

WYCOMBE and SOUTH BUCKS

# WILDLIFE NEWS

JANUARY 2023



**Issue 100**  
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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.

Illustrations by Frances Wilding.  
Photographs by Roger Wilding.

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.

## Editorial

I hope all our readers had a good Christmas and New Year. Issuing a newsletter in late September and in late January does not lend itself to passing on either Christmas or New Year wishes in advance of these festive seasons.

This newsletter is another milestone in the history of our Group as it is the hundredth issue. Issue 1 was published in January 1990 when the then Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group was formed. The newsletter was produced by Maurice Young until he died in 2004. The newsletter was edited by Pat Morris until Pat decided in 2012 that she could not continue her editorial role. In the absence of any other offers to take on these tasks, I took over the newsletter production task in 2004 and then the editorial tasks in 2012. The changes resulted in differences to the appearance and content of the newsletter and further changes such as producing a colour version, and email distribution have taken place as suitable opportunities have arisen. Although I have never been able to match the interesting illustrations produced by Maurice, or win any awards as some of the Group's early newsletters did, we have been fortunate to be able to use Frances's drawing skills to produce many of our illustrations and have used photographs provided by members. The change from black and white to colour was a major improvement, as was the circulation of our newsletter to the majority of our members by email at no cost to them or the Group.

We have now reached a point where the ongoing provision of a black and white version of the newsletter for hand delivery and circulating copies of it by post, where hand delivery is not feasible, is costing a lot more than the membership fee. This is an issue that is currently being addressed and various options are under consideration.

Looking forward, I would expect our newsletter to continue to keep members informed of our group's activities and provide general information on wildlife and conservation issues. The inclusion of all the newsletters since Issue 1 on the Group's website and the associated newsletter index enables members to find details of all of the Group's history since its formation.

### Cover photograph

#### A Winter wildlife garden

We have certainly had a mixture of weather conditions recently from unusually cold spells with snow and ice to very mild weather and a lot of rain, but our gardens and wildlife seem to have coped well with the frequent changes.

## Post 2022 AGM actions

In the September newsletter we reported that after two years of not holding an AGM, there was a lot of business covered at the 2022 AGM which was held on Tuesday 6th September. The existing trustees were all re-elected, together with Wendy Thomas and Peter Bailey, and a meeting of the new Executive Committee was held on 12th October. Peter Bailey was elected as the new Treasurer, James Donald agreed to continue as Vice Chairman and Karen Roberts as Membership Secretary. As no-one was willing to take on the Chairman and Meeting Secretary roles, it was agreed that these roles would be undertaken by EC members on a meeting by meeting basis.

A number of important issues were raised at the AGM which will require detailed discussion and decisions by the Executive Committee. The most important of these and, probably the most difficult to resolve, is how our group can continue to meet its charitable objectives, particularly the one relating to conserving the environment, mainly using volunteers, for the benefit of the public. Whilst many of our activities contribute to the charitable objective of educating the public in the principles and practice of conservation, the increasing age of most of our members makes organising a programme of practical conservation tasks very difficult.

Roger Wilding agreed to continue to take responsibility for the newsletter production, website and events programme tasks but the tasks such as chairing meetings and secretarial tasks will be rotated.

Another issue that we need to address is the cost of producing and circulating our newsletters. Printing costs have risen over time and circulating a printed copy of our newsletter now costs more than the current membership fee and, although most of the printed newsletters are hand delivered, some copies need to be sent by post, the cost of which has also increased. Where we are able to circulate copies by email, there is no cost whatever to the Group so we are considering introducing a charge for the production and distribution of newsletters which incur a printing and postage cost. To increase the membership fee to cover these costs would be unfair to the majority of our members who receive their newsletters at no cost to the Group.

Since restarting our members meetings we have not been charging an admission fee as we felt that members had not received much benefit from their membership during the Covid restrictions other than their newsletter. This decision will reduce the Group's financial reserves but this use of our funds does mean that the money is contributing to our Group's charitable aims. The Executive Committee will monitor this issue and reintroduce an admission fee for talks when this becomes necessary. Our decision to stop meeting at Trinity United Reformed Church in London Road, High Wycombe has reduced the cost of holding members meetings considerably, as the charge for our new meeting venue at Hughenden is similar to the cost of hiring St Thomas Church Hall at Holtspur. All of our evening meetings will be on Fridays as the Hughenden Valley Village Hall is rarely available on other evenings.

## A Journey through The Chilterns - a talk by Dr. Jill Eyres



“Journey through The Chilterns” was the title of an extremely interesting talk by archeologist and geologist Dr. Jill Eyres. We were surprised when Jill started her talk with a photograph of a bluebell wood, but this made her talk so relevant to the interests of our wildlife group, as the plantlife of an area is very much influenced by the underlying geology.

We learnt that our local dry valleys were formed by the melt waters at the end of the last Ice Age when torrential rivers carved out valleys such as those at Bradenham. These now remain mainly dry and the side slopes of such valleys are often steep and support woodland “hangers”.

Mention was made of the hillfort at Ivinghoe, one of around two dozen hillforts in the Chilterns, and burial mounds ranging from Bronze Age barrows dating from around 2000 to 1800BC on Dunstable Downs, and Neolithic burial mounds at Whiteleaf. Less obvious are the burial mounds that can be seen on flood plains such as Cock Marsh between Marlow and Cookham. We were told that ridges and ditches are usually man made and were usually created as boundaries.

In more recent times the changes to the landscape have been the result of action by people to meet their changing needs. Hunter gatherers influenced the landscape for around 400,000 years and farmers have made an impact for around 6000 years, creating hedges for field boundaries and creating orchards, which are now subject to further changes to cater for modern farming methods.

The mining of flints at locations such as Grimes Graves in Norfolk dates back centuries. Flints were used by early man for making tools and weapons. The mechanical and industrial age, however, resulted in the large-scale digging of quarries and mines to obtain supplies of gravel, sand and minerals. Although cement is widely used today, it was in fact a Roman invention.

Mills have been built along watercourses to harness the power of water to drive machinery. Areas of slow moving water in flood plains was commonly used to create watercress beds.

In our area there is plenty of evidence showing how flint, puddingstone and sarsen stones have been used by man for building and landscaping purposes.

Jill has written several books on archeology and geology and she brought a selection of these for sale at the end of her talk. I purchased a copy of one entitled "Chiltern Trails and Tales" which not only provides additional information about the locations referred to in the talk but refers to many of the commons, nature reserves, woods, villages and locations of historic interest I have visited, including on walks along the Thames Path, The Ridgeway and The Chiltern Way.

Jill did offer to follow-up her talk with a guided walk. There are so many possibilities for such a walk - some of the best locations, such as the area around Pitstone Hill and the Ridgeway, involving fairly steep slopes. I think the best way forward would be for members who are interested in taking part in a walk led by Jill to contact me providing information on a location of geological interest they would be interested in visiting so that we can decide whether or not to take up Jill's offer. There would need to be a charge to cover the costs involved, so the higher the number of attendees, the lower the per capita charge would be.

Roger



Ivinghoe Beacon - one of the locations suggested by Jill as an interesting area for a follow-up walk to her talk

## Bird talk by Brian Clews

On Friday 11th November we held our members meeting in the Hughenden Valley Village Hall, a venue we have not used for many years. We needed an affordable venue for our High Wycombe meetings following our decision to discontinue using Trinity URC because of the increased hire charges there.

The Programme Planning Committee decided that we should arrange another bird talk, and having made some enquiries to find a suitable speaker, we were recommended to contact Brian Clews who lives in Cookham. Brian agreed to give a talk to our Group and suggested we called his talk "Birds in Winter". We were expecting to see pictures of bird species which can be seen at that time of year but we were in for a pleasant surprise.

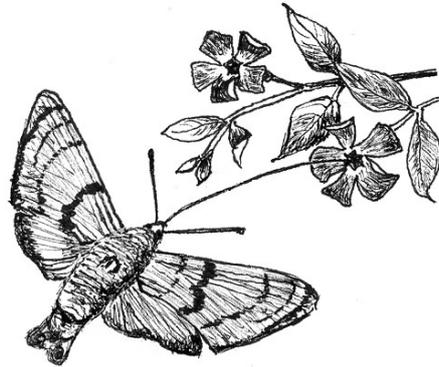
Brian's talk covered subjects such as how birds keep warm in cold weather and included lots of facts on other bird-related subjects such as predation and habitat loss. We learned about the adverse effects on birdlife caused by changing weather patterns and predation. Brian pointed out that the biggest threat faced by birds is caused by cats, which unlike other predators, do not kill for food. Crows will enter trees to take eggs and young birds from nests. Red Kites will normally only take dead birds and then only if they can lift them. The Buzzard is the most common bird of prey in the UK as a whole and can take a bird up to the size of a Wood Pigeon. One of the deadliest bird killers is the female Sparrowhawk, which needs to catch and kill other birds to feed itself and its young. Our speaker had calculated that if a single pair of Robins and all their offspring lived for 10 years the total Robin population could increase by 500,000 so clearly nature makes plenty of allowance to keep numbers under control.

Habitat loss, which includes hedgerows, field margins and orchards, has a major impact on wildlife in general, and one of various ways in which birds keep warm in Winter is making use of their feathers to provide waterproofing and to help with keeping out the cold.

As well as having a remarkable knowledge of all aspects of bird life, our speaker was able to imitate the calls of many of the birds mentioned in his talk which made his talk entertaining as well as increasing our knowledge about our feathered friends.

Having heard Brian's bird talk and learnt that he has given talks on other natural history subjects, I am sure we will be in touch with him again in the future to ask him to give another talk to us.

## Insect pollinators and the effects of climate change on them



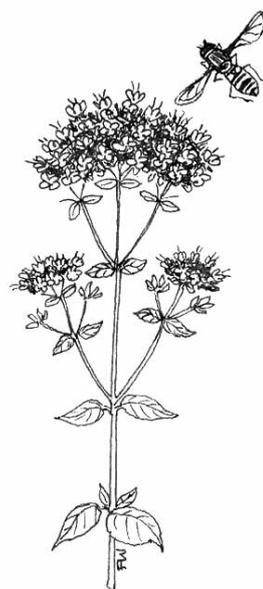
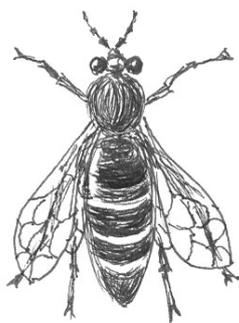
We were pleased to have another talk from John Catton at our December members' meeting which was held at our Holtspur venue on Friday 2nd December. Previous talks by John at our members' meetings have been related to bumblebees so John suggested that he widened the talk to cover other insect pollinators and the effects of climate change on them.

This proved to be a very interesting and informative meeting, illustrating how pollinators have adapted to cope with past changes. Climate change has been happening since prehistoric times, but the pace of change has accelerated in recent times, which will make it much more difficult for pollinators to cope with future changes. The options for insects have always been to stay put and adapt or become extinct. Evidence exists which shows bees were present 50 to 40 million years ago and that those in the Himalayas developed hairs, resulting in the Arctic Bumblebee. Such changes which took millions of years now only take centuries. Many species of plant and animal, such as the Indian Balsam and Ring-necked Parakeet have arrived in the UK in recent years as a consequence of climate change. The honey bee is in the fortunate position of being replaceable. If a colony suffers a problem which cannot be overcome the beekeeper can replace them.

Solitary bees are the most numerous type of bee in the UK, and they nest in cavities, small shells, masonry, banks, lawns and hollow plant stems. The nests of solitary bees in soil are at risk of flooding and bumblebees suffer from hot dry summers as well as wet and cold winters, Native ladybirds are at risk from alien species and other insects are experiencing a mismatch between their presence and the availability of their food source.

It was interesting to learn that the number of bee pollinators is relatively small in comparison with the number of species of other pollinating insects. Around 1,600 of the 27,000 species of insects in the UK that are pollinators include wasps, flies, beetles, moths, butterflies, but only 275 are species of bee (250 solitary bees, 24 bumblebees and 1 species of honey bee). Apart from a few colonies of feral honey bees that have become established in the wild following swarming, all the bee species other than the honey bee are wild.

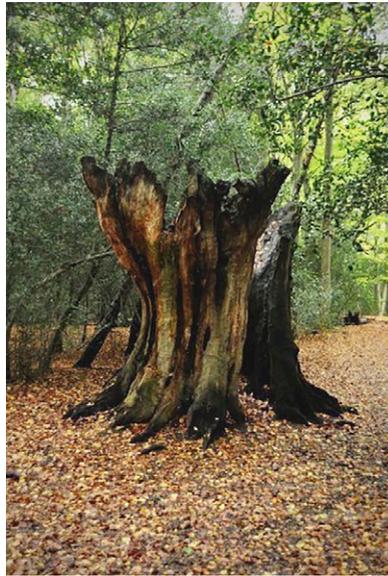
Insect type	Number of species
Wasps	9,600
Flies	7,200
Beetles	4,200
Moths	2,500
Butterflies	55
Solitary bees	250
Bumblebees	24
Honey bee	1



John explained that in prehistoric times wind was the only pollinator but this method of pollination is now almost entirely restricted to grasses and cereal crops and some tree species.

Our gardens, allotments and public parks, which contribute to our health and wellbeing, all rely on pollinators and, as some 84% of crops are pollinated by insects, this makes a huge contribution to our economy.

## A walk in Burnham Beeches



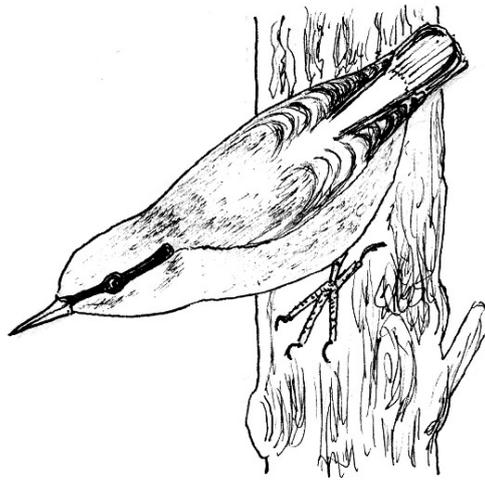
Although there had not been much member support for the walks and other outdoor activities in the May to September events programme, we decided there ought to be some outdoor activities in our October 2022 to February 2023 programme even if they were not well supported.

We included a walk at Burnham Beeches on Wednesday 2nd November in our events programme which Frances agreed to lead and that I would attend so that, if no-one else turned up, we would still both enjoy another visit to one of our favourite local sites of natural history interest. We had arranged to meet at the cafe in Burnham Beeches and decide where to walk according to the weather and the numbers attending. Six of us turned up and we agreed to start with a visit to the boardwalk which crosses the wet boggy area a short distance south of Victory Cross. We were disappointed to find the boardwalk closed, but walking through the area on the opposite side of the road where a number of Juniper bushes had been planted several years ago, it was good to see that the Junipers had matured considerably and were full of berries. We then passed several British White Cattle carrying out their valuable conservation grazing.

During the walk we saw quite a few fungi on the ground and on trees and dead wood. Those of us who were interested in fungi were able to identify some of the species seen which included Magpie Inkcap, Tawny Grisette, Beechwood Sickener and Fly Agaric. As the walk was advertised as a bird walk, we did not hold the others up by spending too long examining the fungi species we found.

Both Frances and Paul noted the bird species they had seen or heard on the walk and we ended up with the following list.

Red Kite  
Black-headed Gull  
Wood Pigeon  
Green Woodpecker - heard  
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker - heard  
Magpie  
Jay  
Carrion Crow  
Wren  
Goldcrest  
Robin  
Blue Tit  
Great Tit  
Nuthatch - heard  
Moorhen



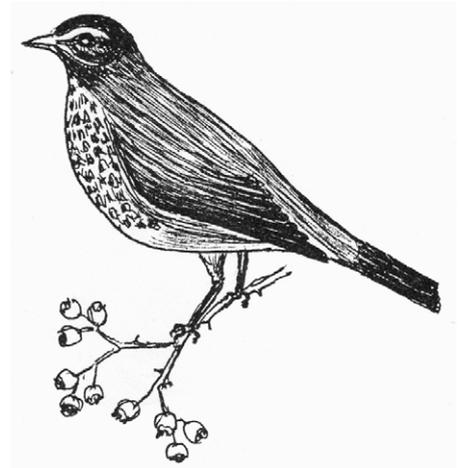
Having reached the lakes, we followed the stream bed as far as the road on the perimeter of Burnham Beeches but decided not to cross it and continue to the final pond where the stream enters a swallow hole. We did consider walking to the moated earthwork to the north of the point we had reached but, having looked at our watches decided it would be a shame to make it a rushed visit and decided to cover that area on a future visit.

At the end of the walk, four of us visited the cafe again and had our lunch there before returning home. Those who came enjoyed the visit and we will almost certainly arrange another visit there at a later date and try to schedule it when the boardwalk is open. The series of ponds on the south side of Burnham Beeches are not at their best at present because some trees have been removed in preparation for action to remove excessive vegetation which is causing habitat deterioration, and the lack of birds normally present on the main lake was very noticeable. I am sure that after the renovation action has been completed wildlife will soon recolonise this wonderful habitat.

Roger

**Wildlife sightings reported**  
**late September 2022 to mid January 2023**

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 23 September | Young Green Woodpecker in a Deeds Grove garden.  |
| 8 October    | Redwings flying over a Deeds Grove garden.   |
| 2 November   | Raven flying over a Deeds Grove garden.  |
| 10 November  | 2 Little Egrets on The Rye.<br>Song Thrush singing on Tom Burts Hill.                    |
| 12 November  | Brimstone butterfly active in a Tylers Green garden.                                     |
| 14 November  | Sparrowhawk eating a Starling that it had caught in a Deeds Grove garden.                |
| 1 December   | 2 Red-legged Partridges in a Deeds Grove garden.   |
| 9 December   | Song Thrush and 2 Blackcaps eating Callicarpa berries in a Deeds Grove garden.           |
| 17 December  | Song thrush, Redwings and 2 Blackcaps in a Deeds Grove garden throughout the cold spell. |
| 27 December  | Collared Dove building nest in a Deeds Grove garden.                                     |
| 3 January    | Hazel catkins shedding pollen in a Deeds Grove garden.                                   |
| 4 January    | Song Thrush singing in mild weather in a Deeds Grove garden.                             |
| 6 January    | Male Blackcap in a Downley garden.   |
| 11 January   | Song Thrush singing in very wet weather in a Deeds Grove garden.                         |
| 14 January   | Song Thrush, Robin and Blackbird in full song before dawn in a Deeds Grove garden.       |



**The recent snow provided an opportunity to see how much  
wildlife visits the garden after dark**



**Contacting Wycombe  
Wildlife Group**

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Website: [www.wycombewildlife.org.uk](http://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 .....

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Telephone .....

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EITHER Payment by bank standing order  
To ..... Bank  
..... Branch  
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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.