

WILDLIFE NEWS

JANUARY 2022



Regular visits of a young female fox to their Deeds Grove garden have kept Roger and Frances entertained for the last few months.

Issue 97 Contents include:

Editorial	74
Gomm Valley update	75
Bird box "hive" update	76
Greater protection for chalk streams	77
New Buckinghamshire Local Plan - Have your say	78
Climate change issue noticed whilst undertaking Woodland Trust species recording	79
Young female fox becomes a regular garden visitor	80
How environmentally-friendly is your garden?	81
Garden tweets and wildlife sightings	83
Wanted - Contributions for future newsletters	84

Wycombe Wildlife News is published 3 times a year to promote the Group and wildlife issues, and to inform members and the public of its activities.

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Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Group.

For the purposes of management of the Group, membership information is held on computer.

I hope you all had a good Christmas and New Year and that 2022 enables you to do things you wanted to do in 2020 and 2021 that Covid prevented you from doing. This is the fifth WWG newsletter to be published since Covid arrived on the scene and there has continued to be enough wildlife activity and relevant news for us to issue our newsletters on schedule.

Wycombe Wildlife Group is a registered charity No.1075175 with the following objects:

To conserve the environment, mainly using volunteers, for the benefit of the public.

To educate the public in the principles and practice of conservation.

Within and around Wycombe District the Group :

Surveys wildlife habitats and their associated flora and fauna, giving those taking part plenty of opportunities to increase their knowledge and identification skills.

Resources permitting, helps manage local wildlife sites by undertaking practical conservation work and provides advice to schools, other bodies and individuals on all aspects of wildlife.

Stimulates public interest in wildlife and its conservation, organising walks, talks and other activities covering a wide range of wildlife topics.

Provides advice on and encourages wildlife gardening.

Co-operates with other groups with similar aims.

Along with the many problems the pandemic has caused has been how best to keep our Group ticking over so that it is in a position to bounce back when those involved feel it is safe to do so.

In the last issue I mentioned our hope that we would be able to arrange an AGM which we had been unable to do at the normal time in 2020 or 2021. We had thought that it might be a good idea to arrange a daytime meeting in a location to which some of our older members could get to using public transport.

With the number of Covid cases still high, however, we have decided that it would be in our members' best interests to delay holding an AGM a bit longer. The income and expenditure accounts for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 were finalised in time for an AGM at the normal time and, as it is no longer necessary for our income and expenditure accounts to be independently inspected, a copy was circulated to members with the last newsletter. As we did the previous year, we asked members to read the document and raise any related issues or queries with us as soon as possible, so that we could submit the income and expenditure data to the Charity Commission in plenty of time to meet the deadline for doing so. No issues were raised by members and the required information was submitted to the Charity Commission.

Members of the WWG Executive Committee and Programme Planning Committee have been asked for their views on when and in what form we could restart some of our activities such as indoor meetings and outdoor activities. The views we have received suggest that there is little appetite for indoor meetings yet. Restarting indoor meetings would of course involve greater risks than outdoor activities such as walks. As well as introducing additional health and safety measures at indoor events, we would need to find speakers who would be happy to give talks at our meetings. Restarting outdoor activities involves far fewer risks, so this might be a good way to start getting back to normal, making sure that the walks arranged include some short ones. We appreciate that many of our members would not want to walk WWG's 20 mile Round Wycombe Walk, although some might like to walk one or more of its component sections described in the guide to the walk on the Group's website. We would very much appreciate the views of individual members on possible future Group activities and would welcome any offers of help to arrange or even lead some of these. We have a vacancy for the role of Programme Secretary as Inge Beck has decided that she is too busy to continue in that role. She did a wonderful job as Programme Secretary and she will be a hard act to follow.

Roger

Gomm Valley update

In the last newsletter I reported that the land within Gomm Valley which was owned by Aviva had been sold to Taylor Wimpey and that, as a result, Human + Nature, the company that had been tasked by Aviva to undertake the development, would no longer be involved. I was very sorry to hear of this, as I had considered that Human + Nature had made a lot of effort to come up with development proposals that retained and enhanced the areas within the Valley with the greatest value to the environment.



I was pleased to be contacted by a company called DevComms (who work with Taylor Wimpey on their major developments by engaging with local residents and interested organisations). I was asked if, as a former consultee on the development of Gomm Valley, I would be willing to attend a meeting to express my views on the important issues to be taken into account by Taylor Wimpey.

I agreed and attended a Zoom meeting arranged by DevComms which was also attended by the member of Taylor Wimpey staff tasked with taking the company's proposals for Gomm Valley forward in discussion with Buckinghamshire Council prior to a formal planning application. The meeting lasted about an hour and a half and I had an opportunity to raise and discuss all of the issues I felt needed to be taken into account to preserve and enhance the parts of the Valley which contribute most to its biodiversity.

I stressed the importance of buffer zones to protect the SSSI and two ancient woodlands and the importance of the existing ancient hedgerows. It was pointed out by Taylor Wimpey that it would probably be necessary to create gaps in the hedgerows in order to provide public rights of way through the Valley. I expressed support for converting the current arable fields in the centre of the Valley into species-rich grassland, including the creation of chalk grassland which would complement the existing SSSI. I was asked if I thought that where the proposed public rights of way crossed these grassland areas they should be fenced off to protect the flowers. I expressed the view that the grassland areas should be open for the public to enjoy, adding that the provision of temporary fences might be advisable to protect sheep, cattle or horses, if grassland management by grazing was introduced. I pointed out that the footpaths were likely to be used by dog walkers and that grassland management by grazing could reduce the maintenance costs.

The planting of trees was discussed and I was informed that trees were likely to be planted throughout the site. I pointed out that the long-term impact on the current views towards the Chiltern Escarpment and distant views over Berkshire should be taken into account when considering where to plant trees on the high ground at the northern end of the Valley.

We discussed the existing Local Wildlife Site (LWS) linking the footpath from Gomm Road and the SSSI and it was pointed out by Taylor Wimpey that this area was not currently being managed. I agreed that the area had not been managed for some time, pointing out that I and a few other volunteers used to carry out occasional management there but this had ceased pending the outcome of the development plans.

I pointed out the value of the LWS in providing a wildlife corridor between the banks alongside the railway line and the SSSI. I was informed that this corridor might need to accommodate a link road between Gomm Road and a new entrance/exit to/from the site at the foot of Hammersley Lane. I commented on the safety issues that such a junction would raise, but I was told that this would be a matter for the Highways Authority to consider. A number of other issues were raised which were not related to wildlife or biodiversity issues and, in giving my views on these, I stressed that they were personal views and not those of Wycombe Wildlife Group.

I pointed out the importance of a sustainable management plan for the creation of the proposed biodiversity improvements and the on-going maintenance of the undeveloped parts of Gomm Valley being secured by legal agreement, pointing out that the lack of such an agreement has caused a problem with the management of the public open spaces within Taylor Wimpey's recent Pinetrees development.

I raised the issue of the number of houses proposed for the development, pointing out the differing totals being published in the Bucks Free Press, the agreed Wycombe District Local Plan and on the Buckinghamshire Council website. The Taylor Wimpey representative was not prepared to provide an estimate of the number of houses likely to be built on the site at this stage, but he did clarify that references to the number of houses would mean the number of individual homes, irrespective of whether they are two bedroom apartments or 4 bedroom detached houses.

I thought that the meeting went well and I am sure that the Taylor Wimpey representative found the discussions helpful. I was asked to email DevComms if I wished to raise any other issues.

I was informed that Taylor Wimpey would like to arrange a public consultation on their proposals to take place in late January 2022 for comments by the end of February/March, so that a formal planning application could be submitted in April 2022.

As I was finalising the content of this newsletter, I received an email informing me that details of Taylor Wimpey's planning proposals for Gomm Valley would be available on-line on www.taylorwimpey.co.uk/new-homes/high-wycombe/gomm-valley on 22nd January 2022, the date on which a public exhibition will be held in the Micklefield Community Centre. Due to the ongoing Covid pandemic, pre booking to attend the public exhibition is essential.

Roger

Bird box hive update

An article in the September 2021 issue entitled "An unusual beehive" described a rare occurrence in our garden, of honey bees creating a "hive" within an empty bird box. The box was designed to be large enough for starlings to nest in, and it was fixed to the trunk of a fairly large conifer tree.

The photograph included in the last newsletter showed what we thought was a swarm of honey bees trying to enter the bird box. Two beekeepers came to collect the swarm and, having removed the bird box from the tree for that purpose, found that it contained both honeycomb and honey, which showed that the nest box had been used as a "hive" for some time.

The beekeepers fixed the bird box back on the tree trunk but the bees remained very angry for a few days, during which time we kept away from their "hive". They soon settled down and we were able to work in the garden around the tree again without any problems.

The workers are still going in and out of the "hive" but only in small numbers, but it indicates that all is well. We hope that the honey in the "hive" will be sufficient to keep the queen and her remaining workers alive during the winter months and that the colony will survive to carry on their pollen collection in our garden next year.

It really has been a privilege to have been able to provide a home for honey bees in our garden without a need to buy a hive and learn the art of beekeeping. We are happy to host this unusual honey bee colony and the bees will remain welcome in our garden as long as they wish to stay with us.

Roger

Greater protection for chalk streams

In October 2021 a new strategy was launched to protect England's chalk streams, which are of international importance: around 85% of the World's chalk streams are in this country. The strategy was published by Catchment Based Approach's Chalk Stream Restoration Group. The Chiltern Conservation Board is part of the partnership that created the strategy and its recommendations, working with the Environment Agency, Natural England, Defra, water companies and environmental organisations.

These rare habitats are found mainly in the south, east and north-east of England where autumn and winter rainwater is stored in chalk aquifers prior to its release from springs. The upper reaches of chalk streams, which often dry out in the spring and summer months, are known as winterbournes. Our local Hughenden Stream does not follow any of the rules, however, and sometimes continues to flow along much of its course for a few years without drying up in Summer, and on other occasions has been known to dry up completely for a few years. The Hamble Brook, which flows into the Thames near Hambleden Lock, often has a flow within the village of Hambleden and sometimes floods Watery Lane near Fingest. The photograph below shows the stream flowing from the woodlands west of Turville in 2014.



Wycombe Wildlife Group has been a member of the Revive the Wye Partnership since the latter was formed around 12 years ago to promote the local Wye stream and its tributaries, and take actions to improve their quality. The other member organisations of that Partnership are the Chiltern Society, High Wycombe Society, Chiltern Conservation Board's Chalk Streams Project, Buckinghamshire Council, the Environment Agency, the Chiltern Rangers and the Friends of the Wye.

Undertaking management actions to improve chalk stream habitats can prove very challenging, especially

where the streams run through private land and in built up areas. Often little can be done until a planning application for redevelopment offers an opportunity for a riverside habitat to be created or extended. In the case of the Wye, which flows hidden in a culvert through the middle of our town, a poll by the Bucks Free Press showed that a high percentage of the local population were in favour of deculverting the river. High Wycombe is not the only town to hide its biggest asset, however: Luton did the same, but at least there are short, medium and long term development proposals for its town centre which should enable the Lea to be gradually opened up to help create an attractive and popular town centre. Apart from within Luton and a few private estates, it is possible to walk the Lea from its source in Leagrave all the way to the Thames with a choice of following the river or canal as you get closer to London, finishing at Canning Town or the Limehouse Basin. Walking the Grand Union Canal offers views of the Gade and Bulbourne chalk streams, as the water from those adjoining streams is used to keep the water level of the canal topped up.

There are 161 chalk streams/ivers in the UK, 20 of which flow through Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire or Oxfordshire. I have visited 11 of these and the one I enjoyed most was the Chess, which I followed from where it joins the Colne in Rickmansworth to Chesham.



Unfortunately the Chesham end was completely dried up at the time, but the rest of the stream was a delight to walk along. I plan to visit the Letcombe Brook near Wantage in the Spring: this chalk stream runs through a small BBOWT Nature Reserve which I have not yet visited.

Roger

New Buckinghamshire Local Plan - Have your say

Although the approved Local Plans for the former District Councils in the county provide a planning framework for current applications, the County Council is preparing a new Local Plan which, when completed and approved, will take the place of the individual approved Local Plans prepared by the former District Councils.

Buckinghamshire Council has sent a consultation document to all stakeholders and organisations included in the Planning Policy consultation database, providing an opportunity to raise issues that they want the Council to consider. The deadline for responses is midnight on Friday 11 February 2022.

Having read through the questionnaire, I felt that this particular one was attempting to get the views of individuals rather than groups such as ours, although the form does make provision for the completer to state if submitting a response on behalf of an organisation. There would be insufficient time to obtain and collate the views of individual members in order for WWG to agree a Group response to this questionnaire. so I am summarising the questions being raised and providing the contact details to enable individual members who would like to respond to do so, expressing their own personal views.

The questions being asked are:-

Place

What do you value most about where you live?

(Options: belonging to a local community, countryside/wildlife, environment, green spaces, good local facilities, good transport links, historic buildings/areas, quality of life, quiet isolated community, other (provide details)).

Do you think you will want to move into a new home in the next five years?

What do you think are the best places to build more homes in Buckinghamshire?

(Options: close to a main town, close to a town/village, new towns/villages, brownfield sites, within existing towns, within existing villages, other (give details)).

Social housing

On a scale of 1 to 10 should the Council identify additional new homes to clear its housing waiting list?

Key workers

On a scale of 1-10 should the Council make provisions to build additional new homes for key sector workers in Buckinghamshire?

Nature

What improvements to the natural environment would you like to see in your area?

(Options: community orchards, improve air quality, linking pathways and natural environments, more green spaces, more ponds, noise reduction, sustainable building materials and designs, tree planting, other (give details)).

Work and activity

What are your views on supporting the local economy?

Having employment sites which are easy to get to using public transport, walking and cycling as well as by car.

Land/sites for new infrastructure like roads, utility services, etc

Land/sites for new jobs

Protecting existing employment sites

Work and activity-other (give details).

Climate change

How important are the following?

Better facilities for cycling and walking, low carbon heating systems and energy efficiency measures in new buildings, more facilities for electric vehicles, more green spaces and tree planting, on-site renewable energy generation, protecting areas from flood risk and avoiding new building in high risk flood zones, sustainable building materials and designs, tighter water efficiency standards in new buildings, other (give details).

Infrastructure

What sort of new infrastructure will we need to plan for?

Cycle lanes, facilities for disabled people, healthcare facilities, power/water generation, roads, schools - primary and secondary, telecommunications, village halls/community buildings, other (give details).

Buckinghamshire-wide strategic issues

What do you think are the top three priorities we need to focus on?

(The need for new homes and other development, the importance of infrastructure, the challenges of climate change and the need to protect the environment).

Should the Local Plan contain anything else?(specify).

The remaining questions cover:

Current working status

Number of children in household

Where resident

Ethnicity, disabilities, impairments or long term health conditions and age category.

How to reply to the questionnaire

You can fill out the survey questionnaire online on Your Voice Bucks: <https://yourvoicebucks.citizenspace.com/planning/local-plan-2021>

There are other ways to comment. A pdf of the questionnaire survey has been added to the website: <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/local-plan-for-bucks>. This can be downloaded and then emailed or posted to the Planning Policy Team.

- The email address is planningpolicyteam.bc@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
- The postal address is Planning Policy Team, Buckinghamshire Council, Queen Victoria Road, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP11 1BB.

Climate change issue noticed whilst undertaking Woodland Trust species recording

Due to the increased and prolonged droughts in our local area, perhaps for five months at a time, the passing of Nature's events are becoming increasingly difficult to record. The trees in most of our local places are looking stressed, with the leaves not opening fully, mainly Whitebeam, Pedunculate Oak and Wild Cherry. The leaves of these species shrivel up at mid to late summer, and therefore are not able to show full autumn colours, or drop naturally.

The only species I have found so far not affected are Hazel, Blackthorn, Elder, and our Chiltern speciality Beech.

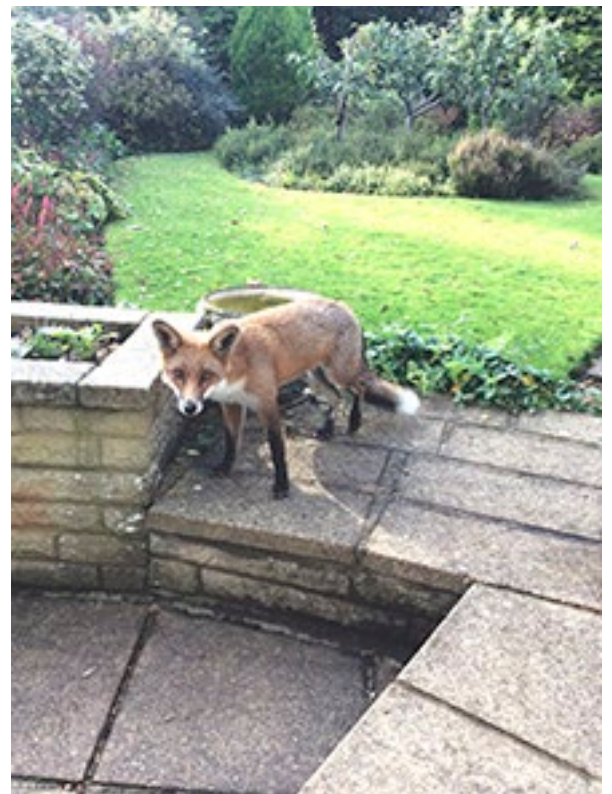
The Bramble leaves seem to be unaffected, but the fruit of that and the Elder shrivel up completely and provide very little food for our wildlife.

I am very worried about the future for our wonderful trees and shrubs, and just do not know whether they will be able to adapt to our new weather conditions.

Frances

Young female fox becomes a regular garden visitor

In the last newsletter the wildlife sightings included a mention of the various activities of a family of fox cubs that treated our garden and neighbouring gardens as a playground. A young female fox has now become a regular visitor and gratefully accepts any food we put out for her.



I have come to the conclusion that our “tame” fox is indeed a youngster, perhaps from an early litter. She is certainly older than the cubs that played in our garden in the Spring, but not yet mature. She has been my constant companion in the garden, creeping up behind me and stealing my gardening gloves from the bucket behind me, tossing them around the garden and pouncing on them. She has then curled up under the raspberries, in the sunshine, closing her eyes and having a snooze, but remaining alert to any sound. She had a close encounter with a squirrel, nearly catching its tail, as they both streaked across the garden.

She has become gradually wilder and more wary as she has grown up, and seems to be attracting a dog fox, who visits the garden after dark, barking. Foxes tend to mate in January, so we hope that she will stay locally so that we can see her litter of cubs in the Spring. She certainly has lifted our spirits in another difficult year.

Frances

Footnote:

Readers who are also members of the Chiltern Society will have seen a report in the Winter edition of the Society’s “Chiltern” magazine, written by its editor, of an almost identical account of a male fox visiting his garden. Reference is also made in that report of the increasing wariness as the young animal matured.

Roger

How environmentally-friendly is your garden?

Back in May 2013 we published a questionnaire to enable members to assess how environmentally-friendly their gardens were. I have decided to repeat this but have included more questions to widen the range of relevant topics covered and changed the method of calculating the total score

Count up how many of the following 50 statements apply to your garden and score either 0, 1 or 2 for each question, according to the degree to which it applies to your garden. Obviously the higher your score, the better your garden is for wildlife and the environment. It is highly unlikely that any of our readers will be able to achieve the maximum score for a variety of reasons, but even if you have no garden, you could still have a mini wildlife-friendly garden in a window box and have a window feeder for the birds.

1. Supplementary food is regularly put out for birds.
2. A variety of bird food is put out to attract a range of species.
3. A variety of food dispensers cater for the needs of different bird species.
4. There is a supply of clean water for birds to drink.
5. There is a supply of clean water for birds to bathe.
6. There is a hedge in the garden suitable for birds to nest in.
7. There is a range of natural nesting sites in the garden for birds.
8. The garden has nest boxes, which meet the needs of different bird species.
9. Bird feeding areas are cleaned regularly.
10. Nest boxes are cleaned every year.
11. Some nest boxes are kept in place in winter to provide somewhere warm for small birds to roost in during cold weather.
12. Some materials that might be of use to birds for constructing or lining their nest are left around the garden.
13. Bats visit the garden.
14. Bat boxes have been provided in the garden.
15. Hedgehogs visit the garden.
16. Other mammals visit the garden. (Ignore Rats and Grey Squirrels)
17. Hedgehog boxes have been provided in the garden.
18. Log piles have been placed in undisturbed areas of the garden to provide hibernation sites for hedgehogs and/or habitats for invertebrates.
19. Leaves and twigs have been left under hedges and/or in undisturbed areas of the garden to provide hibernation sites for small mammals and invertebrates.
20. There is a small pond in the garden.
21. There is a large pond or more than one small pond in the garden.
22. The garden has a pond that does not contain fish (which will eat tadpoles and other aquatic wildlife).
23. Ponds in the garden have a gently sloping edge to enable mammals, such as hedgehogs, to get out if they accidentally fall in.
24. The garden has a pond containing some native species of oxygenating plant.
25. The garden has a pond containing native plant species suitable for the various water levels of the pond.
26. The garden has a damp or marshy area containing some appropriate native plant species.
27. Amphibians regularly breed in the garden.
28. There is a rockery or rock garden made with sustainable materials.
29. As much garden waste as possible is recycled by composting.

30. Garden compost is used instead of purchased garden compost where possible.
31. Some suitable deciduous tree leaves are collected and left until they turn into useable leafmould.
32. Chemical insecticides and fungicides are not used in the garden.
33. Chemical herbicides are not used in the garden.
34. The garden contains garden and/or wild plants that attract butterflies and moths.
35. Butterflies and moths are regularly seen in the garden.
36. The garden contains garden and/or wild plants that are attractive to bees and other beneficial insects.(see footnote *)
37. Bees, hoverflies and other beneficial insects are regularly seen in the garden.
38. A nest box or boxes containing hollow tubes is/has been provided for use by masonry bees.
39. An insect hotel has been placed in the garden.
40. Some flower seed heads are left uncut over winter.
41. The garden contains some native wildflower species grown from seed or obtained from other wildflower gardens or nurseries.
42. Water butts are used to collect as much rainwater as possible for garden use.
43. Tap water is only used for garden watering where necessary for food crops and to prevent the loss of rare or other special plants which would not otherwise survive.
44. An area of grassland is left uncut for at least a month during the growing season to increase the number of flowering plants.
45. More than one area of grassland is left uncut for at least a month during the growing season.
46. An area of grassland is left uncut throughout the growing season.
47. Appropriate action is taken to control pest species such as Lily Beetle, which cannot be controlled without human intervention.
48. Appropriate action is taken to control invasive plant species such as Indian Balsam and Three-cornered Leek which cannot be controlled without human intervention.
49. The garden contains trees or shrubs which provide food for birds.
50. The garden contains trees (which provide food and nesting sites and store carbon).

This is not a competition but merely a means of encouraging members to think about whether their garden could be made more wildlife-friendly. Feel free to copy this questionnaire to friends and relations and, if you are proud of what you already do, let us know your score so we can create a list of WWG Wildlife Garden Champions. One of the stated aims of our Group is to promote wildlife gardening and this is an activity which is not likely to be adversely affected by on-going Covid restrictions.

* Garden plants with single, as distinct from double, flowers provide the nectar and pollen which our beneficial insects are seeking and are just as valuable as native flowers for attracting them into our gardens.

Garden tweets

Sep 23rd - Young Red Kite landed in garden. Perfect in every way but pale in colour.

Oct 6th - Young fox bouncing on our springy heathers and reaching up to pick our apples before playing football with them.

Oct onwards - Squirrels keep digging holes in our lawn to bury hazel nuts. The next squirrel to visit finds the nuts and promptly digs them up.

Nov 6th - Chuckling of the first Fieldfare heard in the garden.

Nov 30th - 2 Robins paired up.

Mid to late Dec - Late flying Buff-tailed bumblebees have been visiting our early-flowering winter heathers in the garden. Although the first one seen by Roger had a white tail, the orange yellow colour of its collar and second abdominal segment which he had noted confirmed it was a Buff-tailed Bumblebee worker (which can have a white tail). The collar and second segment of the White-tailed Bumblebee are lemon yellow.

Late December - A Red-legged Partridge arrived in time to spend part of the Christmas period in our garden. As we no longer have a pear tree in the garden, our visitor roosted on the roof of our house.

Frances

Wildlife sightings

I have not received any wildlife sightings for inclusion in the January 2022 newsletter. Some interesting sightings in our garden have been covered elsewhere in this issue, however.

Roger

WANTED - CONTRIBUTIONS FOR FUTURE NEWSLETTERS

The next WWG newsletter is due to be issued in May 2022. Although I have managed to obtain enough material to issue this and the previous last five newsletters during the Covid pandemic, it is not easy to come up with sufficient interesting and relevant new content, particularly whilst our Group is not arranging indoor meetings. Reports on such meetings were one of the main features of our past newsletters, proving a permanent record of those events as well as being of interest to members unable to attend.

I am always grateful to those who provide me with items for inclusion in our newsletters, and hope that more members will be able to contribute to the contents of future newsletters.

Roger

Contacting Wycombe Wildlife Group

Postal correspondence
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E-mail: w.w.group@btopenworld.com
Website: www.wycombewildlife.org.uk

Joining Wycombe Wildlife Group

To join our Group, please complete a copy of the form on the right and send to

The Membership Secretary,
15 Cherrywood Gardens,
Flackwell Heath, HP10 9AX

Subscription £6 per annum, if paid
by Standing Order, or £7 per annum,
if paid by cash or cheque.

Please enrol me as a member of Wycombe Wildlife Group

Name

Address

.....

Telephone

Email

EITHER Payment by bank standing order

To Bank
..... Branch
Address.....

NEW standing order instruction:

Account to be debited (your account details)

Sort code

Account number

Account name

Beneficiary bank and payee details

HSBC, 1 Corn Market High Wycombe HP11 2AY

Sort Code: 402417 Account number: 92116685

Account name: Wycombe Wildlife Group

Payment details

Amount of payment: £6.00 Six pounds

Frequency: Annually

From:

Number of payments:

Until further notice

Signature

Date

OR Payment by cheque or cash

I enclose cheque/cash for £7.00,
payable to Wycombe Wildlife Group.