

WYCOMBE and SOUTH BUCKS
WILDLIFE NEWS
JANUARY 2024



Hartland Point - one of the many locations included in
the Highlights of the South West Coast Path talk

Issue 103

Contents include:

Editorial **146**

New members

Obituary

**Highlights of The South
West Coast Path** **147**

An introduction to field biology **154**
- a talk by Dr Karen van Oostrum

An interesting letter received **155**
from a member who moved to
Lincoln two years ago

Wildlife sightings reported to end
of December 2023

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.

All photographs taken by Roger Wilding except for one submitted with wildlife sightings and two provided by Rebecca Fraser which show her daughter (now nearly 25) at one of our Group's moth trapping events when she was young.

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 I wish you all a Happy New Year. It is amazing how time flies: it does not seem long since the September issue of our newsletter was issued. Whilst I had a few problems finding sufficient material for that issue, there was no shortage of material for this one, mainly as a result of the lengthy article and photographs needed to cover the Highlights of the South West Coast Path talk, which included some of the fauna and flora to be seen along its route. This has resulted in a need to delay publishing the report on John Tyler's talk at our December meeting until our May newsletter. As we are planning to encourage our members to manage their gardens in ways which will benefit wildlife, delaying the report on that talk until a time of the year when members are more likely to make changes to their gardens might actually prove beneficial.

New members

We are pleased to welcome the following 3 new members to Wycombe Wildlife Group:-

David Molesworth
Mr & Ms Donnelly

Obituary

We were sorry to hear of the death of Ann Priest, an honorary member of Wycombe Wildlife Group, who passed away peacefully at home on 27 September. She was a Bucks Free Press photographer for over 40 years and often attended activities organised by our Group. Some of her photos of our activities appeared in the BFP or Wycombe Star and we usually received copies of others she had taken at our events, with her permission to use them for our Group's own publicity purposes. Ann's photograph of a pair of swans in Hughenden Park was included in one of our early newsletters.

We have received a cheque from Wright Funeral Services for £220, the total of charitable donations to Wycombe Wildlife Group in memory of Ann.

Highlights of the South West Coast Path



Durdle Door



Rock Pipit

On 20th October Roger Wilding gave a talk on the highlights of his walks around the South West Coast Path including the natural history which its wide variation of coastal habitats supports. He has given a number of talks to Wycombe Wildlife Group on long distance walks he has undertaken, including The Thames Path, The Chiltern Way and The Ridgeway, but covering the 630 mile South West Coast Path in a single presentation was very challenging. Coverage of the walk started at Studland Heath near the entrance to Poole Harbour in Dorset. After viewing a few of its wide variety of habitats which include reedbeds, lakes and sand dunes, the walk continued to the Old Harry Rocks (a group of tall chalk sea stacks) before crossing acidic coastal grasslands leading down to Swanage. The walk continued through an area with limestone cliffs containing mine tunnels and former quarries, now providing valuable habitats for fauna and flora. On reaching Kimmeridge, the coast path passes through the Lulworth Army Firing Ranges, which can normally be accessed at weekends, during August and on bank holidays. The section of coast path within the Firing Ranges is marked with a line of yellow posts, and is cleared of any unexploded live ammunition before it is opened to the public. This section of the coast path involves around 7 miles of steep climbs and descents and is graded as severe walking. The coast path then passes well known landscape features such as Lulworth Cove and Durdle Door before reaching Weymouth where two RSPB nature reserves, Lodmore and Radipole Lake, provide good birdwatching opportunities. The Isle of Portland is well worth a visit for its coastal views and to see how nature has reclaimed the numerous disused former Portland stone quarries. The main coastal feature between Portland and Abbotsbury is the Chesil Beach, an 18 mile shingle beach protecting the Fleet Lagoon (one of the few remaining brackish lagoons left in the world) from the sea.



Old Harry Rocks



Chesil Beach

Abbotsbury is also well known for its swannery, where huge numbers of wild swans are fed and are able to raise their young in safety, and for a large attractive garden, which is open to the public and has many interesting and unusual plants and other features.

As the coast path approaches West Bay, the high cliffs are prone to rock falls but beyond the town there is plenty of easy walking until reaching The Golden Cap, the highest point on the south coast of England. The views from the summit are superb and worth the steep climb up. The steep climb down on the west side provides extensive views along the coast towards Lyme Regis, a good place to look for fossils. The Axmouth-Lyme Regis Undercliff is a National Nature Reserve which stretches for 8 miles between Lyme Regis and Axmouth through a jungle-like area that developed following a massive rock fall in 1839. The only two options when walking this stretch of the coast path are to either complete it or turn back, as it is not safe to stray off the path.



Fossils at Lyme Regis



Axmouth-Lyme Regis Undercliff NNR

Sidmouth is best visited when the annual folk dance festival is taking place as the whole town is then filled with the sound of folk music, dancers and visitors enjoying themselves. The coastal scenery is superb where the coast path passes by the red sandstone sea stacks at Ladrum Bay and on to Buddleigh Salterton where the River Otter joins the sea. This is one of the most attractive locations along the coast and, before Little Egrets became so common, this was somewhere where large numbers of them could be seen. Otterton Mill, a short distance inland up the River Otter, is considered to be one of the best places to see otters in the wild.



Ladram Bay



Otter estuary at Buddleigh Salterton

The River Exe needs to be crossed by ferry and those interested in finding rare native wildflowers should visit Dawlish Warren, the only place you are likely to find a tiny native plant called Sand Crocus. Beyond Teignmouth, the coast path passes through Torquay and Paignton, an area often referred to as the English Riviera - it is a popular busy seaside holiday area but this stretch of coast is very attractive and photogenic with some delightful cliff walks. Brixham is an attractive town with a harbour of historic interest, and from there to Dartmouth the coast path is remote with no refreshment facilities. Beyond Dartmouth the coast path passes Slapton Sands where American troops carried out training exercises to prepare them for the D-Day landings. Unfortunately the Germans became aware of these exercises, and a surprise attack by their torpedo boats resulted in huge numbers of American casualties. An American tank marks the site of this incident and acts as a memorial to those killed.

After passing by the lighthouse on Start Point, the narrow cliff path goes around Bolt Head where a wall has been provided alongside a very long drop to the coastal rocks below. Not all of the south coast of Devon involves steep ascents and descents: an area called the South Hams is fairly low-lying with a number of rivers flowing into the sea. Crossing these rivers involves the use of ferry services except for one, the Erme, which can be waded across within an hour either side of low tide. As the river is very wide and the water, even at low tide, is knee high, the only safe option is to take the long detour inland to where there is a bridge that crosses the river, avoiding the risk of salt water camera damage.

Plymouth is an interesting place to visit and the coast path follows the eastern and western sides of Plymouth Sound before passing through a number of coastal towns and villages, many of which have attractive harbours and attract large numbers of tourists. When a photograph of Mevagissey was shown, one of our members pointed out that this coastal village not only was his sister and brother-in-law's favourite place on the planet, but that the photograph showed the cottage where they stay for a holiday every year.



Mullion Cove



Serpentine rock

The Lizard is the most southerly point on the English coast and its scenery is dramatic, enhanced by the attractive greenish serpentine rock which is only found there. Mullion Cove is one of the most attractive locations on The Lizard and on a clear day most of the remaining south coast of Cornwall towards Penzance can be seen.

One of the best known sites in Cornwall is St Michael's Mount which can be reached on foot at low tide, or by ferry when the tide crosses the causeway. Some of the gardens on the steep sides of St Michael's Mount, such as the one on the right, can only be maintained by gardeners capable of abseiling down the slopes. Penzance also has plenty of attractive gardens and is the gateway to the Isles of Scilly by sea or from the heliport.



An attractive plant which is found at the west end of Cornwall is Dodder (*Cuscuta epithymum*), which can completely hide a wide range of host plants with its dense reddish growth



Lands End and Bishops Rock Lighthouse



Cape Cornwall

Nearby Lands End is an example of a location that has been spoilt by the creation of facilities to attract tourists and cater for their needs. It is possible to avoid these facilities and enjoy the walk along the coast to where Lands End sticks out into the sea looking out towards the Bishops Rock lighthouse which warns shipping of the dangers of approaching the rocks extending into the sea at this point. A signpost at Lands End informs you that it is only 874 miles to John O'Groats.

Cape Cornwall, a short distance north of Lands End is very impressive as you approach it. Closer inspection reveals plenty of evidence of its former industrial past but, as elsewhere on the coast path, these remains provide a home for a wide range of fauna and flora. The walk from Lands End to Cape Cornwall includes the only section of the coast path which lacks a set path and the walker is faced with a short rock scramble which can lead to places where you need to retrace your steps to find a safer route. This site is used by the military and others for rock climbing training.

Leaving Cape Cornwall the walk along the north coast of Cornwall passes through another area rich in remains of the county's mining past. The walking conditions are not difficult along this section of the coast but this changes on reaching the lighthouse at Pendeen Watch at the start of a 14 mile severe graded walk to St Ives. It is possible to split this walk in two by taking a path leading inland to Zennor from where there is a bus service. Despite its challenging walking conditions, this stretch of the coast path is extremely scenic. St Ives is one of the most photogenic towns in Cornwall and it is a favourite location for artists and photographers because of its excellent natural light. From St Ives to Newquay, the walking conditions are much easier and it is not until Port Quin is reached that the walking becomes strenuous, and then severe again before reaching Tintagel as a result of needing to descend and ascend four deep river valleys. Tintagel Castle is one of those must see sights on the coast path and it is a site that is easily recognised when viewing it from miles away. After admiring the harbour at Boscastle, more attractive coastal scenery can be enjoyed all the way to Bude. This section of the Coast Path passes Dizzard Point where the high steep cliffs are covered by an area of dense dwarf sessile oak woodland consisting of lichen covered trees considered to be around 6,000 years old.

Roger said that he found the walk between Bude and Hartland Point the most difficult to plan as it is 15 miles of severe graded walking along high cliffs split by 10 river valleys where the path descends to sea level before climbing back up again. Although there is an infrequent bus service which runs between Bude and Morwenstow and between Bude and Hartland village, the bus stop at the latter is around three miles from Hartland Quay on the coast and does not run late enough in the day to be of use. His solution to covering the latter walk was to book a pixie hut on a campsite for two nights and walk from Hartland Quay to Morwenstow along a bridleway

and return along the coast path and then to do the same from Hartland Quay to Hartland Point. This worked well but, as a result of cloud cover, the expected views of the stars from the campsite, where there is no light pollution, did not materialise.



Shore Crab - a Braunton Burrows resident



Ilfracombe

After viewing Lundy from Hartland Point, the coast path was followed along the north Devon coast passing Cloveley to Westward Ho. From here the estuaries of rivers Taw and Torridge create a need for the coast path to detour inland to Bideford and Barnstaple but this easy walking offers plenty of birdwatching opportunities. After Barnstaple the coast path goes past Braunton Burrows (an exceptionally interesting National Nature Reserve which is frequently used for military training exercises). Having visited the reserve on several occasions, Roger recommended it for a whole day visit.

The walk to Ilfracombe via Woolacombe involves walking along a sandy beach or through sand dunes between the headlands of Baggy Point and Morte Point, both of which are worth visiting, although their paths are very rough in places. Traversing the miles of deep sand either along the beach or through the sand dunes to Woolacombe is far more tiring. Ilfracombe has lots of interest and, having good bus services, is a good base for the local coast walks. As the coast path leaves Ilfracombe on its way towards Combe Martin there are excellent views looking back over Ilfracombe's harbour, and the coastal scenery is dramatic all the way to Lynmouth. The most scenic views are as the coast path reaches Heddon's Mouth Cleave where the path has to divert inland before it can descend into a deep wooded river valley. After climbing back up the opposite side of the Cleave, the path continues to Woody Bay and through The Valley of the Rocks to Lynmouth. The Valley of the Rocks is one of the SW Coast Path's highlights, especially when the wild goats are seen on the high rocks.



Heddon's Mouth Cleave



Valley of the Rocks

The lack of a suitable bus service made it difficult for Roger to undertake the remaining coast path between Lynmouth and Minehead. He overcame the problem by walking from Lynmouth as far as the county border and returning to Lynmouth along the East Lyn river which made an interesting round walk. To complete the Somerset section of the Coast Path which finishes at Minehead, he booked accommodation at Porlock which can be reached by bus from Minehead and walked from there to the Somerset/Devon border and then walked back to Porlock. The Somerset section of the walk between the county border and Porlock Weir is mainly through dense woodland which covers the high steep cliffs and is frequently crossed by fast streams descending the steep wooded slopes on the inland side of the path before they descend to the sea. It is impossible to view the sea whilst walking through this dense woodland and it would be foolhardy to try. To cross some of these streams without getting wet feet needed some of the nearby rocks to be repositioned to create stepping stones which had to be rearranged on the return walk. Just before reaching Porlock Weir, the coast path passes Culbone church which is the smallest parish church in the country only seating 33 people. The church which is recorded in the Domesday Book has its own vicar and holds regular services.

The walk from Porlock Weir to Minehead involved crossing a large shingle beach across the estuary behind which there is an extensive area of salt marsh. Account needs to be taken of the tide before this crossing is attempted. On the far side an upward climb reaches a viewpoint from which the coast we have walked along through the woodland can be viewed. Continuing up the path takes us to the Exmoor section of the coast path which follows the highest cliffs in England until the path descends into Minehead where the coast path ends if you started in Dorset, or starts if you decided to walk it the other way. Roger said he would love to do that if he lived in the West Country but viewing his photographs occasionally brings back memories of what is without doubt the most enjoyable walk he has ever done.



Sand Crocus



6.000 years old woodland

It is difficult to specify the natural history highlights of this walk as there are so many, but the rarity of the Sand Crocus at Dawlish Warren and the dense dwarf sessile oak woodland consisting of lichen covered trees considered to be around 6,000 years old at Dizzard Point, must make them strong contenders.

An introduction to field biology - a talk by Dr Karen van Oostrum

The speaker at our members meeting at Hughenden on November 2023 was Dr Karen van Oostrum, an Oxford graduate who was the Head of Education at Cambridge University Botanic Gardens for 6 years. She has been self employed since 2013 delivering training courses across the country, hosting school visits at her local Field Studies Centre and teaching plant science in schools. She also undertakes voluntary work with her local environment group, leading guided walks and running work parties. Her talk to our group, which was entitled "An introduction to Field Biology", provided a structured approach to the identification of a plant by examining its structure to determine its family and then to look at the features which determine its species. The talk covered all parts of a plant and their purpose, starting with roots which provide anchorage for the plant and absorb water and minerals to feed it and the stem of a plant which provides structure and support for the leaves and flowers.

This meeting was well attended and was quite different to our usual members meetings. Instead of sitting in rows and looking solely at an on-screen projected presentation, we sat at tables arranged in a semi circle to both view images of plant features on screen and to examine items of plant material whilst Karen described the features and their function. Karen pointed out that familiarisation of these features helps to identify a plant's family, an important stepping stone towards identifying the species.

We looked at tree leaves and noted the features to look for to help identify the species and features of flowering plants that attract pollinators and enable the plant to flower and produce seed. There was a lot of information provided by the speaker and it would be difficult to remember all the detailed information provided but the presentation certainly showed the value of learning to identify the features of a plant you find and wish to identify in order to narrow it down to its family.

Whilst I have tended to rely on my memory to name individual wildflowers and trees, my ability to remember plant names is getting more difficult. This talk convinced me that examining the features of a plant to establish its family should help me to know where to look in a species identification guidebook to name the species.

Our thanks go to Karen for such an interesting, educational and enjoyable evening which I am sure everyone who attended enjoyed and I hope it will encourage more of our members to record the trees, shrubs and flowering plants in their gardens and on walks.

The attendance level at this meeting was the highest it has been since we restarted our meetings post Covid, so it would be good if the number of plant sightings submitted for our newsletter increases as a result of this talk.

Interesting letter from member who moved to Lincoln two years ago

A note sent to members paying their membership fee by Standing Order and/or have completed a Gift Aid mandate, informing them that our Group has changed its bank to Lloyds Bank, resulted in an interesting letter from a member who moved to Lincoln two years ago but did not cancel her membership as she enjoyed reading our newsletters. Having decided that, rather than complete the new banking documents, the time had come for her to cancel her membership, she has done so but wrote to us to saying why she had not cancelled her membership earlier. The letter referred to activities which she and her young daughter (now nearly 25) had enjoyed including wildlife walks, moth trapping, tree identification walks and pond dipping events organised by our Group and the Ranger Service. She included photographs of some of the activities her daughter took part in, adding that the latter's interest in wildlife when she was young has resulted in their new garden in Lincoln being designed to attract bees and butterflies.



I replied to her letter thanking her for kind words about our group's contribution to promoting her daughter's interest in wildlife and its conservation, from a young girl to an adult. I added that I could remember her bringing her daughter to a moth trapping event which Paul held in our Deeds Grove garden. I also pointed out that, as all our newsletters dating back to when our group was formed in 1990 are available on our Group's website, she could continue to access our newsletters without incurring any charge if she wished to do so.

Roger

Wildlife sightings reported in November and December 2023

Tylers Green garden

24 Ring-necked Parakeets on a Beech tree feeding on beech mast on 7 November. By 9 November the numbers had increased to 80 and they started to feed on apples in a neighbouring garden.

Deeds Grove garden

Fieldfares around all of December and 8 Redwings at top of garden.

Rooks seen and heard flying over garden on their way to their roosting site.

Male Blackcap feeding on *Callicarpa* berries and 2 Robins courting.



This unusual view of a Hummingbird Hawkmoth at rest in a Tylers Green garden on 27 October was submitted with other garden wildlife sightings. It looks very different to when it is usually seen hovering whilst feeding.

Contacting Wycombe Wildlife Group

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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

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