

WYCOMBE and SOUTH BUCKS

WILDLIFE NEWS

MAY 2022



Lords and Ladies (*Arum maculatum*)
photographed in Sands Wood on 25th
April 2022

Issue 98

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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.

Edited and produced by Roger Wilding.
Proof reading by Frances Wilding.

Sparrowhawk photograph taken by Andrew Dodd and Firecrest photograph taken by Graham Giles. Photographs, the source of which is not stated, were taken by Roger Wilding.

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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.



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.

I hope you all had a good Easter and that you have been able to do some of the things that Covid prevented you from doing during the last two years.

This is the sixth WWG newsletter to be published since Covid arrived on the scene and there has continued to be enough wildlife-related topics and relevant news for us to issue another newsletter on schedule.

We have done our best to keep our Group ticking over until we considered we were in a position to bounce back and now we feel it is safe enough to do so.

The income and expenditure accounts for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 have been finalised in time for an AGM but we have decided to delay our AGM until September and start our new events programme with an ordinary members meeting with a talk by John Tyler who has given us a number of interesting talks over the years.

We had originally planned for our first event to be a local bluebell walk but by the time we had finalised our events programme there was insufficient notice available for this walk. I did visit the two woods in Sands which are good for bluebells around the time our walk would have taken place and took some photographs two of which I have included in this newsletter. We could include a visit to one or both of those woods at the end of April next year.

Our new events programme covering from May to the end of September 2022 was circulated, as soon as it was completed, to our members for whom we hold email addresses, and published on the Group's website. Details of the events have been included in this newsletter mainly for the benefit of members for whom we do not have email addresses.

We are no longer able to hold our meetings at Trinity United Reformed Church on Monday evenings but we have been informed that the rooms we usually use are normally available on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Our Friday evening meetings at St Thomas Church Hall can still go ahead and we have made bookings for members' meetings to be held there in October, December and February. We have decided not to arrange a meeting in January.

One of the issues we need to discuss at the AGM is the future of our Group and how it can continue to meet its charitable aims.

Roger



Bluebells in Sands woods
2022

The photograph on the left was
taken in Sands Wood on 25th April.

The photograph on
the right was taken
in High Barbers
Wood in Sands on
22nd April.



Updates on reports in the January 2022 newsletter

The unusual beehive in our garden, resulting from a swarm of honey bees setting up home in an empty bird box designed for use by Starlings, still hosts a thriving colony of bees. The bees survived the Winter, with a small number foraging on warm days and, when Spring arrived, they were soon visiting our winter flowering heathers and drinking from either the bird bath or where water had collected on a stand of trays holding growbags. We expect that some of the bees will need to swarm again as soon as the colony gets too big for the bird box.

The regular visits to our garden by a very tame young vixen ceased in January and we had seen no sign of her until the end of April. We thought she had probably found a mate and moved away to his territory as we had heard a dog fox barking on several nights just before we last saw her. We had missed her visits and hoped that perhaps she or one of her offspring might turn up in our garden a bit later in the year.

Whilst preparing this newsletter, I looked out of the window and saw a fox walking through the garden and as it approached the house both Frances and I were almost certain that it was our tame fox but looking more mature. She came down the garden to the house but when I went down and opened the door to see if she wanted any food, she had gone through a hole in the hedge into the footpath between our garden and the garden next door.



I called out to her but she didn't come back. It seemed likely that she is still in the area so we decided to keep an eye open in case she visits our garden again, possibly accompanied by a family of cubs.

On 2 May she returned and came to the back door and accepted the food we gave her. This gave us an opportunity to see that she had prominent teats, a clear sign that we had been right in our guess that she had been away on maternity leave and now had a family to care for somewhere not too far distant from our garden.

Roger

Biological control of invasive alien wetland plants

Throughout our country invasive alien plants are causing problems in our waterways. The most widespread problem plant in these habitats is Indian Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) which is now colonising woods and roadside verges as well as watercourses. Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) is probably the most damaging aquatic plant, requiring the use of heavy machinery to remove the dense masses of plant material that develop from a single plant. Water Fern (*Azolla filiculoides*), that originally was sold for use in aquaria and garden ponds, has now become established in the wild where it forms dense mats of small free-floating plants on the surface of water and spreads by minute spores. New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) has become a widespread problem in ponds and lakes and is difficult to eradicate because the smallest of fragments of the plant breaking off during its removal is likely to regrow.

Research has shown that Indian Balsam can be controlled by introducing the rust fungus *Puccinia komarovii glanduliferae* which can overwinter and kill infected seedlings in the Spring and also reduce seed production. This rust fungus is native to the Himalayas where the Indian Balsam originated and is host specific so cannot cause harm to other plant species. Indian Balsam is kept under control along the local Wye chalk stream by an annual programme of monitoring and removal of plants found before they spread their seeds and this will continue as the biological control of the species is unlikely to achieve widespread control in the short term.

An alien weevil *Listronotus elongates* has been found to prefer Floating Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) and has been approved for release in the wild. The adult weevils feed on the leaves and lay eggs on the petioles that attach the leaves to the stems of the plant. The developing larvae then mine the petioles for food, causing the plant to collapse.

The alien weevil *Stenopelmus rufinasus* only feeds on *Azolla* species and has a strong preference for *Azolla filiculoides*. It can eliminate its entire food source over a period of 2 to-3 months leaving clear water bodies.

The alien mite *Aculus crassulae* which is found in Australia, where New Zealand Pigmyweed is also a native plant, is the only species that has been found that feeds exclusively on the latter plant species. The mite will not eliminate New Zealand Pigmyweed but it will severely weaken it.

All such introductions are controlled and monitored and are subject to vigorous laboratory tests before a licence is issued permitting their release in the wild, so the potential benefits far outweigh any risks involved.

The need to monitor local planning applications

There appears to be a growing number of planning applications likely to have adverse effects on our local natural environment which we are only made aware of when they are brought to our notice by individual members or local residents. An example of this is a recent planning application relating to a proposed further 5 year delay in the reinstatement of the former gravel extraction site near to Spade Oak Lake. The approved Wycombe District Local Plan included the whole of the former gravel workings within the planned Little Marlow Countryside Park under policy RUR4.

Restoration of the remaining area used for quarrying to a usable condition for inclusion in the Countryside Park was delayed because of a decision to allow it to be used on a short term basis as a film set. The latter use has come to an end but Buckinghamshire Council put forward a planning application to further delay the reinstatement of the land concerned for van storage related to distribution activities. This was brought to our attention, and we submitted an objection to these two separate but related planning applications, and also brought the matter to the attention of other local organisations with an interest in wildlife conservation and protection of the natural environment.

Other planning applications which have been brought to our group's notice include cases of trees being felled and temporary tree preservation orders being imposed whilst the justification of the need for felling could be considered, and supporting local opposition to allowing houses to be built within an area of woodland next to a public footpath alongside

Fieldhead Gardens in Bourne End. Woodland is almost non-existent in Bourne End and the application was refused by the Local Authority but went to appeal, which supported the refusal decision. The matter then went to a second appeal which also supported the refusal decision, but developers rarely give up trying in such cases.

Due to the manner in which these planning applications were published, we only got to know about them through local people. This made me think that our group ought to take steps to ensure that future planning applications likely to have an adverse effect on the local environment and its wildlife are picked up at an early stage and responded to where appropriate. This could best be achieved by having a member of our group taking responsibility for monitoring planning applications and bringing any that appear to have an impact on matters likely to be of interest or concern to our group to our attention.

The planning application monitoring task is a role which could be taken on by any member with an interest in such matters and there would be no requirement to attend meetings or visit the locations concerned. Access to a computer and email, together with a desire to protect our local wildlife and natural environment would appear to be the only essential requirements associated with such a role.

Any offers to take on this important role?

EVENTS PROGRAMME – MAY TO SEPTEMBER 2022

The events that have been arranged from May 2022 to the end of September 2022 have been included in this newsletter mainly for the benefit of those members for whom WWG does not have an email address or are unable to view the events programme on the group's website

Sunday 8 May 2022 2.30pm start

Spring walk at Holtspur Bank*. This wildflower walk will be led by Derek Bourne. Meet in Cherry Tree Road, off Holtspur Top Lane (OS map ref. SU 923904). For more information contact Derek on 01628 526553.

Thursday 19 May 2022 7.45pm-9.45pm

Members meeting. Join us for our first members meeting since March 2020. John Tyler will give us a talk entitled "The Forgotten River" which covers the history of the River Thames which has a huge catchment area stretching from north of Aylesbury to where it joins the Thames south of Dorchester in Oxfordshire opposite the Wittenham Clumps (Members who attended the Earth Trust River of Life Walk in February 2019 walked along the opposite bank of the Thames). Venue: The Sanctuary, Trinity United Reformed Church, London Road, High Wycombe, HP11 1BJ (opposite Pann Mill). Car park at rear of building (free after 7pm). Admission and refreshments are free. For more information contact Roger on 01494 438374.

Saturday 21 May 2022 8.30pm start

Woodland moth species trapping in Homefield Wood (Location OS map ref SU 814867). Contact Paul on 01628 526225 for more information about this National Moth Night event.

Thursday 9 June 2022 10.30 am start

Wildlife walk from West Wycombe Hill to Buttler's Hangings. Meet in the car park at the top of West Wycombe Hill (OS map ref SU827950). The walk will follow a public footpath through woodland on the east side of the hill and then cross to the west side of the hill to visit Buttler's Hangings, an area of open access land which is a SSSI and a former BBOWT nature reserve with interesting flora and fauna. This site is on a steep hillside. Contact Paul on 01628 526225 for more details.

Friday 24 June 2022 9am start

Moth identification event in Flackwell Heath. An opportunity to view moths trapped the previous night in Flackwell Heath and help identify them before they are released. Contact Paul on 01628 526225 for details.

Sunday 26 June 2022 2.30pm start

Summer wildflower and butterfly walk at Holtspur Bank *. This walk will be led by Brenda Mobbs and Derek Bourne and will be about 2 hours long and include a visit to the Butterfly Conservation Reserve at Holtspur Bottom. Meet in Cherry Tree Road, Holtspur (OS map ref. SU 923904). For more information contact Derek on 01628 526553.

Friday 1 July 2022 Meet at 9.15pm for a 9.30pm start

Glow-worm and bat walk at Holtspur Bank*. Join Derek Bourne for this late evening walk. Park and meet by the scout hut in Cherry Tree Road (OS map ref. SU 923904). Bring a torch. For more information contact Derek on 01628 526553.

Monday 11 July 2022

Visit to Chilterns Open Air Museum, Newland Park, Chalfont St Giles

Although the Museum is primarily a collection of reconstructed historical buildings, the site contains many old trees, including the rare Aylesbury Prune, some interesting wildlife ponds and an extensive area of unspoilt species-rich grassland known as The Hidden Meadow, where slow-worms and peregrine falcons are often seen. Long-term High Wycombe residents may well recognise a former furniture factory in the collection, which is now used as a cafe, and the toll house that used to be a feature of London Road.

The standard adult entry fee is £10.50 per person on the door although an advance on-line booking is slightly cheaper. The Museum opens at 10am and we will meet on the Village Green (which is clearly shown on the map you will be given at the Museum entrance) at 10.30am when we can agree what we would like to see as a group before splitting up to enable attendees to spend the remaining time available to them to see items in the collection that interest them the most. Food and drinks are available on site and there are plenty of picnic benches available. There are also plenty of toilet facilities (modern albeit housed in historical buildings).

It would be helpful to know who will be attending, so please let us know a few days before the event by contacting Roger on 01494 438374 or by using the Contact Us page on the Group's website.

Saturday 16 July 2022 10.30am start

Butterfly walk at Stoke Poges Memorial Gardens.(OS map ref SU975825) Meet just inside the entrance to the gardens. There is a car park opposite the entrance. Leader and contact: Paul Bowyer on 01628 526225.

Thursday 21 July 11am start

Butterfly walk at Homefield Wood. Contact Paul on 01628 526225 for details. NB. There are horse flies here so cover up.

Saturday 30 July 2022 8pm start

Moth trapping at Moor End. Contact Paul on 01628 526225 for details.

Friday 12 August 2022 8pm start

Moth trapping with John Hoar at Seer Green. Contact Paul on 01628 526225 for details.

Thursday 25 August 2022 11am start

Wildlife Walk at Yoesden Bank . Contact Paul on 01628 526225 for details.

Tuesday 6 September 2022 7.30 pm-9.45pm

WWG AGM. Join us for this important business meeting, which will review how our Group coped with the difficulties arising from Covid and discuss the future of our Group now that its activities have restarted. Venue: The Sanctuary, Trinity United Reformed Church, London Road, High Wycombe, HP11 1BJ (opposite Pann Mill). Car park at rear of building (free after 7pm). Admission and refreshments are free. For more information contact Roger on 01494 438374.

Sunday 25 September 2022 2.30pm start

Autumn walk with Derek Bourne at Holtspur Bank*. Meet in Cherry Tree Road (OS map ref SU923904)

Events in this programme marked * have been organised by the Friends of Holtspur Bank.

Controlling carbon emissions

I do believe that there is at last widespread recognition of the threats that are resulting from on-going climate change, and of the urgent need to speed up steps to reduce carbon emissions.

One of the current solutions is tree planting on a massive scale. Concentrating on locations where the resulting woodland or forest is likely to have a long term existence is often considered to be the most effective approach. Unfortunately, the more frequent storms and high winds we are experiencing result in many more trees needing limbs to be removed, or even felled, for public safety reasons. In large woods and forests there is far more scope for leaving fallen or cut timber in situ, which benefits both carbon storage and wildlife.

The planting of sea grasses (*Zostera* spp) is also being undertaken. Not only does this provide additional valuable wildlife habitat, these plants reproduce quickly and store carbon, possibly in even greater quantities than trees.

I was interested to read in a reputable gardening magazine that conifers store more carbon than deciduous trees. The reason put forward for this view was based on the fact that coniferous trees do not disperse the amount of carbon that deciduous trees disperse in the Autumn when the latter shed their leaves.

The author of the article also pointed out that the infamous Leyland Cypress (*Cupressocyparis leylandii*), a hybrid between Monterey Cypress (*Cupressus macrocarpa*) and Nootka Cypress (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*), possibly stores more carbon than any other tree.

Whilst there is a high level of support for tree planting, there are lots of conflicting views when it comes to assessing the types of tree likely to be the most effective for long term carbon storage, so we need to rely on the experts reaching agreement on these issues.

Roger

Promoting wildlife gardening

Promoting wildlife gardening does not need to be labour intensive. Ever since its formation, WWG has been promoting wildlife gardening. In the past some of our members regularly opened their gardens for other members to visit, and we organised wildlife garden competitions. We set up displays at garden centres and at Wycombe Show and created a very successful demonstration wildlife garden in the garden centre at West Wycombe. Following a change of ownership, the demonstration garden at West Wycombe had to close, but an opportunity arose to create a smaller wildlife garden in the walled garden at the National Trust's Hughenden Manor. This again was very successful but decisions by the local National Trust management resulted in the loss of yet another demonstration wildlife garden and its contents. Understandably, there has been no desire within our Group to create any further such demonstration gardens. We still promote wildlife gardening but in ways which reflect the fact that our members are not as young as they used to be. The "How environmentally friendly is your garden" questionnaire in the last newsletter is an example of how wildlife gardening benefits can be communicated to the public without the need for time-consuming tasks such as creating and maintaining a demonstration garden.

Another way of promoting wildlife gardening is for members who have a wildflower garden to pot up any surplus plants they have and bring them along to members meetings to be given away to other members. When choosing species to dig up for this purpose, please take account of the invasive nature of some species. One of the most difficult wildflowers to eradicate once introduced is Three-cornered Garlic (*Allium triquetrum*), which has an attractive flower but can soon take over the whole garden.

Pollen

Pollen viewed under Electron Microscope (Public Domain image from the Dartmouth Electron Microscope Facility)



Plants depend on pollen for their very survival. It is vital for bees' development (their sole source of protein), yet it is dreaded by several million people throughout the UK. So what is pollen?

Its Latin etymology, *pollinis*, accurately describes its physical appearance – a fine dust. These microspores carry the male DNA, which is produced in the stamen of seed producing plants. They are released from the anther with the goal of attaching to the stigma (always prominent and often sticky) of the same species. Plants release pollen twice a day, early in the morning and late afternoon.

To maximise their chances of survival, plants have evolved different strategies, self-pollination being the most straightforward (eg. tomatoes, peppers and begonias). For most species though, cross-pollination is necessary and many plants have adapted to attract specific vectors: insects (honey bees, butterflies, moths), bats, birds, water and, to the discomfort of hay fever sufferers, wind.

Wind pollination is an extremely hit or miss affair, so plants relying on this method have to release pollen in vast quantities – in fact far more than is needed. Who has not, on occasions, found their car covered in surplus fine pollen dust? With no pollinators to attract, such plants tend to have an insignificant flower with no scent or nectar. A well-known example for gardeners is sweetcorn, which is planted in blocks, as opposed to rows, to maximise the feathery stigmas' chances of catching the airborne pollen.

Trees with pollen-laden catkins are attractive indicators that Spring is on the way. But hazel and willow, for instance, can, as early as January, bring misery to the minority whose hay fever is triggered by tree pollen. This misery can last up to late April / early May with the flowering of silver birch and oak.

From May to August, with a peak in June, grass pollen is the problem. Presumably this is the derivation for the inaccurate name hay fever. Strictly speaking it should be referred to as pollinosis – though it is usually called seasonal allergic rhinitis. 95% of hay fever sufferers are allergic to grass pollen.

Finally, for another small minority, it is weed pollen (eg nettles, plantains and docks) and fungal spores that trigger attacks. Their "season" is from June to September with a peak in August.

As an aside, if you live in Scandinavia, birch pollen is the greatest cause of hay fever, whilst in southern Spain it is olive pollen.

John Catton

Garden Tweets

There are only 3 tweets in this newsletter:-

The front garden Robin has paired up with a back garden Robin, and is on to a good thing, queueing up at both the front door and the back door for his nibbles. (I know the front garden Robin by the tick on his cheek just below his eye, which he has lived with for over 2 years).

A pair of Feral Pigeons have set up home under a set of solar panels on a nearby house, and are collecting little twigs from the flat roof of our garage and side extension. We have never seen Feral Pigeons here before, but I heard the tell tale “coo-oo-oo” as the male was courting his missis.

Starling and Blackbird parents are desperately trying to find worms in our lawn for their youngsters. Prolonged droughts at this time of the year make life very difficult for our poor birds.

I hope I will have more to report on in the next issue.

Frances

Wildlife sightings

5 January 2022

Grey Wagtail, Heron and Little Egret near Queen Victoria Road Bridge in High Wycombe town centre.

27 January 2022

Song Thrush singing in the morning and Blackbird singing until it was almost dark in a Deeds Grove garden.

2 February 2022

Mistle Thrush and 2 Song Thrushes in full song plus Stock Dove calling and 3 Little Grebes trilling on The Rye.

Most of the Spring 2022

Green Woodpecker seen in a Deeds Grove garden regularly but infrequently.

1 March 2022

Male Blackcap in a Deeds Grove front garden.

3 March 2022

Honey Bees very active and drinking water in bird bath in a Deeds Grove garden. (One fell in and had to be rescued.)

4 March 2022

Chaffinch singing and Blue Tits building nest in bird box by kitchen window in a Deeds Grove garden.

18 March 2022

Nuthatch calling and Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming at back of the Rye Dyke.

21 April 2022

First batch of Starling babies hatched in a Deeds Grove garden.

29 April 2022

Blackcap and Great Tit parents busy searching for food in a Deeds Grove garden.

Photographs submitted by members



The above photograph of a Sparrowhawk plucking a pigeon was submitted by WWG member Andrew Dodd. Although one can feel sorry for the victim of this vicious attack, it is something we have to accept as part of nature as this attacker needs to kill other birds to feed its young.

The photograph below of a male Firecrest was taken by WWG member Graham Giles in his garden in the Amersham Hill area of High Wycombe. This uncommon species tends to be heard rather than seen and is rarely photographed.



WANTED - CONTRIBUTIONS FOR FUTURE NEWSLETTERS

The next WWG newsletter is due to be issued in September 2022. Although I have managed to come up with enough material to issue this and the previous last six newsletters during the Covid pandemic, it is not easy to keep thinking of new interesting and relevant content, particularly whilst our Group is not arranging many indoor meetings. Reports on such meetings will I am sure return to being one of the main features of our newsletters, as they provide a permanent record of those events as well as being of interest to members unable to attend.

I will continue to be grateful to anyone who can provide items for inclusion in our future newsletters.

Roger

Contacting Wycombe Wildlife Group

Postal correspondence
The Chairman,
Wycombe Wildlife Group,
c/o 129 Deeds Grove,
High Wycombe, Bucks, HP12 3PA

Telephone 01494 438374
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.