



Wild About Beds

Summer 2016

New path and boardwalk for Houghton Regis Chalk Pit *from Wildlife Trust for BCN*

It was busy in the Chalk Pit early this year as a new surfaced footpath and timber boardwalk were installed. Both lie along existing paths and desire lines and will improve accessibility over all the seasons. The chalky terrain within the Pit can be very slippery when wet so the surfaced path provides a safe and firm underfoot surface for visitors. The new path runs over 2000m from the main entrance of the reserve, across the different levels and along the top edge of the old quarry to the north west corner of the site.

The impressive looking boardwalk spans just over 100m and cuts across the wet area that floods during the winter. The timber boardwalk enables this area to be accessed all year round, no matter what the water levels, and means visitors won't need to venture into more wildlife sensitive areas in an attempt to keep their feet dry.



Houghton Regis Chalk Pit, site of a BNHS visit on 20 August (please see upcoming events for details). Photo by David Winter

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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 Maulden; the Christmas Members' Evening is held in Haynes.

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, email membership@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.

Editor: Heather Webb

The Wildlife Trust, Priory Country Park, Barkers Lane Bedford MK41 9DJ.

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 September 2016** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

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

Where are our Bedfordshire Swifts?

by *Graham Bellamy*

For me seeing and hearing Swifts hurtling between buildings or spotted as tiny specks screaming high up is part of the enjoyment of a summer's day. It seems Swifts are declining, and I don't like it. They arrive in May from Africa, breed largely in houses and other buildings and leave again in August.

The BTO Bird Atlas 2007-11 (2013) although acknowledging that monitoring Swift numbers is difficult suggests that there was a 38% decline during 1995-2010. Certainly my local Swifts have declined to almost zero and in our own small village of Shillington I know locations where two colonies have gone. One was lost following the redevelopment of an old Peoples home the other when our next door neighbour did some work on the roof soffits to keep the starlings out of their roof. Swift Conservation (www.swift-conservation.org) believe that modern building techniques and materials used in roof repairs and in new buildings are excluding Swifts from their nesting sites. Space can be made in roof repairs to retain access for Swifts without compromising the upgrade or repair, also nest boxes erected to retain or attract new breeding colonies.



A swift *Apus apus* up close. Photo by Klaus Roggel

Myself and few other folk interested in Swifts want to help.

We would like to know more about where our remaining Swifts are breeding so that these colonies can be retained, through giving advice to the owners of buildings and alerting local authorities when colonies are threatened by building works. We are also looking at opportunities to reclaim some ground by giving advice to householders who would like to put up swift nest boxes and attract Swifts back to their neighbourhood. We have joined the Swift local Network (actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk) to help share good practise.

Already some Swift boxes have been put up, and working with RSPB staff, ARAGON housing association have agreed to provide swift access gaps on flat in Biggleswade where they were previously excluded after insulation work and the use of close fitting plastic soffits.

Please let us know the location of Swifts entering and leaving buildings, failing that tell us where you see Swifts flying low around buildings. They often do this while calling or screaming. There is a recording form on the Bedfordshire Birds (bedsbirdclub.org.uk/) where you can find the Swift survey form with the House Martin survey information under Research Projects (bedsbirdclub.org.uk/house-martin-survey/).

If you have not tried it enter the location of your Swifts as a Grid Reference that can be found from using 'Grab a Grid Reference' on the BNHS web page (www.bnhs.org.uk).

Has your local church got Swifts?

Following work by the Hampshire Swift Local Network we are interested in finding out if Bedfordshire churches are used by breeding Swifts. Judith Evans has contacted the St Albans Diocese and they would be pleased to know of any churches where Swifts are so that they can be accommodated during any roofing works.



Swifts over Shillington. Photo by Graham Bellamy

Please visit your local church before August and let us know if Swifts are using it (while you are there please record if House Martins are there as well). Please also let us know if no Swifts were found: it all adds to our knowledge and may prevent a wasted trip by someone else. Do go and have a look.

Good hunting.

We will share all our records with the RSPB (www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/discoverandlearn/birdguide/name/s/swift/ and [swifts\(at\)rspb.org.uk](mailto:swifts@rspb.org.uk)) who are working up a national survey of Swifts and also with BirdTrack.

Marston Vale bird hide targeted by vandals — twice in one week
as reported by Jenna Huber in Bedfordshire on Sunday 25 May 2016

Workers at the Forest of Marston Vale centre, which operates as a charity, discovered the windows of their Tower Hide for birdwatchers had been smashed and benches ripped out on 19 May. On 22 May, one of the nature reserve's rangers became distraught after discovering a teenager trying to set the hide on fire.

Hoopoe says if you'd like to contribute towards the cost of repairing the FMV bird hides text TREE31 £x (type amount you'd like to donate in place of x) to 70070.



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.

Traditional buildings as ecosystems with spiders as biocontrol for woodworm
by Charles Hippisley-Cox, reproduced with permission of the author. Introduction by Graham Bellamy

Here's an interesting article from *The Bulletin of The British Ecological Society*. The "Daddy Long Legs" spider (*Pholcus phalangoides*) is fairly commonly encountered in our part of the world. I have good numbers in my house...and now won't worry about having so many anymore and have a ready story for those who might ask about them!

The following is a shortened version taken from Charles' article with his permission, with minor changes by me and I apologise if I have introduced any errors.

* * * * *

"A recent case study presents an intriguing possibility of using spiders to control woodworm populations rather than potentially dangerous chemical and sprays. The life cycle of the woodworm *Anobium punctatum* can involve a long spell in the wood before the adults emerge. The introduction of a population of hungry spiders as the beetles emerge could break the woodworm life-cycle by predateding the adult beetles before they mate and lay eggs.

In Charles' study he observed what prey was taken by a population of *Pholcus* over five years during repairs to a building. The property had been comprehensively treated for woodworm with permethrin in 2005. All signs of life were eradicated, or so it seemed, but by the following year it was clear that the woodworm has survived with beetles emerging in large numbers in the spring. After spraying there was a conspicuous absence of spiders with the exception of one or two ghostly *Pholcus* apparently missed by the spray.

Pholcus phalangoides misleadingly shares the common name "Daddy Long Legs" with crane flies and harvestmen. "Cellar Spider" is a better vernacular name, but they are by no means restricted to cellar-living, being happy to live under furniture, in cupboards or, most conspicuously, in top corners of rooms where they hang in an upside-down position supported by spider silk. Another popular name is the "Vibrating Spider" as they seem to oscillate when startled. The vibrating also forms part of their mating rituals after which the males usually die. Males rarely live for more than a year but females can live for three years and usually have a considerable number of mates.



The Cellar Spider *Pholcus phalangoides*.
Photo by Graham Bellamy

It is thought *Pholcus* are not native to Northern Europe where they are generally restricted to living indoors. They dislike cold draughts and rapid temperature fluctuations, preferring average temperatures in the region of 8-10 C. They have relatively small bodies: females have a body length of about 9mm with males slightly smaller. However, their legs are 5 to 6 times the length of the body reaching up to a 7 cm leg span in mature females.

Their webs are untidy and lack the regular geometry or funnels of other species and the webs do not normally act as effective traps as *Pholcus* prefers to actively seek out their prey. Their webs are essentially a base from which to hunt and a place for the eggs to hatch. The silk is flicked from their spinnerets at a potential victim before closing in and injecting venom; fresh catches are bundled up in silk before being sucked dry. They even hunt other species of spider including the large house spiders (*Tegenaria sp.*) which can be up to ten times their weight. They are harmless to humans their fangs being too small to penetrate our skin.

The spider population can grow rapidly when prey is abundant. A good food supply stimulates egg production and mating which can take place at any time of year. The female holds as many as 30 eggs in a silk net between her jaws. When hatched the young are transparent and share the web with their mother before moving away and becoming independent. If food is in short supply the mother will eat the young and spiderlings may eat each other, with the slightly smaller males being more vulnerable. The spider

population is therefore self regulating and will decline when food becomes scarce.

The case study

Four unoccupied rooms in a traditional building were monitored over a five year period. In 2006, the main prey of the small population of *Pholcus* was the large number of emerging woodworm beetles that had been untouched by chemical treatment in 2005. In response to this abundant food source, the few spiders reproduced rapidly, resulting in around 75 adults by the following spring. The spiders decimate the woodworm population: approximately 400 beetles were observed caught and wrapped in silk bundles. The subsequent decline in woodworm during 2008 and 2009 confirmed that they were being eaten, if not before mating then certainly before they were able to lay eggs.

Once the rich food supply of beetles started to wane, the *Pholcus* population began to decline, despite the reappearance of house spiders as alternative prey. By 2011, only ten adults remained and most spiderlings were being ingested by their mothers.

This case study presents an intriguing question – whether it is possible to produce spider colonies that can be supplied to home owners wishing to use a more environmentally friendly was to eradicate woodworm.”

* * * * *

I like this study as it shows what anyone can do by observing the wildlife in our own home. Charles sees a more formal study is needed to confirm the findings. For instance a control study in a building not treated for woodworm would be instructive.

Happy spider watching!



Although there are still five months to go to the conference we are already getting so many enquiries both from within and out of county we had to go ahead and make the booking form available online via the BNHS website.

A poster and flier have been prepared and are in the process of being printed. As for our previous event these will be sent out countrywide, so early booking is advised. We will again be limited to 100 delegates.

Some key details and a booking form are appended below but for list of speakers, further details etc. see BNHS website at <http://www.bnhs.co.uk>



Amazing Insects and Spiders in Beds - Some Neglected, Others Not
Another Bedfordshire Natural History Society Conference
of interest to specialists and enthusiastic naturalists alike.

Venue: The Forest Centre, Millenium Country Park, Marston Moretaine, MK43 0PR ,
Date: Saturday 5 November 2016 Open at 09:30 for 10:00 prompt start – finish at 16:00hrs
Entrance: £15 for BNHS & Bird Club members, £20 for non-members.

This fee includes all refreshments and cold buffet lunch. Note ticket price is NON-REFUNDABLE

Please complete and tear off the application form below and return with a cheque to:
Mike Bird, Treasurer, BNHS, 69 Cotefield Drive, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 3DN

BNHS Conference - Change of Speaker

an update from Alan Outen

Unfortunately Guy Knight, Curator of Entomology at Liverpool Museum, is now very ill so unable to give us a talk on sawflies at the Conference. I therefore contacted Andrew Halstead, who has agreed to take over the sawfly presentation. As some of you may be aware Andrew is retired former Principal Entomologist for the RHS and another sawfly specialist, with an excellent reputation as a speaker and author, so we are lucky to have such a high profile replacement.

Assistance required please

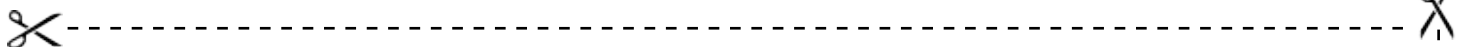
by Helen Gebler



The YounGnats working group would welcome some additional assistance in its aim to equip the young people of Bedfordshire as naturalists.

We currently meet about 4 times a year and produce 3 newsletters for YounGnats members to provide them with seasonal activities for their school holidays. We also support BNHS members at some events particularly those advertised as 'family friendly'. We are constantly looking for ways to facilitate the society's engagement with young people.

If you have ideas that would inspire young people about wildlife or you are able to enthuse them on wildlife topics please consider joining the YounGnats working group. To find out more contact Helen Gebler at [helen.gebler\(at\)bnhs.org.uk](mailto:helen.gebler@bnhs.org.uk)



Amazing Insects and Spiders in Beds - Some Neglected, Others Not
conference booking form

Please send me [] Conference ticket(s). I enclose a cheque, made payable to Bedfordshire Natural History Society for the sum of £

I understand that the ticket price is non-refundable (Please tick)

Please name all the delegates below or on a separate sheet

Delegate 1 Name: _____ Tick if BNHS member

Delegate 2 Name: _____ Tick if BNHS member

Address to which tickets should be sent:

_____ Post code: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

Please indicate if you have special dietary requirements: _____



Events Programme Summer 2016

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

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

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 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.

SUNDAY 10th JULY, WICKEN 10:30am (F) (L)

Visit to Wicken Fen NR for Dragonflies and other wildlife. Normal entry fees apply for non-National Trust members. A guided walk and/or a boat trip are available if you would like to go as a group or you can book independently in advance. For details of options, costs and booking, please contact Sheila Brooke as soon as possible [brooke.se\(at\)btinternet.com](mailto:brooke.se(at)btinternet.com) or 01525 873396.

WEDNESDAY 13th JULY, SHEFFORD 10:30am-12:30pm

Visit to Chicksands Wood for butterflies such as White-letter Hairstreak, Purple Emperor, Silver-washed Fritillary and any other wildlife we can see. There is limited parking at Appley Corner TL106410, MK45 3QQ
Leader: Wilf Powell 07958 161938

SUNDAY 17th JULY, OXFORD 9am 

BBC Day trip to RSPB Otmoor Reserve, Oxfordshire for mainly wetland species. Meet in the reserve car park, SP570126. Leader: Mike Bird

WEDNESDAY 20th JULY, MAULDEN 7-9pm (F)

Visit Duck End NR in the evening for the abundant wildlife at this small, varied reserve. There is limited parking at the site in Moor Lane, Maulden TL051374, MK45 2DJ. Leader: David Withers 07785 573650

SATURDAY 30th JULY, FLITTON 10:30am-12:30pm (F)

Visit Flitton Moor to look for Dragonflies and other water related animals and plants. Meet at the end of Brook Lane. Please park with consideration for the residents along Brook Lane TL058359, MK45 5EJ.
Leaders: David Sedgley 01525 714961 and Rory Morrisey

SUNDAY 14th AUGUST, BEDFORD 7:30am sharp 

BBC Morning birding around Priory Park, Bedford including a bird ringing demonstration by Ed Green. A chance to see a variety of species in the hand. Meet in Priory Park visitors' centre car park at 7:30am sharp. Ringing subject to acceptable weather conditions. Leader: Dave Kramer

SUNDAY 14th AUGUST, HEATH & REACH 11am-3pm (F)

Rushmere Summer Fair. Visit the BNHS stand to see the Nature Table, photographic displays and quizzes. There will be other craft stalls and sideshows. For further details see the Greensand Trust web site www.greensandtrust.org. Park in the Rushmere car park, SP912284, LU7 0EB. Parking £2.00. Leader: Julia Powell 07958 161938.

SATURDAY 20th AUGUST, HOUGHTON REGIS 10am-12.30pm (F)

Visit Houghton Regis Chalk Pit to look at the Geology and wildlife. You will be able to see some Bedfordshire fossils after the walk. Please wear stout footwear as the ground is undulating and uneven. In Houghton Regis, turn off the B5120 at the junction with Lake View Road. Park with consideration for the residents in Lake View Road, TL013233, LU5 5GJ. Meet near the entrance to Dunstable Angling Club.
Leaders: Beth Aucott and Janet Munro 07585 90882

WEDNESDAY 24th AUGUST SUNDON, 10am-12.30pm

Visit Sundon Chalk Quarry SSSI, joint meeting with BIG, looking for the Chiltern Gentian, dragonflies, butterflies and other wildlife. There is limited parking at Common Lane TL044277, LU3 3PF. Leaders: Sheila Brooke 07905 949901 and Alan Outen

THURSDAY 8th SEPTEMBER, AYLESBURY 1:30pm

Visit behind the scenes at St Tiggywinkles Wildlife Hospital. Group tour behind the scenes includes a talk and a slide show. You will be able to see hedgehogs up close. Visit the museum, outdoor educational trail and shop. Fee depends on numbers but will be no more than £7. Book your place with Julia Powell by August 7th [JuliaCPowell800\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:JuliaCPowell800(at)gmail.com) or 01582 661328.

TUESDAY 20th SEPTEMBER, MAULDEN 8pm

Talk "British Collaboration with Moroccan Botanists" by Dr Stephen Jury, Reading University Herbarium Curator, who first visited Morocco in 1974. His work with Moroccan botanists has enabled him to travel much of the country. This has resulted in a great collection of plant and landscape images. At MVH.

SUNDAY 25th SEPTEMBER, BEDFORD 10am-12.30pm (F)

Autumn walk round Priory Country Park observing the varied wildlife. Meet at the visitor centre car park, TL072493, MK41 9DJ. Leader: Sheila Brooke 07905 949901.

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