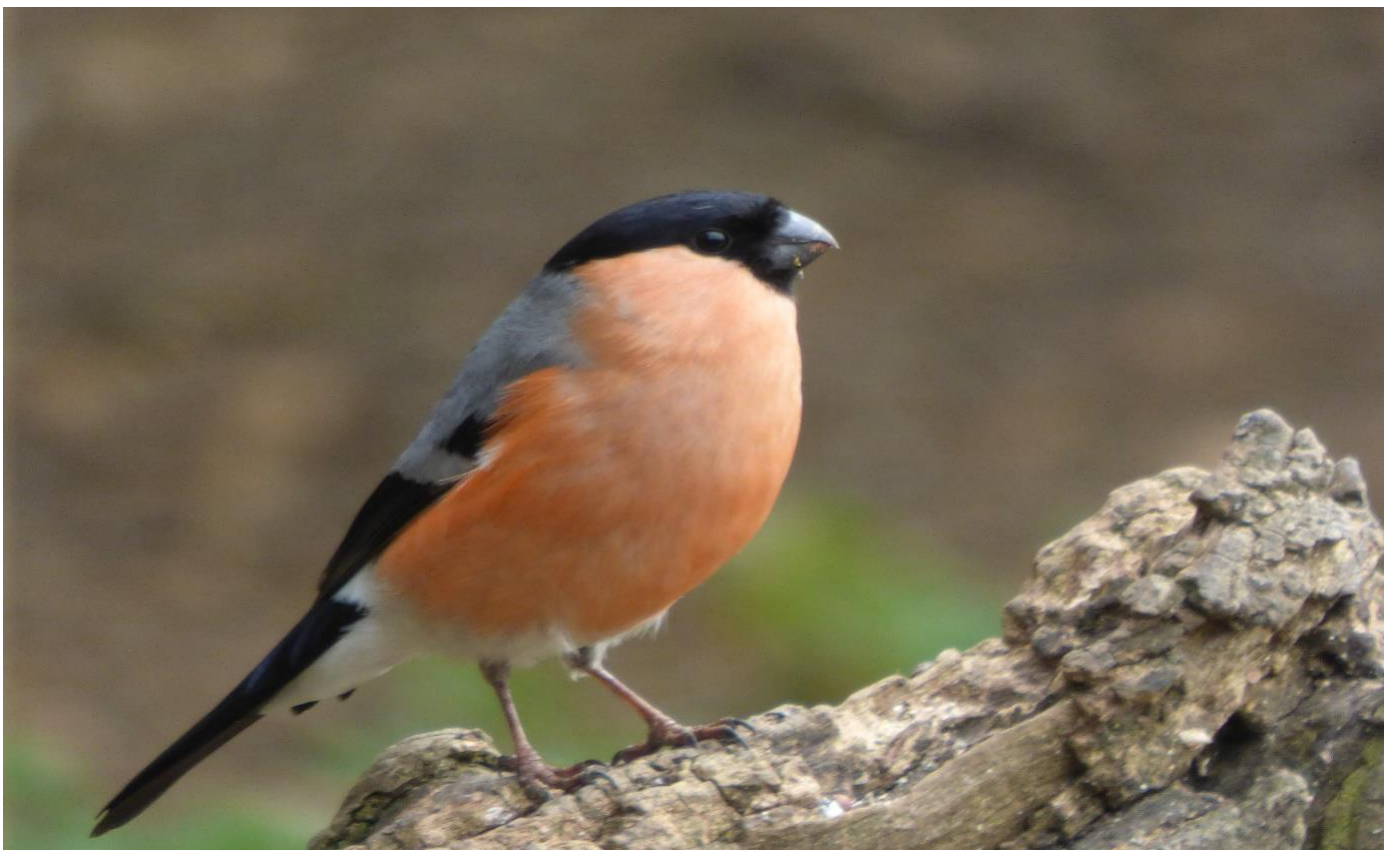




# Wild About Beds

January 2023



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*Photo above: Male Bullfinch*

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)



# Wild About Beds

## 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: Nick Hammond

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

Email: [newsletter\(at\)bnhs.org.uk](mailto:newsletter(at)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 2023** please.

### Thank you in anticipation.

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

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## Notes from the Chair

### *Graham Bellamy*

Happy New Year to all BNHS members. I hope 2022 has been an improvement over 2021. With a much lower incidence of Covid we have held a good programme of outside meetings and in autumn, a return to some indoor meetings at Maulden Village Hall. So almost back to normal. We have decided not to hold in person indoor meetings in the middle of winter in case there is bad weather or an increase in Covid, flu or other ailments. As I sit at my computer looking out on a frozen countryside, we were fortunate in planning to hold the Christmas members evening via Zoom. Was it only a few weeks ago that we had temperatures of 20 degrees? We had a good evening with six lots of presentations covering memorable natural history highlights of the year to around 40 members. Thanks to Andy Banthorpe for sorting and sharing the short talks.

Our first indoor meeting was a Special General Meeting that was necessary to align the membership categories in use by our new membership management system with the wording in the BNHS rules. We also needed to implement the recommendation from Council and our finance committee to begin phasing out the Senior Citizen concession, so that membership fees are closer to the cost of producing the Bedfordshire Naturalist and other running costs of the Society. Thanks to our members who attended who unanimously voted to accept the recommendations.

At our November meeting we were pleased to present cheques of £1000 each to Brian Eversham of the Wildlife Trust and Jackie Ulyett the Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre data manager. This was from sales of our new book, *Bedfordshire - Our Changing Habitats and Wildlife*. We relied on data collected and held by the BRMC in producing the book and for the Wildlife Trust in protecting the wildlife of the County. I'm really pleased to see our recorders are visiting Strawberry hill at Knotting, the new wildlife Trust nature reserve, to begin collecting the wildlife records needed to manage the site. The Bedfordshire Invertebrate Group have also been visiting the new nature reserve being established at Clophill lakes by the Greensand Trust. For the protection of these two important wildlife sites 2022 has been a good year.

We will be holding our AGM on 21<sup>st</sup> March at Maulden Village Hall with doors open from 7 pm. Do come along and hear what we have been doing and approve the election of Honorary officers and Council members. The Agenda for the AGM and nomination forms inviting members to serve on Council will be sent out in the New Year. We have a couple of vacancies for Council members as well as for a Chair, as I am standing down after my three-year term.

If you want to find out more about what is involved, please contact me. The position of Chairman is both varied and interesting, giving a good overview of how the society operates and works with other bodies in Bedfordshire. It may be possible that duties could be shared by two people, so please do give it some thought.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of Wild About Beds. Thank you to all our contributors



Photo: Katharine Flach

## Ancient Woodlands of Bedfordshire

### ***Andy Lear of the Wildlife Trust explains the need to update the Ancient Woodland Inventory and how you can help***

Ancient woodlands in England are defined as sites which have been continuously wooded since 1600. It was once a dominant habitat, but now only covers about 2.5% of the UK land area. The locations of these remaining fragments relate to settlement patterns, land use and ownership, and environmental constraints on farming and woodland clearance throughout history. The conditions created by centuries of undisturbed woodland growth and decay have created a rich and complex habitat, in which the species that have evolved are often slow to colonise, unable to survive in other conditions and are subsequently increasingly rare. It is therefore important to identify and protect the remaining ancient woodland.

An area of woodland must have been 'continuously wooded' to classify as ancient. Ancient woodland habitat is almost impossible to replicate due to its slow development but continuously wooded sites maintain ancient woodland characteristics such as soils, ground flora, fungi, and woodland archaeology. However, woodlands do not have to have been entirely tree-covered throughout the period. Open spaces, both temporary and permanent, are an important feature of woodland. These might occur as natural clearings and disturbance or due to tree felling and coppicing, which have been part of the use and management of woodland throughout much of history. Since it may have been partially cut many times in the past, an ancient woodland may not appear to have a high number of ancient or veteran trees. It can even be plantations of non-native species if this occurred without a period of non-wood cover. Such woodlands retain ancient woodland features and they can respond well to restoration management.

The Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) is an existing register compiled in the 1980s to provide a record of ancient woodlands over two hectares. Originally produced as reports and paper maps on a county basis, it

has since been digitised to create a national dataset. It is a valuable resource, but has some inaccuracies from the initial mapping, the digitisation process and subsequent woodland loss, especially when used at the local scale. While areas of the inventory have been intermittently updated, a widening gap between the standards of the data and its use in determining the outcome of development or woodland management proposals can create significant problems for the authorities involved.

The aim of the update is to standardise and update the data held on the AWI across the country. Since its creation, the availability of evidence, understanding of ancient woodland, and potential mapping detail have increased considerably. The update includes a revision of the current inventory to ensure that known ancient woodlands are still present, correctly mapped, and supported by additional historical evidence. Previously undesignated ancient woodland will also be added to the inventory. These may be sites or parts of larger woodlands which were missed due to mapping inaccuracies or availability of evidence, but are predominantly the addition of smaller woodlands down to 0.25 hectares.

The initial stages of the AWI update process involved using modern aerial photographs, Ordnance Survey MasterMap, and 1st Edition Ordnance Survey maps (1:2500 Epoch 1, published 1843-1893) to identify areas shown as woodland in both the late 1800s and the present day. These are considered to be 'Long-Established Woodland'. The results from this were compared with the existing Inventory to identify areas that may be additions to the inventory and to check the previously designated areas. This process was undertaken by Jackie Ulyett at the Bedfordshire and Luton Biodiversity Recording and Monitoring Centre (BRMC) before being passed to the Wildlife Trust BCN for the final stages.



*Hay Wood, a 1.38ha site in Dean and Shelton shown in a current aerial image, Ordnance Surveyors Drawings, and 1837 OS 1st series maps. Its size means it was too small to be considered on the current Ancient Woodland Inventory, but it was mentioned in a 1287 Assize Roll and reported to have large coppice stools and traces of bank and ditch.*

(Google Imagery c 2022, Getmapping plc, Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky/Copernicus/Maxar Technologies, The GeoInformation Group, Map Data c2022)

Work on the second half of the project started this June with the aim of tracking woodland identified as Long-Established Woodland through time to establish its 'ancient' status. We have been locating, accessing, and georeferencing historical maps (OS drawings, tithe maps, estate maps etc.) to provide evidence for each area back towards the 1600s. We are also using more recent maps and photographs to ensure that the areas were not cleared and replanted at a later date. While some larger areas of woodland are easy to track through history, new additions to the inventory are likely to be smaller areas (since the original inventory only went down to two hectares whilst the update goes to 0.25 hectares) and those with a sparser historical record. The accumulation of evidence from multiple sources will therefore enable us to have the best knowledge of a woodland's continued presence since 1600 and produce an accurate map of this rare habitat across the county, to support its better management, protection, and understanding.

For Bedfordshire we have now progressed to a point where we have mapped changes to woodlands on the current AWI and have produced a list of sites which might potentially be Ancient Woodland. As might be expected there have been some losses since the original inventory was produced. Examples of the most significant changes include much of Charle Wood being turned into a golf course, a large area of Dedmansey Wood found to have been cleared and ploughed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century before returning to woodland and Warren Wood in Clophill being an 18<sup>th</sup> century plantation. Out of the 2844 ha of currently designated ancient woodland nearly 190 ha have definitely been lost and a further 62 ha require further investigation but are likely to be removed. However, over 830 ha of new potential ancient woodland have been identified across the county. These are mainly small, comprising over 300 parcels of land with a median size of 1.2 ha (as might be expected since sites less than 2 ha were omitted from the original inventory). It is apparent that there was a large amount of tree-planting carried out in Bedfordshire from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, often associated with large estates and with landscaping schemes devised by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown and Humphrey Repton. In addition, a number of warrens and heathland sites, particularly along the Greensand Ridge, seemed to have been planted with conifers some time before the earliest 19<sup>th</sup> century Ordnance Survey maps were produced. These tend to represent the larger sites and are likely to be excluded when more evidence becomes available, but have been retained for now as they have been continuously wooded since at least the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. We are looking for other evidence to determine their status of the smaller, undocumented sites.

Woodland often has physical indications of age, such as coppiced trees, banks and ditches to mark boundaries or signs of buildings and settlements in more recently established woodland. The species found within a woodland can also provide additional evidence. Certain species naturally occur near-uniquely in older woodland and colonise new areas slowly, therefore the presence of multiple of these indicator species suggests that an area of woodland is more likely to be ancient.

**We will be undertaking a survey of potential Ancient Woodland sites in spring 2023. Since the project is time limited, we only have two project officers and we are working across three counties, we can only manage this with the help of volunteers. We would therefore like your help please.**

Our relatively simple survey could easily be incorporated as part of a walk. With hundreds of sites involved and a short time frame getting landowner permission to visit most woods is not possible. We are therefore restricting surveys to sites with public access, or crossed by or visible from a public right of way. We will be asking volunteers to complete a tick list asking about the presence of features such as large banks and ditches, tree species and planting, formerly coppiced trees and shrubs and if various ancient woodland indicator species are present. Surveys will be organised on a parish-by-parish basis, so you can just restrict yourself to your local area if you want to. We would also welcome information from anyone who has knowledge of, or has carried out historical research of, woodland anywhere in Bedfordshire.

**To take part in some basic woodland surveys in your local area, contact [ecologygroups@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:ecologygroups@wildlifebcn.org)  
For further information on the project contact [andy.lear@wildlifebcn.org](mailto:andy.lear@wildlifebcn.org)**

*The Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) Update project is a countrywide, multi-partner funded project with an estimated cost of £2.5 million, over 3-5 years. The project has received funding from The Woodland Trust, DEFRA, Natural England and MHCLG (now DLUC). The current update work being carried out in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire is funded in part by a donation made to the Woodland Trust by the Constance Travis Charitable Foundation.*

You can view the current Ancient Woodland Inventory here [Natural England map](#)

## Mammal Group Visit to Strawberry Hill

*Anne de Winter*

The Group was pleased to be invited to visit Strawberry Hill Farm on 2 December.

The event was led by Dr Gwen Hitchcock of the Wildlife Trust (BCN) and several of her colleagues were also present. Eight Mammal Group members made the journey to see this impressive 400+ acre site which is being managed by the WLT. Gwen explained the very exciting vision is for the site – ambitious with much work involved, but it will be a wonderful asset to the Trust if all goes ahead.

Some BNHS groups have already visited Strawberry Hill and surveying is a crucial part of any management plan for the site. Much has been recorded already as you would expect from an area which has been left to rewild for nearly 30 years. Further information at: <https://www.wildlifebcn.org/news/exciting-opportunities-strawberry-hill>.

Our main activity for the morning was to search for Harvest Mouse nests as part of the Mammal Society's national survey. Ken Winder is co-ordinating this for Bedfordshire, and we have already had some success at other sites. All nests are recorded with location, species of grass/sedge etc they are found in and the size of the nest. It was pleasing to find three Harvest Mouse nests in what was a fairly small area – no doubt there are others on the site. Some of the group stayed on in the afternoon, looking for badger setts, and a pleasing sight of a Roe Deer made for a very satisfying visit.



*Group members searching for harvest mouse nests and one that was found. Photos by Chantelle Warriner.*

Camera traps will be regularly put up in order to assist with the surveying. We certainly hope to return and Gwen and her colleagues are keen to collaborate with BNHS recorders in order to build up a picture of the varied fauna and flora to be found here. Thanks to Chantelle Warriner of WLT BCN for the photos.

## Mammal Group Visits Whipsnade

### *Ann de Winter*

We were invited to Whipsnade Zoo on 28 November to give a workshop on the use of Longworth traps to interested members of staff. Ken Winder, Mick McCarrick and Ann de Winter joined an enthusiastic group. The event was arranged with Tyrone Capel who is keen to forge links with the Society, having already been involved with Beds Bat Group and BIG.

We demonstrated how to assemble traps and how the mechanism works with staff then practising this until they felt confident with the process. We then went on to inform them of when and where traps should be set and the type of bait to be used dependent upon species. We then showed staff how to handle small mammals, although several had been involved in this type of activity before so felt reasonably confident about this. We did stress that it is always possible to have 'escapees'!

As ever, the stress was on the welfare of the animals and speed, but care, is of the essence.



*A hope for the future at Whipsnade – a Bank Vole investigates a Longworth Trap.*

This was a very positive experience for all involved. We were told that the Zoo has ordered several Longworth traps for use by staff and these will be deployed at the relevant time. We very much look forward to further collaboration with the Zoo and Tyrone is very keen for Mammal Group members to visit and help with small mammal trapping in the future and give any help they may need.



## The Lizards are coming

**John Wakely asks members to keep their eyes open this summer for a striking orchid that might be making a return to the county.**

One Saturday morning early in mid-June I had an email from an excited member of the public who had found a single Lizard Orchid spike growing on the grassy verge of a roundabout 'near Leighton Buzzard'. He sent a picture and there was no doubt this was *Himantoglossum hircinum*, last seen in the wild in Beds on the chalk near Harlington at least 70 years ago. County recorders tend to get excited about this sort of find and this one was itching to share the news. I asked for a precise location which was provided the following day. Checking on Grab-a-Grid-Reference, this proved to be just over the county boundary in Bucks. Slightly disappointed, I contacted the Bucks record office on the Monday morning as there is currently no BSBI plant recorder for Bucks. They too seemed excited. On Tuesday the original finder, driving past the site, was horrified to find that the verge, Lizard Orchid and all, had been mown!



Because they carry little reserve food, orchid seeds are tiny and can be carried for long distances on the wind. Successful germination depends on seed finding just the right conditions and the specific mycorrhizal fungus which provides nutrition for the developing seedling. In recent years, because of global warming, the species is expanding its range northwards and single plants are popping up all over the place. One was reported from Letchworth, again just over the county boundary in Herts, in 2022. Unlike some other orchid species, Lizard Orchids do not readily self-pollinate which means that a population will not become established until two or more plants occur within the range of a pollinating insect. Most individual plants will therefore not produce viable seed but may live for several years. This year's mown plant has produced a healthy rosette of winter leaves and should flower in 2023.

It is only a matter of time before we have a Lizard Orchid flowering in Beds again. They are distinctive with spikes usually 30-45cm high, so in theory should be relatively easy to spot. I have seen the species from the car in France, and indeed a few years ago spotted what I thought were Lizard

Orchids on the bank of the A14 near Newmarket whilst driving at 70mph. On checking later, the location was close to the population on the Devil's Dyke, so my id was probably correct. (Plant-spotting at 70mph is not to be recommended!). Despite being distinctive, many thousands of motorists, some of whom would have been naturalists, must have overlooked the Bucks plant.

**Please keep an eye out for this handsome flower which will be a welcome addition to the county flora.**

## Autumn Highlights 2022

### *Julia Powell*

*My sincere apologies to Ken Winder, Chairman of the Mammal Group who was referred to as Ken Grinder in the report for Small Mammal Trapping at DENR in the last issue.*

#### **Great Big Green Week October**

The BNHS was invited to have a display stand at two events locally to celebrate The Great Big Green Week. Both events were indoors so it was possible to put on a bigger display and use some of the more delicate items.

The first event we were invited to was held at the **Higgins Museum and Art Gallery, Bedford on Saturday October 1<sup>st</sup>**. We were not given a spot in the foyer with other groups but had a large area close to an entrance to the galleries and near the toilets – so not exactly a backwater. This allowed us to really spread out and placing the display boards against a wall near to the three tables. This enabled the visitors to read the posters and take part in the quiz away from people looking at the skulls and skins on display. Although overall the event only attracted about 168 people, the feedback was very good and we made the most of this opportunity with plenty of networking among the helpers on the stand who had a relaxing time, being able to visit the other stands and partake of the excellent refreshments from the on-site café as well. My thanks go to the people that gave up their Saturday to help out.

On **Sunday October 2<sup>nd</sup>** Wilf and I were back out again with the display (which did not leave the car all night!) and on our way to **Amptill's family event for The Great Big Green Week** along with some more BNHS members. This was held in the Parkside Hall and was a much livelier event with stalls representing environmentally conscious groups although our display space was smaller as the hall was full. It was very well organised and we met with more families of older children than we usually do when the display is out and about. Here we sold two books and two of the limited prints commissioned by the Society many years ago – ideal Christmas presents. (Timing is everything.) Thanks again to the people that gave up their Sunday to help out. *Julia Powell*

#### **Ickwell Bury Nature Reserve 12<sup>th</sup> October**

Ickwell Bury Nature Reserve is owned by Bedford School which uses the grounds for field studies although it is right in the heart of Ickwell. We were joined by Colin Carpenter, an old boy of the school, who regaled us with memories of his time there. We met Chris Jones, our leader, at the house and were able to use the facilities there. (It has a classroom where we might be able to use for an indoor meeting.) Chris led us on a circular walk by the lakes (where there are Mandarin ducks), through the woodlands and meadows, one containing a magnificent oak tree. It is a really stunning spot with a very varied number of different habitats and includes some Victorian features that are now sadly rather neglected. But it was so interesting to hear the various ideas for ongoing management. *Julia Powell*

#### **The Lodge, Sandy 6<sup>th</sup> November**

Despite the damp start for the fungi foragers, the morning was interesting with some good discoveries. Alan Outen and David Buckingham took us out on to acid grassland surrounded by some magnificent trees and finds came thick and fast.



Left: *Amanita gemmata* found in three Bedfordshire sites including the Lodge.

Right: *Ganoderma resinaceum*, uncommon in the county. Photographs by John Pitts.

This annual foray at this RSPB reserve is always a popular event and there were 25 people present for the morning from the Fungi Group, Beds Natural History Society and a few RSPB staff. We covered a different area from usual, mostly grassland though with a few living and dead trees. The total number of recorded species was 130 by the end. Although not exceptional by the standards of this site it is a remarkable total in the context of the season exemplifying the quality of this site's, already recognised as a Site of Mycological Importance.

There were some interesting and excellent finds: *Amanita gemmata*, a Pine associate, is a regular here but with just three Beds sites. *Clitocybe odora* with its distinctive aniseed smell is always a popular species. *Lactarius deliciosus* and *L.hepaticus*, both Pine associates are two of the less frequently recorded members of this genus in the County. *Lepiota felina* and *L.oreadiformis* are both rarely recorded in the county whilst *Leucoagaricus crystallifer* has only a handful of sites nationally, though it has apparently been seen at the Lodge a few times in recent years. Of no fewer than fourteen *Mycena* species found on this foray, *M.polyadelpha* is not often recorded in the county though probably overlooked. *M.pseudocorticola* was the first confirmed record of this species for the county. It has historically been regarded as a mainly western species in the UK. Mark Ward found specimens of a beautiful little *Flammulaster* species on small beech branches. On the balance of probability (including overall appearance, habitat, county and national records) I think that this is most likely *F.muricatus*.

Of the bracket fungi *Ganoderma resinaceum*, *Inonotus dryadeus*, *Ischnoderma benzoinum*, *Lenzites betulina*, *Mycoacea fusca* and *Polyporus brumalis* are all infrequently noted in the County, whilst *Fomes fomentarius* and *Plicatura crispa* are clearly increasing here. The Cauliflower Fungus *Sparassis crispa* always attracts attention. Remarkably the only puffball recorded was *Handkea utriformis* whilst *Scleroderma verrucosum* was the only earthball. I always think it appropriate that bird's-nest fungi are often found on forays to this RSPB reserve. This year three species were recorded: *Cyathus olla*, *Crucibulum laeve* and *Sphaerobolus stellatus*. Alan Outen

## BNHS Talks 2023

### TUESDAY JANUARY 17<sup>TH</sup> 8PM ZOOM

#### **How tropical rainforests work**

Tropical rainforests are the most biologically diverse and complex habitats on the planet. In this talk, David will outline the main ecological processes that keep the forests functioning, and he will describe the current threats that surround their long-term survival.

**About Dr David Jones:** David works at the Natural History Museum in London and lectures at Imperial College. An entomologist specialising in rainforest insects and soil ecology, he has done fieldwork in 18 countries including Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Gabon, Madagascar and French Guiana. He has published more than 50 research articles in scientific books and journals.

### TUESDAY FEBRUARY 21<sup>ST</sup> 8PM ZOOM

#### **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:** My passion for dragonflies has taken me down numerous paths over the last 30 years, enjoying time with many fellow enthusiasts on the way.

It eventually led to me becoming a Monitoring and Research Officer for the Wildlife Trust, now based at the Great Fen. For 20 years or so, my 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.

I have also run courses on species identification for many years; my first, on dragonfly larvae, at the National Dragonfly Museum.

### TUESDAY 21<sup>ST</sup> MARCH, MAULDEN 7:30pm

*This will be live in Maulden Village Hall*

#### **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. **NOTE START TIME.**

### TUESDAY APRIL 18<sup>TH</sup> TBC