



Wild About Beds

Spring 2020

Important announcement *from Wilf Powell*

Due to the current unforeseen circumstances many BNHS activities need to be cancelled or postponed until further notice. The Badger-watching event on 17 April and the Ladybird talk on 21 April will not now take place. The walk around Rammamere and Kings Wood on 4 April may also be cancelled but confirmation on this is being sought. As things develop, further information updates will be posted on the Society website, newsgroup and Facebook page.

The BNHS will monitor the Government advice and alter the programme accordingly.

As this goes to print it has also been determined that the 26 April book launch event has also been cancelled. -Ed.

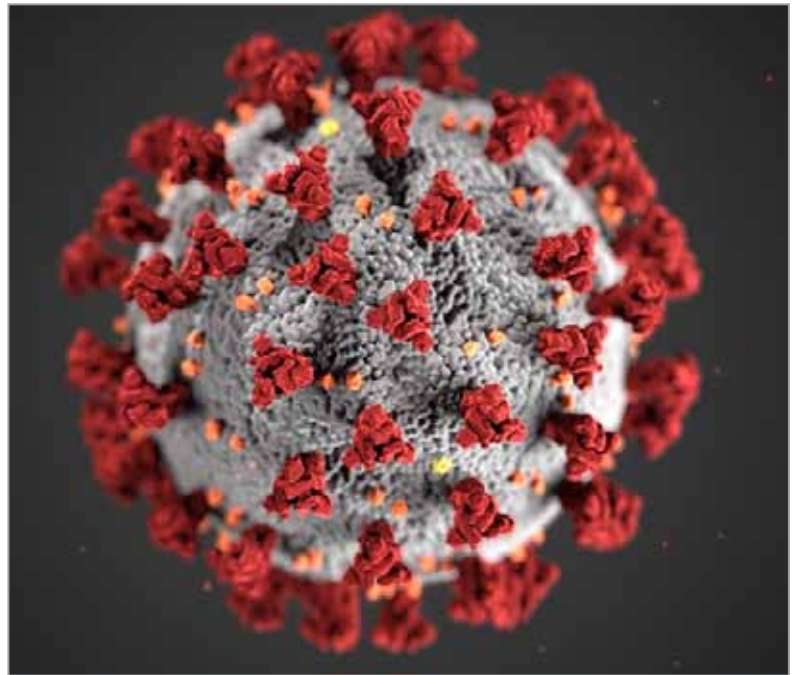


Image courtesy NPS.gov

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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 2020** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next Wild About Beds will be published in **June 2020**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

Spittlebug Survey 2020

from Dr Alan Stewart and Dr Claire Harkin, University of Sussex

Did you know that the 'cuckoo-spit' that you see in spring is produced by the immature stage (nymph) of a spittlebug or froghopper? It is thought that the spittle is produced to protect the nymphs from drying out and from their predators. Once the nymphs emerge as adults, usually in late June, they leave their spittle 'nest' behind and become free-flying. The name froghopper reflects the fact that their face is rather bulbous and therefore froglike, and that they are one of the most powerful jumpers in the animal kingdom. There are ten species of froghopper in Britain. The so-called Meadow Spittlebug, *Philaenus spumarius*, is one of our commonest insects and has possibly the broadest diet of any insect, being known to feed on more than 400 species of plant.



Meadow spittlebug *Philaenus spumarius*. Photo courtesy University of Sussex

Interest in these insects has recently been heightened by the fact that they all feed on the liquid contents of the plant xylem tissue and are therefore capable of transmitting various plant diseases that reside there. One of these, the bacterium *Xylella fastidiosa*, has recently been responsible for the death of millions of olive trees in southern Italy. Fortunately, the *Xylella* bacterium has NOT been found in the UK, but there is a danger that it could be accidentally introduced in imported plants (especially lavender, rosemary and olive).

Exciting Opportunity!

Have you got a little spare time on your hands and would like to contribute to the functioning of your Society? The BNHS is seeking someone to take over from Mary Sheridan as our Membership Secretary. No previous experience or specialist expertise is required and plenty of guidance and help will be provided. The main duties are:

- Looking after the membership electronic database
- Dealing with membership enquiries and receiving application forms
- Sending out membership renewal forms annually
- Posting the BNHS (4 per year) and Bird Club (6 per year) newsletters to members who haven't opted for electronic copies
- Reporting membership numbers at Council meetings (5 per year)
- Getting nomination forms for Officers and Council members signed for their election/re-election at the annual AGM.

The membership database was designed professionally a few years ago and is very intuitive and user friendly. The most time-consuming task is 'stuffing' envelopes for posting but help will be available for this if needed.

If you are interested but would like more information please contact either myself (w.powell4(at)ntlworld.com) or Mary (membership(at)bnhs.org.uk)

Thank you

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Beds NHS for the great honour bestowed on me in making me an Honorary Member of the Society. I joined BNHS in 1970 and the Society has always meant a very great deal to me. We have an excellent team of Recorders, the Society is extremely well run and the publications are superb. As such I feel greatly honoured to have been deemed worthy of such status. I am also extremely grateful to the Society and those who nominated me for an NBN (National Biodiversity Network) award. It was a great surprise to me even to be nominated so I was even more amazed to be shortlisted. Having seen the short list of six I was utterly astounded to be named as the runner up in the terrestrial recording category. Very many thanks to all those involved in selecting me for both these awards.

Alan R Outen

Spittlebug Survey cont'



Spittle on cleavers *Galium aparine*. Photo courtesy University of Sussex

We urgently need good data on two aspects of these insects to understand better how the *Xylella* bacterium would spread if it were ever introduced into Britain: the geographical distribution of the different species of spittlebug and what plant species that they feed on. Last year, we ran a very successful national survey, funded by the Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and coordinated through the RHS, focused on gardeners recording spittle on their garden plants, especially lavender and rosemary. This year, we want to encourage naturalists and the biological recording community to collect records from more natural habitats in the wider countryside.

Can you help? It would mean recording cuckoo-spit when you see it and especially the plant species on which you find it. Your plant identification skills will help us collect vital information. Please consider contributing to this important survey. Much more information and an online form for submitting your sightings can be found on our website at: www.spittlebugsurvey.co.uk.

The fourth BNHS Invertebrate Conference

will be held on Saturday 14 November 2020.

The conference will be of interest to specialists and enthusiastic naturalists alike, both from Bedfordshire and further afield.

The format will be much the same as in 2014, 2016 and 2018 with four talks in the morning and three in the afternoon. There will be a coffee/tea break mid-morning, as well as at the end of the event and lunch will be provided as part of the entry fee. The venue will again be at the Marston Vale Forest Centre, which has excellent facilities, as well as being easily accessible for those coming from distance. You will NOT have to pay to park.

The theme for this year's event is Freshwater and we have another excellent line up of highly acclaimed specialists as speakers. These will include:

Dragonflies and Damselflies	Steve Cham
Mayflies and Stoneflies	John Davy-Bowker
Water Beetles	Richard Chadd
Water Bugs	Tony Cook
Freshwater Molluscs	Peter Topley
Freshwater Crustacea	Nina Birkby

The final talk is yet to be finalised but will cover a group of flies (Diptera) with an association with water.

It promises to be another very interesting day. There will also be displays, including specimens and books by some of the speakers, information about various groups of insects in the county, the BNHS nature table as well as sales. We will again be inviting some high profile honoured guests.

We will be limited to 100 places and following an initial period for members to have priority booking we will be advertising this nationally as we did in previous years. Ticket prices have not yet been decided but keep an eye on the BNHS website and the next issue of *Wild About Beds*.



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.

Winter 2019/2020 highlights

story and photos by Sheila Brooke

Christmas Social Evening 3rd December

I am sure members appreciated, as I did, having this meeting very early in December as it is such a busy time of year. Twelve members eagerly clustered around the computer to load their presentations before the start. The contributions to the supper covered two and a half tables with separate tea and coffee stations being set up next to the kitchen. We had an enormously interesting selection of pictures of a wide variety of subjects. Holiday photos – Birds of Paradise, Scandinavian alpine plants, moths and caterpillars, Australian sea lions and beautiful and rare plants seen around Bedfordshire, this being the last year of recording for the new Plantlife Flora. Photos from gardens showed a mother Stoat moving her litter, a Weasel, a Wood Mouse and a young Fox trying to share the food and drink of the resident Hedgehogs. Birds featured, with information about the ongoing Swift survey and insects were included with pictures of Sawflies, Bees, Wasps, Moths, Dragonflies and Damselflies from sites around the county. As always Richard Revels ended the show and gave us a taster of some of the images going into the next BNHS publication – *Bedfordshire – our changing habitats and wildlife*.

There was a break about 9pm to indulge in the seasonal refreshments, with a very tasty selection of sweet

and savoury snacks, many of which were homemade.

The raffle, which raised £41.39p, was drawn after supper and the three prize winners seemed pleased with their goodie bags donated by Julia and Wilf Powell.

Boxing Day walk

Having had a beautiful Christmas Day weather wise, Boxing Day was rather grey with a hint of rain. This did not deter the hardier members from gathering in the car park at Woburn for our traditional walk around the estate. Thirteen of us set off along our usual route being ably shepherded by Mary Sheridan. There were some great views of the deer herds, the identification of which had some of us scratching our heads but there was too much “networking” i.e. chatter going on to make a very long bird list. Suitably exercised we ended the walk in one of the local hostelrys to warm up a little before going home. Thank you, Mary.

Tring Natural History Museum visit Tuesday 13th January

Although not unfamiliar to many of the 15 strong group, a lot of members expressed admiration for the current displays which appeared to me to be much brighter than I remembered. Our guide, Sophie gave a short illustrated talk about the background of both the house and Walter Rothschild whose collection forms the basis of the museum’s exhibits. After a tour of the galleries still with the original Victorian display cases, we decamped to the Ugly Bug café for our cake and hot drink included in our fee. Most people stayed on to view the Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2019 display and other displays that had caught their eye on the way round. I am sure that several people will be returning soon to have another look.

Priory Country Park walk Wednesday 5th February



Priory Country Park in the mist, 5 February

Some visitors boosted the numbers to 16 at this walk on a bright but not cloudless day. Jon Bishop, only the third warden here since the Park’s inception in 1986 was very knowledgeable and absolutely passionate about the Park. Apart from walking round the lakes, we saw the newly restored abbey wall with its new capping of a porous limestone cement. Now providing refuges for wildlife, there was speculation about the purpose of the holes low down in the wall. Jon’s theory was these were to let out flood water. We saw the meadows where Jon is trying a variety of cutting regimes to maximise the flora with some success and we ended our walk near the Apiary, a private area where the local Beekeepers group have about a dozen hives and offer practical training in bee keeping. A very enjoyable morning.

Langford walk Saturday 7th March

Ten keen walkers duly met at Langford Garden Centre but plans had to change as a result of the flooded meadow. Instead Betty led us along dryer and higher ground of the Ivel River bank to Langford Mill. It is no longer a mill but an impressive building converted into apartments. The day, for a change, was dry and cool with odd bursts of sunshine and the easy, drier walking was appreciated!

We spotted several bees going about their business of seeking out the various flowers and the bird list was a very respectable 27! We returned by the same route and one deserving member, who was holding the gate for everyone else, had a fleeting glimpse of a Kingfisher. We enjoyed a drink and a snack at the Garden Centre café afterwards and all agreed that it had been a really pleasant morning. Thank you, Betty.



At the River Ivel at Langford, 7 March

Focus on Facebook

by Wilf Powell

Here is my review of some of the posts that have appeared on the BNHS Facebook page over the last few weeks. Spring is upon us and many of us enjoy looking for the first signs, one of the most popular being the appearance of frog spawn in garden ponds. Graham Bellamy reported frog spawn appearing in his garden pond on 17th February and posted photos of the accumulating spawn on 24th, whilst Betty Cooke had posted a photo of spawn in her pond the day before. Many frogs spend the winter hibernating at the bottom of ponds whereas toads and newts leave ponds to find winter shelter elsewhere, returning to water to breed in the spring. Andy Banthorpe posted a photo of one of at least 11 smooth newts that had returned to his garden pond by 13th February.

Your garden is an excellent place to observe wildlife and observations of wildlife 'goings on' in gardens are popular postings on the Facebook page. Ann de Winter likes to record hedgehog activity in her garden and she posted a video of three of these popular characters taking advantage of food she had put out for them on 25th February. Please remember if you want to put out food to attract hedgehogs that the old favourite dish of bread and milk is now known to be very bad for them. The best option is tinned dog or cat food. Another charismatic creature that turns up in gardens is the Sparrowhawk, usually looking for unsuspecting prey in the form of garden birds. Geraldine Hogg posted photos of one perching in a Magnolia in her garden in Stopsley, Luton on 24th February and three days later Trevor Morgan posted a splendid shot of a male Sparrowhawk with a sparrow it had killed in the snow in his garden in Houghton Regis.

Away from gardens, there has been an increase in records of Otters in the county in recent years, with sightings regularly posted on our Facebook page. Dan Connors posted a video clip, presumably taken with a trail camera, of an Otter at night under the bridge that takes the A507 over the River Hit at Shefford. A few days later, on 29th February, Steve Blain posted a video of an Otter swimming in the River Great Ouse at Bedford in daylight.

As always, the BNHS Facebook page is an excellent source of information and advice. Alan Garner posted a picture of what he thought was a Varied Carpet Beetle *Anthrenus verbasci* that he had found in his house, asking for confirmation. This was duly confirmed as a Carpet Beetle, probably *A. verbasci*, by Richard Lawrence. Andy Wood asked for advice about the Duckweed in his garden pond and wondered why it seemed to have disappeared this winter, which prompted several interesting comments. Craig Lymm asked for advice on volunteering for plant surveys as he was keen to improve his floral knowledge and identification skills. Graham Bellamy responded with helpful suggestions on how Craig could get involved with activities organised by both BNHS and the Wildlife Trusts. Certainly, BNHS county recorders and other knowledgeable members of the society are always very happy to pass on their knowledge and a great way to learn more about our wildlife is to come along to our field excursions. There is no better way to pick up wildlife knowledge and identification skills than to accompany enthusiasts in the field.

One of the important functions of the BNHS is to record the wildlife of Bedfordshire and we have 24 specialist county recorders who are always keen to receive records from members. Andrew Green, our enthusiastic Sawfly recorder, very helpfully posted a link to three YouTube videos, produced as part of the Field Studies Council (FSC) BioLinks project, that explain what a biological record is. These are well worth viewing whether or not you are new to biological recording. On 17th February, Andrew posted photos of a Sawfly that he came across in May last year when BNHS recorders and members of the Bedfordshire Invertebrate Group were allowed access to the private Southill Estate, courtesy of the Whitbread family. After a visit to the Natural History Museum for confirmation, this proved to be the Hornbeam Leaf-roller Sawfly *Pamphilus marginatus* which is a species new to Britain. Amazing what you can find in Bedfordshire!

Our Butterfly recorder Keith Balmer posted a link to his website on Bedfordshire's Butterflies – www.bedsbutterflies.org.uk – that provides excellent up to date information on the county's butterflies. All the records that members send to Keith every year allow him to maintain this valuable website. On 28th February, Keith also posted a link to his recorder's report for 2019 which will eventually be published in the annual BNHS journal *Bedfordshire Naturalist*.

Finally, Betty Cooke is not only an efficient Hon. Secretary for the BNHS but is also an accomplished artist as demonstrated by the sketches of beetles that she posted on 20th February.



Events Programme Spring 2020

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

SATURDAY 4th APRIL, LEIGHTON BUZZARD 10:30am (F)

Walk around Rammamere and King's Wood, covering two contrasting habitats. Rammamere Heath, one of the largest areas of restored heathland in the vicinity. King's Wood, a designated National Nature Reserve, is part of the largest semi-natural ancient woodland in the county. Covering over 60 hectares, it was originally designated a NNR in 1995 and the area designated was recently extended in 2018. Meet in Stockgrove car park, nearest postcode LU7 0BA, SP919293. Leader: Bob Hook

FRIDAY 17th APRIL, TEWIN (F) 7:30pm

Badger watching visit to Hertfordshire & Middlesex Wildlife Trust hide at Tewin Orchard, joint with the Mammal group. A new mammal hide was constructed in 2006 after 15 years using an old converted stable. It may be possible to see badgers, foxes, muntjac deer, bats and rabbits at twilight. Food is left out at the hide by the wardens each evening and the area is illuminated, but the animal life present is always wary. Bats have found the lighting a useful source of insect food and may swoop past the windows. There are 12 places only, cost £5 per head. **Please book by 27th March** with Sheila Brooke: [brooke.se\(at\)btinternet.com](mailto:brooke.se(at)btinternet.com) 01525 873396 when further details will be given on booking. Leader: Sheila Brooke

TUESDAY 21st APRIL, MAULDEN 8pm

Talk "The Ladybirds of Britain, including some of the smallest" by Dr Peter Brown, Senior Lecturer in Zoology, Anglia Ruskin University. Britain has at least 47 resident ladybird species and many of them are present in Bedfordshire. This talk will delve into ladybird habitats, distribution and interactions between species and will include discussion of some of our tiniest ladybird species.

FRIDAY 24th APRIL, PEGSDON 10:30am

Visit Knocking Hoe NNR which is one of England's smallest chalk grassland National Nature Reserves. It is held on an agreement with the landowner. It has areas of good quality wildflower grassland and at this time of year should have a good show of the nationally rare Pasque flower. Knocking Hoe has a small pond and amphibians may well be present. The reserve is also an excellent place to see birds of prey such as Common Buzzard and Red Kites. There are some steep slopes, Rabbit holes and the potential for slippery ground so good footwear is required. Please park considerately near the Live and Let Live pub and meet in Pegsdon Way, just off the B655, SG5 3JX, TL12133029. Leader: Graham Bellamy

~~SUNDAY 26th APRIL, MARSTON MORETAINE, 2–4pm (F)~~

~~Launch of the society's new publication *Bedfordshire – our changing habitats and wildlife*. This is an opportunity for Subscribers and those who have pre-ordered books to collect them and talk with the authors. Books can be purchased on the day at £20. Tea, coffee and biscuits provided. The Forest Centre, Station Road, Marston Moretaine, Bedford, MK43 0PR. TL004417. Free parking is available by registering on the tablet at reception on arrival.~~

THURSDAY 7th MAY, SANDY, 10:00am(F) 

Visit Sandy Heath Quarry joint with BIG. Sandy Heath Quarry has been worked by several companies since the 1960s and is currently owned by Tarmac. RSPB has managed worked-out parts of the quarry since 2000. There is bird interest on site however the reserve is particularly noted for invertebrates, lichens and bryophytes, most of which are associated with the bare ground features. There is geological interest too, with evidence of ancient sandbanks visible in rock exposures, and it is a very good site for petrified wood. The RSPB is very keen to see more biodiversity surveying in the future and welcome any who would like to contribute findings so that we can monitor the success of our work and help advise our efforts. Park at the RSPB The Lodge gatehouse car park for free SG19 2DL, TL191484. It will be necessary to use two cars to ferry people to the quarry site. Leader: Peter Bradley

WEDNESDAY 20th MAY, RINGSHALL 10:30am

A walk at Ivinghoe Beacon for the Duke of Burgundy butterfly. If the weather is good, there could be Duke, Green Hairstreak, Common Blue, Holly Blue, Brown Argus butterflies, maybe Small Blue, maybe Small Copper, Small Heath, Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper plus the usual generalists. The first 15 minutes' walk from the car park is rough and steep to get to reliable Duke sites and more may be seen further on. Meet in the Beacon Road car park, SP978146. Leader: Richard Harrington

SATURDAY 30th MAY, 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, MK45 5BZ, TL045354. Leader: Colin Carpenter

WEDNESDAY 10th JUNE, TRING 10:30am

A guided walk through Tring Park with the Woodland Trust. An opportunity to explore the history of Tring Park and also the variety of habitats and native wildlife which call Tring Park their home. We will also find out about how the Woodland Trust manage the site and the importance of the rare chalk grassland, which is the second largest in Hertfordshire and designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Meet in the overflow car park HP23 6AP, SP924109. Leader: Jess Vagg

MONDAY 15th JUNE, DUNSTABLE 10:30am

A walk on Dunstable & Whipsnade Downs to see the annual display of possibly six species of orchids, with a chance to observe other fauna and flora, especially butterflies. Meet at the Chilterns Gateway Centre, LU6 2GY, TL008195. Parking £3.50 for non NT members. Leader: Wilf Powell

WEDNESDAY 17th JUNE, CLOPHILL 7pm (F) 

Evening walk around Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, joint with BBC, looking for resident birds and other wildlife. Park and meet at the entrance gate to the reserve TL110387. Leaders: Stefan Baltruschat and Sue Raven

SATURDAY 27th JUNE, AMPHILL 10am (F) (L) 

Churchyard Mini Bioblitz, joint with BIG at St Andrews Churchyard to find out what calls the area home. This County Wildlife Site is designated for its acid grassland. There will also be the nature table and quiz for the children and a chance to see what falls into the recorders' nets. Bring lunch or visit the local outlets if you wish to stay all day. Meet at the churchyard, MK45 2EL, TL036383. There is no parking at the church, but parking is possible close-by e.g. Church Avenue, MK45 2PN. Leaders: Nigel Pollard and Alan Outen

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.