



Wild About Beds

Spring 2026



Photo of Brown Hare by Lisa King

In this 217th edition ...

Pg 2 Society information
Pg 3 Committee news; New website; Theed Pearse Award
Pg 4 Local Geological Sites; Latest volunteers
Pg 5 Publication news
Pg 6 Tribute to Sheila Alliez
Pg 7 Indoor meeting dates
Pg 8 Field meeting dates



The Bedfordshire Natural History Society

www.bnhs.org.uk

Registered Charity Number 268659

All about 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 and whose annual reports are published in the Bedfordshire Naturalist journal.

Members receive this quarterly newsletter and programmes of meetings. Meetings include field meetings to Bedfordshire sites and occasionally farther afield. During the winter months there are illustrated lectures normally held in Maulden Village Hall, or by Zoom; the Christmas Members' Evening is also held in Maulden.

The Society depends on annual subscriptions which are devoted to its working costs, 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.

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

As your new editor, I would like to introduce myself. I am Bev Fowlston and I volunteer not just for the BNHS but also for Bedfordshire Geology Group. Please let me know what you think of the new design of your newsletter.

Your comments and/or notes on anything that you have observed in the field, on the road or in a past Wild About Beds issue are welcome and essential for continuity. Please do send articles to me either as an attachment via email or through the post. Pictures are always welcome, please include a credit for any images supplied. Material required for the summer edition by **15 May 2026** please.

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

Editor: Bev Fowlston

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

Email: <mailto:newsletter@bnhs.org.uk>

Welcome to our new members

Welcome to new members who have joined BNHS recently. Thank you for joining, and we hope you enjoy and find value in what the BNHS has to offer.

Committee News

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO HELP RUN THE SOCIETY

Several crucial roles in the society are currently vacant. Volunteers are invited to come forward and play an active role in the running of the Society and providing services to members so that we are in a strong position as we move forward to celebrate our 80th anniversary year in the autumn.

Field meeting programme co-ordinators – currently vacant

Scientific Committee, quarterly meetings – vacant positions, including Hon Secretary

Council, quarterly meetings – vacant member and Officer positions

Organising/helping with refreshments at indoor meetings – always needed!

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

Development of a new website for BNHS – and a new role of Site Recorder

Article by Mike Robinson, BNHS Webmaster

Following the great success of the Bird Club website redesign in collaboration with WordPress, we have started discussing with WordPress a redesign of the BNHS website. In principle the new site will follow the overall structure of the Bird Club design, whilst retaining the current features of the BNHS site, like mapping and publications.

The new site will give us many benefits including being much simpler to maintain content, news and events, being mobile-friendly, and allowing us to sell publications more easily.

As with the Bird Club website, we intend to provide more information about places and times to see nature. We have an initial list of sites published in the journal, which are mostly sites accredited with a statutory designation, such as SSSI and NNR. The website development will provide an opportunity for a new volunteer, as Site Recorder, to maintain details about that list of sites and gather information about new sites. If you would be interested in this opportunity, please let Rosemary Brind know on journal@bnhs.org.uk.

The new website will come with an integrated membership system across both BNHS and Bird Club, which in future will allow us to provide members-only content.

2026 BNHS Award made to Bedfordshire Geology Group



The 2026 award of £500, made in memory of Theed Pearse, has been given to the Bedfordshire Geology Group (BGG) in recognition of the work they do in developing an understanding of the geology and geomorphology of the county. BGG have shared with us that they will use the money to fund a new Geotrail which will be a short walk around Bedford's town centre,

passing some of the town's most interesting buildings where stone is used in the structure or in decorative features.

On the 4th weekend in November (Sat 28th or Sun 29th) we hope to arrange a joint meeting with Bedfordshire Geology Group, at either Landpark Wood, near Whipsnade, or Potton Scout Hut Quarry, which are both due for monitoring in 2026.

You can find out more about BGG here, <https://www.bedfordshiregeologygroup.org.uk/>

Local Geological Sites

Article and image by Bev Fowlston

Working together with partners, Bedfordshire Geology Group, affiliated to BNHS for many years, continue to monitor and maintain 15 Local Geological Sites (LGS) across Bedfordshire. Many of these sites are also a haven for wildlife and habitats.

In Bedfordshire we are also lucky enough to have 5 Sites of Special Scientific Interest for their geological heritage. These 5 sites are sadly under threat from closure, but we work with Natural England and the landowners to record them before they are lost.

So why are Local Geological Sites important?



LGS are important as they record our geological past, from tropical beaches and warm shallow seas to deep chalky oceans and everything in between. Bedfordshire has a rich and varied geological history that is told in the rocks beneath our feet. We have had unique fossil finds over many years mostly due to extraction of geological resources. Sadly, with extensive quarrying throughout the county over centuries many habitats have been disturbed or even lost. But Bedfordshire Geology Group now work with the working and often disused quarry sites to try and restore some of the lost habitats and wildlife. This is done through collaboration but also with respect for the geological features that we want to preserve for future generations and the habitats around the sites. Sometimes compromises are made to retain the geological exposures but a harmony with nature is always sought. If you wish to find out more then please contact info@bedfordshiregeologygroup.org.uk

Image of Sandy Warren, The Lodge Quarry showing geology and nature working together.

Welcome to our latest volunteers

Nick Matthews, Editor, *Bedfordshire Naturalist*

The role of editor of the *Bedfordshire Naturalist* is being taken on by Nick Matthews. Nick is a new member of the Society who recently retired from the Town and Country Planning Association, where for many years he was editor of the monthly journal *Town & Country Planning* while also overseeing production of TCPA technical, advisory and campaigning reports and other print publications. He volunteers with the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire, the Hertfordshire & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, and Natural England. Nick says that “he hopes to use his publishing experience in support of the Society”.

This post has been vacant for many years since Melissa Banthorpe stood down after producing the journal for 2018. We thank Rosemary Brind, our Hon. Editor, and an editorial team of Chris Boon, Steph Kimsey, Julia Powell and Wilf Powell for continuing to produce the six annual reports published since then. Nick will be able to get his feet under the table straight away, as the first Recorder’s report for 2026 has already been submitted.

The journal publishes the annual reports of our Recorders, as well as papers on the natural history of the county. If you wish to submit an article for consideration, please contact Nick on bedsnaturalist@bnhs.org.uk. Photographs for consideration for the covers are also welcomed.

Bev Fowlston, Editor, *Wild About Beds*

Bev has very kindly taken on the role of Editor of our quarterly newsletter, *Wild About Beds*. Bev is already active in the Society as our Geology Recorder, a position she has held since 2021, and she sits on the Scientific Committee.

Bev is even more active in the Bedfordshire Geology Group where she holds multiple roles of Treasurer, Local Geological Sites (LGS) co-ordinator, Editor of their newsletter. She also runs monthly Geology drop-in sessions at The Higgins Bedford every 2nd Wednesday of the month, 11am – 1pm.

Do please consider contributing observations, photos and articles to Bev for *Wild About Beds* and send them to: newsletter@bnhs.org.uk.

Donations supporting local conservation through the sale of our publications

When the BNHS published *Bedfordshire – our changing habitats and wildlife* in 2020 we decided to make grants to local organisation from any surplus profits. We're pleased to say that at its most recent meeting, Council agreed to make payments of just over £1,300 to both the Wildlife Trust (BCN) and The Greensand Trust. Copies of the book are still available for purchase from our website, but stocks are getting low.

Major new publication – *The Birds of Bedfordshire*

A new avifauna, produced by Bedfordshire Bird Club and published by the BNHS, entitled *The Birds of Bedfordshire*, has been written by Tony Ploszajski and was published in October 2025.



The Birds of Bedfordshire

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.

If you haven't already bought your copy, visit

<https://www.bnhs.co.uk/2019/publications.php> where you can select the most appropriate option, delivery or collection.

Hardback £50, plus £7.95 if posted.

A glowing review of this excellent book, by Josh Jones of BirdGuides, can be found on the Bird Club website <https://bedsbirdclub.org.uk/event/the-birds-of-bedfordshire/>



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 Bjorn Beckmann**
A beautifully illustrated reference guide published by Bloomsbury, that will enable confident identification of British orthoptera.

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



Peter Sutton
Björn Beckmann
Illustrated by Richard Lewington

BLOOMSBURY

Details can be found at:

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

Prices are £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

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.

A Tribute to Sheila Alliez, 1948 - 2026

Article by Kathy Blackmore. Image by Kayte Judge.



Sheila Alliez at Rushmere Country Park.
Image by Kayte Judge

It was with great sadness that we heard the shocking news that, after a short and sudden illness, Sheila Alliez died on 10th January at Bedford Hospital, having been admitted just before Christmas. It is hard to take in that a person who did two back-to-back mega birding trips in Colombia in November and was full of her adventures at the Bird Club Christmas meeting in Maulden, is gone.

Sheila was a founder member of Bird Club when it was established as a separate section of BNHS in 1992 and remained a joint member with the BNHS. She initially served as an officer on the Scientific Committee and was Secretary of Bird Club for nearly 30 years. Chairs and committee members have come and gone but Sheila was a constant, a mainstay of Bird Club, throughout all that

time. She kept us all in order, making sure we followed procedures, never more so than at the AGMs, and always with good humour and a friendly smile. Sheila very much encouraged the introduction of Zoom Talks to maintain contact with members during the pandemic, played a key role in reinstating the Walks post pandemic and very much welcomed the development of the new website as she had adapted to and espoused all other changes over the years. She has been such an important part of Bird Club, she will be very much missed, and we are thankful for the huge contribution she has made to our development.

Many members know Sheila from our Walks and Talks, she was always friendly and welcoming just a lovely friendly person. Birding was an important part of her life, and she had also been a member of the RSPB Local Group in Bedford for many years and was a regular attendee at their meetings and walks. Her enjoyment and enthusiasm for being out birding was infectious and she contributed to the enjoyment of others in the groups she belonged to.

Sheila was also a volunteer at the Greensand Trust where she was greatly respected and will be hugely missed by everyone. Sheila was the bedrock of the yearly Heron Watch event and a valued and much-loved member of the volunteering family, her knowledge and experience was invaluable, and it is difficult to imagine the Heron Watch without her presence and skills.

Staff and volunteers share overriding memories of Sheila teaching young children to look through a telescope for the first time and the sheer joy on both her and the children's faces when a heron was first sighted. Sheila had a passion for bird watching and a knack for passing on her enthusiasm to others, she was an inspirational, warm and friendly lady who had great determination to get things done. She will be greatly missed, and her legacy will continue in the Heron Watch, an event that was close to her heart and something that Sheila was integral in the shaping.

Sheila did not confine her birding to the UK; she had been on many exciting birding and wildlife trips which took her to many parts of the world. She had most recently been to Colombia where she did two back-to-back trips one to the north of the country and one to the south; on this combined adventure she saw nearly 500 species, 194 of them lifers. She described it as 'fabulous' but did admit it was tiring! A life enjoyed and well-lived, an inspiration.

Our condolences to her brother and to all her friends who will mourn her passing, may she rest in peace.

Dates for your diary

BNHS Indoor Meetings

Our indoor meetings are held at either Maulden Village Hall (MK45 2DN) or by Zoom, and generally start at 8pm, although the AGM starts at 7.30pm.

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.

17 March 2026 Maulden VH, 7.30pm: AGM and Recorders' evening - our Recorders will give short presentations about their wildlife records received throughout the year.



Maulden Village Hall.

Image courtesy of Maulden Parish Council website.

<https://maulden-pc.gov.uk/the-parish/village-hall/>

PROGRAMME OF FIELD MEETINGS IN 2026

HELP NEEDED

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 or Rosemary Brind at journal@bnhs.org.uk to find out more.

In 2026, the aim is to set weekend meetings for spring and summer 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 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 field meeting programme is still being developed, as we find time amongst other roles to make the contacts to organise meetings 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. Please consider volunteering with the Events team to help develop an interesting programme of events for members.

Next BNHS Field meeting

Maulden Wood, Saturday 23rd May 2026. Discover the world of spiders on this field trip to Maulden Wood, where we will explore the deciduous and conifer woodland. At this time of year, representatives from many of the spider families will be active. We will look at the methods used to find them and identify as many as possible in the field. Bring a hand lens if you can. The meeting will run from 10am - 2pm, with a 30-minute lunch break, so bring food. Meet in the lay-by beside Maulden Wood, at 10am, MK45 2AP, TL07263940, WTW ///cargo.surnames.briefing

DATE	WHAT, WHERE and WHO
Saturday 23rd May	Spiders, Maulden Wood – Leader: David Carr, Recorder for Spiders and Pseudoscorpions
Wednesday 10th June	Wasseldine farm visit with Jane and Guy Lambourne
Saturday 27th June	Bugs, venue still to be confirmed - Will George, Recorder for Terrestrial Heteroptera
Saturday 25th July	Ferns, late grasses and fruiting sedges, Flitwick Moor - John Wakely, Recorder for Flowering Plants, Ferns and Fern Allies
Saturday 22nd August	Hexton Hills, a visit to the site newly acquired by Natural England – Holly Billcock, Natural England
Saturday 26th September	Molluscs, Barton Hills NNR – Peter Topley, Recorder for Molluscs
Sunday 25th October	Fungi – we hope to be able to arrange a joint fungus foray with Beds and Herts Fungus Group
Sat 28th or Sun 29th November	Geology – we are arranging a joint meeting with Bedfordshire Geology Group, at either Landpark Wood, near Whipsnade, or Potton Scout Hut Quarry, which are both due for monitoring in 2026
Saturday 26th December	Boxing Day walk, Woburn Park