



Wild About Beds

Winter 2013/14

Two important new records for the Bat Group

by Jude Hirstwood

Bat group members had some real excitement when returning to Swineshead Wood in an attempt to catch a *Myotis* bat with the intention of identifying which species it was (*Myotis* are pretty much impossible to separate from sonograms). To our amazement and delight we caught instead a Nathusius' Pipistrelle. This is the first Nathusius we have ever had 'in the hand' apart from a single (dying) individual near Leighton Buzzard twenty years ago. One of the diagnostic characteristics of this species is its heart shaped penis.

We traditionally stop surveys at the end of September, but this year we ventured out on 6th October to look for autumn swarming at Luton Hoo. Autumn swarming happens just before hibernation and consists of bats coming to a specific point (often near a hibernation site) to look for a mate. This year we tried two different areas of the estate and had a very successful evening. As well as Daubenton's, Natterer's, Brown Long-eared, we also caught a Barbastelle. This is the first time we have ever caught a Barbastelle south of Luton, and caused much excitement. It was a great way to celebrate coming to the end of the main bat season.



The elusive Nathusius' Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus nathusii*. Photo by Bob Cornes

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Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:



The Bedfordshire Natural History Society
www.bnhs.org.uk
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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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Email: newsletter@bnhs.org.uk.

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 2014** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next *Wild About Beds* will be published in **March 2014**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

New Recorder of Spiders and Harvestmen



Wasp spider *Argiope bruennichi*.
Photo by John Pitts

Tom Thomas, an enthusiast on arachnids with a wealth of experience, has kindly agreed to become the Society's Recorder for Spiders and Harvestmen. In fact, Tom is returning to the role, which he held for the Society in the 1980s. His interest goes back even beyond that, into the 1960s, and he has a series of over a hundred notebooks recording and documenting his observations since that time. Tom lives in Luton, and has made his street a top hot-spot for arachnids, with some 150 species recorded there over the years: in fact, his house and garden is the best-recorded site in the country for these species! Of course, his activities are not confined to the town, and he acts as the Bedfordshire representative of the British Arachnological Society, as well as regularly travelling outside the county to do fieldwork, to give talks and lectures, and generally to spread the word about this fascinating group of creatures. Tom is an active Fellow of the British Naturalists' Association, whose ranks include such distinguished naturalists as David Attenborough, David Bellamy and Bill Oddie. As our Recorder, he will be happy to receive specimens from BNHS members, and to advise on all matters arachnological (see below for contact details). Welcome, Tom, and we hope you enjoy your new role!

Tom Thomas, 142 Selbourne Road, Luton, LU4 8LS. Tel: 01582 516992. E-mail spiders@bnhs.org.uk

Save money on microscopes and help BNHS

If you are thinking of buying a microscope or other optical instrument such as handlens or a magnifying glass then please take advantage of a new arrangement BNHS have agreed with the Norfolk-based One Stop Nature Shop. A link to this retailer's website has been placed on the BNHS website. BNHS members are eligible to 10% discount on any of the optical instruments on offer. Please note however this arrangement does not extend to binoculars or telescopes. If you find an item you wish to purchase then email treasurer@bnhs.org.uk or membership@bnhs.org.uk. We will then provide you with the unique discount coupon code you should enter onto the checkout page when you are finally purchasing the product. Alternatively if you prefer to place an order over the phone you can quote the discount code and still qualify for the price reduction.



BNHS will also benefit from any of your purchases because the OneStopNature Shop have agreed they will also send a 10% donation to our Society as 'cashback' following any purchase made through this scheme. By using this scheme your purchase will help you keep your costs down and will also provide some extra income for BNHS.

On the trail of the polecat- we need your help!

The Vincent Wildlife Trust has launched its next national polecat survey, to run from 2014 to 2015, and needs your help to gather up to date information on the current distribution of the polecat in Britain.



Polecat *Mustela putorius*. Photo by Joanne Goldby

The polecat is a native British mammal and a member of the mustelid (weasel) family, which includes otter, stoat and weasel. Polecats are generally dark in colour with a striking mask-like pattern of dark and light fur on the face. The polecat is closely related to the ferret and escaped or feral ferrets may breed with wild polecats to produce wild polecat-ferret hybrids, which are generally paler in appearance than true polecats. Polecats are mainly nocturnal and solitary and the most common evidence of their presence is the bodies of animals killed on roads.

The polecat population suffered a severe decline due to historical persecution and became confined to mid-Wales by the early 20th century. The population slowly recovered during the 20th century and polecats are now widely distributed in Wales and central England, with outlier populations in northern England and Scotland. This recovery was documented by distribution surveys carried out by The Vincent Wildlife Trust in the 1990s and 2004-2006.

The Trust is keen to receive any records of polecats, polecat-ferrets or feral ferrets, dead or alive, from anywhere in mainland Britain. Ideally, records should be validated by photographs to allow the animals to be identified. The Trust will also be collecting muscle samples from carcasses for genetic analysis, to investigate hybridisation between polecats and polecat-ferrets.

To submit records or for more information about the survey, email enquiries@vwt.org.uk or visit www.vwt.org.uk.

BNHS one day conference 15th November 2014

by Alan Outen

I launched the Neglected Insects in Beds initiative in 2010 to try and encourage interest and greater recording effort on groups of insects that had previously been under-recorded here. These groups include many attractive, curious and interesting species. Whilst historically they were often considered difficult to identify, the literature and resources available are now much better, and we should be taking full advantage of these if we are to meet the stated aims of our Society. In 2012, I started the Beds Invertebrate Group in order to further develop this project. Following my lecture to the Society on this subject in February 2013, the BNHS agreed my proposal for a one-day conference on this theme. A small committee comprising David Withers, Mike Bird, Sheila Brooke, John O'Sullivan and me has been meeting to facilitate this event.

The date for the conference is now fixed as 15th November 2014 so please note this date in your diaries. (The date has been selected to avoid clashing with key meetings of national entomological societies.) The venue is not yet finalised, but will be announced in the next Wild About Beds, together with further information. Future issues of the newsletter and the BNHS website will then keep you updated. We will be inviting specialist speakers from across the country, and it promises to be a really interesting day. This will be a great opportunity to learn more about some of the amazing species that occur in Bedfordshire, as well as other species that we should be looking for.

Considerable progress has recently been made in the recording of these insects in the county, and we have already made some very interesting discoveries, including of nationally rare species. The Beds Invertebrate Group held a number of very successful field meetings this year, and recording by individuals is also increasing. There is much more that can be done, and we would like to encourage you all to become involved. Even if you cannot identify such insects yourselves, online help, for instance, is now more available than ever before.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, and look out for updates in Wild About Beds and on the website.

Among the groups we hope will be covered are:

Diptera (two-winged flies)



Urophora cardui [Tephritidae], Thurleigh Airfield



Oxya parietina [Tephritidae], Clifton

Psocoptera (barkflies)



Mesopsocus immunis, Flitwick Moor



Loensia fasciata, Flitwick Moor

'Homopterous bugs'



Graphocephala fennahi [Cicadellidae], Sandy Lodge



Eurhadina pulchella [Cicadellidae], Flitwick Moor

Collembola (springtails)



Orchesilla villosa, Maulden Wood



Dicyrtomina saundersii, Stanford Wood

Trichoptera (caddisflies)



Limnephilus sparsus, Flitwick Moor



Agrypnia varia, Stockgrove Park

Photos by Alan Outen

*Have a very merry Christmas
and a safe and happy New Year
from Wild About Beds*

Oliver Pike book offer for BNHS members

by Rory Morrissey

James Sorbie of Castlepoint Press has made an offer on purchases of books in which Oliver Pike was involved and which may be of interest to BNHS members. In particular, there are two large and normally expensive books that he is willing to sell to members for £36 each post paid. These are:-

1. Oliver Rackham, 2003. *Ancient Woodland: Its History, Vegetation and Uses in England*, 2nd edition ISBN 9781897604274

NHBS would charge £84.99 for it. It sounds very readable.

2. JP Grime, JG Hodgson and R Hunt. *Comparative Plant Ecology: A Functional Approach to Common British Species*, 2nd Edition May 2007. ISBN 9781897604304

NHBS would charge £90 for it. It is quite technical.

If any member is interested, please contact James Sorbie by email (castlepointpress@aol.com) or write to Castlepoint Press, Colvend, Dalbeattie, DG5 4QB. He sends books by a signed-for courier but the day and place of delivery can be flexible. He would prefer to be paid by Internet bank transfer but will accept Paypal or personal cheque.

BB's Butterflies is the perfect Christmas gift for all BB fans and butterfly enthusiasts alike

Limited to 950 numbered copies *BB's Butterflies* tells the story of one man's passion for the 'elusive' Purple Emperor butterfly and his efforts to conserve 'the most regal of our British butterflies'.

True blue countryman and renowned naturalist 'BB' Denys Watkins-Pitchford (1905 – 1990) was bitten by the iris bug from a very young age. *BB's Butterflies* is a treasure trove of extracts from his many books and magazine articles featuring the Purple Emperor and other butterflies – and is profusely illustrated throughout with BB's own colour illustrations, distinctive monotone scraper boards and colour photographs.

Featuring a Foreword by Matthew Oates, the National Trust's specialist on butterflies and first-hand contributions from many who knew and supported BB in his conservation work, including Douglas Goddard, Butterfly Recorder for Northamptonshire, Badger Walker and Bill Humphreys, lifelong friends of BB and John McEwen, author and journalist.

"BB changed my life, for his book *Brendon Chase* helped set my path of direction. Sure enough, unravelling the mysteries of the Purple Emperor became my life's work," says Matthew Oates.

BB's Butterflies is hardback, 208 pages and £45 inc p+p. Order online at www.roseworldproductions.com/ to secure your copy or telephone 0121 704 1002. All books will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

A donation from sales will be made to Butterfly Conservation (www.butterfly-conservation.org/).



Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*. Photo by John Pitts



Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*. Photo by John Pitts

Woodworks at The Forest Centre, Marston Vale Country Park 8th & 9th September 2013

Photos and story by John Pitts



Our new display put together by Wilf & Julia Powell, using the recently acquired boards

The Society took display space at both days of this popular and entertaining local festival, the objective being to give the Society wider exposure in Bedfordshire. We hoped that this would not only increase our membership but also help start to decrease the present rather high age profile.

It was an opportunity to show off the interesting and colourful new display prepared by Julia and Wilf Powell and use the recently acquired display boards.

Luckily the weather was in our favour and we had enough volunteers on both days to allow us to rotate supervision so we could all enjoy the wonderful music and good food as well as view

some interesting displays.

As soon as the festival was open to the public our stand had a steady flow of interested public who enjoyed handling the nature table items, particularly the Mangy Mink which seemed to attract all the kids. We also had a lot of takers for the quiz that Wilf & Julia had devised, another cunning plan to harvest potential new members.

I can only speak for the Saturday team but I think we all agreed the day had been a success and at least our objectives partially achieved. Thanks must go to all the Society members who helped on both days.



Young people having a go at the quiz



Michael Bird (BNHS Treasurer) showing some of our book offerings



Sheila Brooke, Liz Millbank (Greensand Trust), Judith Knight and Ann de Winter

A change to membership renewal

by Mike Bird, BNHS Hon. Treasurer

In attempting to retain subscription fees at the current level for the seventh consecutive year, the BNHS Council are looking at alternative ways of reducing costs. One way to save money is by asking members to access their newsletters, *Wild About Beds* and/or *The Hobby*, from the BNHS or Bird Club website. Email messages will be sent to members to inform them of the latest edition when it is released on the website.

Members are asked on the renewal form whether they want their copies to be mailed to them by post or whether they are happy to access them from the website. All that is required is a simple tick in one box on the renewal form.

We hope that you will be satisfied with your newsletter in whatever way you choose to receive it.

Upcoming events

21 Jan 'Bats in Bedfordshire and Beyond' by Bob Cornes. At 7.45 pm, Maulden Village Hall TL048380. Chair: David Withers

28 Jan 'Birds and People: Bonds in a Timeless Journey' by Dr Nigel Collar of Birdlife International. A celebration of our relationship with birds by one of the greats of avian conservation. At 8.00 pm, Maulden Village Hall TL048380.

9 Feb Morning walk around RSPB Sandy Lodge for a variety of birds. Meet at 8.30 am in the gatehouse car park TL191485. There may be a car parking charge for non-RSPB members. Leader: Gen Carpenter.

18 Feb Update on the Bedfordshire Orchid Project and where efforts need to be directed for the coming season, by Richard Revels, Chris Boon and Graham Bellamy. At 7.45 pm, Maulden Village Hall TL048380.

18 Mar Annual General Meeting. Officers and Recorders will present their annual reports. At 7.30 pm, Maulden Village Hall TL048380.

25 Mar 'The Great Crane Project' by Roger Lucken, who has been intimately involved with the successful reintroduction programme on the Somerset Levels. At 8.00 pm, Maulden Village Hall TL048380.

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

27 Apr Early morning birding around Broom Gravel Pits for spring migrants. Park and meet at 7.00 am at the end of Kings Road, off High Street, Broom TL172433. Leader: Mike Burgess.

4 May Annual Dawn Chorus at Maulden Wood. Meet at 4.15 am in the lay-by at the top of Deadman's Hill on the A6, Maulden TL973394. Hot fried breakfast to follow, price £3.00. Please order 7 days in advance with John Adams on 01234 381532. Leader: Pete Marshall.

