



Wild About Beds

The Bedfordshire Natural History Society Newsletter

October 2025 Number 215



*Oleander Hawk-moth
– a new county
record.*

*Photograph by John
Tomlin. See page 5.*

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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.

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 December 2025** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

The next Wild About Beds will be published in **January 2026**. Please note that any views are independent of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and BedsLife.

Note from the Editor

A first Bedfordshire record of a splendid hawk-moth, a photographic record of a Red-banded Sandwasp preparing and provisioning her nest burrow, and the latest news of the Geology Group all feature in this issue alongside news of the Society and future meetings.

After four enjoyable years of editing the newsletter I am stepping down after the January issue. If you would like to volunteer to take over, please contact me on newsletter@bnhs.org.uk I'll be happy to tell you about the joys of the newsletter. Please consider taking it on. It's both informative and fun, and your fellow members are lovely people to work with.

Nick

Hedgehogs in our Gardens

Ken Winder



In 2012 an article from the PTES (Peoples Trust for Endangered Species) stated “Urgent: Hedgehogs are in trouble” as numbers had decreased dramatically. The State of Britain’s Hedgehogs report, published in 2022, suggested that since 2015, rural populations had decreased by half and urban ones by a third. It also stated that rural populations were continuing to decline, but in urban areas, where there were green spaces and gardens, the decline had steadied.

That national decline was also noted in Bedfordshire. In the 1971-85 and the 1995-98 surveys, hedgehogs were recorded in 63% of the tetrads in the county. By the time of the 2000-06 and 2014-18 surveys this had dropped to only 40%. This decline seems to have continued based on the number of records submitted to the BNHS. These dropped from 100 in 2020 to only 36 in 2023. My own personal records of hedgehogs, both dead and alive, also seemed to reflect this. From 2004 to 2016 the average number I recorded per year in the area surrounding Stondon was around 10 per year, whereas for the years from 2017 to 2024 they were 5,3,2,2,4,3,0 and 1. This year up until the end of July I have not seen any hedgehogs in this area. The last time I had hedgehogs in the garden was in 2021 so I wondered what the situation was for other people. Therefore, a request was sent out to members of the Bedfordshire Mammal Group and the BNHS asking if they had hedgehogs visiting their gardens this year and if they had them in previous years. The response to this was excellent. I received replies from 49 people, many of whom also provided supplementary information.

Results for the 50 gardens (including my own) were actually very encouraging, with 35 people saying that they still had hedgehogs visiting their gardens on a regular basis. Virtually all those who had hedgehogs this year also had them in previous years. Positive reports came from Ampthill, Barton, Blunham, Biggleswade

(2), Bromham, Bedford, Cople, Cranfield, Dunstable, Fitwick(3), Haynes, Harlington, Luton, Linslade(2), Lidlington, Leighton Buzzard, Meppershall, Marston Moretaine, Pottton, Radwell, Stewartby, Sandy, Stopsley, Stevington, Shefford, Toddington (2), Westoning and Wreslingworth. Numbers in brackets indicate when more than one report came from a place. When plotted on a map this showed a fairly even distribution throughout the county. Fifteen of those who had hedgehogs reported feeding them and several said they left gaps in fences etc. to help with the hedgehogs' wanderings (up to 2km over one night). On a more negative note, several people stated that they had seen fewer hedgehogs in their garden than previously and only a few reported seeing young.

As for the 15 people who didn't see hedgehogs in their gardens this year, 12 used to see them in the past. Of those, 8 had lost them within the last 5 years. This could be due to a lot of factors which I cannot comment on. In my own case, my garden had not changed much during that time and I continued to put food out and use a trail camera to see if any hedgehogs appeared. Sadly, none did, so it is possible that there were simply just none around. I heard no reports of hedgehogs from my neighbours either. In general, the population visiting our gardens looks reasonably stable, which gives hope that hedgehogs are still doing OK within villages and towns. However, like myself, several people did say that within the wider countryside they were seeing fewer hedgehogs than in the past. It is here that we could face the greatest challenge as more and more of areas which are suitable for hedgehogs, disappear under development leaving only our gardens as their sanctuary.

My thanks go to everyone who submitted records for this survey and for those lucky people who still have hedgehogs visiting their gardens, I hope this continues well into the future.



Hawk-moth First for Bedfordshire

John Tomlin

After a pleasant Saturday morning's birding on 28th June 2025 at Summer Leys in Northamptonshire (The Wildlife Trust BNC) I returned to my Westoning home in Bedfordshire at about 1pm to a very excited wife, Mary.



"I've found a large very attractive moth in the garden" she said "I've put it in a plastic box, is it rare"? I had no idea what it was but I certainly hadn't seen one before. Thanks to modern technology and with the help of the app "Obsidentify" I soon had it potentially identified as an infrequent UK migrant, an Oleander Hawk-moth.



My first priority was to get in touch with Malcolm Hawkes, a keen and very knowledgeable moth expert. "If it is what we think it is", came his reply, "It's a first record for Bedfordshire, I'll be with you in a couple of hours." He was on his way back from RSPB Frampton Marsh twitching a Collared Pratincole.

By 4pm Malcolm and his wife Carolyn were at my home and identification was confirmed – an OLEANDER HAWK- MOTH.

Many photographs later it became a priority to get in touch with the county moth recorders, Andy and Melissa Banthorpe and a selection of the photos were emailed to them.

Gen Carpenter and Pete Marshall also have a keen interest in moths and, like Malcolm, often put out a moth trap in their garden at night to see what moths are in the area. After quick call to them they were

soon with us and excited to see such a rare 'lifer'. It also turned out to be a 'lifer' for Melissa and Andy, who came to see and photograph it the following day which was a Sunday and they added the sighting to the county moth web site.

That evening Mary and I returned our overseas visitor alive and, I think well, back into the wild, releasing it in the village cemetery.

Although "Bird Guides" is primarily for national bird reports, on rare occasions insects also make their way on to their website – a call from Pete Marshall on the Monday "Mary's moth has made it on to Bird Guides" - it must have been rare. An interesting few days with a moth!

Storage Space required for BNHS items

At a recent BNHS Council meeting we discussed the need for some secure space to store boxes of natural history items used for external events. We need the use of something like a lockable garage that is dry and safe and which is ideally located centrally in the county. We would be able to pay a negotiated rental fee for the use of this space. If you or someone else you know has room for these items then please contact the BNHS secretary, Ann de Winter on secretary@bnhs.org.uk

Major new publication – *The Birds of Bedfordshire* Buy your early-bird copy now!

A new avifauna, produced by Bedfordshire Bird Club and published by the BNHS, entitled *The Birds of Bedfordshire*, has been written by Tony Ploszajski. Lavishly illustrated, it covers the 307 species that have occurred in Bedfordshire with a detailed review of the last 33 years, featuring photographs, numerous graphs, distribution maps, breeding information, tables, personal accounts and analyses. It is a veritable mine of information and simply a must-have for any anyone with an interest in the avifauna of Bedfordshire.

To order your copy, scan the QR code below, or visit <https://www.bnhs.co.uk/2019/publications.php> where you can select the most appropriate option, delivery or collection. <https://bedsbirdclub.org.uk/event/the-birds-of-bedfordshire/>

The Birds of Bedfordshire

by Tony Ploszajski

ISBN 978-1-9162417-1-8

Published by the Bedfordshire Natural History Society and financed by The Peter Smith Charitable Trust for Nature, the book contains a detailed review of all 307 species that have occurred in Bedfordshire.

- **506 page hardback publication**
- **399 photographs**
- **Graphs, distribution maps and tables**
- **Personal accounts and analyses**

Chapters include:

- **Habitats**
- **Climate**
- **Birdwatching in the county**
- **Key birdwatching sites**
- **307 species accounts** including locally taken photographs for most and an assessment of change over time
- **Detailed patterns of change** in the county over the 33 years from 1990 to 2022
- **Appendices** covering the county list, earliest and latest dates of regular migrants, highest site counts, selected records for 2023 and 2024, escapes and hybrids, a site gazetteer and a useful reference section.

All sales proceeds (excluding processing fees for card transactions) will be split equally between The Beds, Cambs and Northants Wildlife Trust's reserve at Strawberry Hill in Knotting Green and The Greensand Trust's Clophill Lakes reserve. Both of these sites provide habitat for key species and both face different challenges as they are newly acquired reserves.

The Bedfordshire Natural History Society is a registered charity (No 268659). Further details of the Society's other publications are available on its website <https://www.bnhs.org.uk>.



Launch 4th October 2025 at 10.30am

Clophill Lakes NR (Shefford Road, Beadlow, Beds SG17 5TR)

Special offer until 31st December 2025

£45.00 if collected at the launch event or by arrangement (details to be posted on the Bedfordshire Bird Club website <https://bedsbirdclub.org.uk/>). If posted to an UK address £52.95. From 1st January 2026, the cover price of £50.00 (plus £7.95 P&P), a total of £57.95 will apply.

In order to secure your copy of *The Birds of Bedfordshire*, please visit: <https://www.bnhs.co.uk/2019/publications.php> where you can purchase your copy online and select the most appropriate option (delivery or collection).

Scan me to order
book directly from
our website



Two BNHS publications are now available in digital format

A summary of books published by the BNHS can be found on the publications page of the website <https://www.bnhs.co.uk/2019/publications.php>

Having sold out of hardback copies many years ago, two of the books, the *Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire*, and the *Flora of Bedfordshire* are now available in digital format.

Flora of Bedfordshire (2011)

Christopher R. Boon & Alan R. Outen. 718 pages with hardcover.

ISBN 0950652180 978-0-9506521-8-4 Publisher BNHS

A digital copy of *The Flora of Bedfordshire* is now available, courtesy of BNHS, from the BSBI website, for a small charge of £5 - [click here](#) – or visit the publications page of the BNHS website

Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire (2015)

Richard Revels & Chris Boon & Graham Bellamy. 156 pages with hardcover.

ISBN 978-0-9506521-9-1 Publisher BNHS

A digital copy of *Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire* is now available free of charge, courtesy of BNHS - [click here](#) - or visit the publications page of the BNHS website.

Updating *Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire*

Good progress is being made with regards to preparing a 10-year update on orchid distribution following the publication of *Wild Orchids of Bedfordshire* in 2015. During the two-year orchid survey of 2023 and 2024, 381 records were received from 56 people – thanks to everyone who contributed. Do keep submitting your records for 2025 via Adnoto on the BNHS website. If you have any photos of pollinators of orchids, contact Richard and Geraldine Hogg on geraldine_dick@hoggie49.plus.com

Richard and Geraldine have been scouring the county, visiting sites with historic records of orchids, and have made regular posts of their findings on the BNHS Facebook page, *Wild about Beds*. Three species are regularly recorded by the Wildlife Trust (Man Orchid, Musk Orchid and Frog Orchid), and Graham Bellamy has taken on co-ordinating the Autumn Lady's-tresses count on Knocking Hoe. A number of orchid species are now being monitored in detail under the Rare Species Guardians project.

The orchid group includes Richard and Geraldine Hogg, Graham Bellamy, John Wakely, Chris Boon and Rosemary Brind.

Free to a good home

A cache of copies of *British Wildlife* and *British Birds* from 2016 to 2024 is available free to any BNHS member who might be able to put them to a good use. A few issues of these beautiful publications are missing but the remaining copies are in good condition. If you're interested contact newsletter@bnhs.org.uk

Red-banded Sandwasp

John Curd

I have been observing interactions at a natural bee bank in Rushmere CP since our first Covid lockdown. One of the more entertaining species has been the Red-banded Sandwasp, *Ammophila sabulosa*.

I first spotted females digging their nest burrows in the sparsely vegetated sandy soil. This year I managed to capture one in the act of flying away with an “armload” of spoil from her excavation. This seemed a very precise approach compared to other burrowing species which simply kick the sand down the slope.

The wasp's nest burrow is provisioned either with one large caterpillar or several smaller caterpillars. Larger prey items are carried on foot since they can be too heavy for the wasp to fly with. She closes the nest entrance temporarily using sand and stones while she hunts for her prey in surrounding vegetation. Once provisioned, the wasp permanently closes the burrow with a much deeper plug of sand, and camouflages the entrance with debris.



Excavating the nest (top left), removing the spoil (lower left), provisioning (top right) and sealing the nest (lower right). Photographs by John Curd.



Tribute to Ian Kelly

9th September 1959 to

26th July 2025

Ian was a long-time member of the BNHS and a lifelong resident of Barton, continuing to live in his childhood home until his death on 26th July. He was a one-off, eschewing many of the trappings of modern life - he didn't own a phone or a computer and didn't drive. Nevertheless, his dedication and seemingly unquenchable thirst for knowledge led him to study for and pass several degrees using the local library facilities and, as a result, he was well known and liked by the staff there.

Barton Hills was very much Ian's 'patch' – he knew them inside and out and he was always keen to share his passion for the area with friends and other nature enthusiasts. He was a Flora Guardian for several sites around Barton and would send meticulous monthly reports of his interesting finds around the area to John Wakely, County Recorder for Flowering Plants, Ferns and Fern Allies. John recalls that Ian “was an excellent all-round natural historian with an amazing memory and a more-than competent botanist. He was fascinated by local history, loved to chat and would always come up with fascinating stories.” He was also a conscientious collector of roadkill data, diligently passing the information on to David Anderson, the County Mammal Recorder.

Despite the lack of a car, Ian was a regular attendee at BNHS meetings and field events. One member recalls meeting Ian at an event and shared how amazed they were by his passion for nature, continual quest for learning more and the lengths he would go to get to a meeting. Indeed, Ian's ability to turn up in unexpected places knew no bounds, none more so than when a group of BNHS friends travelling in Estonia on a birding holiday met Ian staying in the same hotel – it's a small world when you're determined!

Ian's love for the natural world went beyond recording and identifying flora and fauna. As a Pagan, he was very much in touch with the wheel of the year and was a familiar face on the

folk circuit. Membership Secretary and morris dancer, Lisa King, recalls meeting Ian on numerous occasions around the country, celebrating the traditional calendar dates at events such as May Morning in Ampthill Great Park, Whittlesey Straw Bear, in Hastings Jack-in-the Green, and the Winter Solstice celebrations with the Witchmen Morris Dancers in Isham. She described Ian as “A constant calm and gentle soul in an otherwise turbulent world.”

Whilst incredibly sad, it seems fitting that Ian passed from this life, outdoors in a place that he knew and loved, surrounded by like-minded people. We will miss the walking stick with a fur tail, the greying curly locks, smiling eyes and bonhomie. He leaves a hole in the lives of those who knew him.

With thanks to David Anderson, Lisa King, John Wakely and Ian’s cousins, Marie Carter and Sue Fowler, for contributing to this tribute.



Your BNHS needs new officers. Could it be you?

Mike Bird shares some of his volunteering experience with the BNHS.

The Council of the BNHS hopes that all of our members enjoy and appreciate the work that is carried out to make the Society a thriving and active community of like-minded folk who care about the wildlife of their county. Like so many other groups it is run by volunteers who contribute their time and expertise towards providing wide-ranging opportunities and information for the benefit of its members.

When I retired (early) from full-time employment I felt that I still had some time and energy to give towards volunteering in a number of different ways. On learning that the BNHS Treasurer intended to step down I gave the idea some thought in taking up those reins. I was used to using spreadsheets but had no formal background in accounting. As it happened I need not have worried about the reporting aspect of the role. Our auditor was very helpful and supportive and I'd been given a lot of advice about what to do and when by the retiring treasurer. I enjoyed taking on the new challenge and was pleased to become an integral part of the friendly and encouraging team of Council members. What's more I found that it took, *on average*, only about an hour a week to do the tasks it required. On becoming Treasurer I was also invited to join the small team involved in producing the Society's two latest books. It was good to have an input into creating these highly praised and well received publications even if I didn't actually write any of the text. Since stepping down as Treasurer I wanted to continue my involvement with the BNHS Council and so have now taken on the role of co-ordinating our indoor meetings. It's been really good to get involved with the running of the Society and it has still left me plenty of time to enjoy my retirement.

We now find ourselves in the situation where our current Treasurer is stepping down after three years in the role come next March. We invite our members to strongly consider giving some of their time towards stepping up and taking on the role of new Treasurer from next year. It would suit newly retired members or individuals who are looking for some experience of dealing with financial matters - but please don't think it is a position only for qualified accountants. An organised working practice and familiarity with using a spreadsheet are the key qualities for the role. If you would like further information then please approach Mike Bird on council14@bnhs.org.uk or Colin Le Boutillier, our current Treasurer on treasurer@bnhs.org.uk and they will be happy to provide further details. Following the untimely and sudden death of our previous Chairman, Terence Ilott, we are also in need of a Chairperson who could provide some leadership for the Society more widely. If you feel you have the skills and experience that such a role requires, the Council would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact Ann de Winter, our Hon. Secretary (secretary@bnhs.org.uk).

BNHS Indoor Meetings

Our indoor meetings are held at Maulden Village Hall, MK45 2DN, starting at 8pm. We also hold online meetings via Zoom and all current members receive joining instructions by email. Our Zoom meetings start at 8pm.

It is worth noting that all of the BNHS meetings are scheduled for the third Tuesday of the month from September through to the following March.

21 Oct Maulden VH. Dr Edmund Flach *My Life as a Zoo Vet* The talk will include some of the highlights and challenges of being the vet for Whipsnade Zoo and then pathologist at London Zoo.

18 Nov via Zoom. Mr Jon Mason. *The Wildlife of the Chilterns*. He is an excellent photographer and a naturalist with wide experience in giving illustrated presentations.

16 Dec Maulden VH. Members' Evening. Members are invited to present their own photos and wildlife encounters from the past year.

20 Jan 26 via Zoom. Mr Leif Bersweden will talk about his latest book *Where the Wildflowers Grow*.

17 Feb 26 via Zoom. Mr Matthew Webb *Adders and other Reptiles of Ramdamere Heath, near Leighton Buzzard*.

17 Mar 26 Maulden VH. AGM and Recorders' evening - our Recorders will give short presentations about their wildlife records received throughout the year.

BNHS Winter Field Meeting

FRIDAY 26th DECEMBER, WOBURN 9:30am

Boxing Day Walk through Woburn Park. Please book with Julia Powell on JuliaCPowell800@gmail.com or 01582 661328. Meet at the Woburn Village car park, opposite the church in Park Street, postcode MK17 9PG, Grid Ref SP950331. Leader: Julia Powell.

BNHS Visits, July to September 2025

Strawberry Hill Farm, Wednesday 9th July, morning meeting

Ten members joined Chantelle Warriner and Gwen Hitchcock for this guided walk at Strawberry Hill, now owned by the Wildlife Trust. On our walk round a small part of the site, we heard about some of the present management, as well as areas where trials and monitoring are taking place, prior to making decisions on future management.

In one area, a trial pit had been created by the Newt Conservation Partnership, a partnership between the Freshwater Habitats Trust and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation. They use money from developments to create and restore high quality habitat for Great Crested Newts. The water level is being monitored by the partnership for a year, before deciding on the detailed pond creation, which will be much larger.

We were also shown a few experiments being run by The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. One set of equipment was trialling an auto moth trap detector, where moths are attracted to a back board, with the images being run through an AI machine to identify the moths. In another, pollinators attracted to Sedum plants triggered two trail cameras above to aid identification of pollinators on the site 24/7.

Among the wildlife seen on the day were Migrant Hawker, Brown Hawker, Southern Hawker, Emperor Dragonfly, Broad-bodied Chaser and Ruddy Darter. A small Tortoise Shield Bug attracted a lot of interest, as did the Broad Centurion Soldier Beetle. Twenty bird species were recorded but, of those, 12 were only heard.

Thanks to Chantelle and Gwen of the Wildlife Trust for giving us such an interesting tour of this nature reserve.



Visit report and photos by Rosie Brind

Brogborough Landfill Site, Friday 18th July, morning meeting

The BNHS trip to Brogborough went well. Seven people turned up on a very hot day and everyone saw Lesser Emperor on the south lake, and they were good views. They were all males and were hovering against the breeze, almost posing for a photo. We walked around this big, shallow lake and three of the group left from here but four of us hiked over the hill to the other lakes and ponds. We were hoping to see Southern Migrant Hawkers and we did. There were only two males that we saw, flying in the reeds of the almost dried-up overflow lagoon.

We could find no Red-veined Darter although they had been seen ovipositing in June. It was hoped that there might be some emerging later in the year.

Many other more common species of odonata were seen, including over a hundred Common Blue Damselfly. Emperor Dragonfly turned up everywhere we went. Interestingly we saw no Red-eyed or Small Red-eyed Damselflies at all. Hundreds were seen last year on the south lake but for some reason there was no floating weed there and hence no “red-eyes”. Where did they go?



Lesser Emperor (left) and Southern Migrant Hawker (right).

Visit report and photos by Rory Morrissey, trip leader

Wrest Park, Wednesday 23rd July, evening meeting

An evening tree walk with David Alderman at Wrest Park, Silsoe to see areas not yet visited such as the early tree planting associated with Jemima, Marchioness Grey (1723-97) and Capability Brown, including the tallest broad-leaved trees in Bedfordshire, the Hatfield Limes (1748).

At 7pm when we gathered outside the gate of Wrest Park as the sun was slowly sinking over the ancient village of Silsoe. It was a calm and inviting evening. Our group was a large one, reflecting the popularity of David's previous tree walks here and elsewhere. David led us first to an amazing Jeffrey's Pine with huge seed cones. The calls of Song Thrushes, Goldcrests and a Green Woodpecker enhanced the atmosphere of this glorious evening as we threaded our way through the dense woodland, chatting as we went from one tree to the next, trying to assimilate history of plant hunters, landed gentry and the rarity and the

great age of these giants of nature. We learnt how the London Plane came to be named and how it withstood urban air pollution. There was a magnificent Lime tree chosen for the Queen's Jubilee as one of 70 specimen trees throughout the UK.

It was well after 9pm when we staggered back to our parked cars and said farewell to David and Wrest Park. Thanks go to David Alderman, Wrest Park staff & volunteers, Sheila Brooke for the organising of the visit and everybody who came along to enjoy a beautiful evening.



Visit report and photo by John Pitts

Clophill Lakes, Saturday 2nd August, early morning meeting, joint with the Bird Club. Eighteen of us arrived at Clophill Lakes bright and early on Saturday morning to be met with the dreadful news of the arson attack which had taken place the previous evening. Charred leaves from the willow trees were on the paths and had collected in ripples on the edge of the lake, emergency services were very much in evidence and members of staff were visibly affected by the devastation. Lisa has let everyone know how they can help with the restoration task ahead and we hope the wider community will respond generously to the fund. Please donate here to help achieve their target of £100,000 (over £50,000 has already been donated): <https://www.greensandtrust.org/>

In spite of our sense of shock we had a really excellent walk with a total of 44 species, not counting the Feral Pigeon! Our route took us beside the meadow area which looks as though it could be very promising for Stonechat but on Saturday delighted us with groups of warblers flitting about. Thanks to Sue Raven for leading, telling us about the reserve and delivering on her 'promise' of a Mandarin Duck for our year list. Thanks also to those taking photographs, to all those who carried scopes and to everyone who came for their company and sharing their enthusiasm of nature, a lovely morning.

Visit report by Kathy Blackmore, extracted from the members' email following the meeting.

Sundon Chalk Quarry, Saturday 9th August

Ten members explored the south end of the quarry which comprises steep chalk 'cliffs', several plateaux and a spring fed watercourse at the bottom which still retained some water despite the drought conditions. The south end of the quarry has not been worked for at least 30 years, but tree succession has been limited by rabbit grazing and use by vehicles, exposing bare chalk. The burnt-out carcasses of a number of cars were a feature of the site! The main interest was the population of Chiltern Gentian *Gentianella germanica* on the upper plateaux and gentle slopes. These numbered in the hundreds rather than the thousands seen during a 2023 survey. Autumn Gentian *Gentianella amarella*, in small numbers, was found amongst the Chiltern Gentians together with the hybrid between the two *G. x pamplinii*. Close to the spring was an area of Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, otherwise only known elsewhere in the county from Flitwick Moor and Wavendon Heath where the ground water is decidedly acidic. In the shallow pools were non-flowering Bladderwort *Utricularia* sp. and the Stonewort *Chara vulgaris* var *contraria*.

Among the butterflies were Small Heath (2), Gatekeeper (20+), Meadow Brown (2). Common Blue (12M, 4F), Brimstone, Comma, Green-veined White and several more whites not identified. Dragonflies included Common Darter (10M, 1F, 1 pair ovip), Keeled Skimmer (12+, all male), Emperor Dragonfly (2F, 1 ovip), Migrant Hawker (4) and Blue-tailed Damselfly (1). We were also fortunate to see Great Crested Newt (1M, 1F), Common Frog (1 adult, several froglets) and a Common Lizard.



Autumn Gentian (left) and Chiltern Gentian (right). Photographs by John Curd

Visit report by John Wakely, trip leader (plants) and Rory Morrissey (the rest)



Latest news from Bedfordshire Geology Group

Bev Fowlston

During the summer months the geology group have been a little quiet. Scorching heat and torrential downpours have put paid to a lot of maintenance work that was planned for the summer at our LGS. However, we have been busy with our monthly drop-in sessions at The Higgins Bedford.

Every second Wednesday of the month we hold drop-in sessions. Visitors can bring along any rocks or fossils they want

identifying and they can "Ask a Geologist" about anything geologically related. Some of the terrific finds have included potential meteorites, usually turning out to be iron or glass slag from old industrial sites that are now people's back gardens! Several local fossils have been brought in from *Gryphaea*, locally known as Devil's toenails, and molluscs to belemnites.

We have had some local rocks brought in too including shelly limestone from Pavenham and areas north of Bedford. There have also been some fabulous metamorphic and igneous rocks from as far away as Columbia (pictured above).

Over the winter period we will be holding our AGM alongside a fabulous talk on fossils by Dr Peter Sheldon who will be presenting this fascinating afternoon talk. An ever-growing range of extraordinary fossils is shedding new light on the history of life: colour patterns in dinosaur feathers and insect wings; DNA from an ecosystem two million years old; the love song of a Jurassic cricket; and ink sacs of Jurassic squid, to name but a few. Medical imaging techniques and particle accelerators now make it possible to see inside the rock surrounding rare and fragile fossils, without causing any damage. This talk will include some remarkable, and often surprising, finds from many parts of the world. Refreshments in the form of afternoon tea will be available following the talk. Please join us on Sunday 2nd November from 2pm at Husborne Crawley Reading Rooms, School Lane, Husborne Crawley, MK43 0XE. Please register your interest on the email below.

Our thanks as always go to those volunteers who have helped during the summer, particularly John Busby. (Photograph above courtesy of Bedfordshire Geology Group.)

To find out more or if you want to help us run this group please do get in touch via email at secretary@bedfordshiregeologygroup.org.uk or visit our website www.bedfordshiregeologygroup.org.uk