



Wild About Beds

Winter 2011/12

The seaside comes to Bedfordshire

On November 14 the twitchers descended on Priory Country Park in Bedford for a very rare sight. Naturalists with their spotting scopes and binoculars lined the north shore of Priory Lake to catch a glimpse of a juvenile Gannet.



The Priory Lake Gannet *Morus bassanus*. Photo by Dave Kramer

Gannets are seabirds and although they have been recorded in land-locked Bedfordshire before, sightings are still quite rare. This was in fact the second 2011 Bedfordshire Gannet, the first having been seen over Stewartby in July. The Priory Lake Gannet was first seen over the Sandy/Biggleswade area before settling in Bedford. It fished and slept, seemingly unconcerned by the lakeside crowds and raucous flock of Black-headed Gulls which were none too pleased with their visitor. A couple of Herons also came and circled overhead to check out the new arrival.

The Gannet stayed on the lake overnight, departing on November 15. It was later spotted in Willington.

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Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:



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BedsLife
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Issue 161 - December 2011

The BNHS

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

Members receive a quarterly newsletter, Wild About Beds, and programmes of meetings. These meetings include field meetings to Bedfordshire sites and occasionally farther afield. During the winter months, there are illustrated lectures normally held in 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 Wild About Beds issue are welcome/essential for continuity. Please do send articles to me either as an attachment via email or through the post. Pictures are always welcome; material required by **15 March 2012** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next Wild About Beds will be published in **March 2012**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society

Raise money for your favourite charity, at no cost to yourself!

by Jenny Sprod, Hon. BNHS Treasurer

easyfundraising
.org.uk

Do you shop over the Internet? If so, you could be raising money for Bedfordshire Natural History Society with each £1 you spend. By logging on to Easy Fundraising (www.easyfundraising.org.uk), registering yourself as a supporter, and choosing your

favourite charity (if it is registered, and hopefully you would select BNHS) as the one you wish to support, you may then achieve a 2.5% to 4% donation every time you shop. There is a wide range of shops and organizations that subscribe to the scheme, including John Lewis, Amazon, Marks & Spencer, Comet and many others, covering goods as diverse as bird food and insurance. There are no hidden extra costs or charges, and it is an easy way to give increased support to BNHS.

You may also like to consider using Easy Search as your browser and raising more funds for BNHS with each search you make.

If you are interested in supporting the BNHS in this way and have any problems in registering, I will be happy to help.

If you are already registered, then don't forget, log in to Easy Fundraising before you start shopping!

From the Editor's desk

I've been spending rather a lot of my meagre brain power lately thinking about data. Not the android character from Star Trek (although I'm sure he's worth thinking about too), but the kind collected by many of our BNHS members. The facing page here says that the BNHS was established to record the flora and fauna of Bedfordshire. As a foreigner I find it mildly perplexing that people would spend hours in the rain, cold, snow and heat simply to make lists of plants and critters.

But by gum I'm glad that they — and you — do it.

What I find most amazing is that despite the hundreds of hours spent combing the county there's still so much we don't know. And it's becoming increasingly important that we *do* know. For several years now the Wildlife Working Group has wanted to know what kind of pond habitat network exists for Great-crested Newts in the Marston Vale. One almost can't drive through the Vale without seeing newt fencing. As ponds are filled in newts are scooped up and moved to new and old ponds alike. So we wanted to know what effect this was having on the entire habitat network. Are newts still able to find ponds to colonise within their 250–500m dispersal distance? And so I took on the job of trying to find out.

The answer as it turns out is a qualified yes. More interestingly though, was how few data I initially found. As with all such projects my first port of call was the Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre. They did indeed have quite a few newt records, but not enough for my purposes once I'd filtered for date and location. The records which were available however represented many, many hours of work by recorders. I was stunned by how much work goes in to producing even a few records, let alone the hundreds that I would need (and eventually did locate, though it took some doing) for my study.

The data issue reared its head again more recently while I was looking into Bedfordshire's rivers. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee — the conservation advisor to the government — has developed a method for identifying priority stretches of river under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The method is based on the presence of specific species which strongly depend on good water quality. BNHS Mammal Recorder Richard Lawrence had made a first attempt to identify priority river reaches, and I volunteered to take it a step further. The process is explained more fully on page 10, but boils down to using species records generated in or near rivers. For our exercise we decided to use a resolution of 1km grid squares. Again my first contact was with the record centre, and I was given a good selection of records. I happily plotted my squares of Brown Trout, Water Vole and the others.

And then I came to Reed Bunting. The methodology states that the Reed Bunting evidence must be a) for breeding birds only, and b) located near a river. The Bird Atlas project of course records breeding birds. It's great in that unlike the national Breeding Bird Survey it covers the entire county. Unfortunately it's done by tetrad, which wasn't precise enough for my purposes. This raised an interesting (and I confess, somewhat frustrating) issue. Some data — like atlas data — are collected to answer questions about long term trends in species distribution and abundance over a relatively large geographic area. These questions require a 'broad brush' approach, hence the tetrad-based recording. My project was more of the 'fine detail' sort, and expecting one data set to fulfil the needs of the other was just not realistic.

Which brings me back to my original musings. Doing what I do I'm fortunate to be in Bedfordshire. I sincerely think we've got one of the best record centres, and one of the best groups of recorders in the country. Despite my occasional frustrations with 'data availability' the records generated here have helped with countless projects, making Bedfordshire widely known in the biodiversity world for our innovation. We've been able to identify Important Arable Plant Areas, evaluate site sensitivity to visitor pressure, create habitat inventories and establish the importance of sites which otherwise might have been overlooked.

Increasing pressures on our wildlife and countryside will only increase our need for data. The information recorders gather for their hobby is in fact vitally important to efforts to preserve, enhance and protect what we have. So to our recorders I say a heartfelt thank you.

In the end I did get some 1km-based Reed Bunting data thanks to the kind folks at BirdTrack. And when I think about it, tetrad isn't too bad: my 'native' Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario is based on 10km squares in the south of the province, and 100km squares in the north. Yikes!

Bernard Verdcourt (1925 – 2011)

Bernard Verdcourt was one of the founding members of the BNHS in 1946, aged just 21. He immediately took a position on Council and the responsibilities of County Recorder for the varied groups of Mollusca, Hemiptera, Ephemeroptera and Neuroptera only vacating the latter in 2003. To mark the Society's Golden Jubilee Council conferred Honorary Life membership on him in 1996. He contributed to most editions of the *Bedfordshire Naturalist*, from its first edition in 1946, until 2000, and you can read these contributions online [HERE](#).

The following obituary was drafted by Bernard's colleagues at Kew. Bernard was most well-known to them for the contributions he made to two distinct fields of East African natural history: he was an acknowledged expert on African plants, but – unusually(?) also on non-marine molluscs: snails and slugs...

Bernard Verdcourt (widely known as BV to colleagues), the well-known Kew botanist who has died aged 86, made contributions to two distinct fields of East African natural history: he was an acknowledged expert on African plants, but – unusually ? also on non-marine molluscs: snails and slugs.

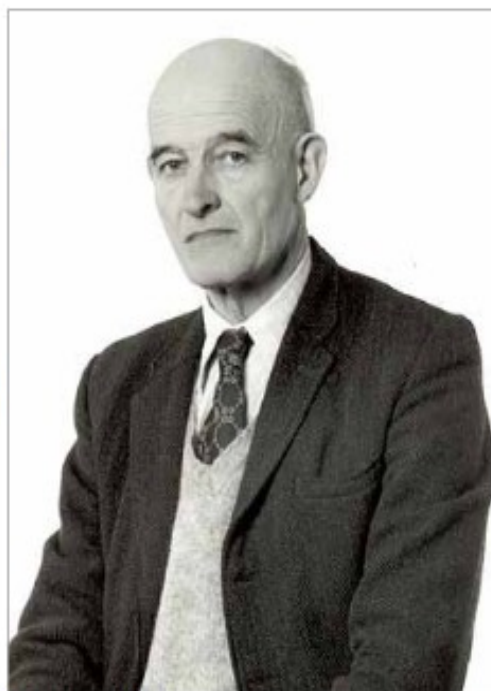


Photo courtesy Kew

Almost one-third of the great Flora of Tropical East Africa, dealing with 12,500 species, was from his pen. His extensive researches on East African molluscs culminated in "A Revised List of the Non-marine Molluscs of East Africa" in 2006, as well as a mass of publications towards the goal of a descriptive account. He was one of the few people in the world who could name molluscs from the area. A number of eminent malacologists have commented that they never understood how Bernard had time to study plants given his publication output on molluscs, remarkable in that botany was his profession, snails a hobby.

BV was born in Luton, Bedfordshire, on 20 January 1925, and went to Luton Grammar School. His love of botany was fostered by the Luton amateur botanist John Dony, and V.H. Chambers, the hymenopterist, who also lived locally, infused him with a growing interest in entomology. During the Second World War he was called up in 1943, and after aptitude tests went to Reading University to train as a Radar Officer; he graduated in 1945 with a degree in Radio Engineering, Physics and Chemistry, just after the war finished. After three years with the Printing, Packaging and Allied Trades Research Association as a microscopist, mycologist, photographer and general dogsbody to Frank Armitage, he joined the East African Agriculture and Forestry Research Organisation in 1948.

Following a year's training at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, he took ship to East Africa, and worked at Amani in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) under P.J. Greenway. He helped move the famous Amani Herbarium to its new building in Nairobi, where it became the East African Herbarium; it is now part of the National Museums of Kenya. The move involved driving quarter ton trucks full of specimens down many muddy hairpin bends. Fifteen years of naming many thousands of plant specimens for various researchers and the general public gave him an unrivalled knowledge of the East African flora and its literature, much called upon in later years by more specialised colleagues. Time for research and writing was very limited, but he gained a Ph.D. externally in 1955, and collected over 4,000 plant specimens with many duplicates; many of these are cited in literature. He also collected East African land snails and slugs, now mostly in the National Museums of Kenya and the British Natural History Museum. From 1958 to 1964 he was Botanist-in-Charge of the East African Herbarium. In 1964 he returned to England and worked at the Kew Herbarium, first as Principal Research Fellow, and later as a Principal Scientific Officer, until his retirement in 1987. He refused promotion to the next rank, believing that others more worthy had been overlooked, and irritated authority in a number of other ways, otherwise it is very likely he would have risen higher. After

his retirement he continued his work on the Flora of Tropical East Africa, the Flora Zambesiaca and the Revised Flora of Ceylon; in his eighties he was still working in Kew four days a week, publishing prolifically, and much sought after for advice, plant identifications, and his enjoyable and rather exclusive coffee circle. His civilized coffee breaks in a hidden corner of the Kew herbarium will be remembered by many staff and foreign visitors; beans were freshly ground in an ancient Peugeot coffee mill, and conversations ranged widely.

Apart from a period in the mid-1970s during which he worked on New Guinea legumes, and some contributions to the Flora of Sri Lanka, he was almost entirely devoted to East African botany. Similarly he scarcely studied other molluscs, though he did add the snail *Perforatella rubiginosa* to the British list, and worked on the minute snails of the genus *Carychium* in Britain, with Hugh Watson. Louis Leakey, the palaeontologist, encouraged him to work on fossil Kenyan molluscs, and the resulting 1963 paper with its paleoclimatic conclusions is often quoted in works on hominid evolution. It was also at Leakey's request that he drove a young Jane Goodall from Nairobi to Gombe Stream Reserve in West Tanzania, where she embarked on her now famous chimpanzee studies.

In 1978 he was climbing a small rock hill in Tsavo, collecting plants and slugs, and was looking into the crown of an Acacia when he trod on something soft and yielding. Looking down he found he had trodden on a lion – a youngish male. Bernard retreated, yelling loudly at the lion, who got up rather lazily and started following. Once he had managed to get about twenty feet between them, Bernard turned tail and fled down the rocks in a klipspringer-like fashion. He later realized that this was the area of the infamous 'man-eater of Tsavo' episodes during which about 140 railway workers were killed and eaten... A meeting with Richard Leakey the next day was not easy, as a very sore throat and an almost complete loss of voice made communication difficult.

Bernard was always very interested in insects and contributed over 150 articles from the age of 19 onwards. His most significant finds were the rare flies *Leopoldius signatus* and *Oxycera dives*. He collected *Meligethes* beetles in East Africa, including numerous new species. In later years he was immeasurably saddened by what he saw as the virtual extinction of insect life in Britain, the diversity of his childhood having disappeared. Throughout his life he maintained his interest in Bedfordshire and was responsible for the first records of numerous organisms for the county. He had an extremely catholic private library of many thousand volumes and was very conscious of the importance of archives and anxious that unique material should go to an appropriate place.

BV had an intense dislike of all sports and games, much to his father's regret; but he did take part in motor racing in East Africa, including in the very tough East African Safari Rally (then called the Coronation Safari), and even finished once, in 1958, with Alan Rogerson in his Peugeot 403. He had a particular interest in historic cars of the Peugeot marque, and was a keen member of the Club Peugeot U.K.

He enjoyed controversy, and was not afraid to speak his mind, either to eminent colleagues or senior management. He once reviewed a revision by a colleague as 'abysmal', and did not suffer fools, gladly or otherwise; but he was an inspiration to many younger colleagues, especially in Australia, East Africa and Europe, who admired his knowledge, his incisiveness and his clear view of what was important in systematics, as well as what was not.

He was a prolific author, and published well over 1200 papers and books on entomology, malacology, botany and the Peugeot marque, but felt he had scarcely done anything of real scientific worth: "just a mass of descriptive material, useful, requiring judgement and knowledge but scarcely any intelligence" as he said himself. Others felt differently, and he was honoured with the Kew Medal in 1986; he was President of the Conchological Society in 1969–70; in 2000 he was honoured by the Linnean Society of London with their Gold Medal and he was named a Corresponding Member of the Association of American Plant Taxonomists in 2008. Typically, he grumbled about the latter ('they didn't even ask me') and was photographed glumly holding his champagne, while a crowd of beaming colleagues raise their glasses around him.

Bernard Verdcourt was married twice, firstly to Lorna Crompton and secondly to Helen Dadd (née McInnes), a cat judge and wine merchant. He is survived by both wives and a daughter, Helen Louise, from his first marriage.

Old Warden's Grasshopper Collection

by Tim Gardiner

Old Warden in Bedfordshire is famous for the Shuttleworth Collection of aircraft from the early 1900s including those that fought in World War II. There is nothing more heartwarming than the sight of a Spitfire in full flight as cricket is played at Old Warden or Shuttleworth College. The Manor House at the College was home to Richard Ormonde Shuttleworth who tragically died at the age of 31 in 1940 while serving in the Royal Air Force. He had won the first British Grand Prix at Donnington in 1935, and built up a good collection of cars and aircraft which are currently housed in the Shuttleworth Collection. Old Warden Park is an impressive place to visit. I have played cricket at the College over the past six years as part of the Writtle College (near Chelmsford, Essex) Old Students' cricket tour. This summer I had missed the annual game against Shuttleworth College on Saturday 23 July 2011, which Writtle College lost for the first time in 11 years. I arrived in the evening and stayed overnight after consumption of several local ales in the Hare and Hounds in Old Warden. As is usual with the cricket tour, Sunday's game usually starts at around 2 pm leaving a long morning to peruse the local countryside. This year I decided to take a long walk around Old Warden Park to see how many grasshoppers I could find.



Field Grasshopper *Chorthippus brunneus*. Photo by Joaquim Alves Gaspar

Starting at the Manor House I decided to walk across the deer park to inspect the wicket (situated at TL 147438) used for yesterday's cricket match in which Writtle College were embarrassingly bowled out for 50 odd runs. The wicket resembled a springy bog with plenty of moss, not ideal for batting, but enjoyed by a couple of Meadow Grasshoppers *Chorthippus parallelus*. The outfield was not much better, with Field Grasshoppers *Chorthippus brunneus* singing the praises of longish grass. Along a fence around the edge of the boundary was long uncut Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*, which to my surprise contained several Common Green Grasshoppers *Omocestus viridulus*, indicative of the unimproved grassland in which the cricket pitch is situated.

The long grass on and around the cricket pitch certainly

benefited Orthoptera, in a similar way to some disused Essex sports pitches which were habitat to the common green grasshopper (Gardiner 2010b).

Walking on up the hill toward Warden Warren (TL 143437), I came across the restored Queen Anne's Summerhouse (at 65 m AOD) with a collection of gravestones which mark the passing of Shuttleworth family pets. To my surprise around the graves was a fine example of lichen heath with abundant Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella* and patches of Trailing St. John's-wort *Hypericum humifusum*. Several Small Coppers *Lycaena phlaeas* flitted around in the warm sunshine, as I searched the bare earth and lichen areas, to be rewarded with the sighting of a solitary Mottled Grasshopper *Myrmeleotettix maculatus*. This grasshopper is a localised species in the UK, being largely confined to heathland in the east of England. Apart from the lichen heath, there was no other suitable habitat in Warden Warren, due to the heavy shade of the conifers; therefore, the Mottled Grasshopper may be on the verge of extinction in the Old Warden area. A translocation has been successfully attempted in Essex (Gardiner 2010c) with relatively few individuals (total moved = 40); however, at Queen Anne's Summerhouse, the population appears doomed due to its small numbers (I could only find one male). Bringing in any more individuals from a nearby site to sustain the population would probably be a futile exercise, particularly as the available habitat is extremely limited.



Mottled Grasshopper *Myrmeleotettix maculatus*. Photo by Bart Wursten

Descending the hill toward Manor House, the Lesser Marsh and Field Grasshoppers (*Chorthippus albomarginatus* and *C. brunneus* respectively) were abundant in lightly grazed grassland on the north

facing slope which was colourful due to the abundance of Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum* and Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*. Patches of dead wood were staked into the ground under several majestic oak pollards. A solitary Dark Bush-cricket *Pholidoptera griseoaptera* was singing from a patch of nettle around these wood piles. A visit by beetle specialists to inspect the dead wood would probably turn up some interesting saproxylic species.

I reached the reservoir banks (TL 141443) to find very low water levels leaving a wet ledge exposed. On this ledge, abundant Water Mint *Mentha aquatica* was growing with occasional alder trees. From this marginal vegetation came observations of the range-expanding species, Roesel's Bush-cricket *Metriopectera roeselii* and Long-winged Conehead *Conocephalus discolor*. On higher ground, Common Green Grasshoppers were heard singing alongside Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus* butterflies. On the higher bank, I estimated that the abundance of grasshoppers exceeded 3 adults per m², very notable numbers for any habitat (Gardiner 2010a).

Pressing on into Old Warden village, the verges were coloured with Lady's Bedstraw on the way to the churchyard (TL 137443). The churchyard had a fair amount of long grassland, from which Common Green, Field and Meadow Grasshoppers were singing. On my way out of the churchyard I noticed a sizeable patch of Large Thyme *Thymus pulegioides*, which was proving very attractive to bumblebees such as the Red-tailed Bumblebee *Bombus lapidarius*.



Stripe-winged Grasshopper *Stenobothrus lineatus*. Photo by Fritz Geller-Grimm

From the churchyard gates, a green lane ran to the north. I hadn't recorded either the Oak *Meconema thalassinum* or Speckled *Leptophyes punctatissima* Bush-crickets, so I decided to use a stick with a road atlas as a makeshift beating tray. I quickly managed to dislodge the Speckled Bush-cricket, but the Oak Bush-cricket was proving harder to locate. After half an hour of beating I was on the verge of giving up due to the approaching cricket match, when I dislodged the oak bush-cricket from blackthorn in full sunlight. Therefore, I had managed to locate 10 species in a three hour morning walk. The Old Warden area (10 x 10 km grid square TL 14) was excellent for Orthoptera due to the scraps of heathland and unimproved grassland in the deer park. The ancient green lane provided scrubby habitat

for arboreal species such as the Oak Bush-cricket. An inspection of the National Biodiversity Network Gateway website revealed that the Slender and Common Groundhoppers (*Tetrix subulata* and *T. undulata* respectively) have been recorded in TL 14, while I observed the Stripe-winged Grasshopper *Stenobothrus lineatus* at the Old Warden Tunnel Nature Reserve in August 2011 bringing the total list for the Old Warden area to 13 species. Inspecting Andy Cherrill's excellent paper on the Orthoptera of central England (Cherrill 2010), it became clear that any 10 x 10 km grid square with more than 10 species was notable. Andy found that these species-rich grid squares contained a greater incidence of favourable habitats such as heathland and unimproved grassland with a lower proportion of arable land. Therefore, Old Warden's patchwork of Orthoptera-rich habitat should be highlighted in the study of Bedfordshire's insect fauna. Of the cricket match, we won easily, despite a late batting collapse. My contribution was taking the wicket which bowled Old Warden out, applauded by singing common green grasshoppers on the boundary's edge no doubt.

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Introducing: Inspector Tracey Day, Police Wildlife Officer



My name is Tracey Day, I live in a village in North Bedfordshire and have lived there all my life. I began my career with the police in 1993, working my first seven years at Luton, and to present date posted here at Bedford Police Station. I have always enjoyed the countryside, and am a keen horse rider, and currently have and compete three horses, so spend a lot of my time off outdoors. My upbringing was on a smallholding where I had responsibility as a child for various animal husbandry and have inherited my appreciation for nature from my mother.

My main role within Bedfordshire Police is running a response team of officers at Bedford attending and dealing with immediate 999 calls. I am also responsible for the care of detainees in the cell block and dealing with any inspector authorities in relation to the same.

Late last year Inspector Phil Cannings retired from the police. He was the force Wildlife Officer, and having expressed an interest in the role, I was asked by the Chief Constable's support officer if I would take on the role. I gladly accepted the role and attended the wildlife officers training course in Braintree in March 2011. Due to budget cuts it has been decided at present that I will maintain my response role and run the Wildlife Officer's role alongside.

I am in the process of trying to meet and greet working wildlife groups and have had the pleasure of meeting the Bedfordshire Badger Network, the Bedfordshire Bat Group and the RSPCA.

On my current agenda I need to liaise with the RSPB, Woburn Safari Park and the deer park management, and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo.

I am also trying to promote my role by having the Bedfordshire Police website updated with details about my role. Although in the early stages, this should be arranged in the near future. This will have my contact details and a message to the public encouraging them to call 999 for cases of immediate wildlife crime in progress, but to email or call me regarding other matters or concerns.

Current cases that I am trying to sort out are a better understanding for officers on how to deal with hare coursers, a bat disturbance issue, a deer shooting, deer poaching using dogs and a case of a Japanese Knotweed problem in Luton. There is also a wildlife crime which I cannot talk about at present due to it being at pre prosecution stage which has been keeping us busy.

I can be contacted by email at Tracy.day@bedfordshire.pnn.police.uk or by telephone on 07507 684331.

*I knew i should have
taken that left turn at
Alberquerque...*



50th birthday celebrations for Felmersham Gravel Pits

The first Wildlife Trust nature reserve in Bedfordshire — Felmersham Gravel Pits — is celebrating a birthday windfall. The £18,250 grant from Biffaward follows hot on the heels of the reserve's 50th birthday party in June, which was also the 50th anniversary of the Beds and Hunts Naturalists' Trust, one of the Wildlife Trust's original constituent parts.

The Felmersham at Fifty project will improve wildlife habitats and protect plants and invertebrates. We will improve and create new wildlife habitat. Practical work will include the following:

- Control of water soldier, an invasive plant which threatens to dominate native water plants in the old gravel pits
- New open water areas to provide habitat for dragonflies and damselflies;
- Improving woodland habitat and age structure through coppicing;
- Enhancing the wildflower rich meadows through grazing and scrub control. Conservation grazing helps to control dominant plant species in the meadows letting the smaller plants flower.
- New tools and equipment for the trusty band of volunteers who turn out in all weathers to help us with the management of the reserve.



Graham Bellamy, Bedfordshire Reserves Manager, said, "As our first reserve in Bedfordshire Felmersham already holds a special place in our hearts and now we can make it even more special and valuable for wildlife for the next 50 years."

Citrus Longhorn Beetle found in the UK

from Defra

The Citrus longhorn beetle *Anoplophora chinensis* is a serious invasive pest that is found in South East Asia. It is listed in the Plant Health Directive and a specific EU Decision is in place to minimise the risk of introductions and to control any findings. Citrus longhorn beetles can infest a very wide range of broadleaved trees and would be a major threat to horticulture and the wider environment if they became established. The larvae feed undetected on the inside of trees leaving them weakened and susceptible to further pest and disease damage. Most of the Citrus longhorn beetles that have been found to date in the UK have been associated with Japanese maple trees imported from China.



In May 2010 the Standing Committee on Plant Health agreed to strengthen the EU's protection against this pest, including a suspension (until May 2012) of imports of maple trees from China, the main source of findings of the pest in the EU. Import requirements remain in place for all countries where the pest is known to be present (China, Japan, South-Korea, North Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Myanmar).

Since July the Citrus Longhorn Beetle has been found in Rutland and Manchester. Defra is asking industry and members of the public to report any sightings of this insect. Additional information can be found online at www.fera.defra.gov.uk/plants/plantHealth/pestsDiseases/clb/.

Citrus Longhorn Beetle *Anoplophora chinensis*.
Photo by Paolo Gibellini

Identifying priority river habitat with species records

by Heather Webb

Over the last six years a fair bit of my work has focused on identifying and locating 'priority habitats'. These are habitats listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), and represent the country's highest priorities for nature conservation. Priority habitats are also enshrined in legislation, specifically in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This gives them a degree of protection so finding out where they are is an important job.

The current list of BAP species and habitats was released in 2007. At that time rivers were identified as a priority habitat. Unlike most of the other habitats it wasn't yet defined. Not all parts of a river are of equal quality so a method had to be found to identify which river reaches were the best and most in need of protection. Since then the 'Rivers BAP Working Group' of national specialists has been refining the definition.

In July 2010 a number of criteria were established for identifying BAP priority stretches of river. One of these is based on the presence and number of a list of species which strongly depend on good water quality. The species list is divided into 'A level' and 'C level' species. A level species most strongly depend on river habitat quality. Where these species occur, the river can automatically be designated as priority habitat. C level species are less dependent on river habitat quality alone. Where six of these species occur in the same area, the river qualifies as priority habitat.

Thirteen of the listed species have been recorded in Bedfordshire (Table 1). Three of these are A level and ten are C level species, and were used to determine which stretches of the county's rivers qualify as priority habitat. Records were plotted on a 1km grid square map of the county. Only records from 2000 onwards were used, which eliminated three species which had not been recorded since that time: Fine-lined Peamussel *Pisidium tenuilineatum*, Greater Water-parsnip *Sium latifolium* and Marsh Stitchwort *Stellaria palustris*. Also eliminated was Tubular Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa* which was more recently recorded but not along a river as required by the methodology.

Table 1 Priority river habitat indicator species recorded in Bedfordshire

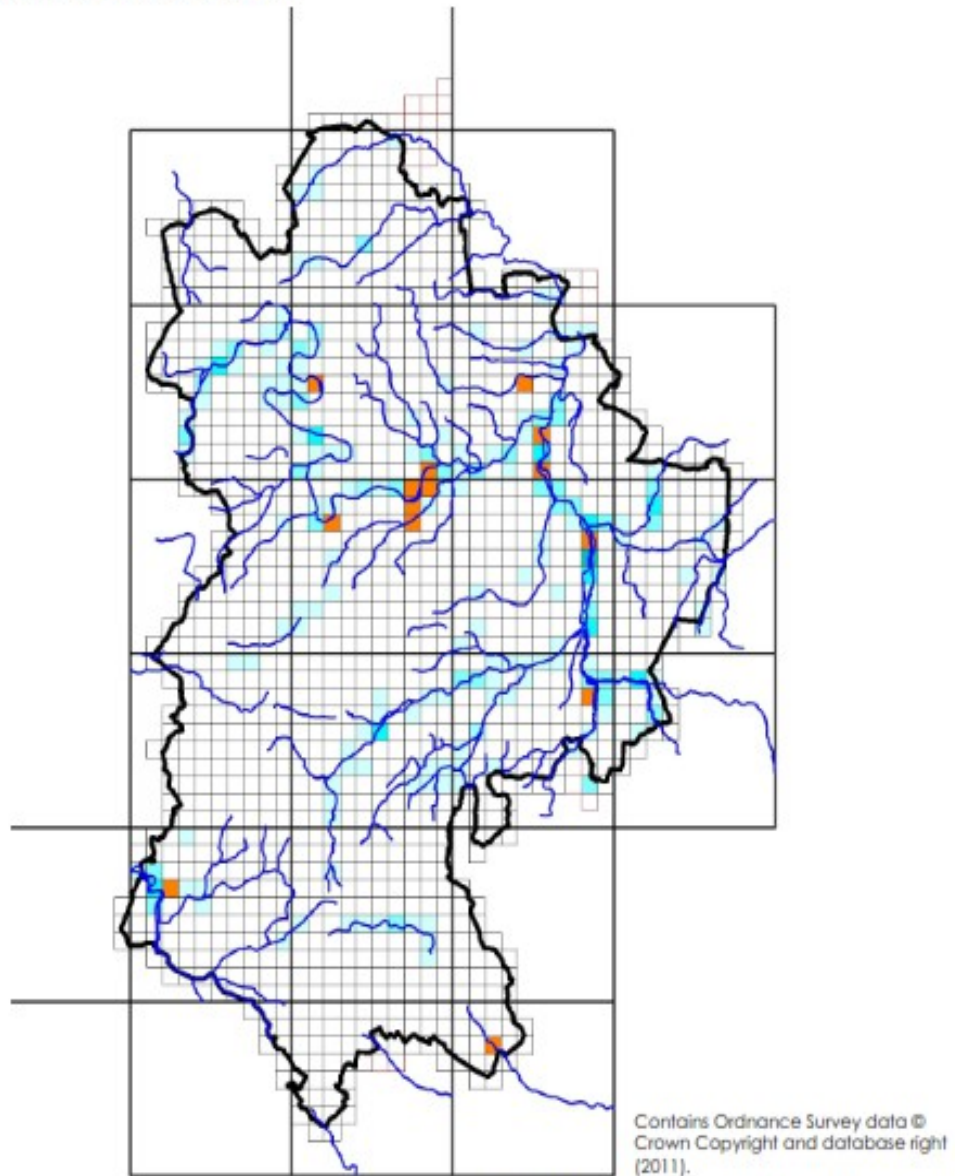
Criterion level	Scientific name	Common name	Classification
A	<i>Cobitis taenia</i>	Spined Loach	Bony fish
A	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Reed Bunting	Bird
A	<i>Pisidium tenuilineatum</i>	Fine-lined Peamussel	Mollusc
B	<i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	European Eel	Bony fish
B	<i>Cottus gobio</i>	Bullhead	Bony fish
B	<i>Arvicola amphibius</i>	European Water Vole	Mammal
B	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	European Otter	Mammal
B	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>	Soprano pipistrelle	Mammal
B	<i>Pseudanodonta complanata</i>	Depressed River Mussel	Mollusc
B	<i>Oenanthe fistulosa</i>	Tubular Water-dropwort	Vascular plant
B	<i>Salmo trutta</i>	Brown Trout	Bony fish
B	<i>Sium latifolium</i>	Greater Water-parsnip	Vascular plant
B	<i>Stellaria palustris</i>	Marsh Stitchwort	Vascular plant

A range of data sources were used, and based on the records found fourteen 1km grid squares were identified as having priority river habitat (Table 2). Each of these squares reflects the presence of one of the three A level species. There were no squares with records of six of the C level species; having said that there are doubtless squares where six C level species occur but simply have not yet been recorded. Figure 1 highlights priority river squares (orange) and illustrates the density of C level species records along the county's waterways (blues).

Table 2 1km grid squares in Bedfordshire and Luton with priority river habitat under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan

Grid ref	Location	Grid ref	Location
TL0155	River Great Ouse at Milton Ernest	TL1455	South Brook west of Chawston
TL0247	River Great Ouse: lower Kempston loop	TL1552	River Ivel at Cannocks Castle, Blunham
TL0747	Elstow Brook at Shortstown	TL1550	River Ivel at South Mills, Chilton
TL0748	River Great Ouse at Priory Country Park	TL1846	River Ivel at Lower Caldecote
TL0849	River Great Ouse at Priory Country Park	TL1837	River Hiz at Arlesey Rail Station
TL0749	River Great Ouse New Cut at Priory Country Park	SP9223	River Ouzel at Leighton Lock, Leighton Buzzard
TL0805	River Great Ouse at Goldington Road, Bedford	TL1217	River Lea at East Hyde

Figure 1 Density of indicator species for UK BAP priority river reaches in Bedfordshire. Orange squares denote priority river.



New publications

The Flora of Bedfordshire has now been published, following years of recording by Society members. This fantastic resource can be purchased for £42.50.

The order form is available on the BNHS website: www.bnhs.org.uk.

The Butterfly Isles by Patrick Barkham is naturalist Nick Baker's pick of the year for 2011. "The author seeks to see all 58 species of British breeding butterfly in a single year...the outcome is a well-written romp, true to the traditional eccentricities that are almost compulsory to those in the pursuit of these winged things." Sounds like a perfect gift for the lepidopterist on your Christmas list!

Upcoming events

Dec 26 Annual Boxing Day walk through Woburn Park. Meet at 9.30 am at the Woburn Town car park, SP950322, opposite the church. Leader: Mary Sheridan.

Jan 17 'Natural History of Sri Lanka' by Dr Wilf Powell. From a wildlife trip to see birds, dragonflies, reptiles and many other species. 7.45 pm at Maulden Village Hall, TL049381.

Jan 22 Day trip to Pagham Harbour and Selsey Bill, West Sussex for some good winter birding. Meet at 9.00 am in Pagham Harbour LNR car park, SZ856966. Leader: John Tomlin

Jan 28 The second **National Moth Recorders' Meeting** will take place at the Birmingham Midland Institute. The programme has been drawn up and the lineup features both amateur and academic researchers. Professor Gareth Jones from Bristol University's 'Batlab' will speak about how bats and moths try to out-wit one another in their predator/prey relationship. The registration fee is £5.00 and includes tea and a buffet lunch. Advanced booking is essential: to book your place please contact info@butterfly-conservation.org or telephone 01929 400209.

Jan 28-29 The **2012 Herpetofauna Workers' Meeting** will be held at the Telford International Centre, Shropshire. The event will include a full and varied programme of presentations and updates from ARGs throughout the UK as well as workshops to suit all interests and to inspire anyone with an interest in herpetology. Details and booking information are available at www.arc-trust.org/events/HWM.php.

Jan 31 'Facing Extinction - the World's Rarest Birds and the Race to Save Them' by Dr Paul Donald, Principal Conservation Scientist in RSPB's International Research Team. 8.00 pm at Maulden Village Hall, TL049381.

Feb 21 'Bedfordshire Hoverflies' by John O'Sullivan. The County Recorder for hoverflies tells us about these very attractive insects. 7.45 pm at Maulden Village Hall, TL049381.

Feb 23 Attention teachers! The second **Bedfordshire & Luton Environmental Education Show** will be held from 2-6 pm at ZSL Whipsnade Zoo. The event will give teachers and other educators a chance to find out what kinds of environmental education programmes are on offer around the county. Details to come but mark your calendars now!

Mar 18 Trip to the Brecks region looking for local specialties. Meet at 8.00 am in the lay-by off A1065 just past A11/A1101 Barton Mills roundabout, TL728743. Leader: Pete Marshall.

Mar 20 BNHS Annual General Meeting. Officers and Recorders will present their annual reports. 7.30 pm at Maulden Village Hall, TL049381.

Mar 27 'The Robin' by Dr Andrew Lack. The natural history of our national bird and its interaction with humans. 8.00 pm at Maulden Village Hall, TL049381.