



Wild About Beds

Winter 2021

First stage of Chalkscapes project awarded Heritage Lottery Funding

Development funding of £232,600 has been awarded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund to help the Chilterns Conservation Board and its partners to progress their plans to apply for a full National Lottery grant at a later date.

The project will work with urban communities in Central Bedfordshire, Luton and Hertfordshire to find new and creative ways of inspiring more people to understand and care about the landscape on their doorstep.

Chalkscapes will feature a suite of complimentary projects which will connect people and communities with the landscape and nature around them. The project has been created to give urgent support to the wildlife, heritage and communities in the North Chilterns in response to unprecedented and relentless levels of housing, infrastructure growth and environmental pressures.



Dr Elaine King, Chief Executive Officer of the Chilterns Conservation Board, said: 'We're delighted to have received this support. The North Chilterns landscape is a special place – it is rich with chalk streams, ancient woodlands, wild flower meadows, and a wide range of amazing wildlife. But it is under huge pressure from road and housing development, pests, diseases and climate change. This exciting new project will enable more people, from very diverse communities and backgrounds, to enjoy and benefit from connecting with nature, while also helping to care for this special landscape on our doorsteps.'

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Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:



The Bedfordshire Natural History Society
www.bnhs.org.uk
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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 **Kath Hindley**, Honorary Membership Secretary, Tel: 01525 841256, email membership@bnhs.org.uk.

BedsLife

BedsLife - Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Partnership is a consortium of government and non-governmental agencies dedicated to promoting the maintenance and enhancement of Bedfordshire's biodiversity. The Partnership oversees the implementation and monitoring of the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Action Plan, which can be found online at www.bedsbionet.org.uk.

Editor: Heather Webb

The Wildlife Trust, Priory Country Park, Barkers Lane Bedford MK41 9DJ.

Email: newsletter@bnhs.org.uk.

Your comments/notes on anything that you have observed in the field, on the road or in a past *Wild About Beds* issue are welcome/essential for continuity. Please do send articles to me either as an attachment via email or through the post. Pictures are always welcome; material required by **15 March 2021** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next *Wild About Beds* will be published in **March 2021**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

From the Chair

by *Graham Bellamy*

Thank you to everyone who has renewed their membership of BNHS recently using the new online system. I hope you have found it an easy process; I know many of you have and thank you for your feedback on the ease of use. You can still pay by cheque if that is what you prefer but you can also use PayPal, card, standing order or BACS. By signing in on the membership page you can remind yourself if you have renewed. Covid-19 has curtailed the range of walks and talks we usually run for members this year so thanks you for your continued support; it is much appreciated.

Two AGMs in one year!

Your Society's committees have all been busy holding their on-line meetings via Zoom. As it looks very much like restrictions will continue well into the new year Council have decided we must hold the Annual General Meeting online.

AGM 1: Last year's AGM (2019/20), that was planned for mid-March, was postponed due to lockdown and we will be holding the business reporting part of the meeting on-line on 19 January 2021 at 19.30. You should receive notification of the meeting with your *Wild About Beds*. After the meeting we will have the opportunity to hear a talk recorded in 1980, given by John Dony on his reflections of his 80 years in Bedfordshire. John reflects on his early interest in wild flowers leading to his writing notable floras of both Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. He also covers the post-war efforts to protect our best areas for wildlife as Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the important part he played. The talk will last approximately 90 minutes. This will just be an audio playing of Johns talk via Zoom...just like listening to the wireless really!

Do let me know if you wish to join the rescheduled AGM, John`s talk or both, and I will send you the Zoom link.

AGM 2: Our AGM for 2020/21 is scheduled for 16 March 2021 and we will be holding this meeting online via Zoom. The Agenda is mailed out with this newsletter. Importantly the AGM is a time to elect your council officers and members for the coming year and below the Agenda are nomination forms for anyone wishing to join Council. Do think about it and ask a Council member or Honorary officer if you wish to know further details. Council meets five times a year plus the AGM under normal circumstances.

Again contact me if you wish to attend and I will send you the Zoom link. The reason for doing this is if it looks like we are likely to have more members attending than our current Zoom licence allows, I can see if we can arrange to accept more.

Happy Christmas to you all and here`s hoping for a significant return to normality during 2021.

Winter Chinese Water Deer count

by David Anderson, Mammal Recorder

The Mammal Group are running a count of the number of Chinese Water Deer (CWD) seen together during the autumn rut. We are fortunate in Bedfordshire to have a wild population of this foreign deer, which originated from Woburn Park escapes during WWII. Since that time the deer has been at very low numbers, but the last five years or so has seen an increase, and we would now like to better understand the current population size and distribution.

The Chinese Water Deer breeding season, or rut, is from November to the end of January, although this partly depends on the temperature and weather conditions. At this time the deer change their normal solitary life and collect together in open fields, with counts of 20 or more. We would like every one, BNHS members or not, to be alert when out and about in Bedfordshire during these three months, for gatherings of these deer. Please make a quick count or estimate, and report the number and location to the Mammal Group secretary. If you have time, a quick photograph would also be welcome.

Please be aware that another deer species, the Roe Deer is very similar in appearance, but you are most unlikely to see this deer with more than two or three together.



Chinese Water Deer, Barton, 1 May 2020. Photo by Ann de Winter

The usual areas for the CWD rut are the fields outside of Woburn Park and the area north up as far as Bedford. They are increasingly also being seen north and east along the Greensand Ridge.

Please report counts via The BNHS Adnoto system, or by email to [mammalgroup-secretary\(at\)bnhs.org.uk](mailto:mammalgroup-secretary(at)bnhs.org.uk).



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.

My 2020 Bedfordshire Lockdown Wildlife Garden

story and photos by Richard Revels

Introduction

Just as I was putting the final touches to this article about making my garden more wildlife friendly during the Covid-19 spring & summer lockdown of 2020, it was announced that another lockdown is starting on November 5 due to the rapid rising infection rate of this virus. So I hope the below will be of interest to BNHS members that may wish to make their gardens more wildlife friendly for the coming years.

The Covid-19 virus has changed everyone's lives across the world, with many restrictions of where we can go, and what we can do, and like most BNHS members my plans for 2020 had to be scrapped due to the lockdown restrictions. So during total lockdown in March and until the travel restrictions were relaxed in early summer, I concentrated on improving my modest sized garden making it as attractive as I could for insects and other wildlife. Because Ivy *Hedera helix* was invading a part of my wild flower area, with its long runners at ground level, I decided to dig up a small part of the garden and remove the Ivy during lockdown. Because of the drought at that time I needed a pickaxe to get into the ground!

Once that selected area had the Ivy removed, I reseeded it with various annual wildflowers that in mid-summer gave a splendid display of once common, but now rare old cornfield flowers that attracted decent numbers of various bees, butterflies, and other invertebrate species. Several clumps of perennial Scabious and Knapweed were either left or reset after Ivy removal. The resulting flowers produced the best mid-summer flower display in my garden that made all the hard work worthwhile.

Over the years the wildlife coming into my garden has provided me with my own (rather small) wildlife reserve that has provided me with a variety of wildlife subjects for my camera, without the need to travel. As it seems unlikely that Covid-19 is going away anytime soon, and more lockdown restrictions are being imposed in the UK, making our gardens more wildlife friendly seems like a very good idea, and will enable us all to record and photograph the local wildlife without the need to travel.



The flowers of Corn Marigolds, Cornflowers, and Corn Cockles in my garden during July 2020, gave a splendid display that not only attracted many insects, it also attracted the attention of neighbours and visiting friends.



My Garden Pond in late June 2020. Note the logs and slabs for small mammals to escape from a pond, and for birds to bath and drink from.

Over the years I have had many thousands of creatures in my garden ranging from mice, voles, hedgehogs, and Red Fox, various bird species, and many different insects and other invertebrates that ranged in size from about 2mm for ants and aphids, to Privet Hawkmoths which is Britain's largest resident moth, as well as wasps, bees and spiders etc. Most gardens hold a remarkable amount of wildlife, and if trees and bushes are growing in or close by, that will boost numbers considerably. There is likely to be well in excess of 1,000 different invertebrate species in most gardens, but with many creatures being small, they mostly go unnoticed as we go about our daily lives.

Having a garden pond will enhance the range of creatures coming into all gardens; however a pond may not be suitable for every household as unattended small children can fall in and drown. A pond without fish will hold many more invertebrates and amphibians than one containing



The highlight of my pond in the spring of 2018 was a Leutistic (yellow) female Common Newt, *Lissotriton vulgaris* that was present in the pond for several weeks. It has not been seen again.

fish, but all ponds will attract a much wider range of wildlife into a garden. My current main pond was created about 16 years ago and within weeks of completion had attracted the local frogs and newts, as well as dragon- and damselflies and a range of other invertebrates. As always predators soon followed and a heron soon found it an easy place to have a feast of Common Frogs, and had to be kept away, so allowing most frogs to spawn without being eaten. I found the best way of keeping the heron away was by putting small sticks or canes into the ground all around the pond edge, and tying cotton between them from cane to cane and also over the pond, so making a web of cotton around and over the pond. This kept the heron at bay during spawning time. As soon as spawning has finished the canes and cotton web are taken down.

One essential thing for every pond should be an escape route for any hedgehogs and other small mammals that may fall in, as they may be unable to climb up the slippery plastic sides of the pond, and can drown. All that is required to prevent that happening is to put a few logs or concrete slabs that are partly in the water. They will also provide a drinking and bathing platform for birds and other creatures, and every year I see at least one female Southern Hawker Dragonflies egg laying on the various logs around my pond edge.

During the 2020 summer the Corn Marigolds *Glebionis segetum* and other once common, but now rare 'weeds of cultivation' gave a superb display in my garden. Such flowers provided various insects with food as well as looking attractive, and several friends and neighbours have requested seeds for their own gardens. Many garden centres sell packets of wild flower seeds, and that is where most of mine originally came from.

Regarding standard garden flowers, as a general approach I would say if they are attracting bees, butterflies and other wildlife they are good plants to have, however they are just for show and not providing food for visiting wildlife, I personally would consider replacing them with plants that provide both food for wildlife, as well as looking attractive.



A female Southern Hawker Dragonfly *Aeshna cyanea* egg laying on a log around my pond.



Common Spotted Orchids, *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* flowering in the long grass part of a Bedford Garden. The seeds probably came from a nearby colony growing on a local nature reserve.

Although lawns are great places for children to play, and adults to relax and socialise on, they are usually fairly sterile places for wildlife, although they are important for Ivy Bees *Colletes hedera* that frequently uses lawns for their nesting burrows, with sometimes a hundred or so males that can be seen patrolling in search of virgin females emerging from a burrows. When one is located it usual results in a cluster of male Ivy Bees attempting to mate with it. For people with larger lawns perhaps part could be converted into a wild flower area, however for the sake of family harmony I would suggest getting approval of your family before making major changes to a lawn.

If part of a lawn is not kept too well trimmed, you may find some unexpected wild flowers have established themselves, perhaps arriving from wind-blown seed, or maybe from seeds that hitched a ride on boots or clothing. I know several people who are extremely proud of the wild orchids that suddenly started

appearing on their lawns. Mostly they started with just one or two plants but when left to flower and produce seeds, numbers can soon build up. One lawn in Bedford has several hundred Common Spotted Orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* flowering on it every year. Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera* also frequently becomes established on lawns and similar places; however numbers flowering of this orchid can fluctuate greatly from year to year.



First recorded in the UK in 2007 and was found by Charles Baker in Bedfordshire in 2008, the Raspberry Clearwing moth, *Pennisetia hyalaeiformis*, came to a pheromone lure in my garden next to Raspberry canes in 2010. That enabled me to photograph it in flight when it flew around the lure.

Shrubs and small bushes will attract a wide range of wildlife into gardens, especially if they are the food plant of the larval stage of insects, and berry bearing shrubs will attract birds during autumn and winter. Bushes can also provide much needed shade during the heat of a hot summer's day that will help prevent insects overheating. You will gather from the above that I try to have a mixture of plants and habitats in my modest sized garden that provides wildlife with a range of flowers, shrubs, and a wildlife pond. I also grow some fruit and vegetables for my-self, that often have aphids with attending ants, as well as their many predators. My raspberry canes attracted the Raspberry Clearwing moths that provided me with pictures in-flight when I put out pheromones nearby. My garden has become one of the best local places for me to observe and photograph wildlife as it is designed for that purpose. The range of flowering plants

provides invertebrates with food from late winter throughout summer and into autumn, so there is usually something of interest to be found. Flowering usually starting in March with Dandelions, Forget-me-nots and Primulas, and ends with Devils-bit Scabious and Ivy flowers in the autumn. Having wildlife coming into my garden made lockdown and the restrictions during 2020 more bearable for me, as well as helping the local wildlife, and I hope other BNHS members may be inspired to attract more wildlife into their gardens, and winter is the best time to plan for next summer's wildlife garden.

My top ten must-have flowers in my wildlife garden:

Marjoram *Origanum vulgare*, is excellent for a range of insects.

Scabious; any or all three species, Field, Small, and Devils-Bit.

Red Valerian, *Centranthus ruber*, attracts many insects and if dead-headed plants will continue to produce flowers into autumn.

Knapweed, *Centaurea nigra* is excellent for a range of insects.

Wood Forget-me-not. *Myosotis sylvaticia*. A good early spring flowering plant.

Ivy. *Hedera helix*. Good for insects on the flowers in late summer and autumn, but needs keeping under control. The Holly Blue butterfly larvae feed on Ivy flower buds in August and September.

Ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, is a good flower for insects and they also brighten up any long grass areas of a garden.

Lavender. A good garden flower for a range of bees and other insects.

Buddleia. Good for a range of butterflies, bees and flies.

Garden Sedum. Usually good for butterflies in early autumn, but hardly any this year.

There are many other flower and shrub species in my garden all of which are good for wildlife, the above are my list of current favourites.

Books about garden wildlife and creating your own wildlife garden:

Rather than write about how to create a wildlife garden myself I recommend getting both of the below books, which are excellent guides with many illustrations. Although covering the same subject, the books

are different enough to justify having both, and both are well worth having as they contain plenty of good advice about a range of subjects.

Back Garden Nature Reserve by Chris Packham. Published in 2001 by New Holland, for The Wildlife Trusts. ISBN 1-85974-520-2

Excellent advice about making a wildlife garden covering just about everything you need to know. The many illustrations that are a mixture of artwork and photographs. This is a 'must have' book for creating or improving a garden for wildlife.

Guide to Garden Wildlife by Richard Lewington. Published in 2008 by British Wildlife Publishing. ISBN 978-0-9531399-7-2

Part of this book also gives excellent advice about making a wildlife garden, the other part is of Richard Lewington's superb paintings covering many hundreds of the most common creatures to be found in gardens, so is also a 'must have' book. The bird paintings are by Richard's brother Ian Lewington, and are also of superb quality. In total there are over 900 paintings as well as dozens of photographs.

A tale of five mammals

by Ken Winder, Chair, Mammal Group

The *Red List of England's Mammals* was published this year and, excluding bats, four species found in Bedfordshire are included in this.

Water Voles are classified as endangered & this is certainly the case in our county. The latest surveys have shown that they seem to have disappeared from the Ivel Valley & are now mainly found in the Potton/Dunton area & possibly around Luton. This loss has been happening over several years & has been caused by various factors, though Mink seem to main reason for their demise over recent years. However, there are still odd sightings around the county, so please try & investigate your local rivers & streams

Hazel Dormice now come under the vulnerable category & in Bedfordshire things have been getting steadily worse. The latest information shows that they are now only found in Maulden Wood where a population was introduced in 2001. The natural population that existed in the Studham area seems to have now gone, whilst the Pegsdon population was lost many years ago. We are still endeavouring to find new populations in the county.

Hedgehogs are also listed as vulnerable. Though some people seem to have regular visitors to their gardens, in much of the county they are rarely seen. Certainly, personally, I have seen a lot less hedgehogs, either alive or dead, in the last few years. The People's Trust for Endangered Species is running several projects connected with hedgehogs.

Finally, Harvest Mice have now slipped into the near threatened category. These animals are hard to find & are mainly located by looking for their nests. Because of this, their status within Bedfordshire is difficult to judge. We have been running a project looking for nests at Sandy Smith Nature Reserve over a few years & are hoping to hold another survey on the 30th January 2021. However, due to the present situation, please wait for further news concerning this. Note also, that the Mammal Society are proposing to do a national survey next year & will be looking for volunteers to help.

One mammal doing well in the county is the badger whose numbers have been increasing ever since they were given full protection. Recently we have been analysing data related to the number of setts in the county & we were surprised to find that out of nearly 530 setts, approximately 200 had not been checked within the last 10 years, so their status is unknown. In order to try and improve this situation, we are preparing to carry out a survey of badger setts over this winter (and hopefully beyond). If anyone wishes to take part in this please contact me on [mammal-group-chair\(at\)bnhs.org.uk](mailto:mammal-group-chair(at)bnhs.org.uk) and I will send you a list of setts which need checking within either your local area or where you regularly visit.

The Bedfordshire Mammal Group is continuing to monitor mammals within the county & we would welcome any assistance in any surveys that we undertake. As always, please enter any sightings of mammals onto the ADNOTO system as these will help in any further studies.

Autumn highlights 2020

by Julia Powell

The Autumn programme of events was severely curtailed but there was a chance of one or two activities in addition to the resumption of talks albeit via Zoom. Unfortunately, the pond dipping at Harrold-Odell Country Park which is arranged to encourage children and young adults to explore a watery habitat had to be cancelled, to the disappointment of both old and young.

However on Wednesday 30 September a walk was arranged at short notice and attended by a small group of people who met in the car park at Woburn. We set out to follow the route used for the traditional Boxing day meeting but had only walked a little way along the road when one of the taller members of the group spotted an enormous fungus about the size of a dinner plate in the field! As we all stopped to admire it, two more less mature ones were spotted nearby. However as there was a big ditch and a strong fence between us and them it was not possible to get any photos of these splendid specimens. There were some large herds of Red and Père David's deer and a couple of Chinese Water Deer along the route. A lone Sika stag was grazing near one of the ponds.

In the following month, Betty agreed to lead a walk round The Lodge at Sandy. In order to accommodate a larger number of people she led two groups of six people each on different days, October 21 and 28. As anticipated, there were good numbers of birds and one or two insects about. A some interesting fungi were seen – a small compensation for the lack of the usual Autumn fungi walk with Alan Outen.



A Manchurian Sika deer *Cervus nippon* stag at Woburn Park. Photo by Julia Powell



Lilac Bonnet *Mycena pura* at The Lodge, Sandy. Photo by Sheila Brooke

Nothing more is planned at present given the ever changing situation as I expect the vaccine programme will not have a major effect until around Easter time. But whenever possible, a socially distanced walk for a small number of people will be arranged somewhere in the county in the winter months. These will be posted on Facebook and in the BNHS Newsgroup with only a few days' notice and you will have to book a place. Please contact me JuliaCPowell800(at)gmail.com 01582 661328 or Sheila BrookeBrooke.SE(at)btinternet.com 01525873396 if you would like to be informed by email when the notice is going to be posted.

*Hoopoe would like to wish everyone a peaceful Christmas.
Stay safe everyone!*



Wintertime orchid hunting

by Richard Revels

A few days into the second UK lockdown I went for my afternoon walk around the nearby Stratton Industrial Estate in Biggleswade to get some exercise and to see if the usual thin scattering of Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera* leaf rosettes were showing on the grassy road verges through that estate. And yes there were a few in the usual places, and with hardly any vehicles around I ventured onto the small roundabout at TL20174316, and found around 100 very healthy looking leaf rosettes all of good size, so if not cut down or eaten should produce a fine flower display come June.

If BNHS members want to do something a bit different this winter while on their lockdown exercise walks, please keep an eye out for these easy to find rosettes in your area, and please record your finds on the BNHS Adnoto website. If you tell friends that you are going on a mid-winter wild orchid hunt, it may raise eyebrows, but winter is the best time of the year to find Bee Orchid colonies and record numbers. The light green leaf rosettes are very visible on grassy road verges, embankments, lawns and other such places where the grass and other vegetation had been cut in early autumn.

John Dony recorded in his *Flora of Bedfordshire* (1953) that during the 1940's and early 1950's the Bee Orchid was scarce and local in Bedfordshire. Since then however this orchid has become much more common in southern and central UK, and has considerably extended its range further north into Scotland. So this orchid seems to be one of the winners due to warming climate. It is by far the easiest orchid to find during the autumn and winter months often being found in the county's urban and suburban areas where it seldom flowers due to frequent grass cutting. Many new locations of this plant were found during the orchid survey back in 2013 and 2014, and by now I expect that there will be more previously unrecorded colonies still out there in urban areas of the county.



About 100 Bee Orchid rosettes are in leaf on a small roundabout on an industrial estate at Biggleswade, Beds. They seldom manage to flower here and at similar places due to contractors frequently cutting the grass verges. The rosettes are however easy to see during the autumn and winter months. Photo by Richard Revels

