



Wild About Beds

Spring 2016

Flit Valley Heritage Discovery Base opening soon

by David Sedgley

A new Flit Valley information centre will open soon, and will display wildlife, historical, geological and other local information. Sitting in the middle of the newly established Greensand Ridge & Flit Valley Nature Improvement Area the new barn will also feature examples of work by local artists while hosting workshops, exhibitions and educational events.

The barn is being named after local artist Jack Crawley, who recently passed away aged 92. In addition to being a superb watercolourist, Mr Crawley worked most of his life doing amazing technical illustrations. He had been a Spitfire pilot during WWII, a test pilot for the Meteor (Britain's first jet aircraft) and flew SOE operations in the weeks before D-Day.



The new Jack Crawley Memorial Barn, home to the Flit Valley Heritage Discovery Centre.

The Jack Crawley Memorial Barn will be officially opened at a celebration on Saturday 11 June: please see page 6 for more information on this great event.

In this 178th issue:

Contents

BNHS Mammal Group launches	2
Obituary: Betty Clutten	3
BNHS Conference: new details	3
Field trip: from elephants to micraria	4

Contents

Hunting plants at New Year	5
A barnstorming great time	6
Dissecting owl pellets	6
Upcoming events	7



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

Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:



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 2016** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next Wild About Beds will be published in **June 2016**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

NEW Bedfordshire Mammal Group

The new **Bedfordshire Mammal Group** is being set up with the aim of "the study and conservation of wild mammals in Bedfordshire". In order to achieve this aim it will:

- work to raise the awareness of wild mammals in Bedfordshire
- survey and monitor mammal distribution and abundance, and identify changes
- organise training in field identification and survey methods
- provide local knowledge and advice to help mammals in Bedfordshire
- work in partnership with other relevant groups, such as the Bedfordshire Bat Group and provide a forum for those interested in mammals in Bedfordshire

An inaugural meeting will take place on Wednesday April 20 at 7:30pm at the Greensand Trust Working Woodland Centre. If anyone is interested in coming please contact Amanda Proud or Richard Lawrence on mammal-group-chair@bnhs.org.uk or mammal-group-secretary@bnhs.org.uk

All welcome



A Hoopoe-eyed reader has pointed out that the moth on page 8 of issue 176 (Autumn 2015) is in fact a Six-spot Burnet Zygaena filipendulae. Thank you for the correction, and apologies for the error! —Ed.

Photo by John Pitts

Obituary: Betty Clutten 13th March 1926 – 27th December 2015

by David Anderson

Long-standing Bedfordshire Natural History Society member Betty Clutten has died after a short illness, at the age of 89.

As there are no family members living in the Bedfordshire area, it was only by the sharp eyes of Pat Baker, that a Funeral Notice was seen in the Luton News. Betty joined the BNHS in 1964, making her both one of the longest continuous serving active members and if not the oldest member, certainly near to that.

Betty was interested in a range of wildlife subjects and supplied records on them to the relevant Recorders. She attended both Indoor and Field Meetings, arriving in one of her distinctive white Minis, as well as the Yorkshire Dales Weekends that were held in the 1970s. Betty joined the Bat Group from its start and had renewed her membership for 2016. It was fitting that the cover photograph of Betty on the Funeral Order of Service, showed Betty holding her neighbour's cat and wearing a Bat Group fleece.



Betty was born in the same Luton house that she lived in for the rest of her life. She went to Luton High School for Girls, finishing as Head Girl and being classed as a 'high achiever'. She then trained as a teacher and taught Geography and Art at Challney High School and Stopsley High Schools. Away from work, Betty was an active member of a fiddle group and was a keen dancer with the Leasiders Folk Dancers. At Betty's funeral, her cousin recounted that the only concession Betty made to modern life was that she had a car and a telephone. Betty never had a radio or a TV, never mind a computer or an iPhone, but she did read The Times every day!

Betty was one of those quiet people who we all knew and seemed to have always been there, but actually never knew well. You and your smiles will be missed Betty. Continue dancing in a better place.

Remember, remember the 5th of November: BNHS Conference at Marston Vale Forest Centre

Following the success of our 2014 Conference the planning for our next one is proceeding well and is loosely linked to the Secrets of the Sands initiative, to promote the importance of the greensand for biodiversity. The format will be much the same as in 2014 with four talks in the morning and three in the afternoon. There will be a coffee/ tea break mid-morning and lunch will again be provided. The venue will again be the Marston Vale Forest Centre, which has plenty of good (free) parking and excellent facilities, and is easily accessible for those coming from distance.

We have another excellent lineup of highly acclaimed specialists with two talks this time on beetles, two on Hymenoptera (bees, wasps, sawflies etc.) and two on some interesting fly groups. The list of speakers (though not the running order) is as follows:

Weevils	Mark Gurney, The Lodge, Sandy
Ground beetles (Carabidae)	John Walters, Buckfastleigh, Devon
Bees, wasps and ants (Aculeates)	Rosie Earwaker, Bex Cartwright, The Lodge, Sandy
Sawflies (Symphyta)	Guy Knight, Liverpool
Robberflies (Asilidae)	Malcolm Smart, Wolverhampton
Soldierflies, bee-flies (Stratiomyidae, Bombyliidae)	Martin Harvey, Buckinghamshire
Spiders	Tom Thomas, Luton

We will again be inviting some well-known honoured guests.

Further details and a booking form will be in the next issue of *Wild About Beds* and on the BNHS website.

BNHS Visit to the Grant Museum of Zoology

article and photos by Sheila Brooke

On 11 January 2016 around 10 BNHS members ventured up to London to visit The Grant Museum of Zoology, which is the only remaining university Zoology Museum in the capital. It is part of University College London, within walking distance of St Pancras, Kings Cross & Euston stations and so easy for most of us. We had a short introduction from a member of staff and then were free to access the collection.

It is very small but houses 68,000 specimens — more than the Natural History Museum! It was established as a teaching collection for the new University of London in 1827 by Robert Grant. He was the first Professor of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy and collected specimens for his students to dissect and study. Some of the dissections on display brought back some memories for those of us who studied zoology in the dim and distant past!



Admiring the Dugong skeleton



Elephant skulls

The museum covers all aspects of Zoology from the very tiny organisms in the Micrarium, to the primates. One of the first exhibits is a large jar stuffed full of preserved moles and another containing bats! Adjacent to this is a beautiful display of glass models of invertebrates made by 19th Century Czech jewelers, Blaschka. Two rare skeletons that take pride of place are the South African zebra-like Quagga, which is almost complete and the Thylacine, a recently extinct carnivorous marsupial. There are skeletons galore including a 5m long Rock Python wrapped round a branch and numerous preserved bisected heads used for Comparative Anatomy. The Dugong is impressive and a gigantic ice-age deer skull is mounted at the entrance.

Other interesting specimens are too numerous to mention but this small museum is well worth a visit and those members who went found it truly fascinating!



Micrarium specimens



Thylacine skeleton



Please note: to reduce the risk of email spam being sent to contributors and others, '(at)' appears in email addresses in place of '@' in this newsletter. -Ed.

BSBI New Year Plant Hunt

by John Wakely

Over the past few years the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland have organised a plant hunt over the new year period. The idea is to see how many plants can be found in flower in a three-hour period over the new year. Because of this year's unseasonably mild weather and the prospect of finding more flowers than usual, I thought I would give it a go.

I have a natural antipathy to 'terms and conditions', so neglected to look up the rules, but decided I would be strict about the three hours and try to find as many plants in flower as I possibly could. I gave the idea a little bit of thought in advance, so that in the couple of weeks beforehand made a mental note of flowers I saw whilst walking the dog or cycling. As a consequence, I devised a 'cunning plan'. Three hours is not long if you have to include travelling time, and so, taking advantage of a break in the weather, it was 'on your marks' at the top end of Maulden Woods, on my bike, ticking off lesser periwinkle as I started my timer. In the course of a circular ride around the woods I started to develop a routine: remove gloves, put on reading specs, fish out GPS device and pencil, then scrawl note. Hazel, primrose, blackthorn and half a dozen others were added to the list. I was nearly home, ready for the next leg, when I found that the bright pink common storksbill that was in full flower the day before, wasn't there. Rabbit or muntjac obviously appreciate an unseasonal variety to their winter diet!

Twenty minutes gone, checking off chickweed, annual meadow grass, couch and several more weeds around the house, it was hopping in the car with the dog. Chris Boon had told me a couple of weeks before that moon carrot was still in flower on Knocking Hoe. I never need an excuse to visit there so it was off to Pegsdon. Wild plum and sweet violets were in flower beside Pegsdon Common Farm's drive. Clambering up the footpath, a couple of hiccups became apparent. Firstly, the chalky arable field we had to walk past and in which I hoped to find some arable weeds, had obviously been sprayed with weedkiller. Secondly, there was a flock of sheep busily enjoying the vegetation on Knocking Hoe — the best laid schemes of mice and men! There was no time to dwell on it, so, with dog in tow I managed to find a couple of moon carrot flowers and some other downland specialists, such as common rockrose and yellow wort. Despite the weedkiller, at the edge of the cornfields there were a number species in flower such as dwarf spurge and common fumitory. Then it was back to the car.

Noting the odd cow parsley plant on the road verges, we went via Water End, where the butterbur wasn't yet pushing up, (but the odd celandine was open) to the outskirts of Ampthill. I'd spotted a sheltered bank with several plants in flower the week before. The deer hadn't got there this time and I was rewarded with several 'ticks' including hedgerow cranesbill and bur parsley (both had been nipped off 2 days later). The next stop was Maulden recreation ground where, because of the pressure of time, Daisy the dog didn't get her usual ball chasing session, but where I was able to chalk up annual knawel (at it's only known current location in the county), and corn spurrey, both in full flower. Annual wall rocket, cat's ear and Canadian fleabane were blooming opposite the village store.

Back home with over two hours gone, Daisy had to give up her place in the back of the car to my bike and I was off to visit mother-in-law in Bedford. With the car parked on the outskirts, I cycled past a single flowering alexanders on the Ampthill Road. Eastern rocket and annual mercury were spotted by the railway bridge together with several other annual species flowering beside the footpaths by the river. There was just time to note black nightshade and ivy-leaved toadflax behind the courthouse before my timer pinged.

Cycling across town and on the car journey home, several more species were seen in flower, so I could have done better. However, on checking the record card later, I found that I had recorded 73 different plant species in flower on Jan 2nd over a period of three hours. This being my first attempt I am not sure how this compares to previous years, but suspect it must be exceptional, because of the mild winter. I will have to do it in future years to see if this is indeed the case.

Reporting the list to BSBI I was told that Bedfordshire was the only county in which moon carrot and annual knawel had been found in flower. It was also suggested that most people doing the plant hunt did a more thorough search of a small area! Perhaps next year I'll read the rules, but I certainly intend to have another go — it was good fun — much better than 'vegetating' indoors!

The Friends of Flitton Moor presents:

FAMILY BARN STORM

INCLUDING OFFICIAL OPENING OF NEW BARN

BY BARONESS YOUNG, PRESIDENT, WILDLIFE TRUST BCN

SATURDAY 11TH JUNE – FROM 12 TO 6.00PM

Featuring:

- Art exhibition – including Auction of some of Jack Crawley's watercolours, and other artworks
- BBQ from 1.00pm
- Themed guided walks & Nature Trail
- **DUCK RACE**
- Children's activities including pond dipping, willow creations, storytelling, weaving etc.
- Displays by local wildlife groups etc.



And much more on The Moor — look out for more info nearer the time.

Owl Pellet Dissection

by Sheila Brooke

On Saturday 6th February a group converged on the Working Woodland Centre at Maulden Wood to spend a morning investigating the eating habits of Barn and Tawny Owls. This was designed for children but in the event only two children were booked in. It is not only children, however, who enjoy this activity!

Mick McCarrick led the proceedings and explained how to go about it. With trays, soaked owl pellets, forceps and lenses in place, about ten participants were ready for business. I think everyone was surprised at how much is packed into a pellet of about 3-4cm. We found skulls of bank vole, field vole, common shrew and pygmy shrew along with leg bones, pelvic & shoulder bones, vertebrae, countless ribs and lots of other bits as well — everything the owl cannot digest and which is regurgitated. Everyone was amazingly quiet as they concentrated on finding as much as possible in their pellet.



It's amazing what an owl can pack into a pellet! Photo by Sheila Brooke

During the morning we had a prearranged visit from Three Counties Radio as part of their Treasure Quest and as a result we gained a further two children whose mum, driving nearby, heard about it on the radio and came to join us. Children were still outnumbered by adults but I think everyone large & small enjoyed the activity.

We hope to do this again sometime so look out for details and come along!!



Events Programme Winter 2015/16

Changes to the programme will be published on the website www.bnhs.org.uk or the BNHS News Group.

In bad weather, the leaders may cancel the event if conditions are unsuitable. Please check early on the day.

All indoor talks start at 8pm except the AGM which starts at 7:30pm and all are held at Maulden Village Hall (MVH), grid reference TL048380, post code MK45 2DP.

Parking is free.

Visitors are encouraged.

A small charge is requested for refreshments at the talks and possibly on other occasions too.

Donations are always welcome.

For field meetings, please wear stout footwear and warm clothing, bring a hat, water and sun cream if it is hot. OS Landranger Numbers 152, 153, 165 & 166 cover Bedfordshire.

REGRETTABLY NO DOGS ARE ALLOWED and children under 16 years must be accompanied by a responsible adult.

Unfortunately some trips will not be suitable for wheelchair users and pushchairs. Please contact the leader in advance if you have any concerns about accessibility.

Please check the web site www.bnhs.org.uk or join the BNHS News Group for the latest information.

(F) Particularly suitable for families and young people.

(L) Bring a picnic lunch for all day events.



Meetings organised by the ornithological section, the Bedfordshire Bird Club (BBC).

SATURDAY 16th April, HARROLD 2–4pm (F)

Pond dipping at Harrold Odell Country Park. There will also be quizzes, the nature table and a photographic display. Meet at the visitor centre car park, SP956566, MK43 7DS.

Leader: Sheila Brooke. 07905 949901.

SUNDAY 17th April, PEGSDON 8am

Morning bird walk over Pegsdon Hills for spring migrants. Park and meet in car park of Live and Let Live Inn, Pegsdon, TL121303.

Leader: Jon Palmer.

TUESDAY 19th April, MAULDEN 8.00pm

Talk “Yardley Chase, a local wildlife gem” by Jeff Blincow. The best recorded wildlife site in Northamptonshire. Learn about the history of the site and the future for this wildlife gem. See also visit arranged for Monday May 16th.

At MVH.

SUNDAY 24th April, BROOM, 7.00am

BBC birding around Broom Gravel Pits in the early morning for spring migrants. Park and meet at end of Kings Road, off High Street, Broom, TL172433.

Leader: Kevin Sharpe.

SUNDAY 1st May, MAULDEN WOOD

BBC event. **Annual Dawn Chorus** in Maulden Wood. Meet in lay-by at top of Deadman’s Hill on A6, TL072394. Hot fried breakfast to follow at 7.00am, price £3.00. Please order with John Adams 7 days in advance on 01234 381532.

Leader: Pete Marshall.

SUNDAY 8th May, POTTON 10:30am-12:30pm (F)

Walk in Potton Wood looking for Early Purple Orchids, Bluebells and other Spring flora and fauna. The wood, an SSSI, is ancient coppice woodland. Meet and park by the water tower, Potton Wood, TL247494. SG19 2EA (approx).

Leaders: Ian Woiwod and Graham Bellamy 07508 113186.

MONDAY 16th May, YARDLEY CHASE 10.30am–1.00pm (L)

Walk in Yardley Chase, once a Norman Hunting Park, now an SSSI. Military use has left railway tracks, glades and open pools in the forest utilised by a range of invertebrates and enhanced by their long isolation from intensive agriculture. Bring lunch if you want to stay on. From Yardley Hastings drive SSW for 2km to the end of Chase Park Road SP852548, NN7 1HF.

Leader: Jeff Blincow 07896 273604.

WEDNESDAY 25th May, SHUTTLEWORTH 10.00am (F)

Visit Swiss Garden for their Invertebrate Walk Day, a joint meeting with the Bedfordshire Invertebrate Group (BIG). The garden was created between 1824 and 1832 to represent an alpine scene. Enjoy walks through the grounds plus insect recording activities and help show off the nature table display.

Please book with Alan Outen to reserve your place: [alanouten\(at\)virginmedia.com](mailto:alanouten(at)virginmedia.com) or 01462 811374

Entrance fee will be waived for members that enter with the group at 10:00 prompt. Meet in car park TL150448, SG18 9EP.

Leader: Alan Outen.

SATURDAY 11th June, MAULDEN 9.30am–12.00 noon (F)

Visit Duck End NR for Small Mammal Trapping. Traps will be set the previous evening and we hope to see mice, voles and shrews close up before they are released. Limited parking at the site in Moor Lane, Maulden, TL051374. MK45 2DJ.

Leader: Mick McCarrick 07562 348766

SATURDAY 11th June, FLITTON 12.00 noon–6.00pm (F)

Visit the Family Barn Storm at Flitton Moor to see the grand opening of the new barn. There will be a BBQ, duck race, pond dipping, nature trail, an art exhibition and displays by local wildlife groups and more. Meet at the end of Brook Lane parking with consideration along Brook Lane TL058359, MK45 5EJ.

Leader: David Sedgley 01525 714961.

WEDNESDAY 15th June, CLOPHILL 7–9.30pm

BBC evening walk joint with BNHS around Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, Clophill looking for resident birds and other wildlife. The reserve is managed by the Greensand Trust and lies on the flood plain and northern slopes of the Flit Valley. Park and meet at the entrance gate to the reserve TL110387.

Leaders: Peter Smith and Sue Raven.

WEDNESDAY 22nd JUNE, TOTTERNHOE Evening

Visit Totternhoe Knolls, a joint meeting with BIG, looking for Stag Beetles and Noble Chafer. Very limited places. Please book with Alan Outen to reserve your place and obtain further details of the meeting point and time: [alanouten\(at\)virginmedia.com](mailto:alanouten(at)virginmedia.com) or 01462 811374

Leader: Alan Outen.

SATURDAY 25th JUNE, FLITWICK 10am-4pm (F) (L)

Visit Flitwick Moor SSSI for the Invertebrate Day joint meeting with Flit Vale Wildlife Trust Local Group recording invertebrates and other wildlife. The site is an important wetland with fen, meadow, wet woodland and peaty soils. Meet in car park at end of Folly Lane TL045354, MK45 5BW, off Maulden Road by Folly Farm.

Leader: Colin Carpenter 07751 356094.

If you wish to know more about any of the events please contact either Sheila Brooke [brooke.se\(at\)btinternet.com](mailto:brooke.se(at)btinternet.com) 01525 873396

Or Julia Powell [JuliaCPowell80\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:JuliaCPowell80(at)gmail.com) 01582 661328