



# Wild About Beds

Spring 2021

## Got space for newts?

by Emily Seccombe

Since 2018, the Newt Conservation Partnership has been creating and restoring habitat in Bedfordshire, and across the South Midlands, to provide habitat for great crested newts and other wildlife. We've recently published our monitoring report, which shows that most of our pond creation/restoration sites now have great crested newts present! To date, the Partnership has created 21 clean water ponds, 4.5 hectares of terrestrial habitat and 300m of hedgerow in Bedfordshire, with several more sites in the pipeline. We're continuing to identify new sites in Bedfordshire, and working with local organisations and landowners to find the best opportunities to support freshwater biodiversity. Landowners who provide compensation sites sign a 5-year rolling management agreement, with an ambition to renew for at least a 25-year period. The agreement sets out annual payments to compensate for any income lost and to cover management costs to maintain ponds and terrestrial habitat in the long-term.



If you're interested in the scheme or know of sites that could benefit from our fully-funded habitat creation scheme, please have a look at our website: [www.newtpartnership.org.uk](http://www.newtpartnership.org.uk) or get in touch with the Project Officer for Bedfordshire, Emily Seccombe: [eseccombe\(at\)newtpartnership.org.uk](mailto:eseccombe@newtpartnership.org.uk)

*More details in the full story p. 11*

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Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:



**The Bedfordshire Natural History Society**  
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**BedsLife**  
[www.bedsbionet.org.uk](http://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\(at\)bnhs.org.uk](mailto:membership(at)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](http://www.bedsbionet.org.uk).

### Editor: Heather Webb

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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 2021** please.

**Thank you in anticipation.**

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

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## Raising Awareness of the BNHS

by *Helen Muir-Howie*

There has been an increase in the appreciation of nature during the past year of lockdowns and furlough. This seems to be an ideal time to promote the BNHS and its work and to increase our membership. A working group has been formed to investigate ways to do this.

There is space in this group for another couple of people so if you would like to help, please contact me. We are particularly keen to involve younger members of the population and need to find ways to reach and engage with them, so we would like someone familiar with the social media favoured by the under 30s to join the working group to help with this aim.

If you just have some ideas but don't want to join the working group, we would still like to hear from you.

Ultimately the BNHS would like to recruit an Honorary Publicity Officer, who would be supported by the working group, so if this position appeals to you please let us know. Helen Muir-Howie [herps\(at\)bnhs.org.uk](mailto:herps(at)bnhs.org.uk) and the Publicity Working Group.



Use the newsletter code NL419 for  
10% discount on **microscopy** equipment

### Notes from the Chair

by *Graham Bellamy*

A year of Covid-induced worry and restrictions to everyday life have affected how we have lived and socialised over the last year.

On the bright side spring is now well on the way; early this week a couple of frogs lurked in the bottom of our small pond probably waiting for a bit of sunshine before spawning. Whilst on a walk we passed a cherry plum in full flower humming with hundreds of visiting honeybees and a few bumblebee queens. Further on, two buzzards called while swooping and diving as a chiff chaff was in song nearby. At the church, rooks were busy on their spruced-up nests, presumably dreaming of the little rooks to come. I like the rooks, they have been keeping an eye on their increasingly wind battered nests all winter, often joined by a gang of noisy jackdaws swopping the news of the day.

Many of our open access wildlife sites as well as footpaths crossing farms have had a battering from the increased number of visits made over winter. On the chalk grassland reserves such as at Pegsdon and Barton Hills, narrow paths up the steep slopes have become significantly wider and damaged. Please support the organisations, often charities, that look after these essential open spaces and nature reserves that have served us so well by giving us the chance to get out and enjoy our wild places in these dark times.

By now we will have held our second AGM of the year. The first was a catch up from last April of the postponed meeting; at our second one we will have appointed the BNHS Council and honorary officers who work hard to keep your Society functioning. Thanks to them and to all our members who continue to give their support. Despite the problems we have still managed to put on eighteen meetings and events for members including four talks. Two talks and three visits before restrictions came into force followed by eight socially distanced visits and two talks plus the Christmas social via Zoom.

Talks given via Zoom, although not allowing a catch up and chat over a hot drink and a biscuit, were well attended with around forty people for our very first zoom talk, over eighty for Wilf Powell's talk on 'The Wildlife of Estonia' and around fifty for the virtual Christmas social. Perhaps even if we eventually get back to being able to hold meetings as we used to, holding some talks and meetings via zoom in the darkest, coldest months of the year is something we can continue. Do let me know what you think.

I very much look forward to a much more normal year ahead, where we can plan some outside events and meet with friends again to enjoy and study our wonderful wildlife.

Do continue to take care.

Graham Bellamy

*Hoopoe would like to remind everyone that the latest BNHS publication Bedfordshire - our changing habitats and wildlife. A photographic record is still available to purchase on the Society website! Get your copy, and get inspired to visit new areas of our lovely county.*



*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.*

Kempston Island: observations from a floodplain meadow in Bedfordshire  
*story and photos by Peter Sutton*

The floodplain meadow on the River Great Ouse at Kempston in Bedfordshire is effectively an island of land formed by the 'Back Brook' that leaves the river at TL 01619 48079 and re-joins the river at TL 02416 47698. At its northern end, the Back Brook leaves the meandering Great Ouse before it reaches All Saints Church at Kempston Church End, forming a deep weir pool known as Dead Man's Pool

The floodplain meadow has become increasingly surrounded by new housing developments and was subjected to major disturbance by the Bedford Western Bypass (A428) road bridge, which opened in 2010.

The meadow although used by dog walkers, anglers and other residents from the estates of Bedford is full of the summer song of birds, grasshoppers and bush-crickets, brought to an abrupt silence as it is mown annually.

The meadow is periodically submerged by the floodwaters of the River Great Ouse as observed in 2014 and the Boxing Day floods of 2020.



Spined Loach *Cobitis taenia* – Back Brook, Kempston – 12 August 2018

This well used and increasingly isolated area of grassland remains a remarkable site with an extraordinary assemblage of species. The aquatic habitat that surrounds the site holds an impressive array of fish including an important population of the nationally rare Spined Loach *Cobitis taenia*.

This beautifully marked fish is found in both the main river and the Back Brook. Other notable species include the European Eel *Anguilla anguilla*, which, in the space of a few decades, has been relegated from ubiquitous resident to an IUCN Critically Endangered species (Jacoby et al., 2014), and the Bullhead *Cottus perifretum*.



Figure 3. The Bullhead *Cottus perifretum* – Back Brook, Kempston – 12 August 2018

Fish predators such as the Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* and Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, and occasionally, the Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* may be seen.

Many dragonflies and damselflies can be observed during the summer months, from the Brown Hawker *Aeshna grandis* and Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator* to the Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens* and White-legged Damselfly *Platycnemis pennipes*.

Among the more difficult aquatic invertebrates to observe is the Shore Bug *Aphelocheirus aestivalis* and the Hairy or Nocturnal Whirligig *Orectocheilus villosus*.

The terrestrial life of the meadow is no less interesting, if not remarkable, for a site that has been subjected to periodic inundation by floodwaters. Perhaps its most noteworthy resident is the large and impressive Necklace Ground Beetle *Carabus monilis*.

This flightless species became a UK BAP Priority Species when studies revealed that it had “declined more than any other British carabid”, with habitat fragmentation and the widespread use of pesticides being given as possible reasons for its disappearance.

Invertebrate life in the grassland of the meadow is abundant with many singing grasshoppers and crickets in summer, including three species that became naturalised in Bedfordshire in recent times. Roesel's Bush-cricket *Roeseliana roeselii*, with its cicada-like buzz is now an abundant species, having arrived in Bedfordshire in 1990 its colonisation assisted by the regular appearance of its long-winged migratory form, f. *diluta*. Similarly, the Long-winged Cone-head *Conocephalus fuscus*, which reached the county in



1997 has a longer winged migratory form. The Lesser Marsh Grasshopper *Chorthippus albomarginatus* arrived somewhat earlier in 1976 and is an equally ubiquitous resident of grassland habitats in the county.

The end of 2020, however, was marked by an extreme weather event in the form of Storm Bella, which by Boxing Day, had resulted in extensive flooding along the River Great Ouse floodplain, and the meadow at Kempston was completely inundated for several days.

It is interesting to speculate as to what impact this event will have on the natural history of Kempston 'island'.

It might be assumed that it could spell disaster for the Necklace Ground Beetle, and yet, this flightless species is known to be associated with flood plain meadows and has remained present despite previous inundations, suggesting that it might have eggs or pupae that can survive short periods of flooding. The situation for resident mammals and other species is obviously more serious and their re-establishment will depend on recruitment from what remains of the wider countryside that has been rapidly disappearing under concrete and tarmac in this part of Bedfordshire.

What is clear is that the study of all forms of life at this site, including an evaluation of the status of the Necklace Ground Beetle after this extreme weather event, will provide a fascinating project for members of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society to explore.



The Necklace Ground Beetle *Carabus monilis* – Kempston floodplain meadow – 12 August 2018



The flooded water meadow at Kempston looking from the A428 road bridge towards the Kempston

### Acoustic Pipeline – automated sound analysis of bats offers a way of recording small mammals and bush-crickets

by Bob Cornes

BTO's Acoustic Pipeline ([bto.org/our-science/projects/bto-acoustic-pipeline](http://bto.org/our-science/projects/bto-acoustic-pipeline)) is an identification service for ultrasonic recordings, offering automated identifications of bats, small terrestrial mammals and bush-crickets. Sound files can be uploaded online and within 48 hours a report offering identifications is made available. There are two rates of charge for the service, which works by a system of credit units. 250 credits cost £50 + VAT. 1 credit pays for the processing of 1 GB of sound file data which sounds a lot, but doesn't go very far when recordings consist of more than 1 MB per second of recording time. There is a substantially lower rate which is offered for data which is not confidential and can be used by BTO for further development of the Acoustic Pipeline or for other unspecified purposes. 100 free credit units per year are offered for registered users, although unused units cannot be carried over to the next year.

The first thing that needs to be said is that the automated ID is good: very good compared with most other automated ID available, whether built into the recording device or a separate package for later processing. This is not only because the identification is made specific to the area in which the recordings were made (each file has to have a latitude and longitude associated with it), but also because unlikely species identifications are flagged with warnings if they are not known to be in the recording area or if they are very rare and therefore worth further investigation. Each identification also has a confidence level between 0 and 1 indicating the goodness of match with the library recordings for the species concerned. Identifications with low confidence levels are offered, but with a warning that low confidence levels (less than 0.5) mean that the identification should not be trusted. All of this should adequately warn users that the results should be interpreted intelligently and not blindly accepted. No doubt some will still be mesmerised by the magic of the technology and be over-credulous about improbable results, but the blame for this cannot fairly be laid at Acoustic Pipeline's door. I submitted some recordings which I had previously analysed and the identifications agreed very well for most species.

A significant selling point of Acoustic Pipeline is the identification of bush-crickets and small mammals in addition to bats. The article in *British Wildlife* last December (Vol. 32, no.3) by Stuart Newson, Neil Middleton and Huma Peace discusses the potential of ultrasonic recordings for non-intrusive recording of small mammals. Acoustic Pipeline offers, for a price, a way of doing this on a larger scale than offered by Longworth trapping and in combination with recording bats and bush-crickets. My knowledge of the ultrasonic sounds of small mammals and bush crickets is not good enough to evaluate the accuracy of the identifications of these groups by Acoustic Pipeline but, given the accuracy levels achieved for bats, it is likely to be good as long as the confidence value is sufficiently high.

What would be needed to make use of this ultrasonic recording analysis with Acoustic Pipeline? The first item is a suitable ultrasonic detector/recorder. Acoustic Pipeline is intended to be usable with many of these, though issues of data format and file naming are raised by some of them. Possibilities range from professional devices such as the Wildlife Acoustics SM4 to less expensive kit such as the Echometer Touch and the Peersonic Bat Recorder. The recording device needs to be full-spectrum (recording the full frequency range in real time) and capable of logging the date and time of each recording. The system is designed to deal with files of a maximum of 5 seconds length and it is desirable that the recording device can be set to make recordings of this length, although it can deal with longer recordings by splitting each into 5 second chunks before processing. A location has to be specified for each file when uploading and a recording device with built-in GPS which stores the location of each file as metadata is convenient, although not essential.

I would welcome any bat records which have been identified using Acoustic Pipeline, as would David Anderson for small mammal records and Kevin Sharpe for bush crickets records. Please send only records for which the confidence level (probability) is greater than 0.5 and include the probability value in the details of the record.

## Give the mower a rest, and create a mini-meadow in your garden

story and photos by Betty Cooke



Mown paths make a mini-meadow appear less unkempt (for those who worry about such things!)

If you leave part of your lawn to grow during the spring and summer months, you may attract some surprising visitors into your garden. Mow a path around the edge and it ceases to look unkempt and becomes another managed habitat. In 2014 I decided to leave a small weedy lawn unmown to see what appeared. It already contained Clover, Daisies, Buttercups, Violets, Ox-eye daisies and Cowslips, which all flowered much more abundantly without the regular beheading by the mower.

In an attempt to introduce some further variety, I scraped one area down to bare soil, scattered some wildflower seeds on one part and left some as bare earth. The rest of the lawn was left as long grass, which thrived and in late summer produced beautiful seed-heads. However, I found that the seed mix was short-lived as most were annuals and not hardy. In the long term the plants that thrived best

were those that appeared naturally, and most likely grew from seeds that were blown in from the local area, or deposited by passing wildlife.

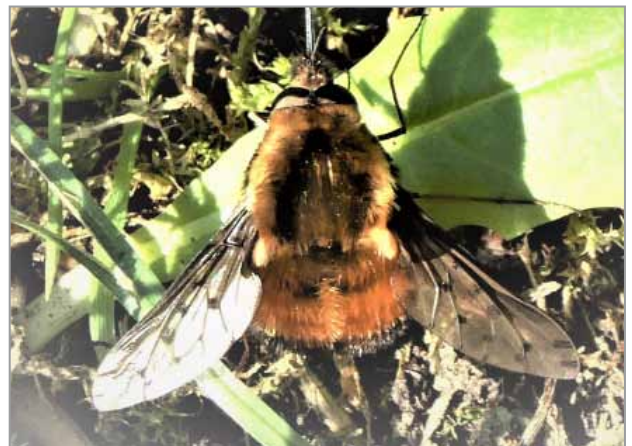
The new plants that quickly arrived included: Ragwort, Speedwells, Flax, Goatsbeard, Thistles, Catsear, Hawkbits, Yarrow, Common Vetch and Lady's Bedstraw. That first summer I was pleased to find some additions to the garden invertebrates, drawn in by the new habitat. These included: Marbled White and Large Skipper butterflies, and a Long-winged Conehead. The larvae of Cinnabar moths soon consumed the Ragworts but luckily not before one of the rarely recorded flies, that are dependent upon Ragwort, was identified as *Merzomyia westermanni*. Two years later I was excited by the unexpected appearance of a Twayblade, the second orchid species to appear naturally in my garden.

Six years later the mini-meadow experiment continues to produce welcome surprises. Last March on the path around the mini-meadow I photographed a Dotted Bee-fly, a first record of that species for the county. The more common Dark-edged Bee-flies are often seen hovering over nest holes of Mining Bees that excavate tunnels in the bare earth. All through the summer the Ox-eye daisies provided a feast for various Hoverflies, Bees, Longhorn Beetles, Flies, and Shieldbug nymphs.

Last September, before the autumn cut, I went over the area with a sweep net and found ten Bishop's Mitre shieldbugs (four adults and six final instars), two Field Damselbugs, a few 7-spots and one Pine Ladybird, and many hoppers, grass bugs and others yet to be identified. All were released unharmed into adjacent borders.

Only one cut is necessary, usually in Sept/Oct and the cuttings are best removed to compost down. However, last year we missed an opportunity to cut at that time, so now there is an area of thick tussocks to investigate. I suspect it may hold a few beetle populations, but that's another story!

If you have an unused part of lawn, why not turn it into a mini-meadow? I can heartily recommend the project; it takes but little effort, offers a safe haven for wildlife, and produces much pleasure!



Dotted Bee-fly *Bombylius discolor* with its characteristic dark wing spots

### A wild town garden

by Joan Schneider

Richard Revels' interesting article (Issue 197) led me to review developments in my fairly wild garden in Dunstable High Street since I took it over in a neglected state about 35 years ago. Attached to a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century house it is long and narrow (c35m x 7m) on chalk subsoil. It used to have the benefit of an equally wild garden across the far end and along part of one side. Over the years the other adjacent properties have been reduced from well-cultivated gardens to mainly gravel on one side and neglected grass the other. The former wild areas have been recently built on or converted for car parking.

Inevitably this, along with the general fall in numbers of species like Hedgehogs and Bats, has meant a reduction in the wildlife seen in my garden. On the other hand, where I inherited only one tree, a not particularly tasty Plum – I wonder if it is the 'Prune' formerly grown so widely in the county? – and plenty of Ivy, Nettles and Brambles, I have added a Silver Birch, a Field Maple, a Rowan, all now grown tall, and hedges which include Beech, Yew, Holly, Hazel, Hawthorn and Dog Rose. There are also garden shrubs, Forsythia, Philadelphus, Buddleia, Jasmine, etc. and a vine which usually has a good crop of small but sweet and juicy grapes. One autumn, pruning the vine, I came on an old blackbird's nest just above eye level. Feeling to see if there was anything in it I was startled to encounter apparently soft eggs. A movement nearby nearly distracted me and looking down I saw the shiny black eyes of a mouse staring at me: it had been storing grapes in the nest.

Hedgehogs used to regularly patrol the garden on summer evenings and one winter, tidying the barn, I found something heavy in an old bin bag: it was a hibernating Hedgehog. There have been none now for several years.

Bird life has varied and I don't expect anything exotic in the middle of a town, but I am saddened by the absence for several years now of the Thrush's song and also the Greenfinch. I put food out daily and am rewarded by the regulars: Robin, Blackbird, Blue and Great Tits, Dunnock, Woodpigeons and Collared Doves and, after an absence of several years, House Sparrows have returned, the family growing annually after an original single pair. I hear Wrens and Chaffinches but they don't frequent the feeder. Goldfinches were common for a while but, like the delightful Long-tailed Tits, they were absent last year. Welcome birds of passage, surprising in such urban surroundings and known only briefly by their song are Blackcap and Willow Warbler in spring and Chiffchaff usually in the autumn. Swifts overhead seem to be ever fewer. One spring when Blue Tits nested in a nearby box I realised that the brood were being fed exclusively from the fatball hanging in the feeder so I removed it to encourage a more varied diet, preferably including caterpillars and aphids off my plants.

I installed a small pond, with oxygenating weed, a Water Lily and Yellow Iris. A friend supplied frogspawn which has resulted in generations of Frogs ever since, though their numbers have diminished in recent years. But there is a puzzling problem: I realised four or five years ago that Pond Snails, numerous for years, the jelly with their eggs covering the undersides of the lily pads, had entirely disappeared. Twice I have tried to restock with snails from a friend's pond but with no success. Pond Skaters arrive in the spring and occasional Damselflies and sometimes a Newt. My Frogs, like my other wildlife, are unrecorded in the BNHS files since they are not online.

A puzzling failure is the Spindle bush. I had hoped for a lovely autumn display but despite plenty of flowers each spring it never produces more than three or four berries. Does it need a mate, or is it a lack of pollinating insects?

The garden faces south-west but is shaded by a large Sycamore tree in a neighbouring property, so a wildflower meadow is not an option, but as well as garden flowers such as Ice Plant *Sedum spectabile*, Lavender, Crocus, Honesty and so on I welcome natives like Cowslip, Primrose, Germander Speedwell, Cow Parsley, Teasle, Wild Carrot and Stinking Iris. This latter (I actually like the smell) provides bright winter colour with its orange berries and seeds itself liberally, but doesn't seem popular as winter food for birds. Bees are busy in sunny patches in summer and the commoner Butterflies are visitors but Ants, once a nuisance, seem much fewer than they were.

My grass patch (I don't call it a lawn) receives minimal care and consists largely of Daisies and Moss,



which, unlike grass, remain green through drought and require little mowing.

During lockdown I enjoy my little patch but fear I am fighting a rear-guard action for wildlife, isolated and enclosed by spreading bricks and concrete.

*Please note: the hard copy of this article was redirected at least a couple of times and arrived at 'WAB HQ' as a scan of the original. The photo of the author's beautiful garden was sadly not useable so as some meagre compensation we offer up the following from the Editor's own little garden which happily does still see its share of Goldfinches (but alas not Greenfinches, for which we are very envious). - Ed.*



### Turning your slides into digital files

by Richard Revels

In the BNHS's latest book *Bedfordshire – Our Changing Habitats and Wildlife* there are a number of comparison pictures of habitats from the 1990s, and recent pictures taken from the same viewpoint at the same time of the year, that show how those habitats are now, just 20 years later. The original pictures were all taken in the 1990s using transparency (slides) film and were published in another BNHS habitat book *Wild Bedfordshire* published in 2000. Some people may be surprised just how much some habitats have changed in just twenty years.

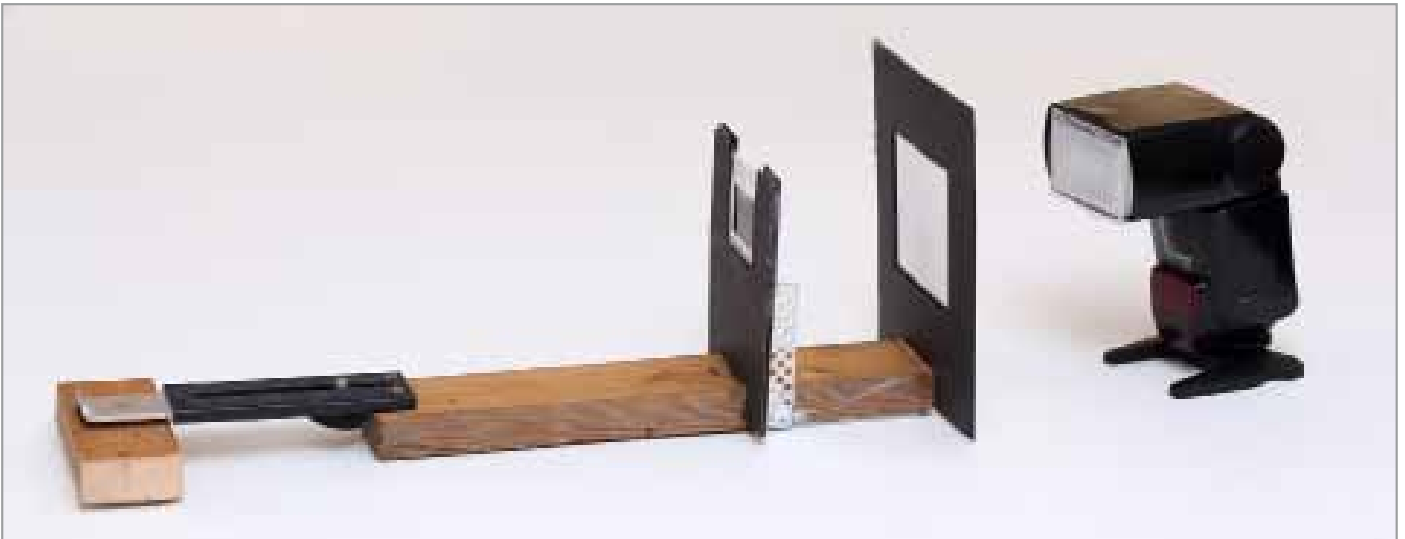
While today our pictures are digital files, all my pictures taken more than 18 years ago were colour slides, and I expect like me many BNHS members will have slides stored away showing places visited both in the UK and abroad, maybe with family and friends taken when film was still 'king', and have been meaning to get them copied to digital files. The good news is that without too much trouble and expense, that can be done, and so enabling those pictures of yesteryear kept usable and viewable in today's digital world. There are firms that will copy them commercially for you, but of course that will cost you money, and there is also a risk that the slides will get lost or damaged while out of your hands. So there are advantages to copying slides yourself.

I have been scanning my own slides since the late 1990s. At first it was to produce digital files so I could produce my own prints with my inkjet printer, and later so they could be used for reproduction in books and magazines. Before buying my first dedicated Nikon Coolscan film scanner back in the late 1990s, I did try a couple of good quality flatbed scanners that were advertised as producing high quality digital files from slides, however I was rather disappointed with the results. Most photographers I knew at that time were using a Nikon Coolscan film scanner, so I also decided to buy one. Over the years I needed to upgrade that scanner as newer upgrades were both faster and produced slightly better results.

My current Nikon Coolscan ED 5000 ED cost me around £900 about 14 years ago and was the last Coolscan made by Nikon. As it is now starting to become unreliable, sometimes freezing just before finishing a scan, I decided to try making my own slide scanner as a backup, using my full frame Canon 5D Mk3 DSLR camera fitted with my Canon 100 mm macro lens. This necessitated the manufacture of a stand to hold the camera and lens, a slide holder, and a diffuser behind the slide to give an even and consistent source for copying each slide.

To make the above rig I utilised the base of a redundant flash bracket, sawing off the angled up-right arm so that the camera and lens could be attached to the bracket by the screw in that bracket. That allows the camera and lens to be moved backwards or forwards as required to give about life size copies. All the assembly was made from materials that I already had in my workshop. The slide holder was made out of mounting board off cuts, with three layers glued together, leaving a central open slot to hold the slide. The slide holder is held in place by 'Blu-tack' on two uprights that are screwed into the central wooden column, so enabling the slide holder to be raised or lowered on uprights when needed. A piece of card with the central area cut out and replaced with standard 100 gsm writing paper, is placed behind the slide as shown in the picture of the rig, and is held in place by two drawing pins with my Canon flash unit with its own diffuser also engaged, is positioned behind.

The total cost to create my slide copier was almost nothing except my time, as all the components: drawing pins, screws, a strip of wood, pieces of mount board, glue and blu-tack were already in my possession, and it only took me an afternoon to put it together.



My home made slide copier is a simple construction costing me just an afternoon in time to make, and it works well, producing good results. While the quality of the scanned images produced will not quite match that of the latest digital cameras, if the slide to be copied is sharp and well exposed, they should after processing produce excellent A4 size prints.

So how did the digital files resulting from the Coolscan and camera of the same slide compare? There was only a slight difference, with slightly more detail being produced in the darker and lighter areas by the Coolscan. The scanner can be set to do up to 16 'multi scans' that produces as much detail as possible from both the shadow and highlight areas. I set up my Coolscan to do eight scans, which saves time. I set my camera to take low contrast RAW files, and so could easily adjusting contrast later in the RAW converter, and doing any final 'tweaking' in Photoshop. By doing that my camera produced files that were very close to the quality of the Coolscan files.

So the Coolscan just wins in the high contrast areas, but not by much.

Spots of dust on the slides were visible in the resulting files produced by the camera, and had to be taken out manually in Photoshop which is easy to do, whereas the spots of dust were mostly taken out automatically during scanning by the Coolscan.

Again the Coolscan just wins.

Sharpness was slightly better using the camera, but extra sharpening is always required with Coolscan files.

This time the camera just wins.

Colour balance should be set up prior to scanning both in the scanner and also in the camera menu. This again can also be done later during processing, however neither files needed much adjusting.

So I think it was a draw this time.

So with little cost in making my scanning setup, and only taking about two hours constructing time, BNHS members may decide to spend some time making their own rig, so they can convert some of their old favourite and unrepeatable pictures into digital files.

### **General advice:**

1. Make sure before scanning that the slides are clean of dust.
2. For best possible results take your camera pictures as RAW files, as they will contain all the information that will not change, and rather like a film negative, you can always return to the RAW file and start again, if and when required.
3. After adjusting and converting in the RAW converter, and then doing a final tweak in Photoshop, I save my files as high quality Tiff files in my photo library. If and when I require a JPEG file, I can quickly and easily make one later.
4. If after you set up your camera in the menu to copy slides, and providing you are pleased with the results, those settings can be saved in your camera as a 'custom functions' so they are saved for using again next time you want to copy more slides.

## Bedfordshire Naturalist – request for volunteer editors

*by Rosemary Brind, Hon. Editor*

Do you like to read good, clear writing that doesn't leave you scratching your head? Do you think that a comma needs to be in the right place? Would you like to help keep up the standards of the BNHS? If the answer is yes, then this is your opportunity.

Work towards producing the Bedfordshire Naturalist for 2020 is beginning, and with the two positions of editors for Parts 1 and 2 (Bedfordshire Bird Report) still vacant, we are seeking offers of assistance with editing and proofreading, or even taking on the editorial lead for production of one of the volumes. The roles include spotting and correcting spelling, punctuation and grammar so that articles are clearly expressed. A style guide has been developed to help ensure consistency in the way in which, for example, dates should be written. Help will be given in developing skills. If you have some time to offer and would like to be more involved with the Society as part of a friendly editorial team, do contact me at [journal\(at\)bnhs.org.uk](mailto:journal(at)bnhs.org.uk) for a chat.

The journals form an important record of the botanical and zoological knowledge of the county, featuring the annual reports of the Society Recorders as well as original papers on natural history. It's very satisfying to have a task with an end date, and to see the finished product drop through the letterbox. The journals will be in full colour once again this year thanks to a generous grant from The Peter Smith Charitable Trust for Nature, and we hope to include an excellent selection of members' photographs.

The deadline for contributions to the 2020 journal is 30th April 2021 and if you have an article that you would like considered for publication, please email [journal\(at\)bnhs.org.uk](mailto:journal(at)bnhs.org.uk) .

An online payment facility has recently been enabled on the BNHS website. By the time this newsletter is published, or possibly shortly after, copies of the 2019 journals, Bedfordshire Naturalist Volume 74, Parts 1 and 2 (Bedfordshire Bird Report) will be available for purchase online for £15 each (incl. p&p). Our most recent book, Bedfordshire – our changing habitats and wildlife, is also available for online purchase, for £20 (+ p&p).

## Newt habitat creation progress in Bedfordshire (cont'd from front page)

*by Emily Seccombe*

We have worked on six strategically located sites in Bedfordshire so far. Below are two examples of our recent work. We will be surveying these ponds this spring for great crested newts.

### **Froghall Wood:**

One of our key sites, a community woodland near Ampthill, owned by Central Bedfordshire Council. We created four ponds in 2020, with the design and location informed by working with the council rangers.

300m of hedgerow was planted over the winter to improve connectivity between newt populations. The site offered an opportunity to create a complex of large ponds with wide drawdown zones to support high levels of freshwater biodiversity. The site is fed by surface water falling on the surrounding woodland and grassland, which provides a clean water source.



Pond created at Froghall Wood in 2020

### **Farmland near Marston Moretaine:**

At another key site, we are taking a whole-site approach to convert an arable field into a wildlife site with ponds, woodland and grassland. The top soil was stripped as it contained high levels of synthetic agricultural chemicals, which would decrease the biodiversity benefit of new ponds and grassland. The surrounding area is to be seeded with a native wildflower mix this spring. 5 main ponds were created in 2020, with an additional complex of 3 experimental linear ponds to create additional wetland habitat on a slope. 2 hectares of woodland were planted over winter to provide the terrestrial cover which newts and other species use for shelter and foraging outside of the breeding season. This site now offers a viable area of expansion for great crested newt populations from Marston Thrift SSSI, where there are several existing great crested newt ponds. This demonstrates how we are taking a landscape-scale approach to deliver habitat creation in strategic locations. The landowner benefits from annual payments which cover any management required and compensate for loss of income. We will continue to work with, and advise, the landowner on how to manage the site to ensure it continues to benefit nature in the long-term. This site provides an excellent example of how the scheme can fund the re-naturalisation of difficult-to-farm agricultural land to benefit a range of wildlife, not just newts.



Pond created on private farmland in 2020

### **Monitoring our success:**

A strength of this scheme is the long-term monitoring of new habitat. This includes yearly checks to ensure management is on track, plus annual eDNA surveys until great crested newts are identified, then every three years thereafter. We also carry out population monitoring at selected sites to understand the impact on great crested newt populations at a landscape scale.

We recently published our monitoring results of the scheme which can be found here: <http://bit.ly/NCPmonitoring2020>. Only two years after the scheme began, great crested newt presence has been recorded in nearly two-thirds of compensation sites and in 36% of ponds created or restored to compensate for developer impacts. Monitoring is also providing evidence of the wider benefits of our work for priority species like the common toad and other freshwater wildlife.

### **How the scheme works:**

The Newt Conservation Partnership receives funding from NatureSpace, an organisation which carries out a new Government-approved approach to the conservation of great crested newts called District Licensing. More information about the NatureSpace District Licensing scheme can be found on their website: <https://naturespaceuk.com/>. The Newt Conservation Partnership uses the funds from developers to create, manage and monitor compensation habitat.

### **Call for sites: are you interested in the scheme?**

We are currently looking for additional sites to create habitat in Bedfordshire this year, with a particular focus on Bedford Borough. Good locations for compensation sites include wet areas on heavy clay – often poor for farming. We are looking for sites with an unpolluted water source, with space to create ponds of ~300-1,200 m<sup>2</sup> in surface area. Additionally, new ponds need to be near existing populations of great



crested newts to maximise the potential for natural colonisation. The habitat around the ponds should be suitable for newts because they spend most of their adult life on land – good newt habitat includes woodland, scrub or rough grassland. We can also restore ‘lost’ ponds, or manage existing ponds to improve them for newts, for example by managing trees or re-profiling margins.

If you know of suitable sites, or landowners who may be interested, please get in touch via email: [eseccombe\(at\)newtpartnership.org.uk](mailto:eseccombe@newtpartnership.org.uk) for further information.

### Spring Programme 2021

Sheila and I are pleased to report that we managed to have a full programme of talks over the winter, largely due to the generosity of members giving up their time to master the intricacies of Zoom. We are also delighted that many more members have participated than we would normally have expected to see at the face to face talks. Thank you to everyone for making this a success and enabling members to keep in contact throughout the long dark winter evenings. Unfortunately all these talks had to be self-catering but that did allow members far more choice in the refreshments available!

In January, last year’s postponed AGM was followed by a remastered recorded talk from the late John Dony courtesy of Chris Boon and his family accompanied by some photos organised by Graham Bellamy. This was followed in February by a presentation from Jeff Blinkow about his Top 10 UK wildlife sites.

The 74<sup>th</sup> BNHS AGM and Recorders meeting was scheduled for March 16<sup>th</sup> again via Zoom.

There are still more talks to come. Please contact Graham Bellamy for login details [chairman\(at\)bnhs.org.uk](mailto:chairman@bnhs.org.uk) if you wish to take part.

We have been able to reschedule to the talk from Dr Peter Brown on Ladybirds originally planned for April 2020.

As we will not be resuming field meetings until June, we have arranged an extra talk by member and renowned wildlife author James Lowen which will be held on Wednesday May 12<sup>th</sup> - a little different to the normal schedule of the third Tuesday of the month.

The details of both talks are as follows:

#### **TUESDAY APRIL 20<sup>th</sup> 8pm**

**Much Ado About Mothing** by James Lowen, an award-winning author who recounts an intoxicating, year-long quest to celebrate Britain’s rarest and most remarkable moths. Travelling the length and breadth of Britain, from Cornwall to the Cairngorms, James Lowen recounts a year spent hiking up mountains, wading through marshes and roaming by night amid ancient woodlands. He treats us to enchanting tales divulged by moths, from migratory feats to mastery of camouflage, and from missives about the state of the planet to their potential service in addressing the global plastics problem. James’s book, *Much Ado About Mothing* will be published by Bloomsbury in July 2021.

#### **WEDNESDAY MAY 12<sup>th</sup> 8pm**

**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.

Dr Brown gave an excellent presentation at the last BNHS Conference in 2018. This is a golden opportunity for those members that missed it or wish to have a refresher. He is co-author of *Field Guide to the Ladybirds of Great Britain and Ireland* published by Bloomsbury Wildlife in 2018. This talk was originally scheduled for April 2020.