



Wild About Beds

Winter 2016/17

Gourmet grub for giraffes

Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire

A happy union has been forged between vital conservation work in the north of Bedfordshire and the dietary needs of grazing animals at ZSL Whipsnade Zoo. Tender shoots and twigs, known as browse, provide additional food for some species, while logs and branches become playthings and bedding for others, serving to enrich their environments.

Logs, branches and leaves have been cut recently at Galsey Wood. On arrival at the zoo the leafy branches are hung for the animals to browse; volunteers have also been packing barrels of silage from the trees as winter feed.



Photo courtesy ZSL Whipsnade

Laura Downton, Bedfordshire Living Landscape Manager said: "Thinning and coppicing some of the trees allows them more space, and sunlight can reach the woodland floor to encourage flowers to grow and an understory to develop. This will provide a haven for all manners of wildlife. We get the woodland managed and the giraffes and other animals get nutritious fresh branches to eat!"

In this 181st issue:

Contents

Oxford Museum: don't forget!	2
Highlights from Autumn	3
Wildlife in the dark	4

Contents

Bedfordshire gardens for science	5
2015 Bedfordshire Bird Report is out!	6
Upcoming events	7

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 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 March 2017** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next Wild About Beds will be published in **March 2017**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

Visit to Oxford Museum January Monday 23rd January



Don't forget!

We will be having a private tour and there will be a charge of £8. Please remember to book your place and find out full details before January 14th when numbers have to be given to the Museum. Contact Julia at either [Juliacpowell800\(AT\)gmail.com](mailto:Juliacpowell800@ATgmail.com) or 01582 661328.



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.

Autumn Highlights 2016

by Julia Powell

Apple day at Bromham Mill October 16th

It needed some doughty volunteers to set up the stand as the heavens opened in the morning. But the challenge was met by Sheila, Sue, Helen and Mike. By the time Wilf and I got there everything was set out and the weather was clearing and the day ended with a nice afternoon. Numbers were down this year as the event had not been well advertised but as a lot of visitors are regulars this did not seem to matter.

Surviving Antarctic Extremes October 18th

We had heard that Lloyd Peck was an exceptional speaker and our efforts to encourage as many people as possible to attend were not in vain. We were given a demonstration about how temperature affects us and shown the clothing required (at least 6 layers) to survive in such extreme conditions as found in the Antarctic. Then we were presented with some stunning pictures of some of the animals that live there without any clothing at all! Though penguins have very thick layers of very short feathers.

Fungal Foray, Sandy October 29th

Again this was a very well attended event held jointly with the Herts and Beds Fungi group.

Conference November 5th

If possible, this was even more successful than the first one two years ago. Well attended and oversubscribed, we knew it was a success when delegates were talking of what they would like at the next one, before the day was half over. Well done and thank you to all involved in making this such a success (and there were many people who carried out small tasks that enabled the day to run very smoothly indeed).

Linslade Water Recycling Education Centre November 14th

A group of about ten people braved another grey day but were welcomed very warmly. We came away with three very important messages:

Do not flush cotton buds down the toilet if they have plastic sticks. They can get a long way into the system and gum up the works at every stage. There is now a move to force manufacturers to make the sticks from paper so they will degrade and you can do your bit by buying these instead. Some major brands have already changed their practice.

Wipes of any sort do not degrade when flushed away even though they are marketed as disposable. Bin them instead.

Wrap up your fats and oils in absorbent paper and send to landfill. If flushed down the sink, they solidify in the sewer near your house or leak in the refuse lorry if not wrapped.

Alien species: the Good , the Bad and The Ugly November 15th

Professor Helen Roy, who did her PhD at Rothamsted is a very enthusiastic speaker, passionate about ladybirds in particular and citizen science in general. She gave us an insight into the work she is doing but also raised a lot of questions about alien species, most of which do no harm and some are even beneficial.

Rushmere Christmas Fair December 4th

Our stand was popular throughout the day with a new quiz mainly for the children but we managed to persuade a few adults to participate too.

Members Evening December 8th

The festive food was abundant and varied as was the mix of photographs and videos show off by the members themselves. Some people had some amazing wildlife encounters this year and were pleased to share the experience with us all.

Watching wildlife at night

by Steve Thompson, Greenkeeper, John O Gaunt Golf Club

When you're out down the park, in your garden or down the golf course, wildlife is all around and can be very obvious. You might see some Blue Tits on the garden bird feeder, butterflies on the *Buddleia*, some ducks down the park, a deer running through or even winter thrushes feeding on the rowan berries whilst you play a round of golf. Wildlife is everywhere but just because you can't see it doesn't mean it's not there. Wildlife is active at night too and your first sign that an animal has been about is probably footprints or even poo.

Badger footprints are quite big (up to 65mm across) have 5 toes, long claws and a broad rear pad, Fox footprints are smaller and narrower and more diamond shaped, Rabbit is generally oval with 5 toes (only 4 show in print) like squirrel which shows 5 toes on its rear feet and 4 toes on the front feet. Otter has large webbed feet approx. 60mm x 90mm with claws rarely visible but longer rear feet & slightly shorter front feet. Deer have cloven hooves ranging in length from 30-90mm, the males of any deer species have larger prints than females and young.

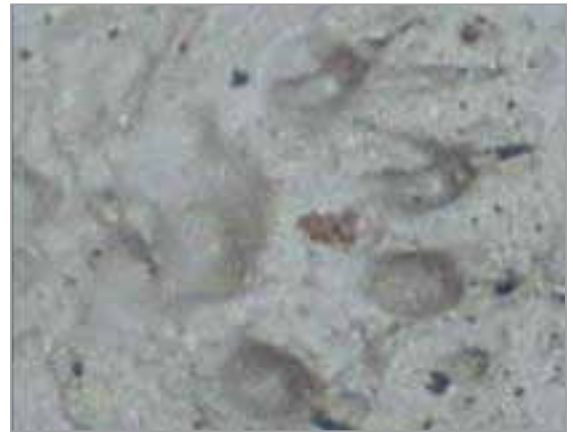
Badger poo is usually left in pits called latrines and is quite variable depending on diet, has a musky smell, can be sausage shaped or semi liquid, brown, black or even yellow or purple depending on what it has eaten, Fox poo is very smelly, usually dark slimy looking, soft in texture and tapered, Rabbit droppings are bullet like, quite hard and light in colour, Deer droppings is like rabbit but darker and shiny and often in clusters. In Otter spraint, the prey is usually quite visible bound together in a tarry black mucus with a distinct sweet odour and becomes paler and crumblier over time.

But how do you see the animal concerned whilst your tucked up in bed?

The answer is to use a trail camera, you can set it up and leave it overnight or for a few days and anything that walks in front of the camera triggers the sensor. There are numerous makes and models and at quite varying prices. I have used 2 on the golf course (John o Gaunt) near Potton with excellent results. One is an Acorn - model 5310A (720p video & 12mp cam) priced around £100 at the lower end of the market, the other I have is a Bushnell Trophy Cam Aggressor. (14mp cam and 1080p HD video) priced around £200.



Spraint of the John O Gaunt otter. Photo by Steve Thompson



Footprints in the clay. Photo by Steve Thompson

The Acorn has been good as an entry level first trail cam and has captured great footage of Badgers by the sett, fox and Muntjac Deer but the Bushnell is far superior in having full HD video and slightly better camera offering clearer higher quality photos and video.

I only got this camera towards the end of August but it has already given me 100% proof of an animal that we had only previously only seen signs of. My records indicate back in 2006 is when we recorded the first signs of an Otter with spraint being found under a bridge. Since then we have found footprints in a muddy ditch, more spraint under more bridges and half eaten fish along the bank of Potton brook that runs through the course. But up until this year no-one had seen an Otter, I had received a few reports of one but no one was 100% sure. On Mon 5th September I set the camera up under a bridge for the first time (after finding spraint the week before) I left it a few days and checked it again on wed 7th. When I was looking through the memory card I found a 15 second clip of a male Otter coming out the brook leaving a spraint then going. I screamed out in

delight at what I was looking at, (my boss thought I had won the lottery). What an amazing sight and final proof that we have Otter. It has returned once on the 27th October. The camera also filmed Wood mice and a Rat and a few birds. The camera will stay under the bridge and hopefully catch more footage as that bridge seems to be a favourite.

Hopefully after you have read this article you might feel inclined to go out and buy a trail camera and find out what hidden wildlife you might have in your garden or nature reserve or local park. They are available from a variety of retailers like Amazon, eBay, and many more. It is worth looking at reviews of different models to help you decide which is the best one for you. Try www.handykam.com to compare different models.



The John O Gaunt otter, spotted at last! Photo by Steve Thompson

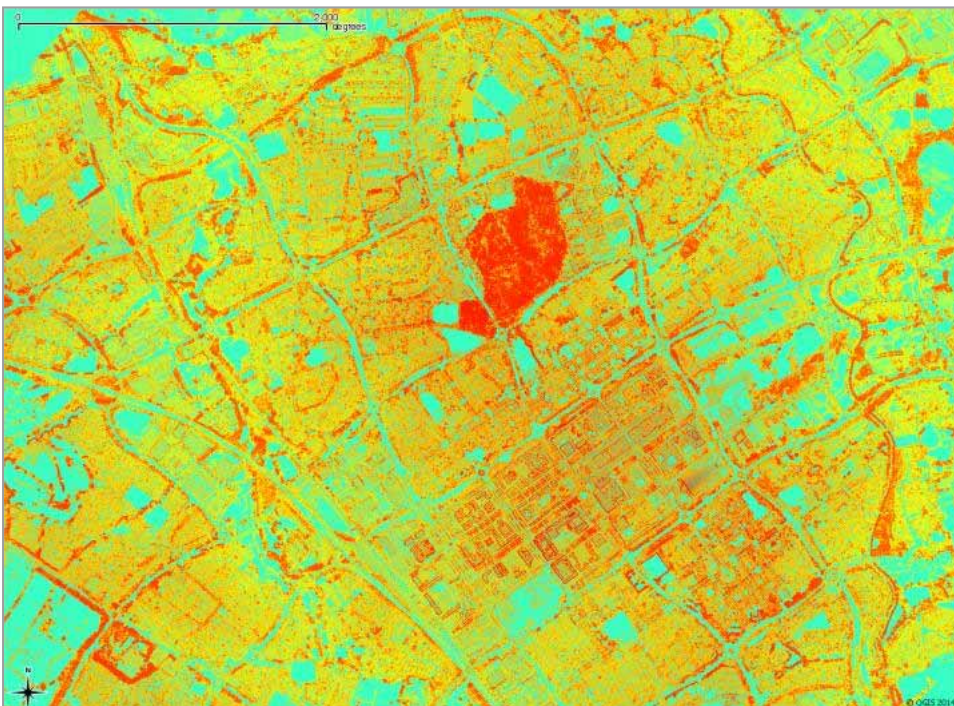
Bedfordshire gardens help scientists understand urban habitats

University of Exeter

A ground-breaking technique which allows green spaces to be mapped in 3D from an aircraft could boost biodiversity, aid human wellbeing and even help protect rainforests.

Using an airborne laser scanning technique and a new image processing approach, scientists from the University of Exeter have been able to create detailed 3D maps that reveal the complex structures of vegetation from the tops of trees down to the ground. Other techniques for mapping vegetation from the air have previously been able only to map the top of the canopy at high resolution or else estimate understorey (shrubs beneath the trees) at much coarser resolution -- missing details such as woodland paths, areas eaten by deer and shrubberies in urban areas.

The new approach developed by Exeter academics uses a system called waveform lidar - and produces 3D images in far more detail than existing techniques, allowing vegetation to be mapped over large areas from above at high enough resolution to pick out small details beneath trees.



This image shows the height variance of vegetation in Milton Keynes, one of the test areas. Photo courtesy the University of Exeter

Dr Karen Anderson, who led the research, explained how other methods for mapping green space can be biased because the hidden understorey is neglected.

"Vegetation canopies are very complex three-dimensional structures, and for the first time we can now measure what lies underneath the canopy over a very large area," she said.

"This has great potential to be used for a range of purposes, from promoting biodiversity in urban areas to mapping easy walking routes and monitoring the health of habitats from cities to rainforests."

Previous research has shown

how green spaces boost human wellbeing, and the researchers hope that these data -- gathered by aircraft over Luton, Bedford and Milton Keynes -- can be used to improve understanding of biodiversity and the impacts it has on people living in towns and cities.

"Amongst other things, this approach allows us to understand how these urban green spaces are connected and we can then explore them in three dimensions, for example, from a bird's point of view," said Dr Anderson, of the Environment and Sustainability Institute on the University of Exeter's Penryn Campus.

"For example, the data might show us how we can manage the vegetation in certain places such that it could have a disproportionate effect on improving the environment."

"It also allows us to understand the impact of private gardens on urban biodiversity. Without this, it is almost impossible to gather data on what's in large numbers of people's gardens - and we know gardens have complex structures and perform a vital function in urban environments."

The 3D structure of vegetation affects ecological function and processes, providing an indicator of habitat and biomass, and impacting on weather and climate.

A similar sensor to the one used by the Exeter team, named Global Ecosystem Dynamics Investigation (GEDI), is due to be added to the International Space Station in early 2019.

After carrying out much of their research in the skies over Bedfordshire and ground testing with Dr Daniel Cox and University College London's Dr Mathias Disney and his ground-based laser, the academics thanked one local woman in the acknowledgements section of their paper.

"Thank you to Mrs Guy of Luton for access to her garden and for providing cups of tea to the field team," they wrote. The research, funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), is published in the journal *Remote Sensing of Environment*.

Latest Bedfordshire Bird Report is available!

The bird report for 2015 was published in December 2016, comprising 128 pages and eight pages of colour plates. Articles include:

- The Birding Year 2015 by Barry Nightingale
- Systematic List
- How are our common birds doing ? The Breeding Bird Survey in Bedfordshire by Richard Bashford
- Ringing report for 2015 by Katie Fuller
- Bird surveys at Church Dunton by Graham Goodall
- Population Status of Birds on the Bedfordshire list by Barry Nightingale
- Rooks and Rookeries in Bedfordshire in 2015 by Roger Hicks
- BTO House Martin Survey in 2015 by Roger Hicks
- Corn Bunting songposts by Roger Hicks
- Gazetteer of Bedfordshire Sites
- Occurrences of rare birds in Bedfordshire by Barry Nightingale

The 2015 Bedfordshire Bird Report can be obtained by sending a cheque for £10.00 (inc postage) payable to "Bedfordshire Natural History Society" to:

Mary Sheridan (BNHS Membership Secretary)
28 Chestnut Hill, Linslade, Leighton Buzzard LU7 2TR
Tel: 01525 378245

Email: membership@bnhs.org.uk

Hoopoe wishes everyone a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year!





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).

TUESDAY 17th JANUARY, MAULDEN 8pm

Talk "Linnaeus: Putting Order into Nature" by Nick Hammond, ornithologist and former director of our local Wildlife Trust. Every naturalist owes a huge debt to Carl Linnaeus, the man who founded modern taxonomy. His life contains all the staples of a good story - mystery, sex, religion and class. Tonight we learn about his flaws as well as his contribution to natural history.

MONDAY 23rd JANUARY, OXFORD 11am

Visit Oxford University Museum of Natural History. A behind the scenes tour of the collection and information about the history of the museum. There will be a charge of £8 per person. **Please contact Julia Powell by January 14th 2017 to book your place and obtain full details.**

SUNDAY 29th JANUARY, HEATH AND REACH 9am 

BBC walk birding around Stockgrove and Rushmere Country Parks, Heath and Reach, for a good variety of woodland birds. Meet in Stockgrove car park, SP920293. Parking £2 (coins only).

Leader: Sheila Alliez.

TUESDAY 31st JANUARY, MAULDEN 8pm 

BBC talk "Saving Nature abroad – the RSPBs international work" by Dr Tim Stowe, Director International Operations. A privileged insight into some of its vital projects around the globe.

SATURDAY 11th FEBRUARY, STREATLEY 10.30 am (F)

Famous for the orchids and butterflies in summer, join us for a walk looking at winter wildlife and traces of the Iron Age hill-fort at Sharpenhoe Clappers, an ancient woodland and chalk escarpment. This is a NT property and Austin is a local NT Ranger. Meet in Sharpenhoe Clappers car park TL065295.

Leader: Austin Smith.

TUESDAY 21st FEBRUARY, MAULDEN 8pm

Talk "Deer Management at Ashridge" by Lawrence Trowbridge, Lead Ranger for the NT at Ashridge. Ashridge has a wild herd of fallow deer that can be traced back to a 19th century deer park at the heart of

the estate around Ashridge House. Fallow deer are a special part of the estate and managing their numbers is very challenging.

TUESDAY 21st MARCH, MAULDEN 7.30pm

BNHS Annual General Meeting. After a short AGM, the Officers and Recorders will present their annual reports. A prompt start is necessary as the programme will be packed with the recorders reports – always of interest to everyone. **PLEASE NOTE START TIME.**

SUNDAY 26th MARCH, BROMHAM 10.30am (F)

Walk at Bromham Mill for signs of early spring wildlife. There is a very active Conservation Group here and a member will be showing off the work done at the Mill and surrounding area managed for wildlife. Meet at Bromham Mill café TL010507, MK43 8LP.

Leader: TBC.

TUESDAY 28th MARCH, MAULDEN 8pm

BBC talk "Making your records count" by Nick Moran, BTO, organiser of BirdTrack. The system expounded and your questions answered.

If you wish to know more about any of the events please contact either

Sheila Brooke Tel: 01525 873396 Mobile: 07905 949901 Email: [brooke.se\(at\)btinternet.com](mailto:brooke.se(at)btinternet.com)

Or Julia Powell Tel: 01582 661328 Mobile: 07958 161938 Email: [JuliaCPowell80\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:JuliaCPowell80(at)gmail.com)

Bedfordshire Natural History Society: Charity number 268659

Fundraising and Offers:

Here are ways to help with raising funds for the BNHS and possibly also help yourself:



[OneStopNature](#)

BNHS members get 10% off microscopes or other items appropriate for invertebrates such as handlenses and magnifiers at the checkout of this online store.

The BNHS receives a further 10% as "cash-back" sent to the treasurer. To obtain a checkout code contact our Treasurer or Membership Secretary.



[EasyFundraising](#)

Purchase goods, or search the web, through EasyFundraising and the BNHS gets money!