



Wild About Beds

Spring 2019

Overwhelming response to smashed nest boxes



Stock photo

The National Trust has been inundated with offers to fix and replace nest boxes which were found destroyed in Chute Wood, Dunstable Downs.

Approximately six shattered boxes were discovered by a visitor on 27 March. Since the news hit the press the Trust has been overwhelmed with offers of help.

The boxes were destroyed during the bird nesting season, and the damage has been reported to the police.

Anyone wanting to help with repairs is asked to contact the Chiltern Gateway Centre (dunstabledowns@nationaltrust.org.uk).

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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 **15 June 2019** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next *Wild About Beds* will be published in **June 2019**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

An early reminder: September's talk

Please put the details – 17th September 2019 at 8pm in Maulden Village Hall – in your diaries now for our first talk of the new season.

Title: Introduction to the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership

Claire Poulton, Landscape Partnership Manager for the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership.

Presentation: Greensand Country covers 40 miles of scenic landscape which is defined by the Greensand Ridge and reaches over three neighbouring counties; Cambridgeshire in the east, across Bedfordshire and into Buckinghamshire in the west. The area contains all of Bedfordshire's remaining heathland, more than half of its woodland and more historic parkland than anywhere else in the country. Our '2020 Vision' for the end of our 4 ½ year Landscape Partnership programme is for the Greensand Country to be a living and working landscape that is cherished by present and future generations. This presentation will update members of the BNHS on the GCLP's achievements and future plans.



Sponsorship of BNHS and Bird Club activities

by Mike Bird, BNHS Hon. Treasurer

Both BNHS and the Bird Club have benefited over several years from generous sponsorship by Opticron, the suppliers of optical instruments and the One Stop Nature Shop, retailer of supplies for entomologists and birders. Both organisations are keen to support our activities and in return we offer them promotional opportunities such as advertisements and links to their websites. You may have also noticed in the back page of the recent 2017 Bird Report two colour adverts; one from Wildlife Travel, the other Sunbird Tours. All of this publicity helps to bring valuable income into the Society.

If you decide to purchase any products from these suppliers please let them know that you are members of either BNHS or the Bird Club and that you were attracted to them as a result of their adverts or sponsorship. We hope that this will encourage them to continue their support for us.

Membership news

by Mary Sheridan, BNHS Secretary

We would like to welcome the following new members to the Bedfordshire Natural History Society. We hope you will enjoy many years of membership with us:

Andrew Hodge, Dunstable

Liz Lobacz, Broom

Anthea Saunders, Langford.

It is with great sadness that we record the death of John Adams on 13th December 2018. John was a long-standing and active member of the BNHS.

Send us your programme ideas!

by Julia Powell

As you can see, the summer programme is complete. Sheila and I welcome ideas from all members and try to incorporate as many as possible. Please let us know of any places you would like to visit in summer next year as you are out and about now, as and when you think of them. Let us know if you would like to lead a walk around your local patch. All we ask is that we end up where we started at the designated time! Next year there will be a particular emphasis on the Greensand but you need to come to the presentation in September to find out why.

It will not be long now until we start to put together the winter programme. Please send your ideas to me or Sheila especially suggestions for outings in autumn and early spring as these are more difficult to find. We have about half the winter talks in mind but would welcome other suggestions.

Julia Powell:

juliapowell800(at)gmail.com 01582 661328

Sheila Brooke:

brookese(at)btinternet.com 01525 873396

*Hoopoe's excited that spring is finally here
and would like to wish everyone a very happy
Easter*



In memory of a good friend: John Adams

by Dave Parsons

I first met John about forty years ago through our wives, Ann and Lynda, who worked together at Haynes playgroup where our children also attended and grew up together.

Having the same interests in nature and the countryside we got on well from the start and spent many hours looking for anything from insects to deer but I think John's favourite subject was butterflies, which was quite handy with Chicksands wood on our doorstep! Chicksands wood was, and still is, one of the best places for butterflies in Bedfordshire. John and I led a few butterfly walks there in the early days, and for many many years we led Boxing Day walks in the wood for Haynes folk. We also spent many evenings badger watching at the far end of the wood. On the long walk through the wood to the sett we were often treated by Woodcocks roding and to hear Lady Amherst Pheasants calling, I think we counted six or seven one evening! Those were the days! I remember one badger watch, it was quite dark when all of a sudden the silence was broken by high pitched squealing, the sort of noise that makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end. We were glad to get back to the car that night. We think the noise was from a Rabbit being attacked by a Stoat. On another occasion we both took our youngest sons, aged about eight, on a BNHS organised badger watch in Ashridge park. We all sat in silence as the light faded. All of a sudden a Badger appeared! No, the silence was broken by a noise like Niagara Falls followed by splat, splat, splat. The cows in the meadow next to the wood were going to the toilet and our two boys got the giggles and couldn't stop. I don't think we saw a Badger that night.

We went on many BNHS meetings near and far and also a few long weekends including Dorset and the New Forest, as well as the Lake District to see the last Golden Eagle in England, and Norfolk to see Swallowtail butterflies. We also spent a week in the Dordogne in France.

I know John really enjoyed the Mammalthons, the lighthearted competitions to see the most mammals in Bedfordshire in 24 hours, especially when all the results were totted up in a local pub.

John was very precise and a good organiser. Among other things he organised the dawn chorus meeting and breakfasts for many years. John and Ann had a Pipistrelle bat roost in their house for years and each year the Bat Group had a meeting there to count out the bats. I'm not sure if the Bat Group turned up for the bats or the refreshments! I expect Ann organised all the food and John chose the wine. Sadly I never got to any of these meetings, what with working nights for over thirty years.

Believe it or not we both had cameo roles in a Haynes panto many years ago, I think we played a pair of butterfly twitchers..?

Looking back there have been so many lovely memories and it looks like most of our outings ended in joy and laughter especially when we were joined by John's son-in-law, Chris.

John was a true gentleman and will be missed by many.

Coming soon: a new book on Muntjac and Water Deer

Arnold Cooke worked for the national nature conservation agencies as a researcher and an adviser for 30 years, leaving in 1998 to pursue his interests in deer, birds and herpetofauna. In total, he has written more than 200 articles, books and reports on various issues of conservation science. This total includes 50 articles on deer and 10 books or booklets on subjects as diverse as pollutants in birds of prey and the status of Britain's amphibians and reptiles. In 2017, he was awarded the Balfour-Browne trophy by the British Deer Society for his work on Muntjac and Water Deer.

Muntjac and Water Deer were introduced to Britain from the Far East. *Muntjac and Water Deer* provides a comprehensive overview of their natural history and the management of their environmental impacts.

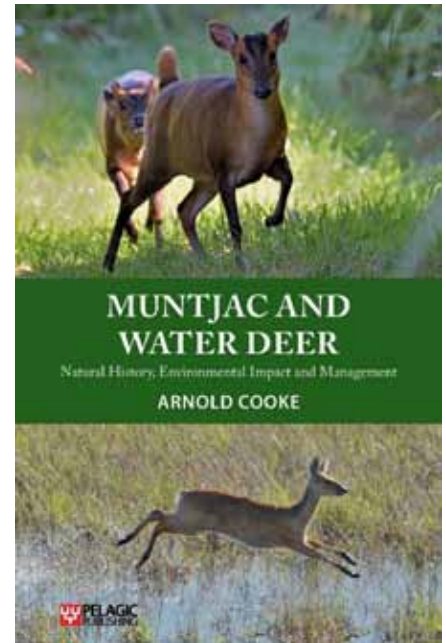
In lowland England, Muntjac deer are one of the drivers of changes in woodland structure and species composition, and many of the principles relating to such woodland impact are also applicable to the activities of other species of deer. Interest in environmental impacts of deer is not solely restricted to

woodlands. The highest densities of Water Deer occur in wetlands, where there is potential for conflict, and considerable numbers are also found on agricultural land. Muntjac deer have settled in suburbia and frequently cause impacts there. Conservationists and national decision makers are concerned both about invasive alien species and about increasing deer populations.

The first section covers the natural history of both species including: breeding biology, deer in the field, colonisation of Britain, a detailed look at colonisation in a single county, methods for studying deer populations and a review of deer population numbers. The second section covers environmental impact: risk assessment, impact management, control of muntjac, effect of Muntjac browsing and grazing, habitat recovery from Muntjac impacts and a study on the impacts of Water Deer. The section concludes with an overview of management and monitoring.

The costs and benefits of both species are discussed, and questions asked about whether we are getting on top of problems caused by Muntjac (locally and nationally) and will Water Deer turn out to be similar to Muntjac? Attitudes and approaches to these species are changing: with Water Deer we are actively studying whether it might be an environmental problem, not waiting until after it has obviously become one. What will happen to distribution, numbers, impacts and attitudes in the future? Will Water Deer ever become a suburban animal? What does the future hold for Water Deer in China and Korea – and how important is the English population as a global conservation resource?

The book will be sold primarily online via outlets such as Amazon and NHBS.



Winter highlights 2018/19 *story and photos by Julia Powell*

TUESDAY 11th DECEMBER, MAULDEN

Unfortunately, the Christmas Social evening was cancelled at no notice at all due to the Hall bookings having been taken over by a new person who was unaware that the WI had a long-standing arrangement to have the hall on the second Tuesday every month. So although we had a confirmed booking, the WI were there first. Apologies to everyone who went but had to be turned away on the night although it would appear that this was not perhaps as well attended as other years. It was decided not to attempt to rearrange this meeting.

ADVANCE NOTICE: THE CHRISTMAS SOCIAL EVENING WILL BE ON TUESDAY 3rd DECEMBER so start collecting now any photos you would like to show.



Dr Ed Turner, Cambridge University Museum of Zoology

WEDNESDAY 26th DECEMBER, WOBURN

Around 19 people, some new faces among them, gathered for our usual Boxing Day walk through Woburn Park ably led by Mary Sheridan. It was a little cloudy and muddy underfoot in places but that did not deter everyone from catching up on all the gossip and walking off some of the excesses of the day before. There were some lovely stags about and a small group of Goosanders showed well which was a new bird for at least one member of the group.

WEDNESDAY 23rd JANUARY, CAMBRIDGE

19 people also turned up for the visit to Cambridge University Museum of Zoology although several were unable to make it on the day. Dr Ed Turner gave us a guided tour starting in the Whale Hall underneath the



Feathers of the extinct Giant Moa *Dinornis* sp.

Fin Whale skeleton, purchased by the museum in 1866 and more giant skeletons awaited us in the main hall. There was a Giant Ground Sloth, Asian Elephant, Elephant Seal and a Python skeleton beautifully set out among many other displays, some newly set up and some the old-style jars of animals preserved in formalin. There were also cabinets illustrating some of the research projects being undertaken. We were taken behind the scenes where Ed showed us drawers of Fan Shells that are now being studied for the life forms that are growing on them as well as the animals themselves. This is an example of how museum specimens contribute to current knowledge and the importance of micro habitats, a feature of Ed's research on butterflies. During the refurbishments, a case was found that is believed to contain more Giant Moa feathers than in all the museums in New Zealand! Ed had also pulled out drawers of beetles, dragonflies and butterflies to show us. An enjoyable day for everyone and look out for Ed on Totternhoe Knolls where he is continuing his research.

WEDNESDAY 13th FEBRUARY, MAULDEN WOOD

We were fully booked for our owl pellet dissection morning at the Working Woodland Centre with 13 children and their Mums and one Dad. While we waited for everyone to arrive, the first comers looked at the nature display. We had a stuffed Barn Owl and a mummified Tawny Owl with some of their prey items on one table and other skulls and antlers on another. Thank you to all the members who donated a large range of pellets. The Kestrel pellets were not as productive with only fur in one, only beetle wing cases in another while another had beetle wing cases and a field vole skull and jaw. Two others had a collection of small bones but only a rodent incisor could be identified. In the Barn Owl pellets, there were bones from a Wood mouse or Yellow-necked mouse in one, Bank Vole remains in two more, four had Field Vole remains which were the most numerous and Common Shrew bones were found in one. There was an unconfirmed report of Water Shrew bones. By the end of the morning, most of the mums were also involved before the children finished with another look at the nature table and scoffing all the drinks and biscuits provided. Many thanks to everyone involved in helping out.



Just one in a large collection of Fan Shells



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.

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

Sheila Brooke: [brooke.se\(at\)btinternet.com](mailto:brooke.se(at)btinternet.com) 01525 873396

or Julia Powell: [JuliaCPowell800\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:JuliaCPowell800(at)gmail.com) 01582 661328

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



Events Programme Spring 2019

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 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)

SUNDAY 14th APRIL, PEGSDON 8am 

BBC morning walk joint with BNHS over Pegsdon Hills for spring migrants. Park and meet in car park of Live and Let Live Inn, Pegsdon, TL121303.

Leader: Jon Palmer

TUESDAY 16th APRIL, MAULDEN

Talk 'Roots of Rockingham: Life between the trees' by Susannah O'Riordan from Butterfly Conservation and Rockingham Forest Project Officer. Hear about the work going on in woodlands across Rockingham Forest to improve them for a number of threatened species and creating the perfect conditions for the reintroduction of the Chequered Skipper as one of the 'Back from the Brink Projects'.

WEDNESDAY 24th APRIL, ASHRIDGE 10:30am

Walk in Ashridge Forest for Bluebells, woodland flora and early Spring butterflies. Park along Monument Drive and meet at the Visitor Centre, SP970130 HP4 1LX. Come early for breakfast at the Brownlow Café or stay on after the walk for lunch there.

Leader: Richard Harrington

SUNDAY 28th APRIL, BROOM 7am 

BBC early morning birding joint with BNHS around Broom Gravel Pits for spring migrants. Park and meet at end of Kings Road, off High Street, Broom, TL172433, SG18 9NL.

Leader: Stefan Baltruschat

SUNDAY 5th MAY Dawn Chorus at Priory Country Park 

A joint meeting with the Bedford RSPB Group. Meet at 5.00am in Priory Car Park, followed by a breakfast at Toby Carvery.

Leader: Peter Marshall

WEDNESDAY 8th MAY, TODDINGTON 10:30am

A walk to visit Fancott Woods and Meadows NR. Fancott has herb-rich floodplain grassland near the source of the River Flit, and bounded by ancient woodland. One of the two meadows is wetter than the second and has a good population of Great Burnet, a few Frog Orchids, Heath-spotted Orchids and Marsh Valerian. The woodland has areas of Bluebells and Ramsons. We will park at the back of the Fancott public

house car park and visit the reserve from the public footpaths. The Fancott public house, TL02232778, LU5 6HT. (Lunch at The Fancott optional. Telephone 01525 872366 to pre order.)

Leader: Graham Bellamy

SUNDAY 12th MAY, SOUTHILL 10am (F) (L)

Bioblitz: All Saints churchyard and Southill Park Estate. We will be recording in the churchyard areas around this rural church and also have permission to access specific adjacent areas of the private Southill Park Estate. **Please book with Alan Outen to register you have permission to visit Southill Park Estate.** The BNHS nature table will be on display. Bring a packed lunch; refreshments will be available. Meet from 10:00 at the church; parking in churchyard or signed nearby, TL 14644212; SG18 9LL. All are welcome to attend the church service beforehand beginning at 9am where there will be a visiting speaker from EcoChurch (ecochurch.arocha.org.uk).

Leaders: Peter Topley and Alan Outen

WEDNESDAY 15th MAY, ST NEOTS 10:30am (L)

Walk around Paxton Pitts NR which is a haven for wildlife with a mixture of interesting habitats, wet and dry. There is a chance of seeing and/or hearing Nightingale and early butterflies and dragonflies should be on the wing. Take a picnic as the café only has snacks. Meet in reserve car park, TL197629, PE19 6ET.

Leader: Betty Cooke

SUNDAY 2nd JUNE, HEATH and REACH 10:30am – 4pm (F) (L)

Visit Rushmere Country Park to take a closer look at the wildlife to be found here in a family bioblitz. Lots of help with identifying species, see the BNHS displays and take part in our quizzes. Especially suitable for young families and BNHS YounGnats and bring your grandchildren. Park in the Rushmere car park, SP912284, LU7 0EB. £3.00 on exit.

Leader: Julia Powell

WEDNESDAY 5th JUNE, BEDFORD 7pm (F)

Evening walk in Bedford Park and Cemetery to view the many mature and interesting trees. David works on the Ancient Tree Inventory and previous walks with him have all been very informative. Park in the Foster Hill Road car park TL048509, MK41 7TB.

Leader: David Alderman

SATURDAY 8th JUNE, TOTTERNHOE 11am (F)

Walk joint with Milton Keynes Natural History Society at Totternhoe Knolls for orchids, (Man and possibly Frog or Musk orchids), butterflies, Duke of Burgundy, Small Blue, Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and other chalk downland wildlife. Meet in the NT Trust car park, SP986217, LU6 1QG. Bring lunch if you want to stay on although the Cross keys is not far away.

Leaders: Matt Andrews and Wilf Powell

WEDNESDAY 12th JUNE, CLOPHILL 7pm – 9pm

BBC evening walk joint with BNHS around Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, Clophill looking for resident birds and other wildlife. Park and meet at the entrance gate to the reserve TL110387.

Leaders: Peter Smith, Stefan Baltruschat and Sue Raven

SUNDAY 23rd JUNE, FELMERSHAM 10:30am (F) (L)

Walk at Felmersham gravel pits for dragonflies and damselflies. This meeting will focus on finding and identifying the range of dragonfly species including rarities such as Variable Damselfly and Scarce Chaser. Norfolk Hawker and Downy Emerald were seen here in 2018 and we hope to re-find them. The various habitat types will be visited to show the diversity and differences in species' composition across the site. Meet at Felmersham NR car park SP98755830, MK44 1JW. Bring a packed lunch if you want to stay on.

Leader: Steve Cham

SATURDAY 29th JUNE, FLITWICK 10am-4pm (F) (L)

Visit Flitwick Moor SSSI for the Invertebrate Day joint meeting with Flit Vale Wildlife Trust Local Group and BIG, recording invertebrates and other wildlife. Meet in car park at end of Folly Lane, off Maulden Road by Folly Farm, TL045354, MK45 5BW.

Leader: Colin Carpenter