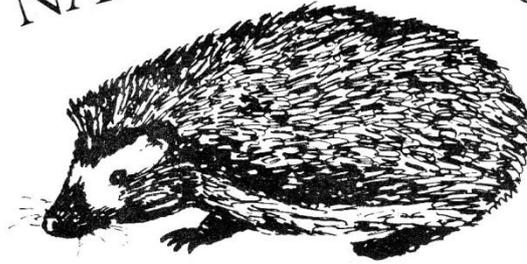


HARROW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY



PRESIDENT: GEOFF CORNEY

EDITOR: JOANNE COLTHUP

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Best wishes to all our members, I hope you are all enjoying the various activities on your programme and with a bit of luck the water will stop falling out of the sky eventually and allow us some dry walks soon, otherwise I suppose I will have to learn to swim.

The field trip though not a seaside one, should nevertheless be very interesting and with a bit of imagination we can enjoy exploring 'Walmington on Sea,' as I expect you know that the Brecklands was where Dad's Army was filmed.

In the Bell Hotel Thetford, where we will be staying the rooms are named after the characters in the series, so we could be dining in the Sergeant Wilson room, and a few yards away is a bronze statue of Captain Mannering. Thetford itself is very interesting and attractive in places with wildlife on the river Ouse and Thet. Last year Elizabeth and I went to see a Dipper on one of the tributaries and were told where we could see otters, so we went to the spot with many photographers, and saw one fishing in the river in broad daylight not far away. It was not at all nervous at the attention it was getting and I am hoping that the family is still living in the same holt. Four of us are going to stay at the hotel and explore the area in April, so that we can get an itinerary printed out, and more details are available from Margaret and myself. I am due to have an operation on my hand at the end of February, so may not be able to drive for a while, and I have other commitments which at present prevent me from enjoying your company but I hope that these will be resolved soon and I can resume normal life this summer.

Evelyn Crispe.

MEETING REPORTS

Friday 13th September, 2013 N.H. Museum Tring & Oddy Hill for Chiltern Gention. Leader: Joanne Colthup

As the weather was damp, it was a good day for us to meet indoors at the Natural History Museum. The museum at Tring houses the Rothschild collection of stuffed animals, birds and insects dating from the 19th Century. Most of us found the birds to be of greatest interest as every British bird was represented, and we were able to see close to, those usually seen at a distance. When I made a pre visit a few days before one of the staff was vacuuming a large bird, giving it an annual clean. He explained to me that the birds and animals could carry mites, and that when they were collected there were no laws of preservation, and that if a collector wanted a specimen it was just shot or caught. The Zebra cafe at the museum was closed for renovation so we found a pleasant place to eat in the town. The weather dried up after lunch so we drove a mile or so to Oddy Hill on the edge of Tring Park and the Ridgeway. When I explored the S.S.I. consisting of chalk grassland a few days before, it was a blaze of colour with Harebell, *Campanula rotundifolia*, Eyebright, *Euphrasia officinalis*, Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis* and Chiltern Gention, *Gentiana germanica*. Sadly when we visited the site the grass had been cut because it was perceived to be the end of the season, only a scattering of flowers could be seen. We did find the odd flower of Chiltern Gention which is very special to the area. The nearby woodland belonging to the Woodland Trust seemed to be poorly managed, it was choked with Beech saplings.

Joanne Colthup

Saturday 12th October 2013 Burnham Beeches. Leader: Joanne Colthup

The meeting was listed as General Natural History so we were open to whatever Burnham Beeches could offer. We were too early for the Autumn colour which the reserve is famous for, and we were unprepared for the surprises in store for us.

The reserve is owned by the City of London and is near to Slough. It is a wooded area dominated by Beech, many of them ancient trees. Soon after we started off it was obvious that it was to be a fungi walk, and as we had no fungi expert with us we had to refer to our books a great deal. As we encountered species after species in great profusion we were overwhelmed by the colour & the nooks and crannies in which they were found. At one point as we were crouched over a cluster of toadstools trying to identify them a Warden passed by and accused us of digging them up. We explained that we were trying to identify them and he was pacified. He then helpfully pointed out a group of Honey Fungus nearby.

The list is probably not complete as some we were unable to identify.

Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*)

Penny Bun (*Boletus edulis*)

Marasmius candidus

Turkeytail Fungus (*Coriolus/trametes versicolor*)

Honey Fungus (*Armillaria mellea*)

Crust Fungi (*Stereum sp.*)

Beechwood Sickener (*Russula mairei* now *nobilis*)

Common Stump Brittlestem (*Psathyrella piluliformis*)

Golden Scalycap (*Pholiota aurivella*)

The Blusher (*Amanita rubescens*)

Sulphur Tuft (*Hypholoma fasciculare*)

Amethyst Deceiver (*Laccaria amethystea*)

Branched Oyster (*Pleurotus Cornucopiae*)

Honey Fungus (*Armillaria polymyces/ostoyae*)

Porcelain fungus (*Oudemansiella mucida*)

Clustered Bonnet (*Mycena inclinata*)

Beef-steak fungus (*Fistulina hepatica*)

It was pleasant enough to sit outside to enjoy lunch at the cafe, having enjoyed an unforgettable display.

Joanne Colthup

26th October 2013: Fungus Foray in Pear Wood. Leaders: Claire Abbott and Rosie Etheridge

We had a good turnout for our annual fungus hunt in Pear Wood. Our crazy weather makes it impossible to predict the most auspicious day for a foray. This year many fungi had fruited early and were already over. For example, Clouded Agaric (*Clitocybe nebularis*) was conspicuous by its absence. However we still found more than 40 different species.

There were plenty of Bonnet Caps (*Mycena*), including the Bleeding Bell Cap (*M. Haematopus*) and the Reddish-Spotted Bell Cap (*M. maculata*). Other familiar species included Amethyst Deceiver (*Laccaria Amethystea*, Butter Cap (*Collybia butyracea*) and Sulphur Tuft (*Hypholoma fasciculare*)

The most spectacular find was Hen of the Woods (*Grifola frondosa*), growing in great masses near Pear Lake. Other interesting species included White Saddle (*Helvella crispa*) and Tan Ear (*Otidea alutacea*). These belong to the Ascomycetes – the spore shooters. Their spores are produced in sacs and, when ripe, they are ejected with great force, like water from a water pistol.

Thanks to all who attended the foray and especial thanks to Elizabeth who as always helped us identify the species.

Rosie Etheridge.

Pinner Memorial Park Tree Walk November 9th 2013: Leader Margaret Huitson

Fourteen of us gathered on a gloomy Saturday morning outside West House in Pinner. We started by looking at a good specimen of *Magnolia Grandiflora*; common names being Bull Bay or Southern Magnolia. It is an evergreen and flowers later than the Magnolias we are accustomed to - it is a native of the Southeast United States and it was

introduced into Britain around 1726. We could see across to the Swamp Cypress *Taxodium distichum*, the top of which appeared to have come off in a storm on the 27th/28th October. It is deciduous and still had all its leaves and may well have stood in its present position since about 1850. It is similar to one planted on the Canons estate. We continued into the Peace Garden which was laid out to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Joanne Verden from the Pinner Association has worked hard to have the garden set up and to ensure that they are maintained to a high standard. We admired the Red Oak *Quercus Rubra* which still had sufficient leaves on to show us its bright, burnished red colour. On the other side of the path the leaves of the *Ginkgo biloba* or Maidenhair tree had turned yellow for Autumn. We discussed this unique species which has no living relatives and is similar to fossils dating back 270 million years. It is native to China. By this time on the walk it had begun to drizzle but we carried on looking at more trees. In the central grass area of the Peace Garden stands a Weeping Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* "Pendula". It looked a bit bedraggled following the recent storm but was still carrying a large number of Ash keys or Samara. Apparently these trees are usually the result of a crown grafted to a rootstock of common Ash and this one certainly looked as if that could be true. We also looked at the decorative Yews *Taxus baccata* 'fastigata' and then moved out of the Peace Garden which had once been the vegetable garden for the house. The area by the playground had once been the orchard and certainly an old Pear *Pyrus communis* remains. There has been a house on the site (not the present one) for 500 years. The Cutlers were the last owners and in 1947 the house was sold in trust for the people of Harrow to Harrow Council.

The rain was becoming heavier. We noted the Silver Maple *Acer saccharinum* a native of Eastern N America which was rapidly losing its leaves. Far to the right a large English Oak *Quercus robur* was at least 200 years old and a remnant of an old field boundary and a stand of Scots pines *Pinus sylvestris* had been planted by the owners to block the view of the new station from the house. Three Californian Redwoods *Sequoia sempervirens* had been planted by Harrow Council and this species is the tallest tree in the world. We admired the Dawn Redwood *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, another deciduous tree long to be thought extinct, which was located in southeastern China as recently as 1941. Its growth rate can actually average a metre per annum. The rain had by now become steady so we decided to retire to Daisy's in the Park for some refreshment and we could admire the Blue or Atlas cedar *Cedras atlanticus* originally from the Atlas Mountains from the dry.

Margaret Huitson.

Thursday 21st November 2013 The Withy Beds Rickmansworth. Leader: Joanne Colthup

I had known of the existence of the Withy Beds for many years as I had spent most of my life in the Rickmansworth area, but I had never visited. It is a wet area of willow marsh, and the willows may have at one time been grown commercially. A few years ago it was bought by Three Rivers District Council and developed as a nature reserve as one of the few remaining wet lands in Hertfordshire. The River Colne runs through and there are wet ditches and woodland consisting mainly of Aspen *Populus tremula*, Crack Willow *Salix fragilis*, and Goat Willow *Salix caprea*. The dominant grass was Common Reed *Phragmites australis*, growing in and around the water. Despite its name, it is a grass and not a reed, the seed heads hang on over the winter. The reeds and sedges were too deteriorated or out of reach to identify. The reserve is very well managed with informative boards and an excellent raised non slip wooden walk way to lead us through. We noticed bird boxes, and especially large boxes intended for owls so a great effort has been made to attract wild life. A spider which has not been seen in Hertfordshire since 1880 was recently recorded in the Withy Beds. We looked and listened hopefully for birds but only saw a couple of Mallard and heard the usual common garden birds. At the end of the walkway we came to a large open meadow which was dry underfoot so we walked back to the entrance. The meadow may be good in summer time for flowers. At the end of the meadow we found an apple tree still with plenty of fruit with very large sweet apples, a relic from cultivation or grown from a thrown away apple core.

Joanne Colthup

Sunday 1st December 2013 Bird Watching Walk with the Friends of Canons Park.

Our group along with others met at Donnefield Avenue entrance to Canons Park at 10.00 a.m. We saw quite a few birds, it was dry and not too cold. At one point I counted seventeen people. Some of us walked to the Basin, where we saw a Heron, Black-headed Gulls, Moorhens, Mallards, Jackdaws and Jays. In total it was 22 different birds we saw or heard, the last being a Green Woodpecker. Tits – Blue and Great, Blackbird, Robin, Crow, Nuthatch,

Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Magpie, Wood Pigeon, Redwing, Fieldfare, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Ring-necked Parakeet.

Marian Sartin

Visit to Maple Lodge Nature Reserve on Friday 17th January 2014

The day started well for birds with a view of a Little Egret from the road passing Pinner Park Farm and a Barnacle Goose and a Canada Goose seen from the road passing Rickmansworth Aquadrome. A Red Kite was seen by John and Elizabeth as they went to open the Maple Lodge Reserve. Brian Hunter took nine of us round to first the Rotunda Hide and then the Teal Hide where we had excellent views of Teal with the males showing the bright yellow patch on the side of their black tails. A Little Grebe made an appearance in between long dives under water. The black and white male and dark brown female Tufted Ducks were also about as well as the usual Mallards. Walking along, some of us had a fleeting glimpse of Siskins in the Alder and a good view of a Goldcrest with its distinctive yellow patch on the top of its head. Many of us also had good views of a Great Spotted Woodpecker. As expected the reserve was very wet but we were fine keeping to the well-maintained paths. Some of us continued up to the Long Hedge path and saw 3 species of geese on the field: Canada, Greylag, and Egyptian. Green Sandpipers were seen earlier on the water by the farm buildings but they had gone by the time we arrived possibly driven off by a passing fox. There was also no sign of the Cackling Canada Goose, a much smaller Canada Goose that was seen on the reserve 2 weeks earlier. We were told it might have been an escapee as its flight feathers looked as though they might have been clipped at one time. We walked back to the club house and enjoyed a hot drink while watching a range of small birds on the well-stocked bird feeders by the hide: Great tits, Blue tits, Chaffinches, Dunnocks, and Coal tits. Grey squirrels and Moor Hens also joined in the fun. Elizabeth Stainthorpe was thanked for helping with the trip and being the gate person and providing the tea and coffee. On leaving the reserve we saw a Green Woodpecker that is often in the field opposite the entrance and a Buzzard flew over. A good visit.

Margaret Huitson

Saturday January 25th 2014. Cassiobury Park for birds. Leader Brian Hunter.

Nine members took part in a walk around Cassiobury Park looking primarily for birds. There had been so much rain on the previous days that to avoid mud and pools of water the walk was entirely on hard-surfaced paths. Even so in several places water was flowing across the path. The area we walked around was mainly an official nature reserve but the majority of visitors seemed to be dog walkers which must have an effect on the local bird population. However we managed to see the following species of birds:-

Blue tit, Great tit, Long-tailed tit, Blackbird, Song thrush, Mistle thrush, Wood pigeon, Robin, Crow, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Mute swan, Canada goose, Mallard, Coot, Moorhen, Heron and Black-headed gull. We also heard the following birds:-

Wren, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Nuthatch, and Great Spotted Woodpecker. We were lucky to not only hear the call of this last bird but also its drumming suggesting that it was already establishing a territory ready for spring. The river Gade which flows through the lower part of the park was in full flow, very fast and high but not yet bursting its banks. We saw no birds on the river. We had an enjoyable walk and saw or heard a total of twenty four bird species. As it was a Saturday we were also able to see the miniature railway in operation with children having rides on it.

Brian Hunter.

North Mymms for Snowdrops. Saturday February 8th 2014. Leader: Margaret Huitson

Eight of us decided to go ahead with this trip and the weather was not as bad as had been forecast earlier. All of us on our journeys to the site drove through pools of varying sizes and saw flooding in the fields. The snowdrops in the churchyard were perfect and the yellow Winter aconites another harbinger of spring were spreading well. Jackdaws were calling all around us and at least one Long-tailed tit was seen. The fields were too muddy for walking so we walked up to the bridge near the church to look at the raging torrent. Normally this river bed has no obvious running water as there are swallow holes in the vicinity and the stream runs underground to emerge in North Mymms Park as the River Colne. Some of us then went on to Shenley Park for refreshments. Those of us

who went on to walk around the well-kept orchard were rewarded by lots of calls from birds hiding in the bushes. We were glad to see Redwings and Fieldfares once they settled down after the Sparrow Hawk, that John spotted moved away.

Margaret Huitson

Bentley Priory Nature Reserve visit on Thursday 20th February 2014

Nine of us met on a wettish morning at the top of Old Lodge Way. We all started up the main path. The horizontal patterns on the bark of the Wild Cherry trees showed up nicely in the rain and as we went on, the stream by the path was chuckling along nicely. Jackdaws were calling as well as Great tits, Blue tits, and Song Thrushes. The distinctive laughing call of the Green Woodpecker was heard. Wild Arum and Herb Robert leaves looked green and lush. We all walked up to the deer enclosure and admired the small herd of Fallow deer. As we came to leave the main path a few members decided that discretion was the better part of valour and either returned or went on an alternative walk. Several of us paddled our way down to Summer House Lake. There was a White Faced Cormorant on the lake as well as the usual Mallards, Canada Geese, Coots and Moorhens. Again several of the party decided to take the shorter route back. Four of us carried on and were rewarded by the sight of a Little Egret, bright white in the dank woodland. One or two of us were lucky enough to see a large number of Redwings as well as Greenfinches towards the end of the walk. We arrived back just as the weather was settling down for a pleasant afternoon.

Margaret Huitson

We thought we would end with a poem by Edith Nesbit (15th August 1858 – 4th May 1924.)

Child's Song in Spring

The Silver Birch is a dainty lady,
She wears a satin gown;
The elm tree makes the old churchyard shady,
She will not live in town.

The English oak is a sturdy fellow,
He gets his green coat late;
The willow is smart in a suit of yellow
While brown the beech trees wait.

Such a gay green gown God gives the larches-
As green as he is good!
The hazels hold up their arms for arches,
When spring rides through the wood.

The chestnut's proud, and the lilac's pretty,
The poplar's gentle and tall,
But the plane tree's kind to the poor dull city-
I love him best of all!