



Wild About Beds

The Bedfordshire Natural History Society Newsletter

April 2025 Number 213



CONTENTS

Focus on Hoppers	3
The National Harvest Mouse Survey	6
BNHS Events Programme	8
BNHS Visits to Date	10

**Photograph above: Wild daffodils in Maulden Wood
by Rosemary Brind**

The BNHS Registered Charity Number 268659

www.bnhs.org.uk

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, or by Zoom; 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 **Lisa King**, Honorary Membership Secretary, Tel: 07703 052808. 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.

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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 2025** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next Wild About Beds will be published in **July 2025**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

Note from the Editor

In the second of his articles on little-known insects Will George features hoppers, which are true bugs. They tend to be overlooked and Will suggests that with ten new species having been added to the county since 2020 there are potential discoveries to be made. The contribution of amateur naturalists is demonstrated in Ken Winder's the National Harvest Mouse Survey.

Please do read Rosemary Brind's descriptions of an exciting programme of future events and those which have already taken place. We're still looking for help with this programme and volunteers will be very welcome. It could add to your enjoyment of the coming summer.

Nick

Focus on Hoppers

Will George

This is the second article in the neglected insect series. This time we are looking at the ‘hoppers’, true bugs in the various families of the sub-order Auchenorrhyncha whose members possess strongly developed hind legs, enabling them to leap away from predators. Like all of the true bugs they possess piercing mouthparts, which they use to feed on the internal fluids of plants. In most cases the sugar-rich phloem is targeted, but the froghoppers and a few of the larger leafhoppers target the water transport system of the xylem. The fluid in the xylem is rather nutrient poor, but evolution’s ingenious solution has been to equip these species with not one, but two distinct sets of symbiotic bacteria, which are able to create essential amino acids for their hosts.

The Membracidae, commonly known as the treehoppers, are represented by just two species in Britain, both of which are reasonably easy to find in Bedfordshire. The Horned Treehopper, *Centrotus cornutus*, is the larger of the two, with two ‘horns’ projecting from the side of the thorax, and is found locally across the county. *Gargara genistae* is a smaller species, and somewhat scarcer, occurring only where the host plant Broom is found, but being reasonably common where it does.

Members of the Cercopidae and Aphrophoridae share the common name of froghoppers, with their nymphs producing a foam-like substance to protect themselves, most famously in the case of the cuckoo-spit produced by the Common Froghopper, *Philaenus spumarius*, a very common spring sight across Bedfordshire. The seven species of Aphrophoridae which occur in Bedfordshire are rather drably coloured in shades of brown, but the sole representative of the Cercopidae is the flamboyantly marked Red-and-black Froghopper, *Cercopis vulnerata*, happily a very common spring species in low vegetation across the county.



Horned Treehopper

Red-and-black Froghopper

Three families of planthopper have Bedfordshire representatives. By far the most species rich is the Delphacidae, with 23 species having been recorded. All but one of these feed on grasses, rushes or sedges, with the exception being the bracken feeding *Ditropis pteridis*, a rather distinctive species which is found commonly across Bedfordshire wherever the host plant is

found. Another distinctive species is *Asiraca clavicornis*, with its remarkable expanded antennae and leaf-like front legs. It has become a common species in Bedfordshire in recent years, occurring widely in grassland habitats.

The other two families are the Cixidae, with four rather difficult to separate spotty-winged species occurring in Bedfordshire, and the Issidae, represented only by the common but unobtrusive *Issus coleoptratus*, a species whose claim to fame is that it was the first in which mechanical gears were discovered. These are used by the nymphs to coordinate their hind legs during jumping, ensuring that insect springs forward in a controlled manner.



Top: *Ditropis pteridis* Above: *Asiraca clavicornis*

The greatest diversity is found in the leafhoppers of the family Cicadellidae, with an impressive 142 species having been recorded in Bedfordshire. These display a dazzling range of colours and patterns, with species such as *Typhlocyba quercus* and *Evacanthus interruptus* amongst Britain's most attractive species. A particularly distinctive species is the Eared Leafhopper, *Ledra aurita*, which as the name suggests has two ear-like projections on the thorax. Despite these, it is excellently camouflaged on its preferred habitat of lichen-covered trees, and most commonly recorded when attracted to moth traps.

The leafhoppers can present an identification challenge, with many apparently colourful and distinctive species having near identical looking relatives. An example is the attractively patterned red and white *Zygina* species which are commonly found in gardens, but which require close examination, and in some cases dissection, to identify to species level. Many species are restricted to one or a small number of host plants, and this can help with identification of similar looking species.



A selection of Bedfordshire's leafhoppers, clockwise from top-left: *Graphocephala fennahi*, *Typhlocyba quercus*, *Alebra albostriella*, *Eupterycyba jucunda* nymph, *Zonocyba bifasciata*, *Iassus lanio*, *Ledra aurita* and *Cicadella viridis* (centre image).

With ten species added to the county list since 2020, and many species only known from one or two sites, there is a great deal of potential for new discoveries for anyone who takes an interest in these fascinating little insects. Beating, sweeping and suction sampling are likely to be the most productive techniques, but many species can be found by a determined observer by simple direct observation.

The [British Bugs website](#) is the best source of identification help, with the [Auchenorrhynca recording scheme website](#) providing a wealth of supporting information. No recent book has been published specifically for the UK, but the English translations of the *Die Zikaden Deutschlands* or the smaller *Fotoatlas der Zikaden Deutschlands* cover all the species likely to occur in Bedfordshire, although they are expensive to obtain at present.

All records of any species of 'hopper' are welcomed, both by myself and by the very active Auchenorrhynca recording scheme, with [iRecord](#) being the preferred route, or otherwise via email to bugs@bnhs.org.uk.

National Harvest Mouse Survey

Ken Winder

As we near the end of this year's survey in 2025 I thought it an opportune time to write a short article as to what has been happening over the past few years. The National Harvest Mouse survey was instigated by the Mammal Society to try and establish the true situation of Harvest Mice within the UK. In the Mammal Society publication Of 2018 on the population and conservation status of Britains mammals, the Harvest Mouse was listed as of least concern in England, vulnerable in Wales and not assessed in Scotland. In addition, the general trend was given as declining. However, the reliability index of the data on which this was based was given as zero, i.e. very unreliable. This was obviously not a great situation when trying to see how the Harvest Mouse was actually doing. So, in 2021 the first national survey began, which basically consisted of looking for their disused nests over the winter months. This survey ran from October 2021 until end March 2022 with three more surveys, including this one, in 2022/23, 2023/24 & 2024/25. The surveys themselves relied on volunteers throughout the country searching for nests and submitting their data to the Mammal Society.



**Volunteers after a successful Harvest Mouse survey at Queen's Wood near Ampthill.
Photograph by Rosemary Brind.**

The situation in Bedfordshire was similar in the rest of the country. Apart from a very detailed nest survey carried out by Derek Rands and members of the BNHS in the 1970s, there was very little information to be had on Harvest Mice. Most of the data collected were of random finds such as nests disturbed during conservation work, skulls found in owl pellets and cat victims. Thus, prior to this new survey, we had very little idea as to how Harvest Mouse distribution compared to that produced in the 1970s.

During the first survey a large number of people volunteered to look for nests, either individually or in groups, and a huge amount of data was collected from around the county. This showed that the Harvest Mouse was present throughout most of Bedfordshire, though there were very few records in the chalk grasslands in the south. The next three surveys built on these initial results and extended the range as to where Harvest Mice are to be found. To date we have now surveyed over 100 sites and of these approximately 60% have produced positive results for the presence of Harvest Mice. Interestingly, positive results from the south are still sparse.

Some of the most enjoyable moments during these years have been our group surveys. To date we have visited a large amount of places including Strawberry Hill Farm, Felmersham, Sandy Smith, Whipsnade Zoo, RSPB Sandy and Woburn CentreParcs. Our latest visit was to Queen's Wood, adjoining King's Wood in Ampthill. In most of our group visits there have been around a dozen people and on this survey ten of us turned up on a beautiful winter's day and spent around two hours searching for nests. In the end we found 11 nests and most of us actually found one. Seeing people's excited look when they find their first nest is really brilliant. Added to this we also saw three Brown Hares and a Chinese Water Deer (which, to many people's dismay, are popping up all over). Over the years many people have joined us for the surveys and usually had a great day,

So what now? Hopefully there will be a fifth survey organised by the Mammal Society in 2025/26. The data they have collected nationally is invaluable and will serve as a baseline for future surveys. They have already produced some papers giving a much better idea as to the distribution of the Harvest Mouse in England and Wales and have also shown their presence in Scotland. Our contribution in Bedfordshire to this has been quite immense, and our knowledge of Harvest Mouse distribution within our own county is now so much better.

Help needed at The Higgins

We have received an invitation to take the BNHS nature table and display to The Higgins, Bedford on Saturday June 14th 2025. The event will last from 11am and end at 4pm. To put on the display to its full potential, we need at least 4-6 people. Please let Julia Powell know by email if you are able to help with this event. It is a great opportunity to meet the public and say why you joined the Society. The Higgins is one of the jewels of Bedford with a great restaurant and some great displays.

If you would like to help, please contact Julia by email: juliapowell800@gmail.com

BNHS events programme



BNHS members enthralled by a Wood Ants' nest on a visit to Maulden Wood in March 2025

Members of the committee are trying to organise a programme of meetings in addition to their other roles, as no-one has yet come forward to help organise field meeting. Do please consider offering to help so we can spread the load more widely and support a wide range of activities for members.

Please check your emails on a regular basis for details of forthcoming meetings, including those that may not be mentioned here.

There may be a number of meetings organised at short notice this year, as people come forward to offer to lead a walk, ideally timed with peak viewing of certain plants or invertebrates, along with spells of good weather! The walk in March at Maulden Wood to see the Wild Daffodils was organised with just five days' notice when we knew the daffodils were at their peak, and 14 members joined in, many seeing them for the first time.

Thursday 24th April, Woodwalton Fen. Following on from February's inspiring talk via Zoom given by Henry Stanier, the BNHS is arranging a group guided walk around Woodwalton Fen from 10 to 12.30pm. There is a charge of £7.50 per person and this will be collected in cash on the day but please contact Mike Bird on council14@bnhs.org.uk to reserve a place on the tour. The Wildlife Trust staff can accommodate a maximum of 20 people so places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. Booking is essential.

Woodwalton Fen is famous as the first National Nature Reserve in the UK and forming a focal point for the Great Fen Project which continues to expand across Cambridgeshire. The meeting point and car park for the guided walk is along the drainage bank at the entrance to

the reserve on Chapel Road, Ramsey Heights, PE26 2RS. If you prefer to park at the Ramsey Heights Nature Reserve there will be an extra half mile walk to the Woodwalton Fen entrance. More details can be found at <https://www.greatfen.org.uk/woodwalton-fen>. Please note there are no toilet facilities in Woodwalton Fen reserve although these are available at the Wildlife Centre at the Ramsey Heights Nature Reserve. We suggest you bring a picnic lunch.

Leaders: Mike Bird and the Wildlife Trust.

Saturday 24th May, Turvey. On this visit to the disused railway line running through the Turvey Estate, we will view plant life in particular but also the many invertebrates, birds, lichens and mosses that flourish here. Orchids should just be beginning to flower. Other plants in or around the railway line have included Adder's-tongue Fern, Black Spleenwort, Rusty-back Fern and Houndstongue. Hobby breed nearby. Butterflies include Purple and White-letter Hairstreaks. Tony Smith always hoped for Grizzled Skipper too. Timing and access arrangements will be confirmed on the BNHS website and by email in due course.

Leader: Brother John Mayhead, Monastery of Christ Our Saviour, Turvey.

Friday 30th May, Kensworth Quarry NR. An afternoon visit to the nature reserve, which is in a restored area of the chalk quarry, as well as to surrounding areas. Hopefully the White Helleborine and Common Twayblade will be flowering well. The nationally important 'Chalk Rock' exposure can also be viewed. There are steep and sometimes slippery slopes, so walking shoes or boots should be worn. Meet at 2pm in the National Trust Chiltern Gateway Centre car park, LU6 2GY, TL008195. The car park is pay and display (Free for National Trust members).

Leaders: Richard and Geraldine Hogg.

Tuesday 24th June, Clophill. An evening walk around Sandy Smith Nature Reserve, Clophill, joint with Bedfordshire Bird Club, looking for resident birds and other wildlife. Park and meet at 7pm at the entrance gate to the reserve TL110387, SG17 5PL.

Leaders: Stefan Baltruschatt and Sue Raven

Wednesday 9th July, Strawberry Hill Farm. Strawberry Hill Farm, Wednesday 9th July. Visit to Strawberry Hill, now owned by the Wildlife Trust, for a guided walk with staff. Nearly 40 years ago, the previous owner decided to put his 150-hectare farm into a set-aside scheme and let nature take over. The land was transformed from species-poor arable fields to open grassland, then shrub and young woodland appeared too. As the habitat became wilder, the wildlife moved in – nightingales, turtle doves, grasshopper warblers, harvest mice, badgers and more. Meet at 10am in the temporary car park, TL00546259, MK44 1AA.

Leaders: Chantelle Warriner & Gwen Hitchcock.

BNHS visits to date

Coming face-to-face with Hedgehogs (and other animals)



On Monday 17th February 2025, a group of 11 members visited **Tiggywinkles Wildlife Hospital** in Buckinghamshire. Members were given a 2-hour guided tour and talk about the hospital site, which was so much larger than many of us expected. On the day, there were 1,221 animals and birds receiving free life-saving care, including 410 Hedgehogs. Many of the Hedgehogs were 'urchins' brought in before the winter, and thought to be abandoned or injured. They have been fed over the winter to build them up to a healthy condition when they can be released this spring. We met up close and personal with 'Macaroni', who sadly had only three legs.



Tiggywinkles Wildlife Hospital, Aston Rd, Haddenham, Bucks HP17

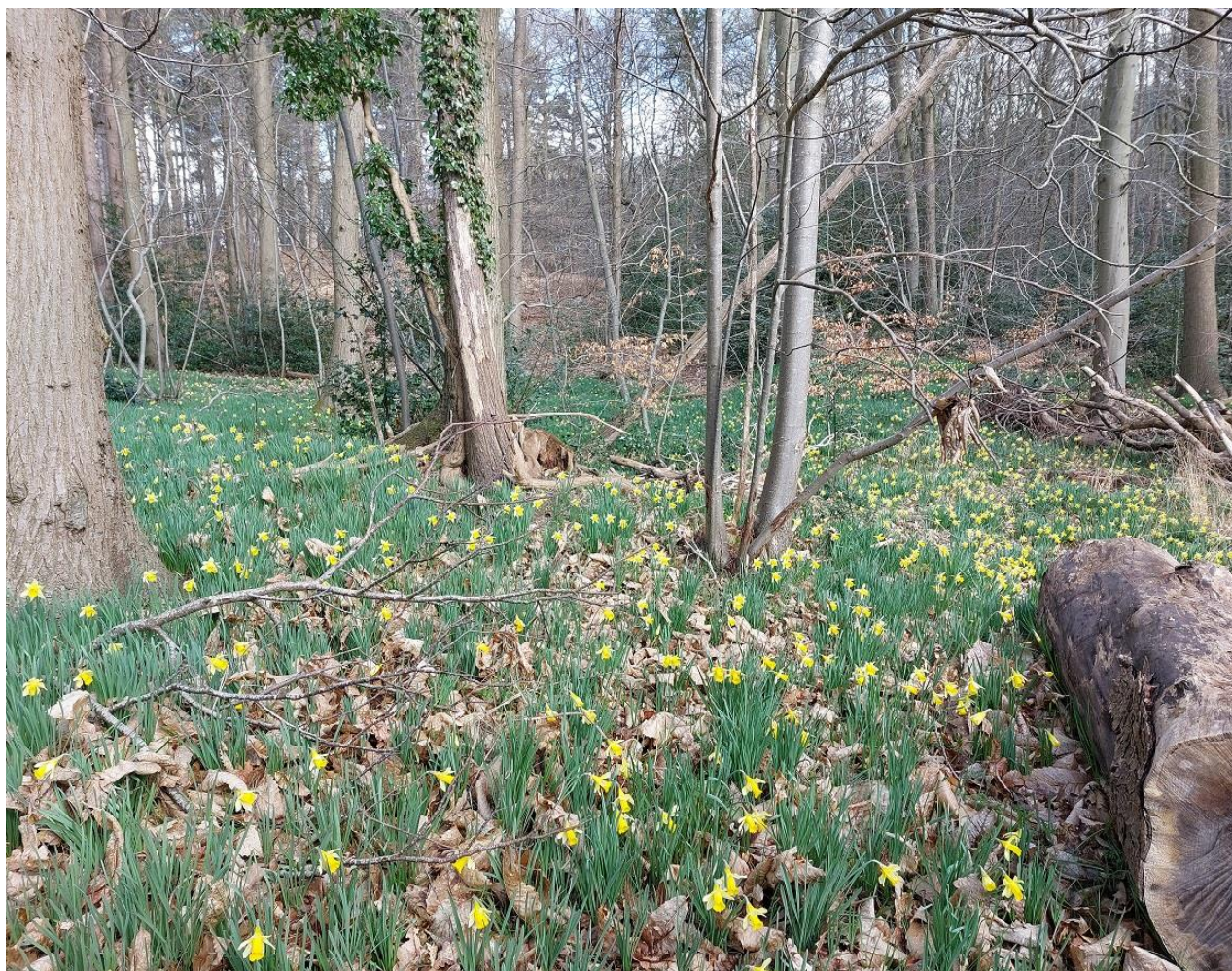
Finding eleven Harvest Mouse nests



The Bedfordshire Mammal group invited BNHS members to join in the Harvest Mouse Survey at **Queen's Wood, Ampthill**, (photograph above) on Saturday 1st March, and 11 people surveyed the site on a lovely day. See the separate article by Ken Winder about the Harvest Mouse survey in this edition of Wild about Beds. The new wood lies adjacent to King's Wood, Houghton Conquest and is being managed by the Forest of Marston Vale Trust. Paths have been made around the site and it will soon be opened to the public. Leader: Ken Winder.

Wild daffodils and wood ants

Friday, 14th March saw an impromptu visit to **Maulden Wood**, where the Wild Daffodils were looking their best. Fourteen members joined in the walk, and enjoyed a fantastic display of the daffodils. We stopped to look at nests of the Southern Wood Ant and, despite the cold day, they were swarming over their nests in huge numbers. This is the only site where they can be found in the county and it is believed that they were introduced by the Duke of Bedford as food for pheasants. Around 70 nests have been recorded in the southern section of Maulden Wood in recent years, on the warmer sandy soils among the



pine plantations. We then moved on the new heath, a sandy ridge which is leased and managed by The Greensand Trust, creating open sandy grassland and heath. It is a good place to look for solitary wasps and bees, and Steve Cham showed us areas where he had been observing interactions between the wood ants and Early Colletes bees – check out his fascinating article about this in the recent *Bedfordshire Naturalist*, Volume 78. We walked back to the cars through the conservation area, where there was a lovely display of Primroses. It was good to welcome several members who haven't been on many, or any, BNHS walks before. Leader: Rosemary Brind.

Photographs of the events by Rosemary Brind

Field trip organisers urgently need for 2025 – can you help?

We urgently need someone to join a team from BNHS to coordinate a programme of field trips for 2025. If you think you might be able to help, please contact Mike Robinson at bnhsevents@bnhs.org.uk to find out more.

If you enjoy our field trips, exploring different parts of the county and meeting up with other members, please consider helping by volunteering for this important role. You can find some information about organising events in the July 2024 issue (210th issue) of *Wild About Beds* that was emailed to members.