



Wild About Beds

July 2023



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Photo above: Scarce Chaser by Rory Morrisey

Wild About Beds is the newsletter of:



The Bedfordshire Natural History Society
www.bnhs.org.uk
Registered charity number 268659



BedsLife
www.bedsbionet.org.uk

The BNHS

The BNHS was formed in 1946, its main function to record the fauna and flora of the county. It has over twenty active Recorders who cover many branches of natural history study and whose annual reports are published in the *Bedfordshire Naturalist* journal.

Members receive a quarterly newsletter, Wild About Beds, and programmes of meetings. These meetings include field meetings to Bedfordshire sites and occasionally farther afield. During the winter months there are illustrated lectures normally held in Maulden; the Christmas Members' Evening is held in Maulden.

The Society depends on annual subscriptions which are devoted to its working, as all offices are honorary. Membership is open to anyone, whether resident in the county or not. If you would like to join the Society, please contact **Kath Hindley**, Honorary Membership Secretary, Tel: 01525 841256, email membership@bnhs.org.uk.

BedsLife

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

Editor: Nick Hammond

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

Email: newsletter@bnhs.org.uk.

Your comments/notes on anything that you have observed in the field, on the road or in a past Wild About Beds issue are welcome/essential for continuity. Please do send articles to me either as an attachment via email or through the post. Pictures are always welcome; material required by **15 September 2023** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

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

Notes from the Editor

The last few months' weather has given naturalists some surprises, among are dragonfly records described by Rory Morrissey on page 4. Various weather extremes were experienced at the spring events, the highlights of which are on page 6, Let's hope the summer events listed on page 9 provide a simple variety of wildlife without extremes of weather. After 10 years the organisers of these great field and indoor meetings, Judith Powell and Sheila Brooke, want a very well-deserved rest. If you would like to help with this important BNHS activity, please consider the plea on page 11, where you will also find a request the vital role of Membership Secretary to replace Kath Hindley, who will be ending a three-year stint.

One other vacancy is for a BNHS Chairman to replace the redoubtable Graham Bellamy, who has completed a very successful three-year term. Graham, you have the Society's sincere thanks.

Nick

Dragonfly News Spring 2023

Rory Morrisey



Scarce Chaser has been seen several places in large numbers leading one observer to question its name. Photographed by Rory Morrisey.

In April it seemed that dragonflies were slow to get going but sightings picked up in May and June, with some exceptional records during the hot weather. Variable Damselfly was seen again at Willington and then at Felmersham GP. In June one appeared at Roxton Lock.

Scarce Chaser was seen along the River Great Ouse and turned up at a few places away from the river, such as RSPB Sandy. A total of 48 was counted at Roxton Lock on 17th June – the comment from the observer – “Not very scarce”.

Norfolk (or Green-eyed) Hawker has also been observed at a variety of locations from St Neots to Willington along the Ouse, at RSPB Sandy and at Felmersham GP, where ovipositing was noted on 16th June.



Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly (above), which has become established at Sundon Chalk Quarry, can be distinguished from the Blue-tailed Damselfly (top) by the extent and pattern of the blue on the final two segments of the abdomen. Photographs by John Curd.

The most exciting find, though, was that Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly had become re-established at Sundon Chalk Quarry. They were seen emergent on 2nd June and 16 adults plus an ovipositing female were noted on the 16th. This follows sightings last year of a single male and a single female with signs that she had been ovipositing. There have also been many Keeled Skimmers at the quarry.

Lesser Emperor and Red-veined Darter were seen in June, so it has been an interesting first half to the year.

Spring Field Meetings Highlights

March 29th Priory Country Park

This seemed to be a popular event judging by the number of booking although sadly, on the day a few people had to drop out for various reasons. This left a small group of 11 which met at Priory CP and enjoyed a very pleasant couple of hours, despite the rain. There was a lot of action on the lake, Black-headed Gulls had taken over the island, a Moorhen had taken to tree climbing, the Great Crested Grebes were there one minute and gone the next and the Canada Geese were making sure they were heard. But no Sand Martins were seen despite careful scrutiny of the purpose-built sand bank.

We heard amazing Song Thrush and Blackbird renditions as we walked through the Finger Lakes area, with lots of other bird life seen and heard too. Spring flowers were appearing and we all agreed that, despite the intermittent rain we enjoyed the wildlife, the company, the exercise and the fresh air. We rounded it off in the cafe with coffee, snacks and a chat. Perfect!

Thanks to Rosie for a very pleasant morning and for filling us in on the history of the site.
Sheila Brooke

April 14th Working Woodland Centre



Photo: Sheila Brooke

We were delighted to welcome 22 people (kids with adults) to the Working Woodlands Centre today for our Owl Detectives Event. BNHS members were on hand to help everyone dissect the pellets. Youngsters, and some parents, became Owl Detectives at this joint owl pellet dissecting morning. Children and grownups alike were amazed at how much they found and had a really great time! They were very enthusiastic and went home with a selection of small mammal bones to display on card and show to their friends. Thanks to GST for hosting the event and thanks to all those who came along to help. I think we all enjoyed the morning!

Sheila Brooke

April 21st Moggerhanger Park



Members braved April showers to visit the grounds of Moggerhanger Park.

This visit could not have been more of a contrast to that of last year when it was very hot and the vegetation was very dried out. Having decided to visit at a different time, the weather was also completely different in being grey and overcast when eight of us met in the carpark. Sophia reminded us of the lay out and we set off to the walled garden for a quick look around, spending time trying to ID a few of the plants and having a quick look at the iris collection before heading to the nearby café to wait out the rain. After the rain stopped and we had enjoyed some welcome refreshment we headed for the wood. There is an amazing display of bluebells and well worth a visit. The botanists resolved some tricky plant identification, the birds were singing and there were a few invertebrates about. We reached the 'bomb crater' - or more accurately a big hole! It held some water but no wildlife seemed to be interested. This prompted some discussion before we made our way back to the cars having enjoyed our morning ramble.

Julia Powell and Sheila Brooke

May 9th Potton Wood

After a day of torrential rain leading to much flooding in the area the day before, a hardy group of 12 gathered at the Water Tower meeting point for the walk at Potton Wood, having been promised sightings of Bluebells and Early Purple Orchids. Wellingtons were the order of the day; I was up past my ankles in muddy water at some points on the path and water was flooding into all the ditches along a lot of the route taken by our leader, Graham Bellamy. After slithering carefully along the narrow paths, we were rewarded with stunning views of both Early Purple Orchids and Bluebells at their peak in a variety of hues. Thank you, Graham, it was worth the effort.

Julia Powell

May 17th Daisleys Lake, Willington

A small group of six people gathered at the Dovecote, Willington for a walk with the aim of looking for Variable Damselfly at Daisleys Lake. This is a very large site and there were many distractions on the way meaning that it was past noon before we thought we had arrived in the vicinity of Daisleys Lake.

I thoroughly enjoyed a BNHS walk at Willington this morning led by Rory Morrisey, who explained the differences between the dragons and damsels that we came across. The sunshine brought out the insects at last, just a few of those seen: Scarce Chaser, Red-headed Cardinal beetle, Red-eyed Damselfly, Denticulate Leatherbug, Green Tiger Beetle. The birds were very vocal, and I was pleased to hear my first Cuckoo of this year.

Betty Cooke

May 23rd Sewell Cutting & Totterhoe Quarry



Orange-tip was one of 11 species of butterfly seen at on this select visit. (Illuvis/Pixabay20)

It was a small, select group that walked along Sewell Cutting (SC) on Tuesday - three of us actually, but we enjoyed the morning! The sun was reluctant to show itself at first but did appear a bit later to tempt out the butterflies. Having walked along the cutting we headed up to Totterhoe Quarry (TQ) where the target Corn Buntings were heard - well, by two of us! We noted 11 species of butterfly at one or both sites - Dingy Skipper (TQ), Brimstone m & f (SC & TQ), Small White (TQ), Orange-tip m & f (TQ & SC), Small Copper (SC), Small Blue (TQ), Common Blue (SC), Holly Blue (SC), Red Admiral (TQ), Speckled Wood (SC & TQ), & Small Heath (TQ). We did see and hear other wildlife too on our amble - including a party of nine dogs - with two humans!

Thanks Steph & Ian for your company.

Sheila Brooke

June 3rd Flitwick Moor bioblitz.

Organised annually by the Flitvale Wildlife Trust local group jointly with BNHS and BIG as a family event as well as a survey by the Recorders, there was representation from all groups

involved. Five recorders were joined by four BNHS members, five members of the local group and two families.

Julia Powell

June 6th Champion Tree Walk at Wrest Park

Originally planned for April 27th and postponed because of poor weather, on the evening of June 6th, a group of 19 members and English Heritage staff joined David Alderman (Director of the Tree Register) for a walk within the grounds to learn about some of the many fascinating trees to be found there.



A Common Lime, one of 26 Champion Trees at Wrest Park

David told us that there are 26 of Bedfordshire's Champion Trees at Wrest Park, two of these being British Champions, which are either the tallest or one having the widest girth.

Before leaving the car park we saw a UK champion magnolia (*Magnolia denudata*) which was introduced from China around 1850. Only a Swiss specimen is larger in Europe. We learned that some of the very large Yew trees were originally planted as hedges around 300 years ago and we saw the tallest broad-leafed trees in Bedfordshire – the lime trees by the Mythraic Glade planted in the late 1700s. Not too far from the Chinese Pavilion, we were shown a Common Lime which is one of the 70 British trees chosen for the Queen's Green Canopy project for the Platinum Jubilee – a very special tree. Later we admired a huge Giant Sequoia which has a girth of 9m and has been hit by lightning on 3 separate occasions. This tree was originally moved inside the house each winter and used as the Christmas tree until it became too large to move. It is now the tallest conifer at Wrest Park.

David gave us a great deal of information and we all learned a great deal of which the above is merely a flavour. We are all grateful to David and the BNHS organisers of the walk.

Marion Hession

BNHS Summer visits 2023

Please keep looking at your emails as a Badger watching event is awaiting confirmation in late August – limited places will be available.

WEDNESDAY 12th JULY, 10:30am

Visit to Strawberry Hill Farm for a guided walk with Wildlife Trust staff – one of their most exciting conservation ventures yet! Spanning 150 hectares, Strawberry Hill is an ex-arable farm that has been left to rewild for 35 years, and the Wildlife Trust is on a mission to save this unique site and its wildlife for future generations. Today it is now home to many rare and interesting species including Nightingales, Grasshopper Warblers, Barn Owls, Great Crested Newts and Badgers to name a few. Come and join us as we continue to get to know this fantastic new site. **Please book with Sheila Brooke 01525 873396 or**

Brooke.SE@btinternet.com. Meet in the car park which will be open grid ref TL005626 Post code MK44 1AA. Please do NOT park on the grass verges.

Leader: Chantelle Warriner.

MONDAY 24th JULY, St NEOTS 10:30am

Visit **St Neots Riverside Park** which covers 29 hectares (72 acres), mainly in the flood plain with a beautiful mile-long waterside frontage. The park is close to St Neots town centre and is divided by the bridge over the River Great Ouse. We hope to see Norfolk Hawker, Scarce Chaser and other hawk and darter species. **Please book your place with Julia Powell JuliaCpowell800@gmail.com or 01582 661328.** Park and meet at the Conygeare Car Park, PE19 2UL, TL181596, on the East side of the River Great Ouse. Variable car park charges: £2.40 for 4 hours/£2 for 3 hours or less. We will cross the river by the footbridge to get back into Beds/VC30. There are toilets and a café there.



*Norfolk Hawker, one of the species that might be seen at St Neots Riverside Park in July.
Photographed by Rory Morrissey.*

Directions to St Neots Riverside Park from A1
From A1/A428 roundabout turn east into Barford Road A428.
At (Tesco Extra) Barford Road roundabout take 1st exit to B1043/Barford Road.
Next roundabout take 3rd exit, stay on B1043/ Barford Road.
At next roundabout take 2nd exit, stay on B1043/Barford Road.
Go over next roundabout B1043/Barford Road and take 1st exit at next roundabout onto Luke Street.
Then turn left onto Hardwick Road.
Stay right on Hardwick Road, continue to Conybeare Court and car park is on right.
Leader: Rory Morrissey.

WEDNESDAY 9th AUGUST, HARROLD 10:30am – 1pm. More details to follow.
Walk at Harrold-Odell Country Park joint with Geology Group. Meet at the visitor centre car park, MK43 7DS, SP956566. Café on site.

MONDAY 14th AUGUST, TOTTERNHOE 10:30am More details to follow.
Walk at Totternhoe Quarry a year on. This is an opportunity to see the practical work that has been put in place for this project. Some paths here are quite steep and are very slippery in wet or damp weather so please wear sensible footwear and bring a stick if you like to use one. Meet in the NT car park, SP986217, LU6 1QG. Please book with Julia Powell. JuliaCPowell800@gmail.com 01582 661328
Leader: Gwen Hitchcock

New Events Organisers and a new Membership Secretary are needed. Details of these roles are given on the next page. Please consider whether you might be able to help the Society with these roles. We are lucky that Sheila Brooke and Julia Powell, our current Events Organisers, and Kath Hindley, our Membership Secretary, happy to make the change as easy as they can.

Wanted New Events Organisers

By the time of the 2024 BNHS AGM Sheila Brooke and Julia Powell will have spent ten years organising the BNHS indoor and outdoor meetings for members plus all the arrangements for the BNHS stall at various local events that have invited BNHS to have representation. We have enjoyed doing this, but now feel that it is time to pass this privilege on to another group of people younger and more enthusiastic than ourselves. We will be standing down at the 2024 AGM.

There are three separate roles which could be undertaken by one or more individuals independently:

- Indoor meetings: Arrange speakers for the Winter programme on the third Tuesday of the month from October to April including the AGM in March. Currently December (liaise with Beds Bird Club about date), January and February are Zoom meetings and the remainder are at Maulden Village Hall.
- Outdoor meetings: Arrange outside events for members throughout the year.
- Manage the BNHS stall when invited by other organisations.

If you are tempted to take on some of these roles, please contact Sheila Brooke (Brooke.SE@btinternet.com) or Julia Powell (JuliaCpowell800@gmail.com)

BNHS Membership Secretary

Kath Hindley will stand down as Membership Secretary this year and we are looking for a volunteer to replace her. If you believe strongly in supporting natural history and want to encourage people to share that interest, and if you have a little time and would like to support the Council in managing all the great work that the Society does, perhaps you could help us.

In terms of the role, the secretary is a member of Council and Finance committee and deals with BNHS and Bird Club membership queries from members and non-members, reporting to Council on membership numbers, It's a varied role, made much easier to oversee by the introduction of the online payment system and database a few years ago.

If this sounds interesting, then please email Kath (membership@bnhs.org.uk) to discuss the role 🙏.

The BNHS Invertebrate Conference is back!

After waiting three years, and now that the threat of Covid has subsided, the BNHS is pleased to announce that plans are proceeding towards staging the postponed fourth Invertebrate Conference on **Saturday 11th November** once again at the **Forest Centre** in the Millenium Country Park, **Marston Moretaine**. The theme for the programme will be on Aquatic invertebrates and we already have a number of well-known local and national experts lined up to give presentations about Dragonflies, Water Beetles, Mosquitoes, Freshwater crustacea and molluscs. The final programme, and further details about the day, have yet to be agreed but we wanted to alert you to the date and venue. It will certainly be an interesting event. BNHS members will be given priority for booking tickets and at a slightly reduced rate. More details to follow via the BNHS website and newsletter.

New Officers and Council members 2023

Officers for BNHS 2023

Hon Chairman	VACANT
Hon Secretary (joint)	Ann de Winter and Sue Raven
Hon Treasurer	Colin Le Boutillier
Hon Journal Editor	Rosemary Brind
Hon Membership Secretary	Kathryn Hindley
Hon Scientific Secretary	Helen Muir-Howie
Hon Chair Beds Bird Club	Kathy Blackmore

Hon Council Members for 2023

Sheila Brooke (Events Organiser)
Gwen Hitchcock
Julia Powell
Wilf Powell
Mike Bird
Nick Hammond
Terence Ilott
Mike Roberts
Mike Robinson

Officers for Bird Club 2023

Hon. President (2023-25)	Peter Smith
Hon. Chairperson (2022-24)	Kathy Blackmore
Hon. Secretary	Sheila Alliez
Hon. Research Officer	Phil Cannings
Hon. Assistant Treasurer	Sonnie Wing
Hon. Bulletin Editor	Andy Grimsey
Hon. Meetings Secretary	Stuart Elsom
County Bird Recorder	Peter Nash with the help of Andy Grimsey
Membership Secretary	Kathryn Hindley

Committee members for 2023

Richard Bashford
Alan Garner
Steve Thompson
VACANCY

Contact details for all the officers and recorders may be found on the BNHS Website.