

# HARROW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY



President: Geoff Corney.

Editor: Joanne Colthup.

Newsletter No. 72 Autumn 2014

## **Chairman's Report**

Field Trip to Thetford District May 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> 2014

This was the field trip which nearly did not take place, as John Hollingdale was in hospital, Margaret was visiting him daily, and I was recovering from an operation on my hand. We couldn't do our usual outing to set an itinerary, but at least the hotel had been chosen well in advance and was comfortable with good food. Luckily being so close to Harrow Elizabeth and Brian did an excellent job putting together an interesting itinerary doing day trips to the area.

After meeting at a picnic site near Mildenhall and moving on to our hotel we decided to go to the local nature reserve walking beside the river Thet. It was raining but by the time we got back the weather had cleared up and we had no more rain after that. Mayflies were dancing over the water and were being taken by fish and a Grey Wagtail, and on the river were Mallard, Canada Geese and an Egyptian Goose. Sparrows were nesting in the embankment walls of the river and we were able to enjoy a host of wild flowers on the walk including Cowslips, Comfrey, Fumitory and many others. On Tuesday morning we went to Weeting and saw 2 Stone Curlews from the West Hide and on the way out I noticed a plant native to East England called Spring beauty. In the afternoon we went to Lakenheath reserve where we saw Drinker and Tiger moth caterpillars, Orange Tip butterflies, also Brimstone, Peacock and Large and Small White butterflies. Further into the reserve we saw a Kingfisher, a Hobby, a Marsh Harrier, some Swifts and a Bittern and a Cuckoo flying, also some Terns on a nearby lake on the way back to the car park. The path was lined with pink Cut-leaved Geraniums and the white form of it and another Woolly Bear caterpillar was also exploring the vegetation with us.

On Wednesday we went to see a Saxon Village which had been set up in West Stowe Country Park, and in the afternoon went to Lackford Lakes Nature Reserve where a guided walk had been arranged. There we heard a Nightingale and a Bullfinch before Elizabeth and I decided to take time out and had a nice peaceful time sitting by one of the lakes until joined by the rest of the group. In the meantime we had been serenaded by Willow Warbler, Cetti's Warbler, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff and Blackcap. We watched great Crested Grebe and Black Headed Gulls on the water and then went for a nice cooling ice cream at the Visitor Centre.

On Thursday we went to Grime's Graves in Thetford Forest where Joanne went on a search for some special plants and found Common Rock Rose, Purple Milk Vetch and Hairy Rock cress. Stork's Bill was common all over the area at every site we visited but is not found in our area. Some brave souls decided to go down a 30 ft ladder into the flint mines but those not fancying that (including me) spent time listening to the Skylarks and watching a Curlew that was sitting on a nest. In the afternoon we had a guided walk in Lynford Arboretum and afterwards went for a pre-booked cream tea at the Lynford Hotel. On the way back Elizabeth and I spent some time at Santon Downham, a beautiful spot by a river where I watched Blue Tits feeding their young in a hollow tree.

On Friday morning we had some free time before starting for home and several of us went to Bressingham Gardens, others stayed in Thetford, and I have no idea what the rest got up to, but we all made it safely back to Harrow after a very enjoyable trip.

Evelyn Crispe

**Saturday March 22<sup>nd</sup> Bayhurst Wood, Ruislip. Signs of Spring. Leader: Joanne Colthup**

On a pleasant, mild morning ten members met in the car park of Bayhurst Wood, a local nature reserve to look for signs of spring. In a clearing by the car park was a plentiful display of Wood Forget-me-not – *Myosotis sylvatica* fully in bloom, they were early due to the mild winter and sheltered open position. Growing on a wall was Ivy-leaved Toadflax – *Cymbalaria muralis* which is an alien introduced to gardens several hundred years ago. Entering the wood we passed a bank of Lesser Celandine – *Ficaria verna*, a glorious yellow display one of the first signs of spring. The trees in flower were Hazel – *Corylus avellana*, Hornbeam – *Carpinus betulus*, Blackthorn – *Prunus spinosa*, and Cherry Plum – *Prunus cerasiflora*.

A Red Kite gave a fine display above the car park at the start of the walk, we also heard Chiffchaff and a Song Thrush. A small flock of Chaffinch flew ahead of us as we walked along, and the highlight of our walk was a Nuthatch building its nest. We stood and watched as it flew back and forth lining a hole high in a tree with mud until it was the right size to enter.

**Walk for bird song in Bentley Priory. Thursday April 24<sup>th</sup>. Leader: Brian Hunter.**

On a cloudy but bright morning six members wandered over Bentley Priory Country Park listening for bird song, including crossing some very muddy places! Some species were heard frequently such as Blackbird, Robin, Wren, Goldfinch, Great Tit, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Nuthatch, Woodpigeon, Blackcap and Green Woodpecker.

Other species were heard only once or twice including Song Thrush, Chiffchaff, Collared Dove, Greenfinch, Willow Warbler and Ring-necked Parakeet. As well as the birds we heard we also saw the following: Crow, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Kestrel, Stock Dove, Blue Tit and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

On the lake we saw Coot, Moorhen, Mallard and Canada Goose as well as a Grey Wagtail by the dam and a lot of Swallows over the water. The best surprise of all was a family group of Mandarin Ducks with both parents and ten fluffy ducklings showing that they had successfully bred on the lake. On another visit, two months later it was pleasing to see that at least six of the Mandarin ducklings had survived to maturity and another duckling was there, showing a second brood had been produced.

There was sufficient time to go to the top of the country park where it was likely that Whitethroat would have been found amongst the scattered bushes.

Several Peacock and Orange-tip butterflies were seen. Also there were abundant Bluebells in the woods and other flowers seen were Lesser Celandine, Ground Ivy, Greater Stitchwort, Cowslip, Marsh Marigold and Goldilocks Buttercup. Pendulous Sedge was also noted.

We were grateful to Derek Turner being present on this walk as his long experience and sharp hearing helped greatly in identifying the birds listed.

Brian Hunter

**Stanmore Country Park for Butterflies and Bluebells 26<sup>th</sup> April 2014. Leader: Margaret Huitson**

It was a fine day for a walk and a group of us walked around the Nature Trail, with us was Maya Dodwell who is the new warden for the west part of the site. The Bluebells have been really good this year and are spreading especially in the cleared areas – a lovely sight. Speckled wood, Small white and Peacock butterflies were seen.

Unfortunately John Hollingdale was not with us as he was in hospital at the time. We are pleased to report that he is now hale and hearty and has been nominated for this year's Harrow's Heroes Awards. He has worked at the Country Park for over 22 years and the fact that it is the open, pleasant area enjoyed by the public and nature alike is in part due to him.

Margaret Huitson

**Moth night at Gilbert's Orchard, Harrow May 21<sup>st</sup> 2014. Leader: John Hollingdale.**

The weather forecast was awful; heavy rain was predicted just at lighting up time. The moral of that is don't always go by what the 'experts' say. Actually apart from a smidgen of drizzle the evening was dry, cloudy and warm: ideal conditions.

There were 8 of us; four from Harrow Natural History Society and Helenka the head gardener. Dick Middleton and Rob Payne, Butterfly Conservation members did most of the identifications.

Twenty-nine species of moth were recorded; five micros, the rest macros. Amongst those were Pebble Hook-tip, Sandy Carpet, Brindled White-spot, Orange Footman and Green Silver-lines. We called it a night at midnight.

If anyone would like the full list please contact me.

John Hollingdale

**Regent's Park for birds and other wild life. May 30<sup>th</sup> 2014. Leader: Margaret Huitson.**

We were to meet at Baker St at 11.00am, but apart from two members who arrived very early the other 6 members were extremely delayed. An 'incident' occurred at Kilburn which shut down the Met. and Jubilee lines for several hours. Arriving by bus and other lines, and keeping in touch by mobile we eventually all met up and set off at 12.00.

We walked a circular route of the park keeping mainly to the water and saw many birds, many being so used to people were uncharacteristically tame allowing us to get very close. Wendy made the list which is probably in the order of birds seen.

Greylag Goose	Gadwall	Red Crested Goose
Common Tern	Great Crested Grebe	Heron
Mute Swan	Pochard	Herring Gull
Egyptian Goose	Barnacle Goose	Bar-Headed Goose
Smew	Red Crested Pochard	Ruddy Shelduck
Pintail	Carolina Wood Duck	Mandarin
Golden Eye	Wren	Chaffinch
Blackbird	Goldcrest	Blackcap
Song Thrush	Robin	Crow
Jay	Magpie	

Apart from very common wild flowers seen everywhere Small Flowered Balsam *Impatiens parviflora* was common in the verges.

Joanne Colthup

**Visit to Ruislip Lido Monday Evening June 9<sup>th</sup> 2014. Leader: Pamela Davies**

On the evening of Monday 9<sup>th</sup> June, eight of us made our way from the Lido car park along the track leading to Poors Field. It was fine and warm but with some dark clouds in the distance.

On the right hand side was a boundary of trees separating the model railway line, in front of which were various stands of Spear Thistle, Nettles and Broad leaved Dock including a number of grasses

such as Yorkshire Fog, *Poa annua* and Cocksfoot.

There was an open field on our left; the grass seemed longer than usual at this time of year, perhaps because it is no longer grazed? There were fewer flowers mainly Clover, Meadow Buttercup, Sheep's Sorrel, and Lesser Stitchwort.

Beyond the field the track narrowed, bounded by a hedge on the left containing Dog Roses, Silver Birch, Willow, Bramble, Honeysuckle, Oak, Hawthorn, and Elderberry. Flowers seen along the way included Medick, but at that stage it wasn't possible to tell which one, Wood Dock, Silver Leaf, Herb Bennet, Herb Robert, Rosebay Willowherb, Hedge Woundwort, and to our surprise one Common Spotted orchid.

Birds heard but not seen were Chiffchaff, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Blue Tit, Robin, and possible Blackcap.

We finally reached Poor's Field, but again this seemed rather overgrown and inclined towards scrub. Unfortunately the rain that had been threatening now started and we returned quicker than we came, and finished with a welcome drink at the water's edge.

Pamela Davies.

### **Northwood Gravel Pits. Friday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2014. Leader: Dave Brooks.**

We should commend Dave for his excellent directions and explanations, and history of the site sent to members well in advance of the meeting.

#### **Geology of the gravel pits.**

The Northwood Gravel Pits (along with other pits in the area) were a major source of gravel for mending local roads. The pits were excavated in the Palaeogene Reading Formation of the Lambeth Group. The sands, silts, clays and gravels were deposited by rivers on a coastal plain under sub-tropical conditions. The Reading Formation forms the surface in the low lying areas of Pinner, Northwood, Ruislip and Ickenham. Local variations are the large proportion of sand in the strata and the replacement of the usual Bottom bed by a seam of pebbles 1.25 – 1.8 metres thick. The pits have been designated as a Regionally Important Geological Site by Hillingdon BC following a recommendation from the London Geodiversity Partnership.

The pits were declared “worked out” in 1898, and the area was saved from development by being designated a public amenity in commemoration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of 1897. Since then, after years of neglect the area has been completely restored with good tarmac paths, clearing of unnecessary scrub, and marking out of a nature trail.

Dave led us round explaining the types of sand and pebbles. Due to the excavations there were deep pits and large heaps of sand, and many 'ups and downs'. Apparently due to the removal of trees the area is a haven for Stag Beetles, we did not see any. The dominant plants were Ground Elder – *Aegopodium*, and Cherry Laurel – *Prunus Laurocerasus*. It is recorded that Nightingales sang there both day and night in the early 1900s.

Thank you Dave for a very interesting and informative meeting. I taught for many years nearby and passed the site entrance daily, but never took time to investigate.

Dave Brook and Joanne Colthup.

### **Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2014: Grasses, Sedges and Rushes in Pear Wood** **Leaders: Claire Abbott and Rosie Etheridge.**

Our walk started well. We had a pleasant stroll along the dyke and down through the wood. We discussed the difference between Hard Rush and Conglomerate Rush deciding that the specimens on the dyke were the Conglomerate species. We looked at the Hairy-wood Rush and admired the Wavy hair Grass near the heather.

Many interesting grasses were waiting to be identified in and near the Scout and Guide fields. As we

approached the latter, the first drops of rain began to fall. Soon we were all pressed up against a large tree trying to keep dry.

“Are you alright?” asked John Hollingdale. “No, I'm all wet” I replied.

Eventually we admitted defeat and the walk came to a premature end. A pity about the Wood Millet and the Wood Melick and the Sheep's Fescue. Better luck next year perhaps.

Rosie Etheridge

**Flower Walk for the Friends of Bentley Priory. Friday June 20<sup>th</sup> 2.00. Leader: Joanne Colthup**

I have been asked for several years to lead this annual walk, only once did a “Friend” turn up, but the walk has always been well supported by our own members.

We followed the Nature Trail using the new leaflet starting at the Old Lodge entrance. It was good weather, a change as the last two years were wet. Following the Deer path we examined the native Pedunculate Oak - *Quercus robur* so that we could compare it with the alien Turkey Oak - *Quercus cerris* further up the path.

Walking up we noted the Wild Cherry - *Prunus avium* with horizontal bands on the bark, and then the Wild Service Tree - *Sorbus torminalis* which is a sign of ancient woodland since about 1600. Few flowers were seen up the path due to the shaded woodland, but we did note Hedge Woundwort - *Stachys sylvatica*, Enchanter's Nightshade - *Circaea lutetian*, and Herb Bennet - *Geum urbanum*.

Passing the Deer Park some of us fed the deer with apple and carrot. The deer are descendants of the herd introduced by the Marquis of Abercorn. We looked for Sanicle - *Sanicula europea* which grows sparsely along that part of the path. It was in seed.

At the top of the path running along the fence dividing the house and grounds from the reserve, the area was more open with acid grassland. According to the leaflet it should have been full of bright flowers, but we saw little more than Tormentil - *Potentilla erecta* and Lesser Stitchwort - *Stellaria grammaea*. Looking through a clearing we had a good view of Box Hill and Leith Hill. We followed the path down to the lake passing the Master Oak, which may date back to the reign of Charles 11, it had been surrounded by railings to deter vandals.

Not many birds were seen on the lake so we didn't linger, but recorded Lesser Spearwort - *Ranunculus flammula* and Alder - *Alnus glutinosa* in the damp areas.

Crossing Old Lodge Meadow to return we found Common Knapweed - *Centaurea nigra* and Meadow Barley - *Hordeum secalinum* which we were able to compare with Wall Barley - *H. murinum* which is one of our most common grasses. Another distinctive grass seen in the meadow was Crested Dog's Tail - *Cynosorus cristatus*.

We had spent several hours on the trail so did not have time to look at Boot Pond. Next year we will concentrate on Spring Meadow which has the more special flowers but is not included on the trail.  
Joanne Colthup

**Plant Identification at Roxbourne Rough Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2014. Leader Joanne Colthup**

It was good to have Dave Bolton the warden to accompany us. Dave has worked tirelessly since the land was acquired by the council in 1992. We walked around the reserve which consists mainly of wooded trees around the edge and rich grassland in the centre which is damp for much of the year and has a variety of plants.

Just to record plants of the Pea family - *Fabacea*., in the grassland we saw Smooth Tare - *Vicia tetrasperma*, Common Vetch - *Vicia sativa*, and Bush Vetch - *Vicia sepium*. In the same family in another field Greater Birdsfoot Trefoil - *Lotus pedunculatus*, Meadow Vetchling - *Lathyrus pratensis*, and Yellow Vetchling - *Lathyrus aphaca* were found. On the several occasions I have visited the reserve I have looked for Grass Vetchling - *Lathyrus nissolia* which is illustrated in the brochure but without success.

Of the Rose family - *Rosacea*, we found Dog Rose - *Rosa canina*, Field Rose - *Rosa arvensis*, Sweet Briar - *Rosa rubiginosa*, Silverweed - *Potentilla anserina*, Tormentil - *Potentilla erecta* and Trailing Tormentil - *Potentilla anglica*. These are just some of the flowers seen.

The pond is at the lowest point of the reserve and due to the fact that the water is continuously

churned up by dogs it resembled brown soup. Around the pond were the remains of Yellow Iris – *Iris pseudacorus* and Lesser Spearwort – *Ranunculus flammula*, also a number of species of willow which I find difficult to identify without catkins and they hybridize.

We were then near to the gate having completed our walk.  
Joanne Colthup

**National Moth Night, Stanmore Country Park, Friday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2014. Leader: John Hollingdale**

Four of us arrived at the Stanmore Country Park car park with persistent rain falling. As a couple of us were not 100% fit and as we waited the rain got heavier and heavier we decided not to go ahead with the event. On the plus side a common Pipistrelle bat frequented the car park and the local foxes were in fine voice; one seen.

**Butterfly walk at Stanmore Country Park. Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> July 2014. Leader: John Hollingdale**

We had a good walk despite not having too much sun. Butterflies seen included many large Skippers and Ringlets. There were also a few Meadow Browns and Small Skipper.

**Ruislip Fields etc on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> July. Leader: John Hollingdale.**

We left the Ruislip Lido car park at the far left hand side and entered a large neglected field. Again butterflies seen were Large, Small and Essex Skippers. We learned hopefully to identify Ringlets, Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers - both male and female courtesy of the Butterfly book brought by Brian Hunter. Common Blues were also seen. Brian's book is excellent with good illustrations of both male and female butterflies. **British Butterflies. A field guide to the butterflies of Britain and Ireland by David Newland and Robert Still.**

We then made our way through the woods to Poor's Field where Joanne took over and showed us many of the plants there. Poor's Field is known as a special area of heathland with special plants, not national rarities but unusual to the local area because of the acid soil.

We concentrated on grasses, sedges and rushes and found:

Slender Rush – *Juncus tenuis*      Toad Rush – *Juncus bufonius*      Sheep's Fescue – *Festuca ovina*  
Heath Grass – *Danthonia decumbens*      Loose Silky Bent – *Apera spica venti*.

The colourful Devil's-bit Scabious – *Succisa pratensis* and Harebell – *Campanula rotundifolia* were showing lovely shades of blue.

John Hollingdale and Joanne Colthup.

**Bentley Old Vicarage Nature Reserve and All Saints Church. Evening meeting Monday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2014**

Led by our warden Rev. James Mercer we started at the entrance to All Saints Church. Sadly, the site 'tidier' had done the autumn/late summer mowing so there was little to see in the way of flowers. We moved on to the very recent installation of a beehive. Bees, of course, in the evening were present in single numbers but the hive is a very welcome addition to the church grounds.

We continued to the entrance to the Old Vicarage Nature Reserve where we stopped and absorbed the information on the new illustrated entry boards. These were supplied by Harrow Nature Conservation Forum and are such a big asset to the site.

Handy to the entrance is the newly excavated and planted pond. This was installed last year and the hoped – for tadpoles had obviously populated it, as frogs have been seen. Yellow Iris, Water Mint, and Purple Loosestrife were planted (none in flower at the time).

Along the path into the middle of the nature reserve is the area for the Forest Group, an education initiative for teaching primary school children from Brent and Harrow about trees and wildlife. Various sheds and wooden structures have been set up to enhance enjoyment for the children.

We departed via the exit to the cemetery and walked back to a welcome coffee/drink at the Leefe Robinson. Later some of us returned for a bat session. Betty Brown

After the welcome refreshments in the Leefe Robinson, around 10.00pm some of the group on the way back to the car park took a short detour to Harrow Weald Cemetery at the back of All Saints Church where we encountered the occasional bat in flight. It was a perfect evening for them, warm and relatively humid so there was plenty of insect prey. Wendy and Margaret had come prepared with their bat detectors and tuned them in so we were able to listen to the bat's non-audible sounds as a series of clicks and smacks. These were most likely to be pipistrelles, possibly characteristic of the Common pipistrelles – *pipistrellis pipistrellus*. We agreed not to hang around for too much longer as we were prey for the midges.

Jane Skelly

### **Fern Walk on Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> July. Leader: Howard Matthews.**

8 of us joined Howard Matthews and Tina at Stanmore Common – the undergrowth was wet following the previous rain but the day remained dry. We had been warned to apply “bug juice” and this certainly proved necessary. Howard explained that Broad Buckler Fern – *Dryopteris dilatata* was as abundant as Common Male Fern - *Dryopteris filix-mas* on this site and we soon headed off the path to see the distinctive tri-pinnate Broad Buckler Fern.

Hart's Tongue Fern – *Asplenium scolopendrium* attractively adorned some of the stream edges. We learned to differentiate Borrer's Scaly Male Fern – *Dryopteris affinis* ( although some of us struggled to see dark spots where appropriate). The Field Study Guide with its simple numbering system proved invaluable for some of the less knowledgeable members of the party. The dense scales on the Golden Scaly Male Fern *Dryopteris affinis subsp. affinis* were distinctive. It is always a pleasure to see the Lady Fern – *Athyrium filix femina* and a good example was seen from the board walk at the pond in Pynding Mersc.

We all ignored the most common fern, Bracken as this seems to always make a takeover bid.

A few of the less hardy members of the party headed back to the car park while the rest set off to see a new fern, Narrow Buckler Fern – *Dryopteris carthusiana* a single specimen of this species. Leslie kindly took a video of the identification of the specimen so that the rest of us could see what we had missed.

A good day which added to the species recorded.

A Post Script from Howard: This is to let you know that I have just heard from Fred (at the Natural History Museum), who has confirmed that the unknown hybrid is indeed a hybrid between Male fern and Borrer's scaly male fern.

Margaret Huitson.

### **Attenborough Fields, Bushey. Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2014. Leader; Joanne Colthup**

The area was new to me until I walked it over in preparation for the meeting, but it had been a regular venue in programmes for the Society going back to the 1970s. It proved to be very interesting as the fields were high with good views over Bushey and Watford. The area is named after a house which years ago belonged to the Attenborough family of BBC fame. Elizabeth said that one of the large houses nearby had belonged to the family but wasn't sure which.

There were just 5 of us on a sunny afternoon, but it was not too hot. We were immediately struck by the dominance of Red Bartsia – *Odonites vernus* which is a dull red semi parasitic plant. There must have been thousands of plants, more than I have ever seen before. The other dominant plant was Creeping Thistle – *Cirsium arvensis*, we saw many butterflies Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper feeding on the thistles.

We had an excellent view of a Buzzard hovering and then swooping as it searched for food. Elizabeth thought she saw a Sparrow Hawk but wasn't sure.

We saw several plants of Lady's Bedstraw – *Galium verum*, and then clumps of Sneezewort – *Achillea ptarmica* which was an exciting find as it not usually seen in our area as it prefers acid soil. I almost ignored it as it looks superficially like Yarrow.

Another interesting find by Marian was a hornets' nest in a large oak stump which was hollow. The hornets, large brown wasps were flying in and out giving us opportunity to observe them. We kept well away as they have powerful stings though they are not aggressive.

We visited a pond in the lowest part of the field, it was fenced off but we saw a Heron waiting patiently, and a Terrapin, large it appeared to be sleeping partially in the water. A family of Mallard with 5 grown chicks and several young Moorhen, were swimming. There was a lot of Gipsywort – *Lycopus europaeus* and what might have been an interesting Water Dropwort but it was not close enough to identify accurately. Standing on a bridge over a stream that was feeding the pond we saw Fool's Watercress – *Apium nodiflorum*.

On our return we passed a group of horses with about 5 foals, they were quite friendly, well cared for and they allowed us to pet them.

It was a varied and interesting afternoon and well worth another visit, perhaps earlier in the year.

Joanne Colthup