



# Wild About Beds

Autumn 2022



In this 204th issue:

## Contents

Notes from the Chair	3
Bugs in Beds	5
BUG Labs return	6
Clophill Lakes	7

## Contents

Summer Field Visit Highlights	8
Indoor Meetings	15

*Photo above: Field Grasshopper by Rory Morrissey on BUG Lab event*

Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:



The Bedfordshire Natural History Society  
[www.bnhs.org.uk](http://www.bnhs.org.uk)  
Registered charity number 268659



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@bnhs.org.uk](mailto: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](http://www.bedsbionet.org.uk).

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Email: [newsletter@bnhs.org.uk](mailto: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 December 2022** please.

**Thank you in anticipation.**

The next Wild About Beds will be published in **January 2023**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

## Notes from the Chair

*Graham Bellamy*

The summer of 2022 has been notable in many ways and autumn has arrived bringing historical events that are of national significance. The passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the accession to the throne of His Majesty King Charles III gripping the nation. It's been a time for reflection on the last 70 years as well as an opportunity to look ahead.

The exceptional drought and high temperatures finally broke in late August and my local chalk grassland looks to have largely recovered already and is sporting a fresh green growth of grassland plants. It was interesting to note the plants that withstood the record high temperatures; pasque flower plants and stemless thistle both looking relatively unaffected while horseshoe vetch and violets looked the worse for wear but have recovered immediately after the first serious rainfall. Our wildlife has to be very resilient.

It will be interesting to hear from our recorders on the effects of the extreme weather. Most of my local wet ditches have dried out having only just recolonised with sticklebacks from the dry weather over the last few years. Where ponds have dried out amphibian breeding success will have been badly impacted.

Butterflies seemed to suffer in the drought although there have been fresh meadow browns on my butterfly transect since the rain and several were mating earlier this week. The small copper butterflies at Pegsdon Hills got through as caterpillars and chrysalids and it was delightful to see several fresh ones in the valley bottom recently.



As ivy comes into flower, most I have looked at have good numbers of ivy bees foraging in the flowers along with the odd honey bee and wasp. Ivy bees are a relatively new addition to the British fauna being first recorded in 2001 and in Bedfordshire in 2014. This photo by Richard Revels comes from the recent BNHS book *Bedfordshire - our changing habitats and wildlife*. There is still plenty of time to get a copy. It would make a great Christmas present. Copies can be order from our web site or purchased at BNHS field outings and talks.

## Issue 204 – Autumn 2022

Looking ahead, I am excited to hear that the Wildlife Trust has secured Strawberry Hill Farm at Knotting. This 150-hectare farm was taken out of agriculture in the 1990`s and has developed as a complex of grassland, mixed scrub and woodland with nightingale, turtle dove and many scrub warblers. BNHS recorders have been invited to help record what other wildlife the new nature reserve holds, and the next few years are set to be very interesting.

We will be holding a Special General Meeting as first order of business on 18<sup>th</sup> of October just before our first indoor talk at our usual venue at Maulden Village Hall, starting promptly at 7.30. The Special General Meeting is needed to ask for approval for making changes to the societies rule 6 on membership. This is to reflect recent changes in membership categories that are needed to enable online payments of subscriptions; and to approve recommended new subscription rates to be effective from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023 by phasing out the senior citizen concession. Members will receive notice of the Special General Meeting, the agenda and the proposals to be voted on. Please attend the meeting to enable your Council to go ahead with these recommended changes.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this edition of *Wild About Beds*. Thanks to all our contributors for another interesting read.



*Strawberry Hill Farm has been in set-aside for more than 30 years providing local naturalists with an unparalleled chance for recording that have resulted.*

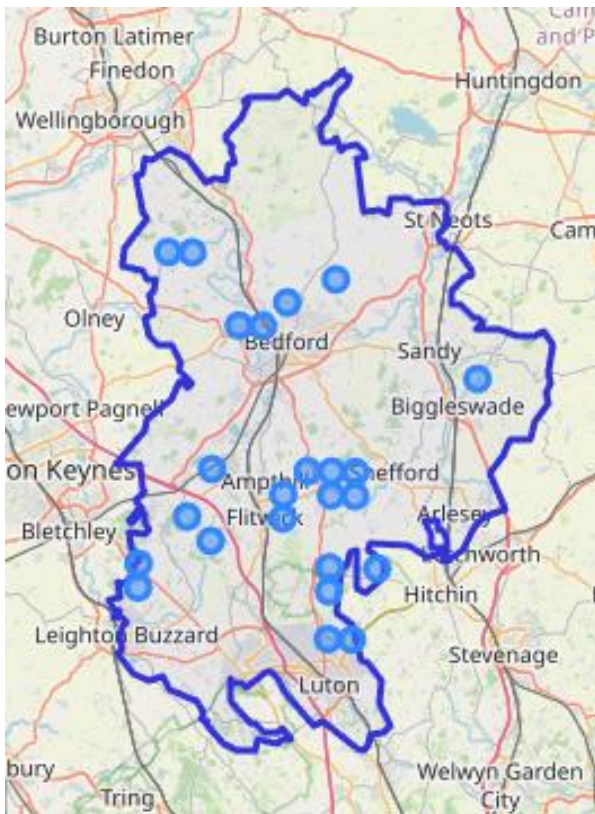
## Bugs in Beds

*Andrew Green*

It has been a busy year for the Bedfordshire Invertebrate Group as we try to catch up on fieldwork missed during the pandemic. To date we have visited 21 sites across the county gathering data on the various invertebrates that inhabit our county. There have been some interesting and exciting finds along the way and disappointments too as the heatwave affected both our insect abundance, and our own endurance in the field.

There will be a report in full in next year's journal, but here is a summary of our work to date in 2022.

Overall, we achieved a good geographical spread of sites with a few gaps that we aim to fill next year. There was a focus on the greensand and chalk this year as we responded to requests to monitor sites managed by The Greensand Trust and Natural England. Next year we hope to visit more of the clay regions and the recent acquisition of Strawberry Hill Farm by Wildlife BCN will add a northern element to next year's trips.



Within our group, we have a diverse range of interests. Our regular attendees primarily focus on diptera (flies), coleoptera (beetles) and hymenoptera (bees, wasps, ants and sawflies) with one or two pan-species recorders filling in the taxonomic gaps. To date 23 of us have added 1090 records to the national database which included 702 species. These numbers will grow as further specimens are identified in the coming months.

## BUG Lab events return

Erika Pratt, Greensand Trust Education Coordinator

Young people and their families once again were encouraged to take a closer look at creepy-crawlies of all kinds - thanks to seven BUG Lab events, organised by the Greensand Trust supported by Central Bedfordshire Council. These events, which returned after two years' Covid-induced absence, at six local countryside sites. Participants were encouraged and helped to list and record what they found (some interesting spellings including a 'ploom' moth and a 'swyrly snayl' but we all have to start somewhere!) whilst committed BNHS members and some Friends of Linslade Wood volunteered to help with identification of species and fun craft activities. Particular thanks to Sheila, Judith, Rory, Julia and Wilf this year for being completely unperturbed when confronted with several bug pots at once from over-excited youngsters.



Quite a few spiders were recorded this year with the positive identification of a male *Nigma walckenaeri* at Blue Waters Houghton Regis being the most exciting (for such a fantastic name if nothing else!). This photograph is courtesy of Rory Morrissey.

## Clophill Lakes - Another new Nature Reserve for Bedfordshire



The Greensand Trust is establishing Clophill Lakes as a new nature reserve in the heart of the Flit Valley between Clophill and Chicksands.

We would like to thank BNHS members for your support so far in helping us to understand this wonderful site, particularly through many varied surveys - with your help we can establish and protect this site as a high-quality haven for nature.

Our vision is to conserve and enhance its natural beauty, wildlife and heritage, whilst providing sensitive sustainable access and promoting understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Greensand Country area to local communities and the wider public.

We have launched our appeal to support our conservation work and the supporting facilities that the site will need to ensure its future sustainability and protection.

Greensand Trust Patron and former Chairman Peter Smith MBE has offered to match any donations made to the Clophill Lakes appeal before the end of December via The Peter Smith Charitable Trust.

**To find out further information or donate to our appeal please visit the Greensand Trust website:**

<https://www.greensandtrust.org/appeal/clophill-lakes>

## Summer Highlights

### June 11<sup>th</sup> Flitwick Moor Invertebrate Day.

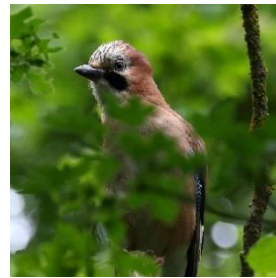
This year's event was held on a rather breezy day, but it was warm and sunny and no rain which was a bonus. Some BNHS Recorders were present along with members of the BNHS and Flit Vale Wildlife Trust Group. We also had a couple of families who had an enjoyable time looking for various bugs and beasts on the Moor. All equipment was provided for them to do this and there were plenty of field guides and helpful folk to identify any finds. Colin Carpenter made a note of all the finds and this will be available in the near future. The County Recorders also seemed to have found various interesting species.



*Chimney Sweeper moth*



*Common Frog tadpole*



*Jay*



A very exciting find by Merv was a Beautiful Demoiselle damselfly and his photo (above) was crucial for confirming the ID for County records. This was the first record for Bedfordshire this year and the County Recorder was very pleased to know they are at Flitwick Moor.

This is a very worthwhile event and we will be publicising it more vigorously next year to try and attract more families to this lovely Reserve. We also hope that more Recorders will be available – there is certainly plenty of scope for a wide variety of species. *Ann de Winter*



**21<sup>st</sup> June Sandy Smith**

An excellent evening walk at Sandy Smith reserve, led by Sue Raven and Stefan Baltruschat, was enjoyed by a large mixed group from BNHS and Bird Club. Highlight was the Little Owl perched on the roof and available for close views through a couple of telescopes as people arrived. Common Spotted, Pyramidal and Bee Orchids were pointed out. Birds were more elusive although 33 bird species were seen or heard and Skylarks sang throughout. The evening ended spectacularly with an eruption of Scarlet Tiger Moths zooming round the trees near the river. Then, as we reached the cars, hundreds of Summer Chafers appeared over the hedges and dive-bombed us! Those who stayed a little later had a bonus sighting of a Barn Owl! *Betty Cook*

**1<sup>st</sup> July St Neots Riverside Park**



This was a new venue for us chosen by Rory Morrissey, our Dragonfly Recorder and it did not disappoint. A little tricky to find and indeed a couple of people did not make it but at least this car park was free with plenty of spaces. We crossed the River Great Ouse back into Bedfordshire and immediately began to see damselflies. Our target species, Scarce Chaser and Norfolk Hawker (photo above by Rory Morrissey) were sighted quickly from the bank of Kingfisher Cut. There was so much to see that we stayed in this vicinity for at least an hour! Butterflies were few and far between, perhaps because we only had sunny spells but there were other insects about with some interesting plants for the botanists in the group. *Julia Powell*

**16<sup>th</sup> July Wadelows Nature Reserve**

Members of the BIG joined an excursion of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society to Wadelows Nature Reserve, fourteen of us in all. This is a site that we have visited regularly over the years, with a mixture of riverside, pools, grassland and woodland. The small ponds and their dipping platform were particularly attractive on a hot day, and we had sensational views here of a patrolling male Emperor dragonfly, *Anax imperator*, among other common Odonata. The hoverflies included the less-common *Helophilus hybridus* basking on floating vegetation. Perhaps most appreciated here, however, was a Water Ladybird, *Anisosticta novemdecimpunctata*, that persistently explored emerging stems for the benefit of all present,

including the photographers. In the grasslands and woodland edge there were large numbers of Gatekeepers, Common Blues and other butterflies. With thanks to John and Bridget for kindly hosting us once again. *John O'Sullivan*

**26<sup>th</sup> July Flitton Moor**



*Screech Beetle found in the Canadian pondweed at Flitton Moor. Photograph by Peter Sutton*

We arrived between 10 and 10.30 am at Flitton Moor and immediately noticed that one of our sites of interest, the drainage channel that runs next to the information hut, had dried up because of a leak in the dam. The channel had had a good population of Three-spined Sticklebacks and Nine-spined Sticklebacks, which were not otherwise present in the adjacent River Flit.

The twelve of us moved on to the main pond, where the water was too low to be accessible from its wooden platform. The edges of the pond were covered with a blanket of the invasive New Zealand Pigmyweed, *Crassula helmsii* which extended, over several metres in some areas, to the water's edge. We began to search what remained of the well-weeded shallow pool (the water weed was primarily another non-native species, Canadian Pondweed, *Elodea canadensis*) which, nevertheless, provided good habitat for the following water beetles: *Colymbetes fuscus*, *Agabus sturmi*, Screech Beetle *Hygrobia hermanni*, *Hygrotus inequalis*, *Ilybius fenestratus* and *Ilybius ater*. The Screech Beetle, which used to be sold as a

novelty in the streets of Victorian London, 'performed' its trick of 'squeaking' in response to being (carefully) handled, and it was good to see one of the less common species, *Ilybius fenestratus*, appear in the net. Among the water bugs were two species of Water Boatman: *Notonecta glauca* and *N. maculata*, and also the large Lesser Water Boatman, *Corixa punctata*. Care was taken to avoid the sharp proboscis of the water boatmen, and even more-so with the Saucer Bug, *Ilyocoris cimicoides*, whose piecing mouthparts and toxic saliva can induce a level of pain that is arguably more severe than a wasp sting!

There was very little in the way of dragonfly larvae, having all hatched out for the year, and little in the way of adults. It was becoming clear that a visit to the ponds earlier in the season would have been more productive, but still, a good number of species were seen including another impressive bug, the Water Scorpion, *Nepa cinerea*.



*Speckled Bush Cricket*

The Nine-spined Stickleback, *Pungitius pungitius* was abundant in the muddy waters and there were small numbers of Three-spined Stickleback, *Gasterosteus aculeatus*. It will be interesting to see what happens to these populations if the pond dries out, which it may do this summer. The adjacent drainage channel is normally a refuge for these species, which reappear in the pond when the river floods and refills the pond, but since it has also dried up, it too will have to be repopulated from nearby refugia for these species. Having exhausted the larger pond, we walked across the cattle grazed meadow to the smaller pond. The grassland was dominated by Meadow Grasshopper, *Pseudochorthippus parallelus*. Also seen was a single Lesser Marsh Grasshopper, *Chorthippus albomarginatus*. There were surprisingly few Roesel's Bush-crickets, *Roeseliana roeselii* and a notable absence of Long-winged Cone-heads, *Conocephalus fuscus*. Dark Bush-crickets, *Pholidoptera griseoptera*, were present in denser vegetation and Sheila found a Speckled Bush-cricket, *Leptophyes punctatissima* on thistle head. The second pond was on the verge of completely drying up and was again dominated by New Zealand Pigmyweed so we turned our attention to the River Flit at the end of the meadow.

A good population of Bullhead, *Cottus perifretum* and a single very large female Minnow, *Phoxinus phoxinus* was found, along with an abundance of Banded Demoiselle, *Calopteryx splendens* larvae. The water of the River Flit was unacceptably turbid – a condition linked to pollution further upstream, but the fact

that two pollution-sensitive species are in the river suggests that the quality of the water is still above threshold levels for these species. A single large recently deceased Signal Crayfish, *Pacifasticus leniusculus* was also found. A visit earlier in the year may have been more productive and allowed the observation of large dragonfly larvae, Great Diving Beetles, *Dytiscus marginalis* and the Long Water Scorpion, *Ranatra linearis*, but all things considered, a good assemblage of interesting species was seen.  
*Peter Sutton*

### 1<sup>st</sup> August Moggerhanger Park

There was a big group of 17 people that met in the dry and dusty car park of Moggerhanger Park. It was still hot and evidence of the drought was marked everywhere. However, we were told about various areas to explore such as the wood and the walled garden. Thus the group split up and agreed to reconvene at the café – an easy decision. I was with the group that explored one of the walled gardens with paths mown through the high vegetation but after about an hour, we moved into the woods where it was much cooler. The other group explored a different area of the woods. Some collecting was done and a species list has been compiled and passed to the manager of the site. Ice creams and lunch at the café including a discussion about the site and future events ended the visit. We will try to arrange another visit in 2023.  
*Julia Powell*

### 17<sup>th</sup> August Harrold-Odell Country Park

Sadly this event was cancelled due to lack of support and a disappointing weather forecast.

### 23<sup>rd</sup> August Swiss Gardens



We were welcomed back to Swiss Gardens to support their Invertebrate Day. Corinne and her staff had set up a large gazebo, some tables and chairs for us near one of the paths. Nine people were here including Sarah Cowling from the local WLT. We had the BNHS display stand and there were a number of families that kept coming back to find out about the nature table materials, take the quizzes and various members helped the young children with pond-dipping in the stream and using sweep nets in the woods nearby. Some of the creatures found in the water were transferred to a small tank for closer examination and

inspected with great interest by the children. One very small creature, difficult to photograph but eventually identified later by Betty Cooke as a Fish Louse – an exciting find although probably not rare. *Julia Powell*

**3<sup>rd</sup> September Duck End Nature Reserve**



*Female Bank Vole and young. Photograph by Julia Powell*

20 traps were set by Mick McCarrick several days beforehand and 16 people turned out on the day including several visitors and the chair of the Mammal Group, Ken Grinder who assisted with the survey.

**Mammals:**

7 Banks Voles including males at 32, 16.5, 20, 35 (plus tick) and 17 grams, females at 14, 21g – and the mother and young under the corrugated sheet (see photograph above);

6 Wood Mice including males at 14, 19, 22.5 and 19.5 grams and a female at 13 grams – plus the 'naughty' one that jumped off and eluded inspection; the other 7 traps were empty when inspected.

**Odonata:**

3 Southern Hawkers – 2 at the west pond and 1 on the car park pond;

5 Common Darters including a tandem ovipositing at the west pond;

1 male Common Blue Damselfly;

No emeralds noticed whilst I was there; unfortunately Rory was unable to join us to confirm identification.

**Butterflies:**

3 Small or Green-veined Whites

2 Large Whites

3 Speckled Woods.

*Martin Palmer*

12<sup>th</sup> September Willington Lakes



*River Great Ouse at Willington*

We convened at the Dovecote, Willington and gathered in a group of nine. After a few moments of reflection for Queen Elizabeth 2<sup>nd</sup>, Betty Cooke who had stepped in a leader at short notice gave us a few words about the magnificent Tudor buildings close by. We then followed a circular route passing over Elstow Brook and along a cycle route until we came to the Elstow Brook again where we came followed the bank back to where we started. Common Darter was readily identified but the blue damselfly and large hawkers which could have been Southern and/or Migrant Hawkets could not be named without more skill in the group. Although the weather was perfect for a walk there were only Green-veined Whites, Speckled Woods and a solitary, well camouflaged Meadow Brown to represent the butterflies. It was disappointing to see the screen for the bird hide had not been maintained although there were many good spots for the fishermen. The highlight came right at the end when a Southern Oak Bush Cricket was spotted. Another site to visit again next year. *Julia Powell*

## BNHS Indoor meetings programme 2022 to 2023

**Please check the web site [www.bnhs.co.uk](http://www.bnhs.co.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 web site early on the day or contact Sheila or Julia.

**Indoor talks start at 8pm at Maulden Village Hall, TL048380, MK45 2DP. Parking is free.**

Visitors are encouraged. A small charge is requested for refreshments at the talks. Donations are always welcome.

**TUESDAY 18<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER, MAULDEN 7:30pm; NOTE START TIME - doors open 7pm**

**There will be a brief Special General Meeting which starts promptly at 7:30pm.**

**The talk “Wildlife of North-east India” by Abidur Rahman will follow immediately afterwards at 8pm approximately.** With many famous national parks and some wonderful wildlife to be experienced, the North-east states of India are popular destinations for international wildlife watchers. Abidur Rahman is an experienced guide and photographer who has led many wildlife and birding-focused tours for visitors to his home state of Assam. He will lead us through some of the highlights of the wildlife to be enjoyed in the region.

**TUESDAY 15<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER, MAULDEN 8pm**

**Talk “Bedfordshire- our changing habitats and wildlife”, book review by Graham Bellamy.**

A talk exploring the changes to Bedfordshire’s wildlife habitats and wildlife since “Wild Bedfordshire” was published in 2000. This book showcased a range of the best wildlife habitats and their wildlife at the end of the twentieth century. What has been happening to our wildlife and wild places in the last 20 years? A team from the BNHS revisited the habitats explored in Wild Bedfordshire to see how they may have changed; what new wildlife areas have been developed and what species have been lost and which species gained and produced a new book in 2020 detailing the changes and where the best wildlife habitats can be found in the county.

**TUESDAY 13<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER ZOOM Start time 8pm, join from 7:30pm**

**BNHS Christmas members evening by Zoom**

Members are invited to share some photographs of their wildlife highlights of the year for all to enjoy. *You can do this in a number of ways and images should be sent to Andy Banthorpe, who has kindly agreed to run the evening, which must reach him at [andy@picus.co.uk](mailto:andy@picus.co.uk) by Friday December 2<sup>nd</sup> at the latest.*

1. You can send photos by We Transfer or Dropbox. Email the link as well and make sure Andy has received them.
2. You can send a Powerpoint but please resize the photos before you send to keep the file size down. You may want to share your screen for your Powerpoint but please still send Andy a copy in case there is a problem.
3. You can send a few photos by email as long as the file is not too large. Please send jpeg files. There is a limit of 10 photos with an extra 5 in case there is time to spare. The evening will be tailored to include as much as possible.

**TUESDAY 17<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2023 ZOOM Start time 8pm, join from 7:30pm**

**Talk “Glorious Greece & its lesser- known wildlife wonders” by Alice Hunter.**

Greece may be a familiar destination for many, with thoughts of beach holidays and pool-side retreats springing to mind. There’s more to this Mediterranean haven than meets the eye though and, in this talk, Alice will share some of the wonderful species that make up the rich tapestry of Greek flora and fauna, along with a few of the spectacular landscapes they grace. Alice is a freelance wildlife photographer and

guide with a lifelong passion for the natural world in all its guises. Born and raised in Herefordshire she is now based in the flat fenlands of Cambridgeshire but travels widely with her work.

**TUESDAY 21<sup>st</sup> FEBRUARY ZOOM Start time 8pm, join from 7:30pm**

**Talk “The Great Fen, a future wetland and more” by Henry Stanier.**

It's been over 20 years since the launch of the 'Big Idea', as it was originally known. Find out more about this wetland for the future, and it is more than just a wetland. Find out how it all started and the progress we have made, now that we have thousands of hectares under conservation management, including projects on wet farming and climate change. All with the latest stunning photographs and wildlife videos.

*About Henry Stanier:* His passion for dragonflies has taken him down numerous paths over the last 30 years, enjoying time with many fellow enthusiasts on the way. It eventually led to him becoming a Monitoring and Research Officer for the Wildlife Trust, now based at the Great Fen. For 20 years or so, his work has involved setting up, training and co-ordinating many teams of voluntary wildlife surveyors, across Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. It has included the monitoring of birds, bats, dormice, amphibians and plants, as well as insects and various other invertebrates. He has also run courses on species identification for many years; his first, on dragonfly larvae, at the National Dragonfly Museum.

**TUESDAY 21<sup>st</sup> MARCH, MAULDEN 7:30pm; NOTE START TIME- doors open 7pm**

**BNHS AGM and RECORDERS SHOW** After a short AGM, the Officers and Recorders will present their annual reports. A wonderful way to find out about the up, downs and new arrivals of wildlife in our county. Also hints about what might be coming our way.

**TUESDAY 18<sup>th</sup> APRIL TBC**