



Wild About Beds

The Bedfordshire Natural History Society Newsletter

January 2026 Number 216



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Photograph above: Sulphur Clover *Trifolium ochroleucon*. John Wakely
Please see the article on page 5 of this issue.

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 - 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 February 2026** please.

Thank you in anticipation.

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

Note from the Editor

There are some surprising revelations in John Wakely's long and fascinating article that compares the status of plants within the county to the national Red List of Vascular Plants published by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland. It also demonstrates the importance of citizen science, which is also shown in Bird Club's Garden Bird Survey, which needs more people to take part. The BNHS also needs members to help in a variety of ways. There are details of how you can become more involved throughout this issue.

Whatever your interests in Bedfordshire's natural history I wish you an interesting 2026.

Nick

A tribute to Alan Roy Outen



29th January 1949 - 25th September 2025

Alan Outen was a long-standing and active member of Bedfordshire Natural History Society and it was with great sadness that we learnt of his death from a stroke, aged 76 years, after a long battle with Vascular Parkinson's.

Alan was born in London but his family moved to Bedfordshire when he was still very young. From an early age he developed a deep and broad interest in living things. This passion stayed with him throughout his life. Alan attended Dunstable Grammar School but transferred to Luton College of Technology so that he could study separate A Levels in Zoology and Botany. It was a natural step for him to then obtain a degree in Zoology and Botany from the University of London.

Joining the Bedfordshire Natural History Society in 1970, he soon became an active member as County Recorder for Bryophytes in 1971, a role he held for 40 years. In 1974 Alan wrote a paper for the *Bedfordshire Naturalist*, "The Mosses and Liverworts of Flitwick Moor", (*Beds. Nat.* 29) emphasising the huge importance of this site. He later wrote the Bryophyte account for *The Flora of Bedfordshire*, published in 2011. In 1998, Alan also took on the role of Recorder for Fungi, a post he held until 2011. He showed further commitment to the Society by serving two terms on Council and on the Scientific Committee; he was also Publicity Officer for three years and Site Recorder for two years.

Alan's diverse interests in natural history extended beyond fungi and bryophytes. This led to him having a broad yet detailed knowledge which he was only too happy to share. He led fungus forays and lectured on their identification. He had an extensive knowledge of plants both local and international which he used when leading field meetings or trips abroad. Pattie shares with us that their honeymoon was a botanical tour of Norway with the Botanical Society of the British Isles! All creatures (great or small) fascinated him - he had been taken to London Zoo as a toddler and been enormously impressed by the sight of an elephant! His enthusiasm for the world around him was apparent to his students when he worked as a teacher of Environmental Studies. He later went on to work for Hertfordshire County Council as a Countryside Conservation Officer. However, ill health forced him to retire early as he required extensive back surgery. Despite the limitations imposed by his health, including later heart surgery, Alan continued to be as active as possible in the BNHS.

In 2010 Alan launched the Neglected Insects in Beds initiative. This aimed to encourage the recording of often overlooked insect groups. In 2011 he set up the Bedfordshire Invertebrate Group (BIG) and with the dedicated help of others in the Society there followed three biennial conferences. These were highly successful, each one being attended by over one hundred delegates who enjoyed exceptional talks from national experts. As a result of BIG's field meetings a large number of county records have been produced, including many Bedfordshire firsts.

In acknowledgement of Alan's tireless dedication and hard work for the society, he was formally awarded Honorary Life Membership of the BNHS on 19th March 2019. He was both delighted and surprised by this honour and this recognition meant a great deal to him.

Alan was always enthusiastic and willing to pass on his knowledge. He loved being able to impart information to young and old alike. He was kind and thoughtful in his dealings with others. He maintained his passion for natural history right up to the very last day of his life working on photography and insect identification. May his legacy continue.

With thanks to Alan's wife, Pattie, for the information used in this tribute.

2025 Summer Garden Bird Survey

Many thanks to Barry Nightingale for analysing the Beds Bird Club Summer Garden Bird Survey submissions and sharing the detailed results with members. Everyone is welcome to participate in this survey that allows us to track the changing fortunes of species feeding or foraging in our gardens. This year feedback was received for 60 gardens, the lowest since our summer surveys began with rather more gardens being classified as urban than previously, if you don't already do consider participating in the future. The results are on the Bird Club website (<https://bedsbirdclub.org.uk>) where anyone wishing to contribute their garden bird records can find recording forms for future surveys

Kathy Blackmore

Rare plants – How does Bedfordshire fit into the national picture?

John Wakely

The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) has just published an updated Red List for Vascular Plants in England (available on the BSBI website). This categorises the threat to plant populations on a scale: **CR** -Critically Endangered (in danger of imminent extinction), **EN** – Endangered, **VU** – Vulnerable, **NT** – Near Threatened, **LC** – Least Concern. The 2025 Red list is derived mostly from records used to produce the national 2020 Plant Atlas. Threat assessments are not made simply on numbers but reflect changes in the number of hectads (10km squares) in which species have been recorded. The derivation of threat categories is explained in the above publication. A small population of a rare plant may be stable, whereas numbers of a common species may be declining markedly.

Of the nationally rare plants found in Beds, approximately 25% of species have been assigned a different national threat level compared to the 2014 list. Most of these changes are negative but a few show an encouraging increase.

A Rare Plant Register for Bedfordshire has also been updated. The two publications are not quite equivalent in that the Beds RPR generally lists nationally **LC** plants which have been



Large-flowered Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis speciosa* (left) had a good year and Rough Poppy *Roemaria argemone* (seen on the right as a seedhead) may be numerous in the county despite being listed as nationally vulnerable.



Left: Critically endangered *Buglossoides arvensis* is now found at one site in Bedfordshire, but it might be present elsewhere. Photograph by Stephen Squires. Right: Annual Knawel *Scleranthus annuus*, which is listed as endangered is found in large numbers on a sandy bank at Maulden where it was saved from a proposed council amenity planting scheme. Photograph by Caroline Gilby.

recorded at less than 10 sites in the county over the last 25 years, together with all the species threatened nationally, even when they occur in more than 10 county locations. There is considerable recording bias. More records were collected early in the period when Chris Boon was working on his remarkable 'Flora of Bedfordshire' than have been accrued recently. There has been a change in recording personnel and land access. This means that changes in local plant populations are more difficult to assess. Data collected by the Rare Plant Guardian scheme, now in a 4th year, are going a long way towards rectifying this. This scheme is also monitoring Spiked Star of Bethlehem *Ornithogallum pyrenaicum*, Greater Pignut *Bunium bulbocastanum* and Chiltern Gentian *Gentianella germanica*, species with (probably) stable populations which have very restricted ranges and are Bedfordshire specialities.

First the good news – species which have slipped off the county RPR because they are now found at more than 10 locations include Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, Vervain *verbena officinalis*, Houndstongue *Cynoglossum officinale* and Corn Marigold

Glebionis segetum (although in the last case it occurs in seed mixes, so the origin of plants may be unknown).

..and the bad news – it is likely that Corn Buttercup *Ranunculus arvensis* (**CR**) (last seen 2005), Proliferous Pink *Petrorrhagia prolifera* (**EN**) (2004) and Purple Milk-vetch *Astragalus danicus* (**EN**) (2008) are now extinct in the county.

Buglossoides arvensis (**CR**) is still found at one site on the edge of Luton. It has been recorded from six other Beds sites between 2000 and 2003 and these will be searched in case it may still be present.

Of the Beds plants graded **EN** nationally, a few are still found in significant numbers at certain sites whilst others are just clinging on:

A few plants of Ground Pine *Ajuga chamaepitys* still appear in cultivated areas on Knocking Hoe and adjacent Knocking Knoll field.

Corn Chamomile *Anthemis arvensis*, also an arable weed, has been recorded from 8 sites since 2000, Stinking Chamomile *A. cotula* from 13. These ‘mayweeds’ as a group require careful examination to determine species and the rarer ones may be overlooked.

There have been several recent records of Wormwood *Artemisia absinthium* from the Biggleswade area and a single record from Lidlinton.

The last three records for Good King Henry *Blitum bonus-henricus* were in 2017 and from Brogborough, Arlesey and Dunstable respectively.

Flat-sedge *Blysmus compressus* was recorded at Totternhoe Mead in 2008.

Field Mouse-ear *Cerastium arvense* is still being found regularly at sites across the chalk and also on the Greensand in the east of the county.

Small numbers of Nettle-leaved goosefoot *Chenopodium murale* have been recorded from seven sites, including two in 2025.

Few-flowered Fumitory *Fumaria vaillantii* is still appearing in reasonable numbers in a few arable field margins on chalk between Pegsdon and Bushmead, Luton.

Large-flowered Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis speciosa* has had a good year with about 20 plants flowering at the one known county site in a field adjacent to the A507 at Maulden.

Large populations of Dyer’s Greenweed *Genista tinctoria* occur at Waterloo Thorns, Thurleigh Airfield and Bromham Lake.

Opposite-leaved Pondweed *Groenlandia densa* was last seen in a ditch on Biggleswade Common in 2000.



Sulphur Clover *Trifolium ochroleucon* is thriving on clay soil in the county with several new populations being found recently on road verges.

Musk Orchid *Herminium monorchis* survives in small numbers at Totternhoe Knolls.

Henbane *Hyoscamus niger* has occurred in four separate sites, the last being Meadow Lane Gravel Pits, Bedford in 2017.

Venus' Looking-glass *Legousia hybrida* has been reported from 20+ locations in arable fields from Stotfold across to Chalton.

Field Cow-wheat *Melampyrum arvense* is still found on the edge of Brogborough Pit with numbers now in single figures.

Whorled Water-milfoil *Myriophyllum verticillatum* is found at Felmersham Gravel Pits and Harrold-Odell Country park.

The Knocking Hoe population of Burnt Orchids *Neottia ustulata* appears stable.

The only record of Tubular Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa* in the last 20 years has been from a pond at Warden Abbey.

Pasqueflower *Pulsatilla vulgaris* is still found in large numbers on Barton Hills and Knocking Hoe, with small numbers at Pegsdon Hills and Ravensburgh Bank.

Prickly Poppy *Roemeria argemone* is found each year at locations both on the chalk and across the Greensand Ridge, usually in small numbers but occasionally in abundance.

Fine-leaved Sandwort *Sabulina tenuifolia* is known only from Bunkers Hill near Potton and was last seen in 2018.

Annual knawel *Scleranthus annuus* is found in large numbers on a sandy bank on Maulden recreation ground, together with several other rarities. Mercifully, plans by the council for amenity planting on the bank were discovered and challenged successfully. There are also a few plants currently on a footpath at Stockwood Park.

There are records for more than 20 grassland sites for Pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, but only a few in the last few years. Checking historical sites for the species will be a priority task for 2026.

Small numbers of Field Fleawort *Tephrosia integrifolia* have been found in the last couple of years on Barton Hills, Pegsdon Hills, Dunstable Downs, and Little Galley Hill, with a larger population on Knocking Hoe.

Most of the 18 records for Strawberry Clover *Trifolium fragiferum* are from the early 2000s, and so we are not sure how many populations are extant. A pleasant surprise this year was the finding of several extensive populations on mown verges at Wixams.

Populations of Sulphur Clover *Trifolium ochroleucon* in the county are thriving. The species prefers clay soil and several new populations have been found on road verges in recent years.

Broad-fruited Cornsalad *Valerianella rimosa* has been found for more than 50 years at Jeremiah's Tree south of Barton. Small numbers are still recorded annually.

Loss of habitat, such as chalk downland, is responsible for several species appearing on the nationally **VU** list although they may still be plentiful in Beds (found in at least 10 locations). These include Squinancywort *Asperula cyanchica*, Trifid Bur-marigold *Bidens tripartita*, Quaking-grass *Briza media*, Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*, Clustered Bellflower *Campanula glomerata*, Spring Sedge *Carex caryophyllea*, White Helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*, Small Toadflax *Chaenorhinum minus*, Small Thistle *Cirsium acaule*, Basil Thyme *Clinopodium acinos*, Treacle Mustard *Erysimum cheiranthoides*, Dwarf Spurge *Euphorbia exigua*, Common Rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, Yellow Vetchling *Lathyrus aphaca*, Narrow-leaved Everlasting-pea *Lathyrus sylvestris*, Corn Mint *Mentha arvensis*, Rest-harrow *Ononis repens*, Long-headed Poppy *Papaver dubium* s.s., Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia*, Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*, Salad Burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*, Rough Poppy *Roemeria argemone*, Great Yellow-cress, *Rorippa amphibia*, Creeping Yellow-cress *Rorippa sylvestris*, Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*, Meadow Fescue *Schedonorus pratensis*, Bladder Campion *Silene vulgaris*, White

Mustard *Sinapis alba*, Large Thyme *Thymus pulegioides*, Hare's-foot Clover *Trifolium arvense*, Narrow-fruited Cornsalad *Valerianella dentata* and Horned Pondweed *Zannichelia palustris*.

VU species occurring in less than 10 Bedfordshire sites include Silver Hair-grass *Aira caryophylla* (8 Greensand sites), Hairy Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla filicaulis ssp vestita* (2), Orange Foxtail *Alopecurus aequalis* (4 seasonally wet sites), Wild Celery *Apium graveolens* (2), Barberry *Berberis vulgaris* (6), Giant Bellflower *Campanula latifolia* (7 woodland sites), Distant Sedge *Carex distans* (2 old records), Pale Sedge (2 woods), Frog Orchid *Coeloglossum viride* (4), Flixweed *Descurainia Sophia* (5), Narrow-lipped Helleborine *Epipactis leptophylla* (1), English Gentian *Gentianella amarella ssp anglica* (1), Chiltern Gentian *Gentianella germanica* (4), Long-stalked Cranesbill *Geranium columbinum* (1), Wood Barley *Hordelymus europaeus* (4), Sea Barley *Hordeum marinum* (5), Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* (4), Spotted Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris maculata* (1), Yellow Bird's-nest *Hypopitys monotropa* (3), Wild Candytuft *Iberis amara* (2), Sheepsbit *Jasione montana* (2), Round-fruited Rush *Juncus compressus* (6), Bitter Vetch *Lathyrus linifolius* (1), Smith's Pepperwort *Lepidium heterophyllum* (7), Blue Pimpernel *Lysimachia foemina* (1), Crested Cow-wheat *Melampyrum cristatum* (4), Round-leaved Mint *Mentha suaveolens* (2), Mousetail *Myosurus minimus* (1), Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis* (3) Cat Mint *Nepeta cataria* (7), Fine-leaved Water-dropwort *Oenanthe aquatica* (1) River Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fluviatilis* (2) Fly Orchid *Ophrys insectifera* (1) Man Orchid *Orchis anthropophora* (5), Greater Broomrape *Orobancherapum-genistum* (3), Shining Pondweed (*Potamogeton lucens* (6), Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris* (1), Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica* (3), Spring Vetch *Vicia lathyroides* (2), and Heath Dog-violet *Viola canina* (4).

NT species found in more than 10 county locations: Green-winged Orchid *Anacamptis morio* (12), Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, Wild Liquorice *Astragalus glycyphyllos*, Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, Musk Thistle *Carduus nutans*, Little Mouse-ear *Cerastium semidecandrum*, Autumn Gentian *Gentianella amarella*, Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*, Crested Hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha*, Henbit dead-nettle *Lamium amplexicaule*, Field Pepperwort *Lepidium campestre*, Wood Melick *Melica uniflora*, Corn Mint *Mentha arvensis*, Spiny Rest-harrow *Ononis spinosa*, Burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, Flattened Meadow-grass *Poa compressa*, Wild mignonette *Reseda lutea*, Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, Fiddle Dock *Rumex pulcher*, Arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia*, Heath Groundsel *Senecio sylvaticus*, Charlock *Sinapis arvensis*, Water Chickweed *Stellaria aquatica*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Field Penny-cress *Thlaspi arvense*, Small Nettle *Urtica urens* and Blue Water-speedwell *Veronica anagalis-aquatica*.

NT species found in less than 10 county locations: Deadly Nightshade *Atropa belladonna* (6), Star Sedge *Carex echinata* (3), Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea* (6), Flea Sedge *Carex pulicaris* (1), Greater Dodder *Cuscuta europaea* (4), Common Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium* (2) Chalk Eyebright *Euphrasia pseudokernerii* (9), Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus* (4), Small-

flowered Fumitory *Fumaria densiflora* (1), Elecampane *Inula helenium* (4), Weasel's Snout *Misopates orontium* (1), Greater Butterfly Orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* (5), Wild Radish *Raphanus raphanistrum* (7), Moon Carrot *Seseli libanotis* (1), Shepherd's Cress *Teesdalia nudicaulis* (3), Spreading Hedge-parsley *Torilis arvensis* (5) and Marsh Speedwell *Veronica scutellata* (1).

LC species found at 10 sites or less : Fragrant Agrimony *Agrimonia procera* (3), Velvet Bent *Agrostis canina* (5), Brown Bent *Agrostis vinealis* (3), Field Garlic *Allium oleraceum* (1), Rustyback *Asplenium ceterache* (1), Hard Fern *Blechnum spicant* (2), Intermediate Water-starwort *Callitriche brutia* (6), Blunt-fruited Water-starwort *Callitriche obtusangula* (1), Various-leaved Water-starwort *Callitriche platycarpa* (5), Green-ribbed Sedge *Carex binervis* (2), White Sedge *Carex canescens* (2), Long-stalked Yellow-sedge *Carex lepidocarpa* (1), Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata* (6), Maple-leaved Goosefoot *Chenopodium hybridum* (5), Common Calamint *Clinopodium ascendens* (8), Lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis* (3), Crosswort *Cruciata laevipes* (2), Dodder *Cuscuta epithymum* (2), Perennial wall-rocket *Diploxys tenuifolia* (5), Spear-leaved Willow-herb *Epilobium lanceolatum* (1), Marsh Willow-herb *Epilobium palustre* (5), Pale Willow-herb *Epilobium roseum* (2), Green-flowered Helleborine *Epipactis phyllanthes* (7), Violet Helleborine *Epipactis purpurata* (9), Glabrous Whitlow-grass *Erophila glabrescens* (2), Dense-flowered Fumitory *Fumaria densiflora* (3), Mare's-tail *Hippuris vulgaris* (5), Orpine *Hylotelephium telephium* (4), Imperforate St John's-wort (8), Smooth Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris glabra* (9), Bristle Club-rush *Isolepis setacea* (6), Bulbous Rush *Juncus bulbosus* (3), Heath Rush *Juncus squarrosus* (1), Juniper *Juniperus communis* (3), Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria* (5), Pale Flax *Linum bienne* (1), Southern Wood-rush *Luzula forsteri* (1), Great Wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica* (3), Bog Pimpernel *Lysimachia tenella* (1), Bur Medick *Medicago minima* (1), Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* (5), Blinks *Montia fontana* (9), Knapweed Broomrape *Orobancha elatior* (10), Ivy Broomrape *Orobancha hederaceae* (3), Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis* (1), Yellow Bartsia *Parentucellia viscosa* (4), Purple-stem Cat's-ear *Phleum phleoides* (1), Spreading Meadow-grass *Poa humilis* (8), Four-leaved Allseed *Polycarpon tetraphyllum* (4), Solomon's Seal *Polygonatum x hybridum* (3), Cornfield Knotgrass *Polygonum rurivagum* (5), Hard Shield-fern *Polystichum aculeatum* (6), Trailing Tormentil *Potentilla anglica* (2), Hoary Cinquefoil *Potentilla argentea* (3), Oxlip *Primula elatior* (1), Ivy-leaved Buttercup *Ranunculus hederaceus* (3), Small-flowered Buttercup *Ranunculus parviflorus* (4), Pond Water-crowfoot *Ranunculus peltatus* (3), Small-flowered Sweet-briar *Rosa micrantha* (3), Round-leaved Dog-rose *Rosa tomentella* (1), Eared Willow *Salix aurita* (2), Brookweed *Samolus valerandi* (1), Wood Club-rush *Scirpus sylvaticus* (2), Wild Service Tree *Sorbus torminalis* (1), Autumn Ladies Tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* (2), Greater Chickweed *Stellaria neglecta* (1), Bird's-foot Clover *Trifolium ornithopodioides* (5), Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor* (1), Navelwort *Umbilicus rupestris* (2), Bladderwort *Utricularia australis* (2), Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* (4) and Marsh Violet *Viola palustris* (1).

Those of us who record botanically in Beds will be surprised at several of the national trends. The concept of Field Mouse-ear or Pepper Saxifrage being in danger is thought-provoking because we encounter them reasonably frequently. Anyone lucky enough to see the swathes of Dyer's Greenweed at Thurleigh Airfield or Waterloo Thorns will be amazed that it is in trouble.

Species found at a single county location which are widespread elsewhere must be worthy of conservation effort, in addition to those that are nationally rare. There will be some additions to the Rare Plant Guardian scheme and a focus on searching for endangered plants in the next couple of years. The presence of Charlock (**NT**) which is on the county 'common' list is a reminder that data collection is important. The more we record the better will be our understanding of changes in the county flora.

New Treasurer needed to stand at AGM

Colin le Boutillier, our present Treasurer, is coming to the end of his 3-year term, and he will not be standing for re-election at the next AGM in March. The Society cannot function without a Treasurer so all members are asked to consider taking on this role for 2026.

The duties are not difficult. Time required is about two days a month but broken down into short periods of a few minutes to an hour. Work is concentrated during the winter months. Perhaps the most taxing part is the actual handover between Treasurers as we deal with several financial organisations.

Only basic arithmetic is required to keep the books. It can be done using a simple paper notebook. Using a spreadsheet may help to pick up errors as you make them. Being able to build spreadsheets may give you more fun and enable more elaborate analysis of the Society's business.

In addition, the Treasurer is a Member of Council, which meets five times a year. Meetings take place during a weekday evening, at a central location in the county, or via Zoom.

The outgoing Treasurer expects to be available to assist the new Treasurer during a settling in period.

Contact Colin to discuss the role at treasurer@bnhs.org.uk or call on 07941 075690

For other ways in which to help run your Society please see page 14.

A Grey Heron fishing for Pike at Wrest Park

Peter Sutton

Wrest Park in Silsoe, Bedfordshire, is a fantastic place to observe aquatic life, from the colourful dragonflies and damselflies that patrol its waterways to the various species of fish that can be seen in its ornamental ponds and wilder stretches of canal. The scarlet red fins of Rudd *Scardinius erythrophthalmus* can be seen flashing beneath the surface among the shoals that congregate in the Long Canal and the Broad Water, and every so often, a disturbance occurs as they race, even occasionally leaping out of the water, to evade the sharp-toothed jaws of the Pike *Esox lucius*. These sleek, torpedo-shaped predators are perfectly camouflaged as they lie in wait for their prey, silently, like green tiger-striped statues among the aquatic foliage, before their large tails produce the explosive thrust that powers them towards anything that strays too close. However, the Pike is not the apex predator in these waters, and on 11th May 2024, its nemesis, the Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* was observed exhibiting some unusual behaviour as it searched for its next meal.



Far left: Shoal of Rudd at Wrest Park.

Left: Grey Heron wading in deep water.

The Heron in question appeared to be swimming like a waterfowl but had simply waded into deeper water to pursue its prey. One swift strike later, and the gaping duck-billed mouth of the Pike could be seen as the Heron held it firm in its long beak. The Pike was then skilfully manoeuvred with a couple of deft moves and swallowed whole.



Volunteers needed to help run the Society

Several crucial roles in the society are currently vacant, or will become vacant at the AGM. Volunteers are sought to come forward and play a role in the running of the Society so that we are in a strong position as we move forward to celebrate our 80th anniversary year.

Roles for which nominations are sought at the AGM in March:

Honorary Chair – currently vacant

Honorary Treasurer – Colin le Boutillier finishes his 3-year term at the AGM

Honorary Secretary, Scientific Committee – currently vacant

Other support roles required for 2026

Field meeting programme co-ordinators – currently vacant

Editor, *Wild about Beds* newsletter – Nick Hammond is stepping down after the January 2026 edition

Editor, *Bedfordshire Naturalist* – currently vacant

Committee members

Organising/helping with refreshments at indoor meetings

If you are interested in supporting the society in any way, please contact our Hon. Secretary Ann de Winter at secretary@bnhs.org.uk

Dates for your diary

BNHS Indoor Meetings

Our indoor meetings are held at Maulden Village Hall, MK45 2DN, starting at 8pm, but the AGM starts at 7.30pm. 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.

20 Jan 2026 via Zoom. Mr Leif Bersweden will talk about his latest book *Where the Wildflowers Grow*.

17 Feb 2026 via Zoom. Mr Matthew Webb *Adders and other Reptiles of Rammamere Heath, near Leighton Buzzard*.

17 Mar 2026 Maulden Village Hall. AGM and Recorders' evening - our Recorders will give short presentations about their wildlife records received throughout the year.

BNHS Field Meetings

Bedford Cemetery, Saturday 28th February 2026. Discover the surprising diversity of lichens to be found in an urban setting. This walk through the park and up the hill to the cemetery will provide a gentle introduction to the study of these overlooked organisms. There is a great deal of interest in Bedford Cemetery, the odd spectacular rarity, lots of well-developed common and distinctive lichens and many lichen phenomena which can be appreciated even if you don't know a single lichen species.

Meet in the car park off Foster Hill Road (on the west side of the park) at 10am, MK40 2JZ, TL04825093, WTW [///wounds.under.tender](http://wounds.under.tender)

Leaders: Martin Butler and Mark Powell.

Provisional Programme of Weekend Field Meetings

HELPERS NEEDED

A core programme of monthly weekend meetings is being developed for 2026. Some of these meetings will introduce members to different species groups, led by our Recorders.

In the absence of dedicated field meeting programme organisers for the last two years, field trips have been organised by members on Council who already have other roles in the society. We **urgently** need one or two people to join in and share the load of organising events and improve the offer to members. **Please consider joining a field meetings team to enable us to continuing offering a programme of events for members.**

We have listened to comments made by some members, that working folk can't attend weekday meetings. We have also heard of people who have not joined the society because they know there are few weekend meetings to attend. Weekend meetings are aimed at encouraging younger, working people to feel their needs are supported, and allow them to receive better value from the society. We hope this will go some way towards addressing this gap in our programme and we hope that all members will be able to join in the meetings and learn more about our county's wildlife.

The aim is to set weekend meetings for the **4th weekend of every month**. This will complement the Bird Club programme whose meetings are on the 2nd weekend of the month, and so avoid clashes for everyone who is a joint member.

Some weekday meetings will also continue be arranged and help is needed to develop that programme. If there are particular places that you would like to visit, do please get in touch.

The weekend field meeting programme is not finalised yet, and a number of permissions still need to be sought. However, a provisional list of dates, topics and leaders is given below so

you can at least highlight the dates in your 2026 calendar while awaiting further information in the next newsletters, email or on the website. Weekend meetings may yet be arranged for the 4th weekends in March and April and if you are interested in organising one, do please get in touch.

Provisional programme of weekend field meetings for 2026

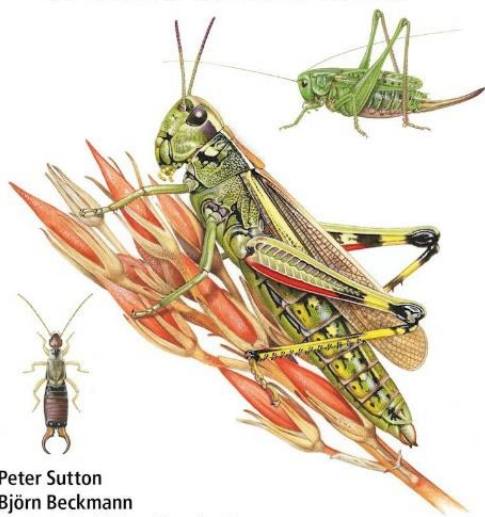
Saturday 28 th February	Lichens, Bedford Cemetery. Leader: Martin Butler, Recorder for Lichens, and Mark Powell
Saturday 23 rd May	Spiders, venue still to be confirmed – Leader: David Carr, Recorder for Spiders and Pseudoscorpions
Saturday 27 th June	Bugs, venue still to be confirmed - Will George, Recorder for Terrestrial Heteroptera
Saturday 25 th July	Ferns, late grasses and fruiting sedges, Flitwick Moor - John Wakely, Recorder for Flowering Plants, Ferns and Fern Allies
Saturday 22 nd August	Hexton Hills, a visit to the site newly acquired by Natural England – Holly Billcock, Natural England
Saturday 26 th September	Molluscs, Barton Hills NNR – Peter Topley, Recorder for Molluscs
Sunday 25 th October	Fungi – we hope to be able to arrange a joint fungus foray with Beds and Herts Fungus Group
Sat 28 th or Sun 29 th November	Geology – we hope to arrange a joint meeting with Beds Geology Group, at either Landpark Wood, near Whipsnade, or Potton Scout Hut Quarry, which are both due for monitoring in 2026
Saturday 26 th December	Boxing Day walk , Woburn Park

We urgently need someone to coordinate a programme of field trips, so if you think you might be able to help, please contact Mike Robinson at bnhsevents@bnhs.org.uk to find out more



Members encounter deer during the Boxing Day visit to Woburn Park. Photo by John Pitts.

Field Guide to the
Grasshoppers
and Allies
of Great Britain and Ireland



Peter Sutton
Björn Beckmann
Illustrated by Richard Lewington

BLOOMSBURY

New publication co-authored by BNHS Recorder for Grasshoppers and Allies
Field Guide to the Grasshoppers and Allies of Great Britain and Ireland by Peter Sutton and Björn Beckmann

A beautifully illustrated reference guide published by Bloomsbury, that will enable confident identification of British orthoptera. Publication date 19th February 2026
Pre-publication copies can be ordered at a 10% discount : paperback £36 and hardback £54. Details can be found at:

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/field-guide-to-the-grasshoppers-and-allies-of-great-britain-and-ireland-9781472976796/>

Post-publication prices will be £40 (paperback) and £60 (hardback)

304 pages, 180 colour artworks and 100 colour photos

Grasshoppers are conspicuous for their giant leaping movements, bright colours and song. There has never been a better time to study these insects in Britain: over recent decades some species have declined, others have expanded their ranges and there have even been new discoveries of species that have come across from mainland Europe. This pioneering guide lays bare the complexities of identification of the 80 or so species that may be encountered in the British Isles. An engaging introduction explains why orthopteroid insects are so intriguing and rewarding to study, and how the pursuit can take you to visit extraordinary places. The illustrated 'At-a-glance' guide and key to the orders provide a helpful starting point to begin the process of identification, leading to the main species accounts that include details of distinguishing features, life-cycle and habitat, tips for distinguishing between similar species, distribution maps, sonograms and QR codes linking to sound recordings. The text is brought to life with Richard Lewington's meticulous artwork, alongside photographs of the insects in their characteristic habitats. Designed to be accessible to beginners while also offering plenty of interest to more experienced entomologists, this book is the definitive guide to the Orthoptera and allied insects of the British Isles.

A Note from Peter Sutton, BNHS Recorder for Grasshoppers and Allies

Having spent much time over the last few years in preparation of the long-anticipated Bloomsbury *Field Guide to the Grasshoppers and Allies of Great Britain and Ireland* (Sutton, Beckmann and Lewington, 2026) I am delighted that it will be published on 19th February 2026. The Orthoptera of Bedfordshire are well-represented with species from a number of

key habitats, from the Mottled Grasshopper *Myrmeleotettix maculatus* that can be found on Cooper's Hill in Ampthill and the Short-winged Cone-heads *Conocephalus dorsalis* of Flitwick Moor, to pictures showing the aquatic abilities of the Slender Groundhopper *Tetrix subulata* at Manor Park, Flitwick, and the purple-red form of the Field Grasshopper *Chorthippus brunneus* at Totternhoe Knolls.

Red Fox meets Hedgehog



In a garden on the edge of Sandy last December a feeding Hedgehog freezes at the approach of a Red Fox. Within four minutes both were back to foraging.