



Wild About Beds

Autumn 2017

Small mammal trapping at Duck End NR: a red-letter day!!

by Sheila Brooke

About a dozen of us met up at DENR on Saturday 9th September for the annual small mammal search. We had a cool but dry morning with intermittent sun, which was rather better than the weather we have had at some meetings this year. Mick put out 16 Longworth traps on Thursday night, set them on Friday night and we gathered to check their occupancy on Saturday morning.

We started off with three fairly placid Bank Voles followed by a greyer Field Vole or Short-tailed Vole. Three



Harvest mouse *Micromys minutus* trapped at Duck End Nature Reserve. Photo by Mick McCarrick

traps near the water were empty but the traps were well-placed by Mick and the other 13 were all occupied. Near the wood pile, of course, we had a Wood Mouse! Three more Bank Voles and three more Wood Mice were caught. With two traps to check we were pleased to find a shrew in one – not a Water Shrew but a Common Shrew and we were happy with that. The star appearance, though, was a delightful Harvest Mouse – I believe the first for the reserve – and the first I have seen caught in a Longworth trap. This quite unexpected mouse, our smallest rodent, was much admired and sent us all home with a spring in our step. We were pleased to have two youngsters with us so that was a rare treat for them.

With five species and high occupancy it was a very successful morning – thank you Mick!

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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 Maulden; the Christmas Members' Evening is held in 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, 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 **1 December 2017** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

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

Brown Hare survey

The Brown Hare (*Lepus europaeus*) is one of the most iconic symbols of the English countryside. Between 1991 and 1993 a national survey was undertaken which estimated the winter population to be 817,000 +/- 137,000. It also showed that the stronghold for hares in England was in the eastern counties, including Bedfordshire.

A survey was carried out in Bedfordshire by the Wildlife Trust between 1996 and 1998 which showed an extensive, though patchy, distribution of hares throughout the county. Recently, however, it has been noticed that hares are no longer being seen in places where they have been found in the past. The Bedfordshire Mammal Group have therefore decided to undertake a survey to establish whether or not their range has changed. The survey began in January 2017 and will run until the end of December 2018 to enable maximum coverage of the county.

So if you see any hares in Bedfordshire, please visit the Beds Mammal Group website (<https://www.bedsmammalgroup.co.uk/research-projects>) and enter your sighting on the form in the research section. This will automatically generate an email to the group. Please also ensure that any positive sightings are also recorded on the BNHS adnoto system. Establishing where hares are no longer found is of equal importance. So please check any sites where you remember seeing hares in the past and if none are seen please also send this record via the Beds Mammal Group website.

Hopefully at the end of this period which should have some understanding as to the situation regarding any change to Hare distribution.

Shire Oak Heath SSSI – an appeal by the Greensand Trust

Shire Oak Heath SSSI lies to the west of Heath and Reach; a remnant of the large tract of heathland that formerly stretched north from Leighton Buzzard. It is less well-known to local naturalists than the heathland at Rammamere and Stockgrove as it was, until recently, in private ownership.

When the Greensand Trust and Central Beds Council purchased the Rushmere Estate in 2010 the western side of the SSSI came into their ownership. Since then the Trust has carried out a considerable amount of restoration work removing birch and young pine regeneration from the area and it is now included within the extended Rushmere and King's Wood NNR, as well as being accessible to visit as part of Rushmere Country Park.

Now the remaining 17 acres has been offered for sale to the Greensand Trust. The current owners have agreed the principle of purchase by the Trust, dependent on us raising the funds to cover the purchase costs. Several grants have already been successfully obtained but in order to secure the site and the costs of its restoration we need to raise about £50,000.

In the late 1980s/early 1990s the site was still relatively open heathland with more heather present than at Rammamere or Stockgrove however, in the years since, it has become taken over by birch and bracken.

If the Trust is successful in purchasing the site we will clear back the encroaching trees and scrub to open up the area and allow the remaining heathland and acid grassland vegetation to recover once more. This should benefit many heathland species – from solitary bees and wasps to reptiles and, who knows, maybe the slave-making ants (*Formica sanguinea*) that were recorded there in the past will prove to still be there!

If you'd like to donate to the appeal, you can do so via the Trust's website: www.greensandtrust.org/appeal/restoring-shire-oak-heath-appeal or by sending a cheque made out to 'The Greensand Trust' to The Greensand Trust (Shire Oak Heath Appeal), Working Woodlands Centre, Maulden Wood, near Haynes West End, Bedford, MK45 3UZ.



In recent decades the heathland has been taken over by birch as seen here. Photo courtesy Greensand Trust

New Programme = New Volunteers needed

by Julia Powell

You will see from the new Winter 2017–2018 programme that we are having a stand at Bromham Mill Apple Day Sunday October 15th. This is always a good day out even when the heavens opened in the morning as they did recently. I will be starting the day with a Bedfordshire Clanger for breakfast before buying my winter supply of apples when I go there.

Also in the programme is the Christmas Fair at Rushmere CP on Sunday 3rd December. This is a good opportunity to buy your Christmas tree. You may be able to pick up one or two small gifts too.

It would be good if we could have a couple more new faces on the stand to tell people about the society and to catch up on the news and views of other society members. If you are willing to help even just while someone has a coffee break you will be most welcome. Please contact me either by email [juliacpowell800\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:juliacpowell800(at)gmail.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.

Wildlife holiday in The Vercors, France

by Betty Cooke

This summer four of us from BNHS, together with friends from the Wildlife Trusts, spent a most enjoyable week in the regional national park of The Vercors, in the lower slopes of the French Alps. The main focus was plants and butterflies, of which there were many. The two leaders, one of whom was our Graham Bellamy, had already scoured the area during the previous week with another group, so a good variety of plants were readily refound.

The 21 orchid species that we saw included Black Vanilla, Lizard, Butterfly, Frog, Burnt, Coralroot, and Bird's-nest. The Alpine meadows were awash with colour, plus interesting plants along the streams and tracks. Some new to me were Nodding Wintergreen, Swallow-wort, Perennial Yellow Woundwort, some spectacular Houseleeks and a tiny fern, Moonwort.



Black-veined White *Aporia crataegi*. Photo courtesy Betty Cooke



Tickled by a Marbled White. Photo courtesy Betty Cooke

We were delighted to see 59 species of butterfly, many of which seemed to be attracted towards Wilf for instant identification! Marbled Whites were particularly confiding and settled on various parts of our anatomy. An Apollo kept our cameras whirring as it posed for several minutes on a Nodding Thistle. Some of my many first sightings were Blue-spot Hairstreak, Purple-edged Copper, Almond-eyed Ringlet, Great Sooty Satyr and many Blues and Fritillaries. Up to eight species of Burnet Moths puzzled us with their various markings.

Bugs and beetles were stunning too. The two Checkered Beetles, *Trichodes leucopsideus* and *T. apiarius* were both different from the species seen in Croatia last year. Colourful bugs included *Graphasoma italicum*, *Lygaeus equestris* and *Calocoris roseomaculatus*. A performing Mantis-fly was particularly memorable; also a Praying Mantis, and many different Grasshoppers and Bush-crickets.

Upland birds that we encountered included Griffon Vultures, Golden and Bonelli's Eagles, Alpine Swifts, Crag Martins, Alpine Choughs, Crossbills, Crested Tits, Cirl Buntings, Citril Finches and Black Woodpecker.

So much to see, among great company, in comfortable accommodation and fortified with excellent food....a wildlife holiday to remember!



Trichodes leucopsideus. Photo courtesy Betty Cooke

What do you get if you cross a Praying Mantis with a Lacewing?

by Wilf Powell

During a recent holiday to the Vercors mountains in the Rhône-Alpes region of France (see article by Betty Cooke), a strange insect attached itself to my wife's trousers whilst we were exploring the Col de Pennes. At first, we thought it was a diminutive, brown Praying Mantis but one that no-one was familiar with. The morning was dull and damp and there were a couple of drops of water attached to the creature's wings. It proceeded to bend over backwards and use its modified front legs, which were very like those of a Mantis,



Mantispa styriaca. Photo by Wilf Powell

to try to brush off the offending water droplets. This action was repeated several times as it calmly sat on people's arms, allowing everyone in our party to get good views and photographs and keeping us entertained for some ten minutes before it was carefully released onto nearby vegetation.

That evening, whilst the day's flora and fauna encounters were being discussed and recorded, a picture of the unusual beast was spotted in a field guide brought along by one of the trip participants. It turned out not to be a Praying Mantis at all but a Mantis Fly (sometimes called a Mantid Fly), which belongs to the Order Neuroptera, together with Lacewings, Snake Flies and Alder Flies, and so despite the apparent similarity is unrelated to the true Mantids (Order Mantodea). Interestingly, although the wings of the two insects are completely different, the front legs of both Mantis Flies and Mantids have evolved very similar, distinctive, shapes for the same purpose; the capture of insect prey. Mantis Fly adults can strike extremely rapidly once a suitable prey insect,

such as a small fly, alights within striking distance. There are around 400 known species of Mantis Flies, mostly occurring in the tropics, with only five species, all in the genus *Mantispa*, found in southern Europe. The one we encountered was *Mantispa styriaca*, one of two species recorded from mainland France. It is regarded as a rare insect and has only been recorded south of the Loire valley, most frequently close to the Mediterranean, so we were very fortunate to encounter one.

Mantispa styriaca has a fascinating life history. The young larvae have well developed legs and antennae and a flattened body (campodeiform), as do those of the closely-related lacewings. They search for the egg sacs of spiders, especially those of wolf spiders (Lycoside), which they penetrate to feed on the spider eggs. Once inside the egg sac they transform into curved, grub-like larvae (scarabaeiform) and use their modified, tube-shaped mouthparts to pierce the eggs and suck out their contents, eventually pupating within the egg sac.



Mantispa styriaca brushing water droplets off its wings. Photo by Wilf Powell

Half-term fun at Rushmere Country Park

by Julia Powell

Sheila and I have put an event into the programme for Wednesday February 14th at Rushmere Country Park. We intend to have our stand in the atrium of the Visitor Centre with the usual display. However we would like to expand the activities offered with more quizzes etc. If the weather is kind we would like to add a self guided wildlife safari/treasure hunt for visitors to look out when out for a walk.

So we would need volunteers to look after all this of course. But if anyone has any ideas for more entertainment we could offer we would love to hear from you. We are thinking that we might book the classroom for Owl pellet dissection and have some colouring of pictures too.

What we are aiming to do is make the Rushmere Visitors more aware of the wildlife they can see around them when out for a walk or even in their own gardens.

Please contact Julia Powell 01582 661328 or [juliapowell800\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:juliapowell800(at)gmail.com).

Summer Highlights (and Lowlights)

by Julia Powell

Only four intrepid members braved a cold and windy day to meet at Sharpenhoe Clappers on July 20th. There was little chance of seeing our target, the Dark Green Fritillary butterfly so we proceeded with the other aim of our field meetings: exchanging news and views. This was successfully completed and we all went on our way.

There was a much better turnout for our next meeting at The Lodge on July 27th when Betty showed how the heath there had been managed and the effect of the different conservation management options put into practice.

This was followed on August 9th by a visit to Bellows Mill where we experienced the most dismal weather of the whole summer programme. However this did not deter eight or nine members from enjoying a walk around this private site although needless to say no dragonflies were spotted. We plan to arrange another visit next summer as this has a lovely variety of habitats and hope that the weather is a little kinder to us next time.

On the following Sunday, August 13th members had a choice, either visit the Rectory and churchyard at Clifton for a bioblitz or participate in the Summer Fair at Rushmere CP. The nature table (we have enough material for at least two boxes) was very popular at both. Each event was well supported and everyone taking part had a good time.

August was a busy month as we had been invited back to Swiss Garden to help with their Invertebrate Walk Day on August 16th. Well over a dozen members took part either helping out with the BNHS stand or doing their own thing. The quiz was very popular with the families that came to see us too.

Our last event in August took us to Harrold Odell Country Park (HOCP) on August 23rd where we were taken around by Janet Munro who is based at HOCP. About eight of us were shown a lot of the park that is not well frequented, missed seeing an otter by about 20 seconds down by the river but we spotted wildlife along the way including woodpeckers, herons, egrets, gadwall, several butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies and a few other invertebrates.

Ending our walk on a high, we arrived at the hide to find several BBC members there twitching a Cattle Egret! Thanks to them for allowing us to peer through their telescopes and also to Tim for finding the bird — second county record!

About eight people met at Brownlows café for a self-guided walk around Ashridge. It was a lovely day and so much time was spent exchanging news and views that nobody minded that we were walking for about half an hour longer than planned at the outset. We did not miss the graffiti on some of the trees left there by American servicemen just before they left for the Normandy landings and we were quiet enough to see a dozen or so deer not far away.

Our last summer field meeting on September 9th at Duck End Nature Reserve topped the lot when Mick McCarrick kindly led a small mammal trapping event. One of our YounGnats turned up with his family and we were treated to a glorious haul with 13/16 traps having occupants. We had six Bank Voles, all male, one Field Vole, female, four Wood Mice, two female, two male, one Common Shrew, sex not confirmed, and very unexpected one Harvest Mouse male, a new record for this site.

*Hoopoe would like to let everyone know that the **deadline for articles for issue 185 Winter 2017/18 is 1 December, not the usual 15th.** Please get your copy in early, thank you!*





Events Programme Autumn 2017

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

In severe weather, the leaders may cancel the event if conditions are unsuitable. Please check the website early on the day or contact Sheila or Julia.

Indoor talks start at 8pm except the AGM which starts at 7:30pm and all are held at Maulden Village Hall, 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 26th SEPTEMBER, MAULDEN

BBC talk to celebrate the Club's 25th Anniversary we present 'Birds of Prey' by Iolo Williams. Admission by ticket only. See BBC website for details.

SUNDAY 8th OCTOBER, OLD WARDEN 10.00 am (F)

Joint meeting with Herts & Beds Fungi Group, Beds Natural History Society and a limited number of members of the public.

Despite dry conditions this proved a productive site last year as well as an interesting venue. The site is charming early 19th century landscape garden, with plants from all over the world, ponds, bridges, rose arbours, miniature buildings, a grotto and fernery, and a tiny, thatched Swiss Cottage. The adjoining woodland and lakeside picnic area are also accessible to us. Meet at 10:00am in the Shuttleworth collection main carpark (SG18 9EP Grid Ref TL150448). The normal entrance charge (£8) is being waived for those attending this meeting but please ensure you are punctual in order that we can enter the site from the free car park as a group. If you are late you may have to pay the normal admission charge! There is a restaurant, bar, tea-room and toilet facilities are available and as there is plenty here to occupy people for the day you may wish to bring lunch or purchase refreshments there. Please book with Alan Outen to reserve your place before midnight Wednesday 4th October: [alanouten\(at\)virginmedia.com](mailto:alanouten(at)virginmedia.com) 01462 811374
Leader: Alan Outen.

SUNDAY 15th OCTOBER, BROMHAM 11am – 4.30pm (F)

Bromham Mill Apple Day. Visit the BNHS stand at Bromham Mill, TL010507, MK43 8LP. See our nature table where you can touch the preserved material. Marvel at the photographs of the local wildlife. Test your knowledge with the quiz. (There may be an entry fee.)

TUESDAY 17th OCTOBER, MAULDEN

Talk 'A Tale of Trees: the battle to save Britain's ancient woodland' by Derek Niemann, a freelance writer. Based on his book, this is a story of how we are a nation that loves its ancient woods and trees. We prize our sturdy, noble oaks, lofty pines, bluebells and primroses, badgers and dormice. But only a generation ago we were all set to wipe them out. In just 40 years, more than a third of our ancient woods were destroyed. How and why did this happen? Derek tells us a story of tragedy and heroism, ingenuity and blindness. It will inspire everyone to go out and explore the precious ancient woods that remain, and

delight in their richness. Derek will bring copies of the book for sale (hardback £12), and he would be delighted to sign copies should anyone wish.

TUESDAY 31st OCTOBER, MAULDEN

BBC talk 'The Complete Owl' by Dr Michael Leach, Professional wildlife photographer, revealing the life of our resident British Owls including dramatic high-speed in-flight photography.

TUESDAY 21st NOVEMBER, MAULDEN

Talk 'Our changing orthopteran fauna' by Peter Sutton, National Recording Scheme Organiser for the Orthoptera since 2002, originally a research chemist by trade, now teaching science at a Bedfordshire school. This talk will attempt to provide an overview of the British and Irish orthopteran fauna, and discuss some of the dynamic changes that have been observed in recent years, including: the changing distribution of species that have responded to climate change and other factors, the current status and conservation management of some of our rarest orthopterans and recently naturalised species and potential new species that may become established in the future.

MONDAY 27th NOVEMBER, LONDON, 11am

Visit ZSL Library to see selected highlights of the collection such as items by the artist Edward Lear, the ornithologist John Gould, the oldest book in the library (1551) and some archival material, all of which gives a flavour of ZSL's history since its founding. **Please book with Julia Powell by Nov 17th [juliapowell800\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:juliapowell800(at)gmail.com) or 01582 661328.**

TUESDAY 28th NOVEMBER, MAULDEN

BBC talk 'Swifts - the one bird we can all help' by Edward Mayer, Swift Conservation. Following his last visit in 2007, Edward will update us on the latest ways we can help this iconic species.

SUNDAY 3rd DECEMBER, HEATH & REACH 11am – 3pm (F)

Rushmere Christmas Fair. Visit the BNHS stand to see the Nature Table, displays and quizzes. Park in the Rushmere car park, SP912284, LU7 0EB. Parking £3.00 (coins only).

SUNDAY 3rd DECEMBER, HENLOW

BBC Morning walk round East Beds area for wintering species. Park and meet at Henlow Bridge Lakes, TL188379.

Leader: Greg Nunn.

TUESDAY 5th DECEMBER, MAULDEN

Christmas Social evening with seasonal refreshments. Bring along a selection of your photos (on a CD or memory stick) and some food to share. Doors open 19:30pm.

TUESDAY 26th DECEMBER, WOBURN 9:30am–12 noon (F)

Boxing Day Walk through Woburn Park. Meet at the Woburn Village car park, opposite the church in Park Street, SP950331, MK17 9PG.

Leader: Mary Sheridan.

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: [JuliaCPowell800\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:JuliaCPowell800(at)gmail.com)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: The BNHS thanks all who have kindly given permission to visit and to hold field meetings on their properties.

Bedfordshire Natural History Society: Charity number 268659