



Wild About Beds

Spring 2013

Big declines among garden birds

Results from the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch survey 2013, released last week, shows that numbers of House Sparrows, Starlings and Song Thrushes, some of our best loved and most familiar garden birds, have fallen in gardens. These are three red-listed species of the highest conservation concern that need our help the most, so the RSPB is advising how to manage gardens to support them.

According to Big Garden Birdwatch results, since 1979 House Sparrow numbers have dropped by 63%, Starling numbers by 82% and Song Thrush by 59%.

The RSPB's Adrian Thomas, author of RSPB Gardening for Wildlife, said: 'Gardens can offer a real lifeline for wildlife. Just doing a few simple things in our gardens can mean the provide food, shelter and nesting spaces for birds, which are vital for the species that are struggling. Temperatures are still quite low across the country, so birds do need all the help they can get as we progress into the breeding season.'



Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*. Photo by Ray Kennedy (rspb-images.com)

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Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:



The Bedfordshire Natural History Society
www.bnhs.org.uk
Registered charity number 268659



BedsLife
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, 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 June 2013** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next Wild About Beds will be published in **June 2013**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

Ash Dieback

by *Graham Bellamy*

Following on from the article on Chalara, or "Ash Dieback" in the last edition, infected trees will show symptoms, and new infections will be apparent from June to October so look out for the effects of this disease on Bedfordshires ash trees.

Anticipating the possible damaging progress of ash dieback disease John Pitts thought it would be worthwhile making a photographic record of Bedfordshire's ash trees and the places they take in our county's landscape. John has started a flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/groups/2133021@N25/> inviting anybody to upload photos for posterity just in case the worst should happen. It would be helpful to record the date, place and 6 figure OS reference.

Have a go and photograph your favourite old ash tree or view of an ash wood. Let's hope the problem will not be as serious as is feared.

Further information and some videos to help identify the disease can be found on the web:

<http://www.fera.defra.gov.uk/plants/plantHealth/pestsDiseases/chalaraInfo.cfm>

The genetic code of the fungus and of ash trees that show resistance is currently being studied and may hold a lifeline for our ash woodlands.

An Easy Way To Raise Funds for BNHS

by Mike Bird, Treasurer, BNHS

Do you shop online? Did you know that every time you buy something you could be raising money for Bedfordshire Natural History Society?

That's right - over 2400 well known retailers including Amazon, M&S, Boden, Waitrose, House of Fraser, Vodafone, Virgin Atlantic and many more, will donate a percentage of what you spend to Bedfordshire Natural History Society! when you shop with them, via fundraising website easyfundraising.org.uk

An Easy Way To Raise Funds

It's like Nectar but instead of earning points, each purchase generates a donation. So instead of going directly to a retailer's website, go to [easyfundraising](http://easyfundraising.org.uk) first and choose the retailer you want to shop with – then everything you spend with that retailer earns a free donation for Bedfordshire Natural History Society. It's completely free to use and your shopping won't cost you a penny more.

On average, each retailer will donate 5% of the cost of your shopping - and those donations soon mount up. So whatever you need to buy, from your weekly grocery shop or fashion must-have, to your business travel, office supplies or mobile phone, buy it via [easyfundraising](http://easyfundraising.org.uk) and raise money for Bedfordshire Natural History Society at no extra cost to you!

Please register to support us when you shop online - <http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/bnhs>.

As the latest recruit to BNHS [easyfundraising](http://easyfundraising.org.uk) I was pleasantly surprised how genuinely easy it was to register and to then buy online products through the scheme.

Of Squirrels and Blackbirds

by Jenny Sprod

It has taken my husband Alan and me 30 years to come to a successful conclusion in the battle to make food available to the blackbirds but not the squirrels, but at last this has been achieved.

Our bird feeding regime began with a simple bird table, but we quickly established that this was inviting squirrels in to the garden, so an early prototype of the squirrel guards, now readily available, was created from compost bin lids. However, we found that blackbirds do not hunt for food much above ground level, so inverted hanging flower baskets were utilized on the ground. Once again, these were easily breached by squirrels (it is amazing what a small space they can get through) and were also probably an attraction for rats and mice, although we never saw any. Over the years we have accumulated a number of bird feeders all of which are inaccessible to squirrels — once we had tied down lids to the fat ball & fat cake feeders with wire — but without solving the problem of the blackbirds. At last I thought I had a solution in the form of a large plant-pot on which I placed a base for a bird feeder guard. I watched with dismay as a squirrel easily swung itself from ground level on to the feeder and through the bars.



The successful conclusion came in the form of a large carboy that I had rescued many years ago from the local refuse collection site. It is an original carboy for containing acid, much larger than the ones one sees in garden centres for bottle gardens, and this replaced the plant pot. It took several days for blackbirds to try it, and then only after I had slotted a stick through the bars of the feeder for them to perch on, but now they visit it regularly throughout the day to feed on suet pellets, dried mealworms, and a very popular robin mix. Robins and dunnocks are also regular visitors to the feeder and starlings have just discovered it, but although squirrels have inspected the area thoroughly and sat on a nearby low wall estimating whether they can jump the distance to the feeder, they have not made the attempt. Not an attractive adornment to our garden I admit, but then this is not our priority.

Nature Table – Artefacts and volunteers, please!

by Julia Powell

Artefacts

One of the main current aims of the Society is to increase interest among children and young people. Our Nature Table is in great need of replenishment. We would like to assemble enough material for two nature tables to be lent to schools and have more material for our stand to use at any shows/exhibitions to which we are invited. If you have young children or grandchildren, what would you like them to be able to see on our Nature Table?

As this is the time of year well noted for spring cleaning, we are asking all members to dig out natural history artefacts that they no longer want. Most of these should be robust enough for small children to handle, although it may be possible to organise seasonal displays that are more temporary e.g. fungi and berries, colourful leaves in the autumn. Birds, wasps and bees nests are often not used next year and may be found when cleaning out nest boxes or the garden shed ready for the coming year. We are hoping to mount delicate items in clear boxes and are looking into the possibility of embedding different types of poo in resin. Items do not have to be found only in Bedfordshire: we have a seal skull at present which gives rise to very interesting comments! A shark jaw has been donated recently too.

Please supply as much information about what the item is, where it was found, dates etc. and any other interesting facts with each item if you can.

- Does anyone have a connection to the Woburn Estate so we could have some more antlers or bones from deer carcasses?
- Is there anything interesting for which we could ask Whipsnade Zoo or Woburn Safari Park?
- Have you any suggestions of items that sparked your interest in Natural History that might inspire someone else?
- Can you suggest items to develop a theme that relates every day articles with nature e.g. wool production using raw wool, teasel heads for carding and felt as one of the finished products,
- Are Mammal Group members able to supply plaster casts of footprints or various types of mammalian faeces (please ask us first before donating!)? More nibbled nuts and pine cones are welcome too as are fur skins. The mink skin usually entices children to the table to begin with.
- Is anyone in the Bird Club able to give us nests or more feathers to build up a collection?
- Are there any bat artifacts out there we could have?

We are also looking for more

- Bones and skulls, antlers, tusks and teeth
- Conkers, acorns, sycamore wings, ash keys and any interesting seed pods
- Mounted butterflies and moths or even just the wings
- Cast insect skins, exuvia from dragonflies and similar, pupae cases
- Snail shells and pieces of shed lizard or snake skins
- Pebbles and fossils (Please check with your local archaeological society that these items are not more valuable to them first.)



Please bring items to one of the meetings or if you cannot get to a meeting, contact people listed below.

Volunteers

Is there a very helpful person out there willing to help be the kit custodian, to maintain, label and generally keep the kit in order? We are also in need of someone to coordinate bookings and transport the kit between schools and venues across Bedfordshire. Can you help?

Julia and Wilf Powell
Erika Pratt
Sheila Brooke

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Erika.Pratt@Greensandtrust.org
Brooke.se@btinternet.com

Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire

by Chris Boon

Richard Revels, Graham Bellamy and I would like to thank all members who turned out on a not very nice evening at Haynes Mission Hall on 30 January for the launch of the latest botanical project to survey the county's wild orchids. The objective of the survey is to publish a book about the wild orchids of the county in 2014. About 80 people attended and were introduced to the project by me. This was followed by Graham who outlined the excellent and easy to use software Adnoto for online recording which was developed by Keith Balmer – to whom many thanks. This can be found on the BNHS website www.bnhs.org.uk and clicking either on the Bee Orchid photograph or, lower down on the page, the Burnt Orchid picture. The last half of the meeting was the showing of Richard's superb photographs of all the species which are known to occur in the county plus those that are considered extinct. It would be good to refind one of these species!

As Richard showed with his photographs several orchids can be found during the winter because their leaves appear at this time. Several species have already been recorded this year and the data have been entered in Adnoto. These include Autumn Lady's-tresses, Bee Orchid, Burnt Orchid, Early Purple-orchid, Frog orchid, Green-winged Orchid and Man Orchid.

One of the most frequent species to be found in the county is the Bee Orchid which, incidentally, is Bedfordshire's county flower. The recent *Flora of Bedfordshire* showed that its distribution in the county has undergone a nearly three-fold increase since the 1970s. This was based on data collected between 1987 and 2006. For the new book we hope to include maps of the distribution at a scale of 1km square for records from 2000 onwards. The map for Bee Orchid shows the distribution for three time scales and clearly shows that the recent records, that is those recorded using Adnoto, appear to be new locations. Many of these records are from roadside verges which may not have been surveyed for the flora. If they had been surveyed during the flowering period it is possible that the verges had been mown! The map also shows locations showing records from before 2000 and these sites will need to be resurveyed.

All this indicates much field work to be carried out in the next two years before the intended publication in late 2014.

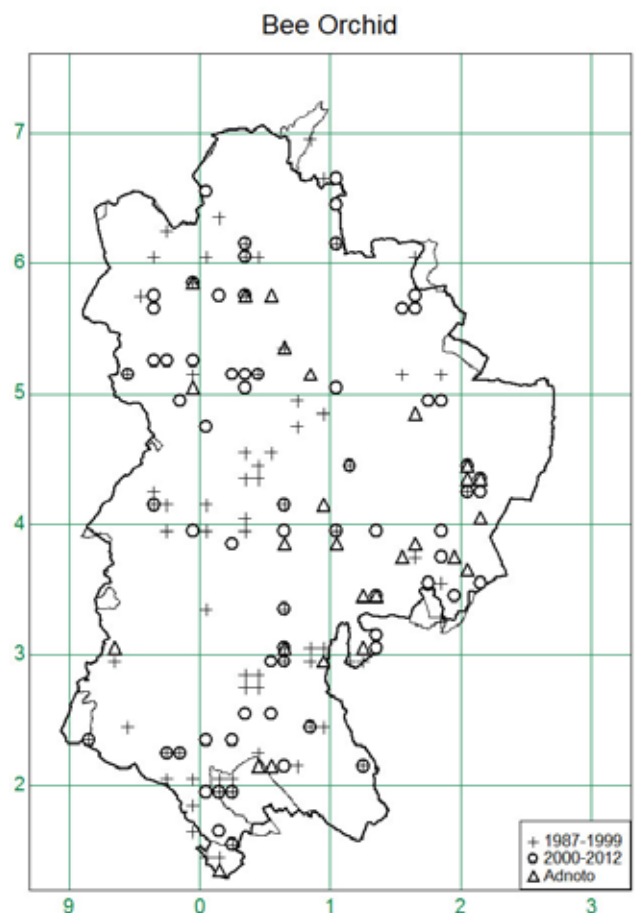
Good orchid hunting to you all!

Reptile and Amphibian Recording Forms

It will soon be spring and with the warmer weather will come the amphibian breeding season and the reptiles will be out basking in the morning sunlight. This gives plenty of recording opportunities. To make it easier to send in your records you can now find Adnoto forms for submitting Reptile and Amphibian records on the BNHS website.

I don't mind if you send in records as you acquire them or whether you save them up until the end of the year.

Helen Muir-Howie
Reptile & Amphibian Recorder

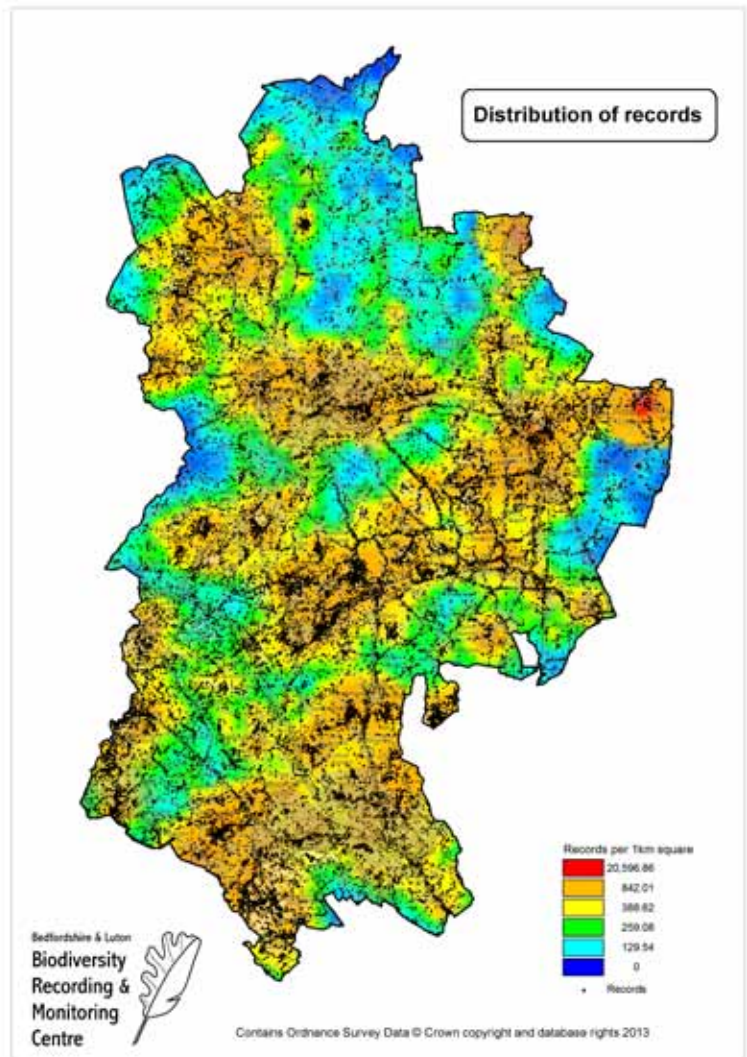


A million records mapped

by Keith Balmer, Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre

In *Wild About Beds* 162 it was reported that the BRMC had broken through the million record mark with the importation of a batch of records supplied by Andy and Melissa the macro moth Recorders. We were recently experimenting with different ways of mapping single species distributions using record density and wondered what would happen if we fed in the one-million-and-a-bit records that we hold now.

The process required creating a grid of 1km squares that covered the county and then counting the number of records whose grid references overlaid each square. (2km and 10km records were excluded from the process as being too imprecisely located for this task). The 1km totals were then fed into an algorithm that looked at surrounding counts and smoothed them into a sort of contour map that was then luridly coloured. This was then overlaid with little black dots showing all the records, each plotted at the centre of its grid square, then underlain with an Ordnance Survey map and finally trimmed around the edges to "Greater Bedfordshire" (i.e. the larger of the admin boundary and vice-county 30 boundary). The result is shown here. (Not so impressive when printed in small scale in back-and-white but the colour version will be placed on the BNHS website).



It's fascinating to study where we have mostly recorded. Popular sites stand out clearly as masses of black dots overlying yellow "high" areas, as do many of the major roads, sadly often recording the demise of creatures, especially mammals. The dark blue areas with their paucity of spots show the least recorded areas, mostly corresponding with intensive agriculture. (I wonder if we are missing any gems in these areas?) The red "Mount Everest" is at Cockayne Hatley marking the location of IanWoiwod's long running Rothamsted moth trap. When shown the map Ian said "it's easy, anyone can do it, just run a moth trap in the same place every night for 36 years and count everything you can!"

I hope you enjoy looking at the fruits of your labours. You were here, and here, and there...

Neglected Insects in Beds - Progress Report to end 2012

by Alan R. Outen

As you will be aware I launched this initiative in 2010 and in 2012 set up the Beds Invertebrate Group. The progress with some of the groups that I set out to target has been very encouraging though others are making less headway. In addition to the records that I and others have been generating, I have also been searching the literature for past records, a process which is still ongoing. Although I did not intend including them in this exercise I have received very many records for Coleoptera (beetles) and Hymenoptera (bees, wasps, ants etc.), mites and various others as well as inevitably finding specimens of these myself in the course of my own fieldwork. Where it has been possible to get these identified they have also been

databased. Please note however that Bernard Nau is our Recorder for Heteropteran Bugs, Colin Carpenter for Bumblebees, John O'Sullivan for Hoverflies and Wilf Powell for Weevils so do continue to pass your records and specimens for these groups to them.

I have tabulated below the numbers of species recorded for the county up to the end of 2012 for the groups that I had intended focusing on as well as others for which I have databased records. As you will notice in actual fact there have been more records of beetles than for any other group!

Group	Number of species recorded in Bedfordshire	Total species in UK	Total database records
DIPTERA 7035 spp [excl Syphidae 276 spp]	1203	6759	3127
'HOMOPTERA'	182	1194	310
PSOCOPTERA: barkflies	20	69	67
TRICHOPTERA: caddisflies	65	200	242
EPHEMEROPTERA: mayflies	15	51	69
PLECOPTERA: stoneflies	2	34	2
COLLEMBOLA: springtails	14	250	31
COLEOPTERA: beetles [excl weevils]	not counted!	--	3145
HYMENOPTERA: bees, wasps, ants etc [excl bumblebees]	not counted!	--	645
OTHERS: earwigs, fleas etc.	not counted!	--	62
ARACHNIDA: mites, ticks, etc. [excl spiders and harvestmen]	not counted!	--	32
MYRIAPODA: millipedes and centipedes	not counted!	--	87

Progress with Diptera, Caddis, Mayflies, Barkflies and the sub-order Auchenorrhyncha (within the artificial grouping Homoptera) has been especially pleasing.

The Auchenorrhyncha includes the froghoppers, leaf-hoppers, tree-hoppers and lace-hoppers and of these we now have 109 species recorded for the County of 397 in the UK. The other sub-order within the Homoptera is the Sternorrhyncha, which includes the scale insects and mealy bugs, psyllids, aphids and here we have just 76 species recorded of a total 797 UK species. Of 439 true Aphids in the UK we have just 33 confirmed for Bedfordshire, a major factor here being the lack of available help and literature.

A very considerable number of overall records derive from The Lodge at Sandy whilst the vast majority of the Diptera records are from the work of Jon Cole. Already there have been a few species of Diptera, Coleoptera and Collembola added during 2013.

Caddis

Progress on caddis has been especially pleasing from a very low start point. Most of the records have come from light traps and several garden sites have already produced very significant lists of species as well as some very interesting individual records. If others are willing to collect the caddis from their moth traps I would be very grateful. I can sort out the few that I can identify and then the rest go to Ian Wallace as National Recorder. He likes the specimens to go into 70% alcohol, one species per tube, as soon as possible and I can do this after sorting specimens out. Please supply your name, site, grid ref and the date for each collection. I will then ultimately let you know what species have been identified. Some people have very successfully sent specimens through the post live and



Chaetopteryx villosa, Duck End NR, 15 Nov 2012. New to county, collected and photographed by Alan R. Outen, identification confirmed by Ian Wallace

if these are identifiable common species I have then been able to release them. I can refund postages if you request this. This group had a very long season last year with the first records from early May to 17 December. My thanks again to those who have already contributed to this part of the project.

Beds Invertebrate Group

Despite the disappointing weather conditions last summer the Beds Invertebrate group held several excursions last year which by all accounts were enjoyable and productive. I will soon be sending out details of the first field excursions for 2013. If anyone else is interested in joining this group then do please let me know. No specialist expertise is necessary, just an interest in invertebrates, though clearly we greatly appreciate the expertise of many of those who are already members and more specialists would be especially welcome. We all learn from one another so do give the group a try. We currently have 26 registered members.

As I indicated at the start of this project I claim no specialist expertise in any of these groups but I have received a vast amount of invaluable help from the Coordinators of some of the National Recording Schemes as well as via the various Forums and websites to which I drew attention via previous issues of this Newsletter. I am exceedingly grateful for all their help and time given so freely and also to the increasing number of Society members who have supplied me with specimens and records. Without this the project could not have achieved what it has.

I am very grateful for all the positive feedback that I have received following my recent lecture. Those who were there will be aware that the Society has now agreed that we can proceed with the organisation of a one day conference on neglected insect groups. The intention is to invite some of the leading entomologists in the county in order to further encourage interest in these groups and greater understanding of how to identify the species. It is hoped that this will take place sometime in 2014.

Frances Davies (nee Woollon) 1947 - 2013

by Alan R. Outen

It is with deep sadness that I must report that Frances Davies died on 1 February 2013. Frances was for many years the Society's Recorder for Lichens and author of a popular guide to Common Lichens of Bedfordshire. She went on to become a leading authority on volcanic lichens around the world. She died of sarcoma which is rare form of cancer, from which she had been suffering for about eighteen months. It is hoped that an obituary will be published in the *Bedfordshire Naturalist* though it is probable that this will not get into the next issue.

Upcoming events

14 Apr Morning walk over Pegsdon Hills for spring migrants. Park and meet at 8.00am in the car park of the Live and Let Live Inn, Pegsdon, TL121303. Leader: Jon Palmer.

20 Apr Small mammal trapping at the Wildlife Trust Old Warden Tunnel Nature Reserve. Park and meet at 8.00 am in the car park in the track off Southill Road TL112444. *Please note: the meeting point is about 2km south-east along the road from the grid reference in the programme. The meeting point is at the crest of the hill.* Leader: Richard Lawrence.

5 May Annual Dawn Chorus in Maulden Wood. Hot fried breakfast to follow, price £3.00. Please order 7 days in advance with John Adams on 01234 381532. Meet at 4.15am in the lay-by at the top of Deadman's Hill on the A6, TL072394. Leader: Pete Marshall.

Recording woodlice?

If so then you're in luck: Keith Balmer has now produced an Adnoto form for the nine commonest woodlouse species. If armed with the Field Studies Council's The Woodlouse Name Trail: A Key to Common Woodlice and a hand lens even mere mortals can record these nine species while alive and enter the records onto Adnoto.

Get recording: there's a whole new world out there!