



President: Geoff Corney Editor: Margaret Huitson (temporary). Newsletter No 76 autumn 2016

### Chairman's Report.

Dear Members,

I have some sad news to write in the Newsletter. Doreen Wright who had been in the Natural History Society since the beginning, died during the summer. She was an active member, and was on the committee until recently when forced to retire due to failing health. She often helped on our table at the various shows usually bringing some plants for sale and even when she came to my Garden day last year brought apples from her garden which we sold for our society funds. I am sure all of us especially those on the committee will miss her.

While on the subject of Garden days, Charles and Pam's Open day was a great success and they took around £70 in tea money and on sale of plants, and I am still collecting money even now for my open day and at the moment am around £60 from tea money and sale of products which is still growing. Charles and Pam were lucky in having a day with wonderful weather but the weather on my Open day was really terrible, windy and heavy showers, but 13 people still came on the day and others have come since, and anyone who wants to come and see it is welcome. I am hoping to be able to collect £10 to send to my charity IFAW as well.

Evelyn Crispe

### Looking After our Swifts

Are we going to lose our swifts by 2030? I am afraid it is very possible we will. The main problem is that due to the modern construction of our buildings and the fact that many older buildings are being improved by installing loft insulation etc the swifts are losing their nesting sites.

Since the time of the Romans buildings have been mainly constructed with bricks and timber and there have been nooks and crannies for the swifts to nest in but modern buildings often consist of steel and concrete and do not have any openings which can be used for nesting.

The answer is to provide artificial nest boxes and in many places this has been done. The nest boxes can be attached to the outside wall of the building or they can be part of a new building which is often firmer.

Some people may ask does it matter but swifts eat a lot of small insects which they catch in the air. These insects are mainly midges, mosquitoes and aphids which can be harmful to animals and plants. Another problem for the swifts is that the use of insecticides means that the chemicals will accumulate in their bodies and may eventually kill them.

Some councils are already trying to help the swifts by getting builders to install nest boxes in their new buildings. It would be very good if Harrow Council could be persuaded to take part in this scheme. It would also be helpful to the swifts and other wildlife (including bees) if the use of insecticides could be reduced.

David Hughes from Planning Policy (Harrow Council) writes: –

*“The Harrow Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) identifies the swift as a bird of conservation concern in Harrow. It is on the ‘amber list’, which denotes species that have suffered moderate decline or of European concern. The BAP recognises a number of species of wildlife have made their home in built up areas and notes that new developments and refurbished existing buildings often have no voids under the eaves, under tiles or in wall which render them sterile with regards to wildlife.*

*Consequently, the BAP includes a number of actions relating to the built environment and birds. For example, it indicates that developments should incorporate nesting and/or roosting sites for relevant species of birds and/or bats. Preference should always be given to ‘built-in’ features such as roosting bricks, bat tubes and bat bricks. With regards to birds, priority should be given to Species of Conservation Concern in Harrow (which includes Swifts) appropriate to the surrounding habitat.*

*In the context of the above, the Council already seeks provision of bird boxes and the like when it is assessing planning applications.*

## Bentley Old Vicarage Nature Reserve Lichen Walk Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2016

(A report of this walk, led by Rosemary Etheridge and Jane Skelly, with pictures is available on the website). By the car park at the entrance we first noticed an example of (1) *Lepraria incana* on tree bark. This is scurfy in appearance and never has fruiting bodies. It is tolerant of acid and nitrogen pollution and commonly found in polluted areas. Next, we identified a fine example of (2) *Xanthoria parietina* (a yellow lichen) on a fallen twig, again often found in areas of pollution. On the same twig we identified (3) *Physcia adscendens* - the variety of *Physcia* whose lobe-ends are helmet-shaped, (4) *Hypogymnia physodes* and (5) *Melanelixia subaurifera* (muddy-looking).

Moving on from the car park area we took the opportunity to inspect and compare examples of lichens on tombs of granite, limestone and possibly of sandstone. We agreed that it would have been helpful to have some weak acid available to test for limestone. The acidity of the granite stone does not support many lichens but we nevertheless observed (6) *Psilolechia lucida* yellow green in colour that grows happily on acid substrate. On the nearby limestone tomb we identified two species of (7, 8) *Verrucaria* – *baldensis* and *nigrescens*.

We were uncertain whether the cross was limestone or sandstone, but an occasional twinkle in the grain suggested sandstone. On this we found a white lichen tentatively identified as (9) *Aspicilia calcarea*.

Further into the woods we chose to take the anti-clockwise route. Someone pointed out the fresh **Cow Parsley** *Anthriscus sylvestris*. Other plant species we saw were the delicate blue-petalled **Siberian Squill** *Scilla siberica* (not native to Siberia despite its name), **Blue Anemone** *Anemone apennina* and **Lesser Periwinkle** *Vinca minor*.

Another fallen twig offered more examples of lichen species – (10) *Lecanora chlarotera* (with fruiting bodies like jam tarts), (11) *Lecidella elaeochroma* (with fruiting bodies like fruit gums) and (12) *Physcia tenella* (with powdery soredia on the lobe-ends).

An interesting black discoid fungus – *Diatrype disciformis* - was observed on a fallen twig.

In the butterfly meadow a **Buff-tailed Bumble Bee** *Bombus terrestris* was looking for a home. Fallen tree trunks block the path to the cemetery. More *Lecanora* and *Lecidella* were found on twig bark. Sprouting **Goat Willow** was in evidence, a brown butterfly (possibly a woken-up Tortoiseshell) fluttered by.

The scent of the **Few-flowered Garlic** *Allium paradoxum* was detected. There was a lot of interest in the hybridised pink *Polyanthus* next to the *Allium*. We examined the flowers to see if they were pin-eyed or thrum-eyed. An exciting finale to the walk were the sightings of a male **Brimstone Butterfly** *Gonepteryx rhamni* over the pond.

## Stanmore Country Park moth evening –Saturday April 9<sup>th</sup> 2016

At this time of the year the weather can be unpredictable. Margaret said, after looking at the sky, we would be lucky to see any moths. She was almost right. The sky was clear and there was little wind. We met Alistair in the car park and started to set up the equipment in the field nearby. Thank you Alistair for having a Swiss knife. A wire had pulled out of a connection and Alistair put it back with a screw driver. This after finding the garage mice had chewed a few holes in the sheet.

Rob then turned up with a damaged chin. That was sorted. We waited until, in one five minute period, three moths turned up; one Small Quaker, one Common Quaker and a No 6.

For the uninitiated this is: BF6 *Dyseriocrania subpurpurella* common name: Common Oak Purple

We then got colder and colder so with no hope of seeing any more moths we departed. The car thermometer was showing 3.5c when we got home. I checked last year's report and we saw 13 species of moth in similar weather conditions. That's nothing for you.

John Hollingdale

## Bluebell Walk in Pear Wood – Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2016

Leaders: Claire Abbott and Rosemary Etheridge

Nine of us braved the rather doubtful weather for a walk round Pear Wood. We started along the top path and had a look at the orchard, currently being restored by Claire and Peter Elton. Next we made a brief diversion into Ten Acre Field to admire the view from the top.

We continued along the path and we saw some **Wood Anemones** and **Celandines**, as well as a good sprinkling of **English Bluebells**. Then, as we got near the Hazel coppice area, there were gasps of amazement as a wonderful blue mist of flowers came into view. The Bluebells were amazing – the best we have ever seen in Pear Wood.

We walked round Pear Lake, where we saw a couple of **Coots**, then back through the wood and along the dyke, noting the patches of **Heather**. Finally we looked at the Scrape, a small pond near Wood Farm.

The sun never came out, but the bluebells were brilliant!

### **Eastcote House Gardens-Thursdays 28<sup>th</sup> April 2016**

It was a lovely spring morning when 11 of us met in the grounds of Eastcote House which was demolished some years ago (1964). However the grounds were kept as open space and our purpose was to try and identify some of the old trees. Unfortunately it seemed to be a little early in the season as the leaves were barely out, but with the aid of an old sketch map we managed to pick out: Yew, Oak, Dawn redwood, Wellingtonia, Eucalyptus gunnii, Tulip tree, Lawson cypress, Thuja and Scots Pine.

It was a little too early for much in the way of wild flowers but we did find a good sized patch of "Goldilocks" *Ranunculus auricomus*. Cow parsley was in bud along the top path and there were a few bluebells which we thought were probably hybrids.

We then had a look round the old walled garden which was looking very attractive with spring bulbs and flowers. This had been renovated a few years ago and is now looked after by the Friends of Eastcote House Gardens. Afterwards we finished the morning at the new café which although small is to be recommended.

Pam and Charles Davies

### **Stanmore Country Park – Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2016 - Spring Walk**

A sunny day at last. Field Woodrush, Bugle, Cuckoo Flower, Dog Violet and Celandine were blooming in our first meadow. Careful said Joanne (the botanist); it may not be Dog Violet. We will bring a flower back home next time we visit to make a proper identification.

In the next meadow, a Holly Blue and a Green-veined White were flying. The botanist spoke up again and what we thought was Meadow Foxtail grass could be Marsh Foxtail; the meadow being very wet. More investigation is required.

We then made our way to the S/W corner of Wood Farm which adjoins the Country Park. Here in a sheltered spot an Orange Tip and a Small Tortoiseshell were seen.

We passed back over a new bridge and in what is known as the gas ride, a Peacock butterfly was sunning itself. On the rest of the walk, Marion pointed out a Red Kite flying overhead and some of the party spotted one of the resident Muntjac deer. A pleasant morning was enjoyed by all.

John Hollingdale

### **Spring Birdsong at Bentley Priory**

Six members attended at the earlier time of 9.30 am for our annual birdsong walk round Bentley Priory Nature Reserve on 5th May. At the start we admired the Cuckoo flowers in the large meadow and heard Blackcap, Blackbird, Song thrush, Robin, Wren, Dunnock and Great tit singing. There were also many Crows and Jackdaws there and a Swift was seen overhead.

Passing through the wood we again heard Wren, Robin and Blackbird and admired the Marsh marigold by the stream. Crossing the Green Sward we had good views of a Mistle thrush (non-singing!) and heard the lovely song of a Garden warbler.

On the lake there were several Canada geese and Moorhens as well as many Coots, a few Mallard and a Herons. A male Mandarin duck was also there which suggested a nest might be present. Near the dam a pair of Grey wagtails obviously had a nest. Unlike previous years there were no Swallows flying over the lake due, presumably, to the closure of the nearby riding school.

There was a fine display of Cowslips on the grassy slopes of the dam and nearby we heard Chiffchaff and Chaffinch. We visited the grand old oak tree but there were no signs of Nuthatches nesting in it this year and we did not hear Nuthatches calling at all today.

On the way back from the lake we stopped to admire some large patches of Goldilocks and Stitchwort. We also saw a large rabbit in this area and Long-tailed tits. Back at the meadow we had a "magic moment" as we were treated to a flying display by a pair of Hobbies while a Buzzard circled high above and a Sparrowhawk flew across.

On this walk we saw many white butterflies and several Commas, Peacocks and Orange-tips.

Brian Hunter

### **Moth Evening in Lady Gilbert's Orchard, Grimsdyke. Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

The weather behaved itself on this night and five of us gather around the light to await developments.

The first moth to arrive was a Lunar Marbled Brown and by the end of the evening more than a dozen had appeared. Brindled Pugs were also in numbers approaching ten. Other moths included Waved Umber (two), Pebble Hook-tip, Orange Footman and Sandy Carpet. New to the site were Iron Prominent and a late Chestnut. Also late moths were Common and Small Quakers and a Hebrew Character

The only micro successfully identified was a *Eriocrania subpurpurella*.

Two more micros have been sent to Colin Plant for IDing. I have looked at them but the conclusions I reached seemed

improbable; either not recorded in Hertfordshire at all or only seen in two locations in the county, according to Colin's book 'the Moths Of Hertfordshire. Will let you know when he gets back to me, which on past history may take some time. He is a very busy entomologist.

Postscript: Colin did get back to me quite promptly; thank you Colin. The two micros were *Esperia sulphurella* and *Tachystola acroxantha*. The last I should have known but it is a new record for this site.

My thanks to Bob Black for his help on this night

John Hollingdale

### **Bee Walk Grim's Dyke Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2016**

Friends of the Earth (FOE) and Harrow Natural History Society

It was overcast and miserable and we weren't really expecting to see many bees, but we were nevertheless well rewarded for our participation in this year's Great British Bee Count. Armed with our Friends of the Earth spotter's chart, guide books and a little in-house natural history expertise we were able to identify seven species...or we think so. Altogether, there were 21 enthusiastic bee counters including two new FOE members. Helenka, Head Gardener at Grim's Dyke, kindly allowed us to roam unsupervised in the vegetable garden and Lady Gilbert's Orchard.

Whilst gathering in the main car park in front of the hotel we spotted a couple of Buff-tailed Bumble Bees *bombus terrestris* or could they possibly be White-tailed Bumble bees *bombus lucorum*? The striped pattern looks remarkably similar, but our subjects wouldn't stay still for long enough to provide a definitive answer. There was also some difference of opinion about whether the white-tails, though widespread, are known to inhabit Harrow Weald. Our next species was a Red-tailed Bumble bee *Bombus lapidarius* and this one was clearly a female as noted by the absence of a yellow ruff around its face. We hadn't even begun the walk in earnest when a Common Carder bee *Bombus pascorum* graced us with her presence. Only she wasn't quite so common, as by the gigantic size of her she must have been a Queen.

Amazingly, we had already identified three bee species on our Bee bingo cards and we hadn't even begun the walk. Somebody then pointed out a hover fly in a nearby flower bed, which gave us a bonus point. Was there a wasp? Moving into the garden at the rear of the hotel we observed several more Buff-tails (or perhaps White-tails) in the border on the delicate blue flowers of Green Alkanet *Pentaglottis sempervirens*. Next, we identified an Early Bumble bee *Bombus pratorum*, thankfully not too early for our walk. We ambled slowly through the vegetable garden, then to the orchard and finally to the sunken garden. On the way we saw another Early Bumble bee, a Tree Bumble bee *Bombus hypnorum*, with its distinctive orange, black and white pattern, a Communal Mining bee *Andrena carantonica* and a Cuckoo Bee. Quick note: the Tree Bumble bee is a welcome new arrival to these shores. It is a very effective pollinator and doesn't seem to be damaging any of our native bee populations.

By 4 pm the sky looked even more overcast, and then someone suggested tea. The hotel lounge looked very inviting. It was generally agreed that despite the gloomy weather we had a very successful afternoon, and for those of us who have them we can now record our findings on our FOE apps.

Thank everyone for taking part and to Helenka and Grim's Dyke for having us.

Jane Skelly

### **National Moth Night at Stanmore Country Park Friday June 10<sup>th</sup>**

The weather was very good; a cloudy still evening. Nine people attended including some very experienced people who were very good at potting moths and identifying them. Thank you all very much.

We did see a Lime Hawk-moth which I believe was the main reason for having NMN on this weekend.

Other notable macros were Oak Tree Pug, Peach Blossom (voted the prettiest moth of the evening) and Peppered Moth. Some discussion then took place about whether the change from black back to white was evolution or not.

Also among the 25 macros were White Ermine and Orange and Buff Footman.

A total of sixteen micros were also identified with some assistance from Colin Plant. Thank you Colin.

We finished at midnight

My totals in the previous evening from my back garden where 16 macros and six micros from a Robinson trap that had been left out all night.

I can send full lists to anybody who is interested. John Hollingdale

### **Evening Walk - Ruislip Lido, Monday 13th June**

It had been raining earlier but had stopped when nine members arrived for this evening walk beside the Lido. Even so, it was decided to restrict our walk to beside the Lido and avoid the mud in Poor's Field!

There was the usual large flock of Canada geese by the water together with a solitary greylag goose. On the water there were many coots, several mute swans and a few mallard, moorhens, tufted duck and great crested grebe. Overhead there were many swifts, swallows and house martins and several common terns.

We were lucky to get quite close to some very young coots and moorhens with their juvenile plumage swimming with their parents. On the walk we heard blackbird, robin, sedge warbler, song thrush, woodpigeon, crow, dunnock and parakeet.

A rural note was provided by the loud lowing from the cattle in the adjoining field as dusk fell.

We finished by taking advantage of the lakeside restaurant to have refreshments.

Brian Hunter

### **Stanmore Country Park Moth Night Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> August 2016**

The weather was good this night; very warm. The date was picked to coincide with the flight period of the Oak Processionary Moth. I was curious to see if it had reached this nature reserve as I had had one in my garden in Harrow the previous year. However none appeared. There were 10 of us this evening including Dick and Barbara our visiting experts, one lady from Herts who also knew a thing or two about moths and Mr Shah and his two children. It's good that people come along who know nothing about moths. Marian, was there to do some of the capturing, with her husband Norman.

We started off with an Olive which was also the last moth to arrive. There were eighteen macro species including eight which had turned up on NMN. The pick of these were two Jersey Tigers. Amongst the other macros were Black Arches, Ruby Tiger, Small Phoenix and Tree Lichen Beauties.

We have also identified eleven micros, the pick of which was the uncommon *Epiblema costipuntana*; there was ragwort all around us. We packed up after two and a half hours.

There is a little box now in the expert hands of Colin Plant with the micros I couldn't identify. I can send a list of species seen that night if anyone is interested.

We will be back in the same month next year to check if the Oak Processionary Moth has arrived. I don't think it will be long.

John Hollingdale

### **Ickenham Marsh Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> August**

Six of us visited this London Wildlife Trust (LWT) reserve. To get to it we walked down the extension of Austin's Lane which is also part of the Hillingdon Trail. Flora seen along the way included Hedge Woundwort, Bristly Oxtongue, Burdock, Mugwort and Woody Nightshade.

We arrived at the reserve to find a party of volunteers led by Simon Hawkins of the London Wildlife Trust (LWT) altering the corral in an attempt to contain the three Sussex cattle that were grazing there. They were about to be transferred to the Ten Acre Wood nearby. Margaret thought that the grass that they had been recording there as Wavy Hair Grass was in fact Tufted Hair Grass. Simon was grateful for this information.

We did not enter the reserve as it had been badly poached by the cattle.

So we then walked along by the Yeading Brook, which had stretches of Himalayan Balsam, to an open field. The Himalayan balsam was very popular with the local bees. We were visiting this reserve to see Rooks; however none were to be seen; only Jackdaws. Dick Middleton later told us that the MOD had had the trees reduced because of the close proximity of the Northolt Aerodrome flight path. Unfortunately the Rooks had then decided to move on.

Few butterflies were noted only several Speckled Woods, a Meadow Brown and a few Whites which never seemed to land. Later on a Holly Blue passed us by. One adult moth was seen, a Yellow Shell and the leafmines of *Stigmella Aurella*. Also a Sparrowhawk passed quickly overhead.

We then returned to our cars. This is a pleasant place to visit and if continuing on the Hillingdon Trail one can visit the other LWT reserves on the other side of the A40.

John Hollingdale

### **Headstone Village Show**

This year for once the weather was kind to us, it was fine but not windy and a steady trickle of visitors passed by. We were in the nature corner representing the Herts and Mddx Wildlife Trust and our Harrow Natural History Society and Simon's microscope and pond life were popular as usual.

This year Marian made us a Honey Cake and lots of people enjoyed trying to guess the weight of the cake (one pound eight ounces) and an estimate of the number of flowers visited to collect the honey for the cake was about one million. The winner was very pleased and the cake was enjoyed appropriately enough by beekeepers at the Apiary.

Margaret Huitson

On the 11<sup>th</sup> April, we had Ian Currie giving us an interesting talk on “Weather Lore – Fact or Fiction.” This has prompted me to write a few sayings here:- “*Red sky at night, shepherd’s delight. Red sky in the morning shepherd’s warning,*” this is most reliable when weather systems predominantly come from the west, as they do in the United Kingdom. The red sky appears when dust and small particles are trapped in the atmosphere by high pressure, scattering blue light leaving the red light to give the sky its notable appearance, so at night means fair weather is generally headed towards you, the next day will usually be dry and pleasant, whereas in the morning means the high pressure is moving east, the good weather has passed, most likely making way for a wet and windy low pressure system. Sailor’s delight and warning has been used in place of shepherd’s, which brings us to another nautical saying:- “*Mackerel sky and mare’s tails make tall ships carry low sails,*” different cloud types were used to determine whether sails needed to be lowered. Mackerel sky, resembling the scales of the fish, is associated with altocumulus clouds while mare’s tails refer to cirrus clouds, both types could develop before the instance of a storm. “*Rain before seven, fine by eleven,*” may sometimes be true but is far from reliable. The weather systems tend to be variable and move through this country quickly with the westerly flow off the Atlantic; this can sometimes mean a low pressure front may have moved through in a morning, it is not always the case and often does stay around for longer than a morning.

Our Field Trip to Hungerford in May, included seeing the Wilton Windmill, where associated sayings to the miller were found, feeling the quality of the flour the mill was making by rubbing it between thumb and finger and would then adjust the Stone by “*Rule of Thumb.*” Sometimes, when the mill was working hard and the wind slackened, there would not be enough power to keep it running, so it would “*Grind to a Halt.*” The miller would have been a practical man willing to grind any grain brought to him; all would have been “*Grist to the Mill.*” The sharpening of mill stones was a tough business. Hot sparks made as the stone was chipped away would burn the craftsman’s face and hands. An experienced man would be able to “*Prove his Metal*” – his skill with his hard steel tools. Before the Flour Dresser was invented the Bran would have been removed by sifting it through a square sieve called “*Temse*” (sounds like Thames!) With hard work so much dust would be created that it looked as if someone had “*Set the Temse on Fire.*”

### **The Months** by Sara Coleridge 1802-1852

January brings the snow, makes our feet and fingers glow.  
February brings the rain, thaws the frozen lake again.  
March brings breezes loud and shrill, stirs the dancing daffodil.  
April brings the primrose sweet, scatters daises at our feet.  
May brings flocks of pretty lambs, skipping by their fleecy dams.  
June brings tulips, lilies roses, fills the children’s hand with posies.  
Hot July brings cooling showers, apricots and gillyflowers.  
August brings the sheaves of corn, then the harvest home is borne.  
Warm September brings the fruit, sportsmen then begin to shoot.  
Fresh October brings the pheasants, then to gather nuts is pleasant.  
Dull November brings the blast, then the leaves are whirling fast.  
Chill December brings the sleet, blazing fire, and Christmas treat.

This poem concludes my contribution to the Autumn Newsletter,  
Marian Sartin