



Wild About Beds

Summer 2019

Winter 2019 Programme of Talks starts in September

Our first speaker is Claire Poulton, Landscape Partnership Manager for the Greensand Country Landscape partnership (GCLP). Claire will give us more detail in her talk. We hope to incorporate some of the events in the BNHS Summer programme 2010 so please look out for them. Here is part of the executive summary from 2017 when the partnership was formed.

“Greensand Country” is an island of distinctive, beautiful and loved countryside, based on a band of higher ground stretching from Leighton Buzzard to Gamlingay, rising out of the surrounding clay vales. It contains all of Bedfordshire’s remaining heathland, more than half of its woodland, and more surviving historic parkland than any other landscape in the country, often surrounding notable manor houses. This landscape character is a legacy of its underlying Greensand geology, which led to much of it being regarded as ‘marginal land’ not suitable for agriculture, as well as its management over centuries by major estates.’



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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 September 2019** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

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

The 4 "Rs" – Refreshments, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle

by *Julia Powell*

There were some comments made at the last couple of talks about the plastic cups used for the refreshments. These were purchased in bulk some years ago and I am told the order was accidentally duplicated at the time. When we have got to the end of the supply, we will review the situation. Currently the cups are taken off site and recycled. The cup holders and plastic spoons are reused.

I will be supplying Clipper coffee which is organic and Fairtrade. I also expect to buy Fairtrade teabags using plastic-free, non-GM unbleached teabags with both tea and coffee packaged in recyclable boxes and jars. The milk will be organic and the sugar will be British and packed in paper bags.

The biscuits require a little more thought. The aim will be to reduce the amount of packaging and include recyclable material. Another aim will be to have a mixture of plain and fancy biscuits to accommodate taste and dietary preferences in relation to the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes, but I am happy to be informed of more specific dietary needs. Inclusion of non-GM ingredients and palm oil will be considered before purchase.

All of this is what we normally do at home. I try to buy products using recyclable materials rather than relying on someone else to use those products. Printer paper, kitchen roll, facial tissues and toilet roll made from recycled paper are all available at major supermarkets on the same shelves as the regular products and so are an easy place to start. I cannot save to world but I hope I can do a little bit to help.

BNHS IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOP on PLANT GALLS

Sun 1 September 2019

Working Woodlands Centre, Maulden Wood, Haynes West End, Beds, MK45 3UZ

Tutors: Peter Shirley (co-author of the superb FSC book *British Plant Galls*, Brian Spooner (former Head of Mycology, RBG Kew), Tommy Root and Chris Leach

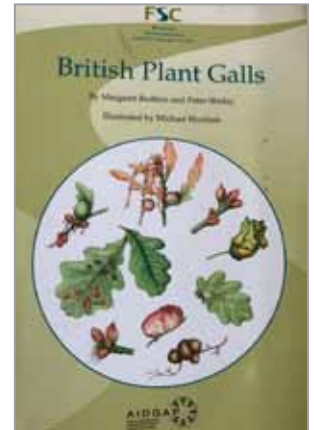
Following the successful BNHS workshops on aphids and earthworms (which was oversubscribed), this year's workshop is on the fascinating subject of plant galls. We currently have 275 gall species recorded in the county, out of 1276 known in the UK. The morning will be spent indoors: Brian and Tommy will talk about basics, Peter will talk on Cynipids. In the afternoon we will visit Barton Hills to search for and identify galls.

Participants should bring a packed lunch but tea, coffee, juice and biscuits will be available.

Cost for the day is just £12 per head

Pre-booking is essential and places will be limited. A number have already provisionally reserved places and we expect the remaining places to fill quickly.

It would be galling to miss out!



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.

A week in Wild Herzegovina *story and photos by Betty Cooke*

In May 2019 a group of intrepid BNHS members enjoyed a very well-organised wildlife week in an unfrequented part of the Balkans. We booked with a company called Wild Herzegovina run by Denis Bohm, now based in London but who takes much pleasure in showing visitors around his native country. His infectious enthusiasm and excellent local knowledge resulted in an impressive bird list, fifteen of which were lifers for me!! Highlights, to name just a few, included a group of about 30 Red-footed Falcons, nesting Penduline Tits and Rock Nuthatches, and spectacular numbers of Sand Martins noisily swirling over our heads in a working quarry.

Every day saw us in a different habitat: a boat ride through extensive reedbeds and lakes to find a group of about 20 Glossy Ibis, a long walk deep into a huge cave system to see the elusive olm in its natural surroundings, picturesque rivers, spectacular waterfalls, karst fields and alpine meadows bursting with colourful flowers, and always framed by stunning mountain scenery.

With careful planning, Denis made sure that we avoided exposure to the worst of the weather, which for the first half was not kind to those in search of butterflies, but the second half helped to produce a respectable list of 38 species.



In the Dinaric Alps



The whole week was taken at a gentle, easy pace with plenty of time to take in the beautiful scenery and wildlife. The dedicated minibus driver followed us along tracks, collecting us to go further, and supplying us with refreshments. Lunch was mainly taken at nearby restaurants, providing very fresh, local cuisine, often straight from an adjacent river. Accommodation was very clean, well equipped and comfortable. Evening meals, delicious and substantial, were taken at a restaurant near the restored Old Bridge in Mostar, where we were based.

A memorable trip. Thanks Sheila for suggesting this!

A beautiful field cricket

Spring highlights 2019

story and photos by Julia Powell

Ashridge Forest 24 April

Only seven people came out but were sufficiently early to enjoy a coffee at the café before setting off, which allowed the stragglers to join us at the start. The change in weather or the late reminder may have contributed to the paucity of numbers or maybe we all take bluebells for granted. But they truly are a British phenomenon as 50% of the world population may be found in Britain.

Our leader, Richard Harrington avoided the very popular Dockery Wood and instead led us on an equally beautiful walk where there were very few other people and an area unfamiliar to most members present. The Bluebells were at their peak and we all enjoyed a 360° panorama of



A rare clump of white bluebells

beautiful blue-violet flowers with an occasional (one in one hundred thousand) white clump of flowers. It is good to know that Spanish Bluebells are only weakly competitive and are removed by the NT Rangers on sight. A badger sett also took the interest of the group as there was a collection of flies (species unknown) dancing in the entrances. Sadly the weather was too cold for butterflies except for a few Speckled Woods and a distant indeterminate White.

Fancott Woods and Meadows 8 May

Despite the weather forecast (or maybe the lure of sunny intervals and showers in earlier forecasts), the dismal rain did not deter 10 people for Graham's walk around Fancott Woods and Meadows where there was a good show of Bluebells but nothing to rival those at Ashridge. Now owned by the WLT, there were indicator plants of ancient woodlands with the Bluebells, Ramsons, Sanicle and Dog's Mercury and certainly there are some very old Ivy. Having been sheltered in the woods, we moved out into the rain and the Meadows where there was a good display of Cowslips. Among all the green leaves we found Pignut, Marsh Valerian and Adders Tongue Fern. Some Frog Orchid plants were also found but not yet in flower and similar for Saw-wort. A single Small Copper butterfly was seen resting but it was not the weather for birds as the rain interfered with both spectacles and binoculars.

Southill Bioblitz 12 May

The weather was warm and dry for this joint meeting of BNHS, BIG and BBC members to explore Southill Park courtesy of the Hon Charles Whitbread, organised by the Rev Caren Topley, following on from the previous bioblitz at Clifton. In all, 29 people turned up and were supplied with tea and biscuits by local parishioners. Weather conditions had not been so clement during the night as no moths came to the light trap although a Lime Hawk was found nearby. An interesting variety of species were found both in the ponds and the compost heap! Also found were a selection of sawflies, Diptera, Hemiptera, an unusual

weevil and a second snakefly species after one in Duck End during the week previous. Peter Topley found a good range of molluscs and there was a display of shells in the church while outside, the nature table stuff was on show although there were very few local people that came back after the church service. A respectable number of birds were also seen or heard.

Paxton Pitts Reserve 15 May

A worthy nine people met in the car park on a lovely warm day for a walk around Paxton Pits led by our own Betty Cooke. A good range of birds were both seen or heard including a fly past by a Cuckoo. However the Nightingale eluded us although one had been in the area in the previous days. A number of damselflies were seen among the other insects on the wing and plenty of flowers for the botanists to ID and for the rest of us to enjoy. We all had a pleasant picnic lunch outside the Visitor Centre before setting off for the second part of our walk.

Rushmere Country Park family bioblitz 2 June

Three BNHS members were present to help ID the invertebrates seen here. 19 species were on the bird list and the Invertebrate list was considerably longer. Thanks to the members who helped out.

Bedford Park and Cemetery evening walk 5 June

Unfortunately the weather forecast and the 75th Anniversary D-Day events probably contributed to the very poor turnout with only three people in attendance. David Alderman, Ancient Tree specialist first gave us a little history. The park was opened in 1888 after Bedford Corporation held a competition and is Grade II listed by Historic England. Now it has well deserved Green Flag status. Over 18,000 trees and shrubs were planted, including many pairs widely separated and of which David showed us examples although we saw one tree which had originally been entwined with another now missing. We walked round the cricket pitch and down to the lake before heading into the cemetery. David gave us a fascinating resume of the characteristics of the trees and fashions of the time when they were planted. However the history of the final tree we saw, planted on its own by the entrance to the cemetery was unknown to him. It was an extremely unusual Lacebark Pine with beautiful patterned bark and was obviously significant by the prominent position in which it can be seen.



Lacebark pine *Pinus bungeana*

Totternhoe Quarry 8 June

At this joint meeting with Milton Keynes Natural History Society, we were outnumbered seven to three on a very overcast day. However the Man Orchids showed well with Common Spotted, Pyramidal and Twayblade also in flower. One of member missed the meeting due to the grid lock in Dunstable caused by the truck convey of which we were very much aware in the quarry. This is perhaps why most people missed the first call of a Turtle Dove. Unfortunately we were not able to elucidate its whereabouts. It was not until we were on our way back that the first butterfly, a Red Admiral was seen briefly. The sun came out and a few freshly emerged Small Blue butterflies were seen by the side of the track at the end of an interesting walk for our MK colleagues but perhaps disappointing for the local people who know what a good site this can be.



Some very, very old ivy

Focus on Facebook

by Wilf Powell

A few years ago, the BNHS Facebook was set up and is ably run by John Pitts. It now has well over 200 members, many of whom post photos and comments about interesting wildlife observations from around the county. Here are a few of the things featured in the first couple of weeks of June.

Ann de Winter and Andy Banthorpe both posted photos of the striking Longhorn Beetle *Agapanthia villosoviridescens* with its beautiful grey and black striped antennae. This is a common beetle that is often seen on thistles in early summer, as in Andy's photo. We usually think of longhorn beetles developing as larvae in wood but this species develops in the pithy stems of perennial herbaceous plants.

Dragonflies often feature and in early June photos were posted of an immature male Emperor Dragonfly taken by David Barnes at Kempston Mill, mating Four-spotted Chasers, Hairy Dragonfly, Emperor Dragonfly and Azure Damselfly at Duck End NR by Merv de Winter, a Large Red Damselfly on the River Ivel near Biggleswade by Danny Spring and a male Downy Emerald at Sandhouse Lane NR by John Curd. Duck End near Maulden is an interesting little reserve with a diverse dragonfly fauna and was one of the first places in the county (together with Flitton Moor NR) where the Willow Emerald Damselfly was reported in Bedfordshire in 2016. This damselfly is a recent colonist from the continent, first being observed at sites in Suffolk and Norfolk in 2009 and gradually spreading westwards.

Keith Balmer, county butterfly recorder, uses Facebook to post regular updates of the records he receives via the 'Adnoto' recording facility available on our website. This is an excellent and easy way to report sightings of a range of wildlife groups and I would encourage everyone to make use of it if they don't do so already. Butterfly photos, of course, are regularly posted on the Facebook site. Andy and Melissa Banthorpe posted photos of Small Blues which are abundant at Totternhoe Quarry NR this year; they recorded 84 during a recent walk around the reserve. Danny Spring photographed Brown Argus, Common Blue, Meadow Brown and Large Skipper in grassland near Biggleswade and David Barnes found a very battered Painted Lady at Kempston Mill.

David Gowing spotted an Otter swimming in his local stream in Gravenhurst early one morning and David Barnes posted photos of three Grass Snakes he encountered in Priory Country Park. On the bird front, John Pitts reported a Ring-necked Parakeet flying over Toddington in the direction of Woburn whilst Anne Doody observed a Barn Owl hunting over fields at Sandy Smith NR.

Plants also feature regularly, particularly orchids. Ian Kelly and Scott Stalham both photographed Burnt Tip Orchids at Knocking Hoe National Nature Reserve. This orchid has declined significantly across the UK and this colony is the only one left in Bedfordshire and probably the the East Midlands and East Anglia. Similarly, Totternhoe is the only area in the county where the Man Orchid survives, with small populations on Totternhoe Knolls, in Totternhoe Quarry and along Sewell Cutting. Every year BNHS members help the Wildlife Trust to monitor the Man Orchids at Totternhoe and Geraldine Hogg posted a photo of a fine specimen found during this year's survey. Graham Bellamy's one-word comment on the photo - "corker" - says it all! An interesting form of the Common Spotted Orchid, the rare var. *rhodochila*, was photographed on a roadside verge near Barton by Ian Kelly. This variety has an excess of anthocyanin which produces solid reddish areas on the lips of the flowers and often turns the leaves deep purple, as in Ian's photos.

Ian Kelly also reported an interesting gall on Lady's Bedstraw growing on the A6 road verge. From his photos, Andy Banthorpe was able to identify the gall as *Geocrypta gallii* as he had also recently found examples at Cut Throat Meadow near Ampthill. This is a timely reminder that the BNHS are holding a workshop on plant galls, organised by Alan Outen, which will take place on Sunday 1 September at the Greensand Trust's Working Woodland Centre, Maulden Wood.

Betty Cooke enjoys photographing the fauna and flora she encounters in her garden and regularly posts photos of unusual finds or things she can't identify. Recently she photographed leaf mines on Purple Toadflax which Andy Banthorpe identified as those of an agromyzid fly of the genus *Chromatomyia*.

The BNHS Facebook is a useful site to post photos of things you can't identify or aren't sure about as there is usually someone who can provide the answer. The Facebook site can be accessed from the home page of the BNHS website – www.bnhs.co.uk – so do take a look.



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)



BIG – Bedfordshire Invertebrate Group, book your place with Alan Outen: [alanouten\(at\)virginmedia.com](mailto:alanouten(at)virginmedia.com) 01462 811374

SUNDAY 14th JULY, RAMSEY 9am 

BBC Day trip to the Great Fen, Cambridgeshire, joint with BNHS, for local breeding birds, dragonflies and butterflies. Meet in the car park at the end of Chapel Rd, Ramsey, Huntingdon, TL245847, PE26 2RS.

Leader: Pete Marshall

WEDNESDAY 24th JULY, SHUTTLEWORTH 10am – 4pm (F) (L) 

Visit Swiss Garden for their Bug Hunt, a joint meeting with BIG. Walks through the grounds, insect recording activities and nature table display. Please book with Alan Outen. Entrance fee is waived for members entering with the group at 10:00 prompt. Meet in car park, TL150448, SG18 9EP. Café on site.

Leader: Alan Outen

SUNDAY 28th JULY, LUTON 10am (F) (L) 

River Lea Bioblitz joint with BIG to record wildlife on the River Lea, Leagrave Marsh and Waulud's Bank. The site is a mosaic of open fen and wet woodland, formerly a SSSI, including the source of the River Lea, with relics of calcareous grassland, elm woodland, old hedgerows and the open grasslands of the Waulud's Bank ancient earthwork, which include a population of great pignut. There are areas of Victorian beech plantation with white helleborine in good numbers. Meet in Sundon Park Road car park TL056246, LU3 3AA (approx.). Bring packed lunch if you are staying on.

Leader: Trevor Tween

FRIDAY 9th AUGUST, DUNSTABLE 7pm – 9pm 

BBC Visit to Dunstable Sewage Treatment Works for a variety of wetland species. Meet in Birdwatchers' car park, off Thorn Road via A5, TL004242.

Leader: Peter Marshall

MONDAY 12th AUGUST, DUNSTABLE, 10:30am (F)

Walk on Blows Downs for the chalk grassland slopes with their abundant flora and Chalkhill Blue butterflies as well as visiting the new extensions to the County Wildlife Sites at The Paddocks and The Hayfield. Park at the end of Half Moon Lane with care, TL02972150, LU5 4AB.

Leader: Esther Clarke

WEDNESDAY 21st AUGUST, TODDINGTON 10:30am (F)

Visit to Wadelows Nature Reserve, a private Nature Reserve behind Poplars Garden Centre. It is adjacent to the River Flit and the mixed habitat will allow a good range of wildlife to be recorded. Meet in the car park TL023302, LU5 6HE.

Leader: John Pitts

SUNDAY 1st SEPTEMBER, MAULDEN 10am

Gall Workshop – please contact Alan Outen for details and to book your place.

SUNDAY 1st SEPTEMBER, BROGBOROUGH 8am – 1pm 

BBC morning birding around Brogborough former landfill area and other nearby sites, joint with BNHS, for late summer visitors and possible passage migrants. Meet in Marston Thrift LN Reserve car park, Wood End near Marston Moretaine, SP973411, MK43 0NZ.

Leader: Steve Blain

MONDAY 2nd SEPTEMBER, HARROLD 10:30am – 1pm (F) (L)

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

Leader: Sheila Brooke

SATURDAY 7th SEPTEMBER, MAULDEN 9:30am-12 noon (F)

Visit Duck End NR for Small Mammal Trapping (mice, voles and shrews). We have had a Harvest Mouse at the last two meetings there and we are hoping for Water Shrew. Limited parking at the site in Moor Lane, Maulden, TL051374, MK45 2DJ.

Leader: Sue Raven

TUESDAY 17th SEPTEMBER, MAULDEN 8pm

Talk “Introduction to the GCLP” by Claire Poulton, Landscape Partnership Manager for the Greensand Country Landscape Partnership. Greensand Country is defined by the Greensand Ridge and reaches over three neighbouring counties. 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’ is for the Greensand Country to be a living and working landscape cherished by present and future generations. This presentation will update BNHS members on the GCLP’s achievements and future plans.

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

Hoopoe is thrilled that summer appears finally to be here, and hopes you all are enjoying it as much as he is!

