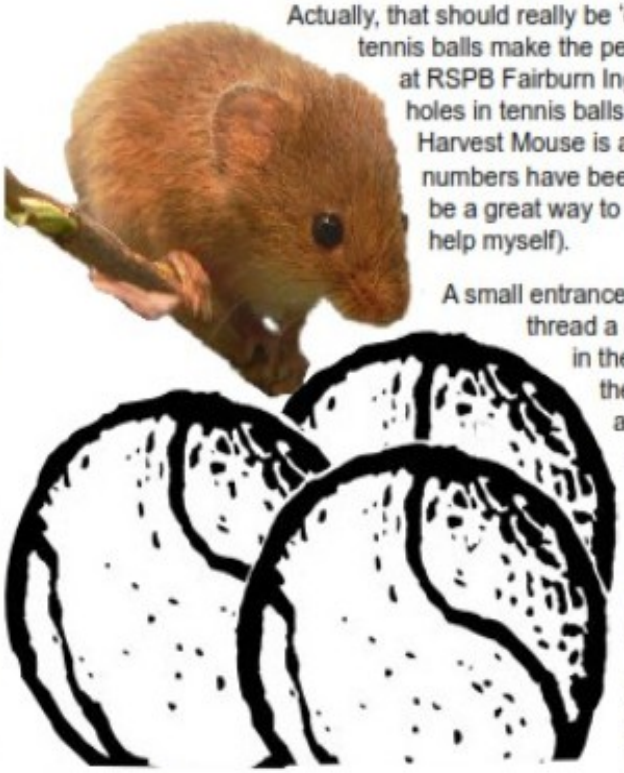
Muntjac

Autumn 2010

New balls, please!



Harvest Mouse Micromys minutus. Photo by Hendrik Osadnik

Actually, that should really be 'old balls, please': according to the RSPB, old tennis balls make the perfect Harvest Mouse house! Staff and volunteers at RSPB Fairburn Ings (near Castleford) have been busy drilling holes in tennis balls, all in aid of the furry little reedbed denizen. The Harvest Mouse is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species, which means numbers have been declining. Providing new nesting sites might just be a great way to help the species...um...*rebound* (sorry, couldn't help myself).

A small entrance hole is cut into each ball, as is a slot in which to thread a stick. This allows the mouse houses to be stood in the reedbeds, about a metre above ground where the mice like them. The balls are then lined with hay and birdseed is scattered around to attract the new residents.

Well, if it can be done in Castleford, why not here? Over the summer a few BNHS members have been gathering balls and canes. There's been talk of putting in some mouse houses at Duck End and Sandy Smith Nature Reserves.

So if you happen to see a tennis ball in a local reedbed, tread quietly: someone might be sleeping in there!

In this 156th issue:

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Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:

The Bedfordshire Natural History Society
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BedsLife
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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, Linslade, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 2TR. Tel: 01525 378245, 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.

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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 December 2010** please. **Thank you in anticipation.**

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

Future Muntjac issues - paper or electronic?

The question of making The Muntjac available in an electronic format has been discussed several times. Starting with the December 2010 issue, we can offer you an option of accessing The Muntjac via the BNHS website (www.bnhs.org.uk). Please note that we do not have the facility of being able to send email copies directly to those of you that wish to opt out of the hard copy version. The two options will be either to continue as today, or to view The Muntjac, programme, associated forms etc on the website. For the latter option we will announce in each newsletter the approximate issue date of the next. You will then need to keep viewing the website around that date until you see the announcement on the website that The Muntjac is available.

If you want to opt out of receiving a hard copy then please complete the enclosed form and return it to Mary Sheridan. If you wish to continue to receive a hard copy, as today, then you do not need to take any further action.

From the Editor's desk

How long does it take to make a meadow? Or a chalk grassland? Or a woodland?

I've been wrestling with these questions lately, for a couple of reasons. For one, I'm working on a model to predict how sensitive our wildlife areas are to visitor pressure. The new coalition government might have axed regional planning but Bedfordshire still faces a lot of growth. And with development comes people, people who want and need areas to recreate and commune with nature. And that's a good thing: we want others to explore and find in nature the same joy and wonder that we do.

But what are the impacts of all these people on our already fragmented habitats? And more importantly (for us in the Biodiversity Partnership anyway), can we tell which of our sites and habitats are most at risk? That's the question I've been trying to answer, using a model developed back in my native Canada. In my opinion, habitats which take longer to develop should be considered more sensitive. This is because once they're lost they take more time to re-create, assuming re-creation is possible. But when is a habitat 'created'? If we sow a chalk grassland mix onto bare soil there's a good chance we'll get a decent chalk grassland plant community in a few years. But research shows that in the medium term, a 'mid-stage' community often evolves. And this community will go one of several ways. Most likely it will either revert to a species-poor plant community, or it will stay at this middle stage, not really doing anything. If we're very lucky it will over many years start evolving into a richer, more ancient looking chalk grassland.

But how long does that take? There are few studies on the subject, and those I've been looking at indicate that even after 70 or 80 years the vegetation still doesn't resemble ancient chalk grassland. We've got examples of this in Bedfordshire, even. The fields next to Knocking Hoe were taken out of arable production 50 years ago, and still the Pasqueflowers present on the Nature Reseve won't grow on those fields.

This leads me to the Biodiversity Action Plan. Bedfordshire and most other counties in the UK have such plans, plans with targets. We've got our own targets, but we're beginning to think they might be way out of line. We originally planned to create chalk grassland by 2020 in some places. Is this reasonable though? I doubt it. On the other hand, if we set targets for a more realistic 2100, would we get any support? Funders, politicians and, well, everyone to be honest, like instant gratification. We like to be able to say we sowed 10ha of meadow, some meadow indicator plants grew and so we created a meadow. But did we? Sure there are some nice flowers there, but what about the soil ecology, the micro-invertebrates and the myriad complex ecological interactions that belong in good habitat?

Hence the dilemma. Set realistic targets and risk losing support for our efforts. Set unrealistic targets, satisfy funders and decision-makers but imply that these new 'sanitary' habitats are in any way as robust as the real thing. What to do?

I vote for the former. I think saying we can restore in a few years something like a wet woodland downplays its value. The most interesting, robust and therefore valuable sites are those which have had decades, if not centuries, to evolve. Even with our help, Nature has to take her time, and I think this is a message we need to start promoting.

The Pasqueflowers may never grow on those arable fields. If they don't, what does that say about our ability to 'create' habitat in the first place?

Introducing Liz Anderson, Ecologist for Central Bedfordshire

May I introduce myself, Liz Anderson, Ecologist for Central Bedfordshire Council. I began working for the Council in March this year, prior to that I had previously worked for the Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre in Hertford for 7 years before taking time out to raise three children and experience life in Australia for a while. My spare time is consumed predominantly with my boys and taming an unruly garden and vegetable patch. Working half time can present a challenge to 'fit everything in' and I'm a little less 'hands on' than I'd like, but do get the odd opportunity to get out in the field. A Bedfordhsire girl born and bred, so despite travelling 25,000 miles round the world (not good for my carbon footprint I know) I couldn't escape the pull of my home county. I'm a bit of a 'Jack of all trades, master of none' in that I have no particular specialism, rather an appreciation of the environment as a whole and its essential role in our quality of life.

Raising a Noctule *Nyctalus noctula* pup with the mother present

by Martin O'Connor BSc (Hons) MIEEM Bedfordshire Bat Group
Tanya O'Connor, Bedfordshire Bat Group (Primary Carer)

I would like to thank all those that have offered advice and shared their experiences throughout: Heidi Cooper-Berry (Avon Bat Group), Maggie Brown (Yorkshire Bat Group), Anthony Mould (Natural England), Paul Kennedy (Somerset Bat Group) and David Norman (vet).

A special thank you goes to those in the Bedfordshire Bat Group who have helped in the tasks presented to us throughout the process of looking after the pup: Simon Pidgeon, Irene Sabinarrz, Bob Cornes, Jude Hirstwood, Chris Lunn, Viv Heys, Angie Cornwell, Emily and Jake O'Connor.

Introduction

In April 2010 after a long day of buying equipment for the Luton Bat Project, Bob, Jude and I were just finishing a meeting when Bob asked if I could go and pick up an injured bat from an address in Luton. I found some gloves and a vivarium and drove to the collection address. On arrival I was met by the home owner who explained that the bat had been found in the Airparks car park at Slip End. On Bob's advice she had duly put the bat in a secure cardboard box with ventilation holes and a dish containing kitchen towel soaked in water.

I opened the box and looked at the bat (*panic!*); the first thing that went through my mind was that the gloves I had were a little thin. The second was how I was going to put into the vivarium what I expected to be a Pipistrelle.

I gingerly removed a Noctule (not a pip!) from the temporary home Julie had provided and placed her into the more robust plastic vivarium. I explained to Julie that I would take the bat home and check it over and let her know what was going to happen. Once home I checked her over and found that she had a broken right humerus. The break was bad, but was not a compound break, so a decision was made to give her a chance. After feeding her and booking her in with the local vet (Normans in Luton), the normal regime of looking after an injured bat proceeded.

The shock

All was going well with the bat: she was eating and gaining weight, and she had adapted to captivity. It is fairly rare in Bedfordshire to have a Noctule in captivity so some discussion was taking place about her future and whether we should keep her as a permanent captive for education and training. It was decided that this would be the case.

I was working away from home the week of May 24. On the evening of the 25th Tanya rang me worried that something was wrong with the bat: she had gone off her food, was lethargic and being a little aggressive. I immediately thought that she was going to die, but the next morning Tanya found her alive and well.

I arrived home about 3.00pm on the 26 and after sorting myself out had a quick look and noticed a little blood on the kitchen towel lining the vivarium. I assumed that she'd been scratching at the broken wing where it was healing and thought nothing more of it.

That evening as we sat down to dinner the bat was unusually vocal: I could have sworn that I heard two distant calls. After dinner I went over to the vivarium and lifted the cover. I looked in, looked and looked again: four feet not two. She had gone and had a pup.

Not two feet, but four! Photo by Martin O'Connor

What next

After several frantic phone calls to carers around the UK, we decided that we would not interfere in the first instance and let mum get on with it. After the first day

(and hopefully the bonding period) we wanted to weigh the pup. Tanya took them out of the vivarium and gently removed the pup from mum, who showed no aggression; Tanya puts this down to the bond (cuddles) she had built up over the intervening weeks caring for her. I quickly weighed him and a day after he was born he weighed as much as an adult pip at six grams. Tanya put him back on mum: a tense moment - would she reject him? We need not have worried, because within a second she had put him back on the nipple and he was suckling again.

Mum was brilliant: whenever the pup was removed to be weighed she would immediately take him back. He was weighed every three to five days, ensuring that the artificial diet mum was receiving had enough nutrients and minerals to sustain them both.

Warming up for the nightly flying lesson. Photo by Martin O'Connor

On June 12 Tanya was exercising both the bats. She was holding the pup when suddenly he opened his wings and started flapping them. The next day she took him into our bedroom, the room with the fewest crevices. She held him up and within a minute or two he took flight. A slow drop to the floor would be a better description, but nevertheless a flight.

In the meantime, the Bat Group committee were discussing how we were going to release him. Tanya had done some research on flight cages. The Group had previously decided not to build a permanent flight cage so Tanya was looking for temporary solutions. After several hours of searching for something that would be big enough to fly him in, she came up with either a large polytunnel or a large fruit cage.

The tunnel was ordered and as it turns out is probably one of the larger flight cages in the country. So on June 27 five members of the Bat Group set up the tunnel at a secret location in Luton. After a couple of days finishing the inside by laying down white dust sheets (so the bat could be seen after landing), filling up gaps (to stop him inadvertently escaping) and building a door, the tunnel was finished.

The first flight was on July 5 and by this time the pup was flying well, turning twice in the tunnel. We initially flew him every other day. Each time he increased his strength and flight ability. From July 2 he was flown nightly for at least an hour. Every night he increased the number of laps he could do in the flight cage until he could sustain continuous flight for several (10+) minutes.

On July 17 we spent a full night in the tunnel with him. A 400mg Biotrack radiotag was applied between the shoulder blades. This was to ensure he could fly for a sustained period with the tag and so, on release we could track his movements.

Some interesting observations were made while flying him. Due to the enclosed environment, his echolocation calls were at a relatively high frequency, peaking at about 27 kHz. Sonograms revealed strong overlapping echoes from the tunnel walls. Perhaps because of this, the bat seemed to have difficulty in locating the tunnel walls at first, and frequently bumped into them. After several flights he soon learned to avoid them and turned before reaching them. His wing beats were much more rapid than those of a noctule flying in the open. Possibly the most striking was his ability to take off from the ground with apparent ease, using his wings to push himself up until he had sufficient clearance for shallow wing beats. Mum noctule also tried to do this when she was in the tunnel, however due to the broken wing she was unable to fly and it would seem that it is an instinctive response to being on the ground.

Release

A traditional bat box was made and hung from the back of our house. On the morning of the 18th the pup was placed in the box with food and water. A cloth was used to block the entrance hole during the day.

In the evening the group gathered at the house for the release. After checking his weight (29g), the tag

and his forearm length (49mm), he was put back in the bat box and the towel was removed to unblock the entrance. A couple of hours later nothing other than a little movement and echolocation could be heard from the box. Then at 10.55pm he flew out and strongly off to the west. We tracked him for about 10 minutes; he was flying in large circles apparently exploring the surrounding area. After this he flew out of range, possibly to the south east.

Tanya stayed up and checked every so often, about 4am he was flying around the garden and struggling to find the entrance of the box. He landed on the garden umbrella, so Tanya picked him up and put him on the entrance of the box. He climbed in and could be heard eating the mealworms left for him.

That morning, having checked he was still in the box, I decided to adapt the box slightly once he left. I shortened the top of the box to raise it higher up the wall, and added a rectangle of carpet to the rear of the box. This increased the surface for him to land on when he returned enabling him to crawl from the carpet to the box.

On July 20, Bob, Viv, Angie and I were at Luton Hoo mist netting (a fairly poor night as it goes). Previous visits had revealed noctule activity along with a range of other bat species. After we packed up Bob got the radio tracking equipment out and within a second, he picked up the pup. At first he was flying around the main house. The next contact was when we were crossing the lake, he had moved down to the lake area. When we arrived back at the cars we tried again: he was still around the lake.

The next morning as Tanya was leaving for work at 5am, she found a strong signal and when she looked in the box she found he had managed to find and enter the box himself.

From July 21 he was coming and going as he pleased. Each night he would circle the house a couple of times and then head off towards Luton Hoo. On July 22 he left at the normal time, however on the 23rd he was not in the box. That day Group members tried to find him via the car tracking system, both in the day and evening, but to no avail, however July 24 saw him return to the box provided.

That morning I weighed him. He weighed 27g, a loss of 2g since his release. This was still a good weight and indicated that he was feeding on his own. On July 25 I checked the weight again and he had lost another gram. I gave him a few more mealworms just to get his weight back up, but we had been reducing them for a couple of days. We did this to encourage him to feed when out, and although he lost a little weight, he must have been feeding or he would have lost a lot more.

The tag failed on July 27. We could still monitor him by checking the box and he continued to come back up until at least the 31st (after this Tanya and I went on holiday). The great news was that I had examined the droppings and found invertebrate wings in them, as mealworms don't have wings this told us that he was feeding himself in the wild. He came back to the box until August 9 and since then we have not seen him.

The group feels that this has been a successful soft release. We have learned a lot throughout the process, which has been very hard work, however very worthwhile. The mother Noctule will remain in permanent care as a training and educational bat and has started her new career, with some success. The pup has now moved on from the house; however the box will remain in place for some time, just in case he comes back.

Editor's note: **Mea culpa!** The bat reported in the printed version of the last issue was in fact this very Noctule. Apologies to the little guy for the misidentification!

Field Meeting Souldrop Parish and West Wood Knotting 14 July 2010

by Tony Smith

Souldrop is close to the county boundary with Northamptonshire, situated between the A6 Trunk Road and the main rail route to the north and south. Only the Forty-foot Lane (Three Shires Way), now ruined by off-road vehicles, runs from west to east. So it is somewhat isolated. It lies to the south of the high ridge of Boulder Clay between the valleys of the River Ouse and River Nene. A stream runs south towards Sharnbrook to enter the Ouse. Another, the River Til, runs east from ground next to West Wood towards Newton Bromswold and then to Yelden, Tilbrook, and Kimbolton before entering the River Ouse at St. Ives.

Around the village of Souldrop there is quite an area of unimproved grassland used for sheep grazing, stabling and horse riding. It is not easily worked.

The building of the railway followed the stream valley to Sharnbrook and necessitated a high embankment for some distance. More alkaline soil was exposed and it is here that has given more interest. The adjoining fields are now permanent set-aside or, for the last few years left fallow after cropping with clover.

With the weather being unhelpfully overcast and cool, we only mustered eight people; Bernard Nau, Sheila Brooke, Andy and Melissa Banthorpe, Peter Almond, Arman Siddiqui from Forest Enterprise, with a student from Shuttleworth College.

Souldrop Churchyard is of interest with some old gravestones, but like many others is being tidied. Its dry-stone wall is being completely rebuilt with infill between stones and an adjoining footpath.

Gulliver's Spinney is owned by the Woodland Trust. It contains some interesting trees and plants, some alongside the stream which runs under the railway line and then along the boundary of two of the fields of interest. A Light Emerald moth, Forest Bug and Kidney-spot Ladybird were found.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*. Photo by Mark S Jobling

Over the rail bridge and into the adjoining fields, the Banthorpes found the remains of a silken web used earlier by the larvae of the Small Eggar Moth. The rare Four-spotted moth was known here until 2003, but has not been seen since. Steam locomotives no longer cause fires, the larger plants and shrubs now grow profusely, mechanical spraying of the rail track and cutting of line-side vegetation all contribute to loss of habitat for the Field Bindweed, its food plant. The Grizzled Skipper butterfly has not been seen since 1999, but over twenty of the commoner species should still be there.

Records on the the day were Large and Small Skippers, Small and Green-veined Whites, Common Blue, Brown Argus, Marbled Whites, Gatekeeper, Ringlets and Meadow Browns. Moths recorded were Cinnabar, Mother Shipton (larva), Silver Y, The Ash Bud, *Agapeta hamana* and *Pyrausta popularis*. Other insects seen were 24-spot Ladybird, Oak Bush Cricket, 2 Roesel's Bush Crickets, and Long-winged Conehead. Birds seen or heard, were Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker, Common Crow, Woodpigeon ,Wren, Chiff-chaff, Willow Warbler, Whitethroat, Goldfinch and Bullfinch. A field away is a plantation in which there is a rookery. Sixty nests have been counted here in one spring. In one of the fields, a Western Red Cedar's branches were weighed down by the prolific fruit buds. Plants of the Wild Liquorice grow here.

This area forms part of one of my favourite walks at any time of the year and takes in Back Lane to Colworth Estate and the footpath through Round Wood.

West Wood Knotting is the best of the woods in north Bedfordshire to see the White Admiral butterfly. Due to fairly recent coppicing of Hazel, the making of tracks through the blocks between rides by the Bedford Archery Group, and the management by Forest Enterprise, this insect enjoys the prolific growth of Honeysuckle, its food plant, and the light and shade which enables bramble to fruit over a long period. Peak numbers are usually seen in mid-July between 11.30 am and 4.00 pm. Ten is probably the yearly average count for any one day. On the day only two were seen, lying in sedentary position. Yet four days later on July 18, 22 were seen, with three Red Admirals, six Comma and quite unexpectedly, three, possibly four Silver-washed Fritillaries.

West Wood is well worth visiting between mid-April and October leaf-fall. Try to avoid weekends, when the Archery Club may be functioning.

I must thank Cheryl Lundberg of Forest Enterprise, Suzie Castleman, Donna Rawlinson and Sue Hollins for their help in making the whole possible. It was very stimulating to have such knowledgeable companions, but it could have been so much better if the weather had been more conducive!

Maulden Wood Gall Report, 30 May 2010

by Seán Karley
British Plant Gall Society recorder for the Wildlife Trust area
email: seankarley@tiscali.co.uk

We met a little later than usual because we were using the car park next to Maulden Parish Church and we did not want to get in the way of the congregation returning home for their dinners. Because in the past we have found that gall-hunters are very difficult to get moving I asked everyone to put on notional blinkers until we reached Maulden Wood itself. This did not prevent Ian Farmer from Doncaster scouting the area around the church beforehand, locating 18 species of gall causer before we officially started.

We set off along the Greensand Ridge Walk, across the field adjacent to the car park, itself a nature reserve, and then down through a narrow strip of woodland including the public footpath. When we got to the wood I gave a brief explanation of "what are galls?" for those who had not previously studied them. Then we started recording galls in earnest, following the Greensand Ridge Walk around the south-east corner of the wood, and along the southern edge.

We botanists had a bit of a puzzle with some *Prunus* bushes. It was of course much too early for there to be any fruit around. Eventually we concluded that they must be *Prunus domestica s.l.*, but until the fruits are checked we do not know which variety.

We then passed out of the open field into a path between the main wood and an area fairly recently planted with conifers. This was where I had found the Jumping Gall, caused by *Neuroterus saliens* (a wasp), on the leaves of Turkey Oak, *Quercus cerris*. These are the asexual generation of the wasp. We were hoping to find the sexual generation galls, known as Sea-Anemone Galls, also on the same species. (See Muntjac No. 153; December 2009 p. 4 for an article about these newcomers to Bedfordshire). We had a good look for these, but without success. However this search turned up the sexual generation galls of *Andricus grossulariae*, known as the Gooseberry Gall. This is another newcomer to the British Isles, having first been recorded here in Berkshire in 2000.

By now it was time for lunch. The grass was very dry and comfortable, so we settled on the spot.

Afterwards we set off again, still going eastwards. And in less than 100 yards we found our main target for the day. Sea-Anemone Galls were fairly plentiful on the very next Turkey Oak. So now we have confirmed the full cycle for this species of wasp in Bedfordshire. Not bad travelling for a tiny wasp which was first recorded in England in Hackney in 2006. Nearby on some very sandy, acid soil on the edge of the track Ian Farmer found some galls caused by a beetle, *Apion frumentarium*, forming small thickenings on the leaves of Sheep`s Sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, another personal first.

When we reached Clayhill Cottages we turned north into the body of the wood. At the next corner, where we joined the main east-west ride, there was solitary small Wild Service Tree. It was awkward to get to, but we managed and sure enough it yielded galls of *Eriophyes viburni*, a mite. I was fooled here when I was presented with a leaf bearing galls, and told it was from a bush of Wayfaring-Tree, *Viburnum lantana*. I said it could not be because the leaf was virtually hairless. On being dragged to look at the bush for myself I had to admit that I was wrong. In my defence, the leaves are usually decidedly downy.

We now turned West again and headed for the cars. Some of us took a detour up a ride to the North to admire a very fine specimen of the Wild Service Tree. Sadly all the leaves were out of reach, so it was just as well that we had struggled in to see the earlier specimen. And then we went home.

In total we had recorded 62 different plant galls.

A few days later I got an e-mail from Keith Palmer, from Rye in Kent. He had also come to join our walk. Unfortunately he had gone to last year's meeting point by mistake, and only found out why he was by himself when he got home. He had not wasted his journey however. He also made a list of the galls he saw, and four of them were not on the list Ian had made. I have added these on at the end of the list below. And for good measure, one of these was a new record for the wood; *Dasineura tympani* galls on Hedge Maple, *Acer campestre*. This gave us a grand total of 66 galls on the day.

County Wildlife Sites: Bedfordshire's Hidden Treasures

by Laura Downton, Wildlife Sites Officer, Bedfordshire Wildlife Trust, and Nick Carter, East of England Wildlife Sites Officer

Most naturalists and conservationists have heard of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and even internationally designated sites, such as Special Protection Areas but how many have heard of County Wildlife Sites (CWS) or know what they are? You may be surprised to know that there are approximately 38,000 such sites across England with over 6,500 in the East of England alone, covering nearly 100,000 ha. Bedfordshire currently has about 400, covering just less than 7% of the total county area. They are found on both public and private land varying in size and shape from churchyards and ponds through to much larger areas of ancient woodland and species rich grassland.

Nun Wood CWS. Photo © Laura Downton

CWS are recognised as being at least of county importance, sometimes national importance for their nature conservation value; this is defined by the presence of important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species. They are intended to represent local character and distinctiveness and provide comprehensive coverage of sites, rather than be a representative sample as SSSI are and thus have a vital role to play in meeting overall national biodiversity targets. They complement other site networks by providing essential wildlife refuges, stepping stones, corridors and buffers linking and protecting other designated sites.

Bedfordshire's first CWS were identified after a Phase I habitat survey was carried out by the Wildlife Trust from 1987 - 1988. Some 360 CWS were recognised in 1990. Unfortunately, since these surveys were done many sites have been managed inappropriately or not at all and their wildlife value has declined. To offset this there are now appropriate management options paid for by agri-environment schemes administered by Natural England and the Forestry Commission. The discovery of new sites has also helped as has the growing awareness in the importance of such CWS. For example, national and regional public sector organisations have an obligation to manage their own sites and, in some cases, to monitor the management on all CWS to try to increase the number in positive conservation management.

How can you help?

Ravensdell Wood and Grassland CWS. Photo © Laura Downton

Most of Bedfordshire's current 400 CWS have been recognised as CWS for the presence of BAP habitat(s) and indicator plant species, which have met or exceeded the habitat and species thresholds outlined in the CWS selection criteria. Sadly though, biological information for a number of CWS is extremely sparse and very little information is held about the habitats and species (*e.g.*, lower and higher plants, birds, invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians) present. Any information collected could help to reinforce why CWS are so important for biodiversity and further support the need for stricter measures to protect these sites now and in the future, particularly in relation to the planning process. If you are interested in doing some recording and monitoring please contact Laura Downton (email laura.downton@wildlifebcnp.org; tel 01234 364213) for more information.

For more information about CWS please visit the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre (BRMC) website at www.bedsbionet.org.uk.

Don't forget! This issue of the Muntjac is available online! Visit www.bnhs.org.uk to check it out!

After the woods come the woodlarks...

by Peter Bradley, Site Manager, RSPB The Lodge

Woodlark Lullula arborea. Photo by Rodrigo Saldanha de Almeida

This autumn marks the 5th anniversary of the first trees being felled at The Lodge. Since then, about 40ha of plantation have been removed, the soil beneath has been scraped away, and the sand sown with heather seed. The deforestation wasn't without its opponents, but although the older stands of conifers looked attractive, the overall value for wildlife was quite low. We were accused of clearing ancient woodland, although aerial photos showed large areas felled and replanted in the 1940s and 1960s. It is likely that heathland or acid grassland was here for some five thousand years, until exotic conifers were planted in Victorian times.

Five years is not a long time in ecological terms. It is hard to be sure, but the development of the original heathland through prehistoric slash, burn and grazing may have taken centuries. However, after five years of expensive conservation work, the 'new' heath is coming on well, and heathland birds are starting to give it the 'thumbs up'.

April 2007 saw the first woodlark singing on the cleared ground. In 2009, the first heather plants began to flower, and a nightjar graced the reserve, resting in broad daylight beside a visitor trail.

This year, there were numerous records of singing woodlark, from late March to late May, concluding with confirmation of a pair. On May 27, while surveying breeding birds on the new heath, we came across a male woodlark, singing on top of a dead larch. At the same time, another woodlark (believed to be female) flew from the ground to a nearby stump, where it watched us walk carefully past. This seems to have been a late nesting attempt by a pair.

There is still a way to go before we can call the new heath 'finished', and we have some challenges ahead of us. We now have lots of young heather, but grazing by rabbits is stopping many plants from flowering, and we are installing exclosures to fence rabbits out of the best patches. There is also a risk from invasive birch, bramble and bracken, which we are using herbicides to control. Nonetheless, the growing presence of woodlarks is very promising indeed, and we await 2011 with high hopes!

Come 'rock on' in Bedfordshire!

The Bedfordshire Geology Group was formed in 2004 by an enthusiastic bunch of amateur and professional geologists. The Group has a full schedule of events, including

- field trips and guided walks
- workshops
- lectures
- social events

all aimed at getting 'hands-on' with with local rocks and fossils. We work closely with local companies, museums and country parks, and we collaborate with conservation organisations on a range of projects.

So if you like history (and really, what's older than fossils?), have a fascination for geology or just enjoy getting outside and seeing the county, consider joining us! You can check out our programme of events, learn about Bedfordshire's rocks and landforms, and find membership information on our website: www.bedfordshiregeologygroup.org.uk. Alternately, email us at membership@bedfordshiregeologygroup.org.uk.

Don't forget! This issue of the Muntjac is available online! Visit www.bnhs.org.uk to check it out!

In Focus: Birds and Dragonflies of Willington, July 10, 2010

Photos by John Pitts. Text by David and Karen Anderson

The BNHS had a most successful meeting at Willington on Saturday July 10, looking at the area's birds and dragonflies. Local resident and expert Robin Edwards lead the group of 30 people and identified the birds, while Karen and I pointed out the various dragonfly species. Starting from the National Trust Dovecote car park, we were pleased to see a Spotted Flycatcher in the churchyard and a Sparrowhawk above us. Just a short walk down towards the river at one of the local houses, was a tremendous colony of nesting House Martins, at least 50 birds. At the bridge over the Elstow Brook we saw our first damselflies as well as a fly past Kingfisher, the first of three during the day. The combination of small and large rivers, plus still water lakes, produced a good range of dragonfly species, several of which were in cop and ovipositing. On the walk back towards our lunch rest, Nancy Dawson found the star species of the day: a lovely mature female White-legged Damselfly.

Over all we saw nine dragonfly species, 16 butterfly species and a good range of birds. Thanks to all for your interest and contribution and to Robin for an excellent day.

The participants all eagerly gathered at the water's edge for the Willington Polar Bear Dip 2010

'Mmmm, nice and warm, yeah, that's the stuff...Oli Out of my sun, you: we can't all be endotherms making our own heat like you there, matey!'

'Now what does that say? Yarn over, slip one stitch, knit one, pass the slipped stitch over, knit 6, purl 1...'

'Oooh, look at him: isn't he lovely?'

'Why yes, yes I am, thank you very much!'

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BNHS Butterfly Meeting: July 24, Centenary Wood, Pulloxhill

by David Anderson

The meeting hosted a large gathering of mums and children from the Flitvale Wildlife Group. The day was hot so a good range of butterflies was anticipated. A short walk along the main path and we passed the meadow with standard trees that the Society planted in 1991 to commemorate our 45th anniversary. It was nice to see that the plaque on the entrance gate post is still in good condition. In fact the other plaques around the woodland marking planting by Councilors and other worthies were rusted and hard to read, while the Natural History Society one was clean and shone brightly. I will put photos of the plaque on the 'Bedfordshire's flora and fauna online' when I work out how to do it!

The common grassland butterfly species were soon found with lots of explanation and photographing. Some additional interest was supplied by Sheila Brook catching a range of bugs and crickets, but other butterflies were hard to find. Both ponds were dry, but the larger one did still produce a couple of Ruddy Darters and more surprisingly about 7 or 8 Emerald Damselflies including a couple in cop, Whether they were going to lay any eggs is a mystery to me, but I hope not to them!

Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum*. Photo by Marcus Beard

Overall a morning well spent, with a happy and hopefully better informed group of people. It was good to see long time member Joyce Main in attendance. Perhaps this is a type of meeting the Society should run more often, showing the public and youngsters wildlife and interesting species.

Upcoming events

Oct 1 This year's Chilterns Commons Day is taking place right here in Bedfordshire, at the Dunstable Downs Chiltern Gateway Centre, Whipsnade. The event is for all those interested in the Chilterns commons, including site managers, land owners, parish councils and others. The delegate fee is £10 which includes lunch and refreshments, and booking is essential. For information and/or a booking form contact Donna Hunter by Thursday Sept 23 on 01844 355501 or dhunter@chilternsaonb.org.

Oct 3 The Bedfordshire Geology Group is holding a Grassroots Project Day from 11.00-15.00 at the Marston Vale Forest Centre, Marston Moretaine. For further information contact Bev Fowlston at bev.fowston@gmail.com.

Oct 16 Luton Hoo Walled Garden is hosting an Apple and Pumpkin Gala from 10.00-16.00. This celebration of autumn's rich harvest includes entertainment for the whole family. The entry fee is £5 for adults, children under 15 get in free. More information is available on the Luton Hoo Walled Garden website.

Oct 17 Bromham Mill's 19th annual Apple Day will run from 11.00-16.00. Come visit the East of England Apples and Orchards Project stall to get your fruit identified, or just have a great day out with the family!

Nov 7 The Bedfordshire Geology Group is holding a site clearance and visit to Deepdale Quarry, Potton, from 11.00-14.00. Contact Bev Fowlston (bev.fowlston@gmail.com) for details.

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.

Dec 9 The Bedfordshire Geology Group annual Social Evening will take place from 19.30-21.30 at the Husborne Crawley Reading Rooms. Contact Bev Fowlston for booking/details: bev.fowston@gmail.com.