trichoptera.htm>.

The National Biodiversity Network Gateway has just had its **50 millionth record, and it came from our own local record centre, the BRMC!** The record in question was that of a micro moth *Mompha ochraceella* (Buff Cosmet), which was recorded in a moth trap near Cranfield in 1982. Keith Balmer, Biodiversity Network Officer at the BRMC has used the Gateway to help local naturalists map records through the BNHS website. In fact, over 520,000 Bedfordshire records are on the Gateway. Well done to Keith and the rest of the BRMC team!

A local captive Noctule bat has given birth! Photos are on the [Bedfordshire Bat Group facebook page](#). A video of mum and baby is also online on the [Bedford Today website](#).

### Upcoming events

**Jul 3** Sharpenhoe: walk over Sharpenhoe Clappers and Moleskin Hills to see Dark Green Fritillary and others, led by Peter Glenister. A joint meeting with Butterfly Conservation. Meet at 10.00 am at the National Trust car park, TL065295.

**Jul 10** Willington: looking for birds and dragonflies around Willington Gravel Pits and Ponds, led by David & Karen Anderson and Robin Edwards. Meet and park at 10.00 am at Willington Dovecote, TL106500.

**Jul 14** Souldrop: field meeting, morning walk around Souldrop Parish and on to Round Wood and the fields south of Sharnbrook Summit. Afternoon to West Wood for White Admiral. Led by Tony Smith. Meet and park at 10.30 am at Souldrop Village Hall, SP986617. If joining for the afternoon meet and park at 1.45 pm at West Wood, SP992621.

**Jul 24** Pulloxhill: butterfly walk and look for other wildlife at Centenary Wood, led by Peter Glenister. Joint meeting with the Flitvale Wildlife Group. Meet and park at 10.00 am at Cenenary Wood, TL063349.

*Due to unforeseen circumstances the bird ringing meeting planned for Sunday August 8 at Willington has unfortunately had to be cancelled. We have been able to arrange another bird ringing demonstration on August 15 as a replacement.*

**Aug 14** Leighton Buzzard: walk along the Grand Union Canal for butterflies, dragonflies and other wildlife, then on to Ouzel Meadows for Black Poplar trees, led by Phil Irving. Meet and park with care at 10.30 am in Globe Lane, a turn-off to Stoke Road, and look for sign for Globe Inn, SP912261.

**Aug 15** Beeston: *replacement for Aug 8 bird ringing meeting*. Morning bird ringing demonstration, weather permitting, led by Derek Gruar. Meet and park at 7.00 am at Cos Lodge, Beeston, near Sandy TL171479.

**Sept 12** Frieston Shore, Lincs: day trip to Frieston Shore and Frampton Marsh RSPB Reserves, led by John Tomlin. Meet at 9.00 am in car park of Frieston Shore Reserve, TF398425.

**Sept 15-17** The theme for the **2010 Commons Conference** is The End of Tradition: Aspects of Commons and Cultural Severance in the Landscape. The event will take place at Sheffield Hallam University. The conference dinner on Thursday evening will feature special guest Professor David Bellamy. Details are available from [info@hallamec.plus.com](mailto:info@hallamec.plus.com) or 0114 272 4227.

**Sept 25** Maulden: small mammal trapping at Maulden Wood, led by Richard Lawrence. Meet at 10.30 am in the lay-by at top of Deadman's Hill on the A6, TL073394.

**Nov 16-17** Bristol Zoo will be the venue of a two day conference on **Species Survival: the White-clawed Crayfish in a Changing Environment**. With a focus on current developments in crayfish conservation, the conference aims to foster a strategic approach to the future conservation of this BAP priority species. Programme details are available on the Bristol Zoo website [www.bristolzoo.org.uk](http://www.bristolzoo.org.uk).