

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

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May 2012

SPRING 2012

The Committee for 2012/13 is as follows:

Barclay Arnott	740500
Ann Biggs, Chair	740810
John Burgess	749441
Freda Crofts	Hon. President
Susan Everitt, Treas	740352
Wendy Lanman	741138
Jane Marsh	740680
Paul Mason	740219
Robert Norman	740473
Chris Prescott	749038
Gill Smith	741662
Mike Smith	741662

NineAcre Wood, the Future



Website:
www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk

Please feel free to get in touch with any committee member with questions or information you might have. If you have any specific records of flora and fauna, please send them to Paul Mason, 13 Aldreth Road, Haddenham (740219).

A cold day in March saw several members of the Conservation Society assembled at NineAcre Wood. Concerns had been raised over some aspects of the wood's management; consequently a meeting was arranged between Ian Froggatt (The Woodland Trust's Local Manager) and ourselves to discuss these aspects. A tour of the wood followed and various items were discussed.

The wood had originally been planted over-dense to ensure coverage, to be thinned selectively as the wood matured. There was an exceptional success rate, and as no thinning had been done the dense canopy had caused many less vigorous varieties to bolt. The spindly trees and sparse floor is particularly apparent at the far end of the wood. Wild flowers had failed to germinate as inadequate light was able to reach the woodland floor.

Ian explained that the Trust's management policy centres on a policy of minimum intervention. Studies had shown that the natural processes (although taking longer) create a sustainable and robust habitat. Exceptions include unsafe trees as well as some community intervention from local groups.

Following a walk around the figure of eight path it was concluded that there was room for improvement, Scalloped edges into the main bulk of the wood would improve diversity by softening the transition from path to wood and encouraging a wider variety of species.

Ian was happy for a working group to be formed, led by ourselves. To achieve this goal he would lend his expertise as to which trees should be removed. As any work would have to be carried out during the winter months, another visit later in the year would confirm the plan of attack.

All in all it was a mutually beneficial meeting, NineAcre Wood being helped the most.

Contributed by John Burgess

Membership information

Subscription rates
1 Jan to 31 Dec 2012
Individual: £6
Family: £10

If you wish to join the Society, send your cheque, made out to *Haddenham Conservation Society*, with your name, address and telephone number, to

Susan Everitt
21 Twenty Pence Road
Wilburton, Ely CB6 3RM.

This will entitle you to receive our regular newsletter and will give you free entry to the winter talks.

(A saving of £2.50 per session).

Chairman's Annual Report

We had another good winter season of talks, arranged by Ann Biggs, that included, not only tonight's about Meerkats, but also we learned about Red Kites and Otters, Cambridgeshire's Butterflies, Spain's Wild Places and the Nene Washes. Three fine newsletters appeared under the great editorship of Wendy Lanman.

Star event in the summer was a visit kindly arranged by Michael Church to the new improved pumping engine by the Old West River where many members saw how important this installation is to keep the fens well drained for agriculture. We thank David Jordan for demonstrating the power of the new pumps. Michael showed us how large the area is that is controlled by the installation. We noted that Swallows were already using the new buildings and also that new Owl and Bat boxes were part of the plan. Blossoms & Bygones was another success and the children's Barn Owl pellet dissection table was continuously in use. Thanks also go to Ann Sherwood for leading another great Small Animal trap day in September.

Some members attended the Bird Ringing and Moth Trapping events in Robert Norman's orchard organised by Stuart Sharp. These had to be organised at very short notice according to weather conditions.

More nestboxes were set up around the parish, with 12 spread around The Old Burial Ground and the Churchyard proper. Nineacre Wood and Aldreth Road Orchard also had more added to those already there. Another was erected by Aldreth Causeway. A Kestrel box put up in Nineacre Wood was promptly taken over by Jackdaws, but hopefully a Little Owl box sited on the edge of the Petrus wood will attract the right species. The latter two boxes were made by Jake Allsop.

Over recent years we have had concerns about the Woodland Trust's management of NineAcre Wood and contacts with their changing field staff. Hopefully this has now been rectified and work parties will carry out work on widening rides and maybe some pollarding during the next winter.

We continue to watch for any local Planning applications that concern wildlife and to have input to the management of Fairchild's Meadows. Work parties in the Old Burial Ground led by Mike Smith have gone ahead with the teams' usual efficiency but more volunteers are always needed.

Our website has gone from strength to strength. Many people are now logging on to it and contacts have resulted from it. Almost daily wildlife news can be found and updates of forthcoming events are included. Systematic lists of *The Birds of Haddenham* book have been updated, along with Haddenham's Wildflowers and Dragonflies and Orthoptera (bush crickets and grasshoppers) have also been uploaded. Many thanks go to Tina Bone for designing and managing it.

During the year Jim Sawyer decided to no longer be HCS treasurer so thanks go to him for his work. Susan Everitt bravely offered to take on what can be a thankless task sometimes, and we thank her.

Finally, thanks go to each and every one of your committee who work well as a team and with great enthusiasm.

Paul Mason



Thank You Paul

Paul Mason has resigned from his position as Chairman. He was a founding member way back in 1985, and has worked extremely hard as Chairman over the last 16 years. He has monitored and recorded the wildlife, both flora and fauna, around the parish and has been instrumental in ensuring that any maintenance work has been done in such a way that it has not endangered the unique environment we enjoy in Haddenham.

The Committee wish to thank him wholeheartedly and feel very fortunate that he will continue to share his extensive knowledge as a committee member.

This does, however, mean that we need a new Chair. Ann Biggs has accepted the role for one year, after which we shall need to find someone to replace her. Would you like to join the Committee with a view to becoming Chair next year? If you would like to find out more, please call Ann on 740810.



HCS Website

As you will have noticed if you read the Chairman's Report, the Systematic lists of Haddenham's butterflies and moths, crickets and grasshoppers, birds and plants have been updated on the website.

Past newsletters are also available to read as well as past and future events.

There are also some beautiful photos of birds which can help you identify what you might have seen yourself.

Use the website - it's there to help you and for you to enjoy.

Renew your subs!

Subscriptions were due on
1st January.
Please pay promptly if you haven't
done so already - it really helps.

Thank you.

News From Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

Strange things are happening this year, but at least the reed warblers are back again. They came in small batches this time, so there wasn't that one morning when all of sudden they were chatting away in great number. The main thing, though, is that they are back and were chatting in chorus on 8th May when I opened the window.

The strangest of all, though, is that I heard a cuckoo several times between the 27th and 30th of March. Admittedly, it had been very warm the week before (the 30th marked the downward turn). I know it was a cuckoo because I checked that it wasn't a collared dove, which can sound like a rather slurred cuckoo.

At the end of February I was looking out of the window towards an old willow tree where a great-spotted woodpecker had nested a couple of years before and saw a starling cleaning out the nest (starlings had used it last year). I had never seen that before. It dived into the hole and come out with a beak full of debris which it let drop to the ground. It then proceeded to wipe its beak vigorously on a branch before disappearing again into the hole and starting all over again. As I write this, I'm sure there are starlings nesting there.

We have all seen kingfishers now which is a relief. Those very cold, sharp spells we had late this winter could well have killed them again, but all seems well.

Cormorants have been and gone and, whatever one feels for them, they are beautiful to watch as they swim so gracefully after the fish.

Alas, the blanket weed is still here. Last year's is a fibrous mass covering the bottom of the pond in our corner. That could have been due to the fact that the reeds had grown to such an extent that they were creating the ideal environment in the shallow water. Their edges have now been sprayed and the water is deeper, so that might solve the problem.

Old Burial Ground Update

Why are some dog owners so inconsiderate?



The Old Burial Ground, before it was Old. From an old postcard

Our last working party on 18 March aimed to tidy up the area for spring. The weather threatened us, but eventually came good. This allowed us to get on with some grass cutting to encourage the yellow rattle, shrub pruning to open up the pathways and to encourage new growth and some weeding in the butterfly garden to show off the flowering plants to best advantage. We also spread more wood chippings to set off the plants and reduce weed growth.

Many thanks to the volunteers who gave their time and effort.

We now look forward to another sparkling display in this lovely area from spring onwards.

But not everything is smelling of roses.

Dog poo definitely does not, especially when it is on your clothes or tools!

To our dismay, we found dog poo randomly distributed and partly hidden by grass; two of our volunteers and some tools became contaminated. This now seems to be a serious problem to us and to visitors of course, especially to children playing in the grass.

Do those few dog owners who persist in leaving this hazard ever think of the consequences of their selfishness?

Why should volunteers give up their time to keep the area open and a pleasure to visit be rewarded by having to clean stinking dog poo from themselves and their tools?

We have had awareness notices put up, arranged for a dog poo disposal bin at the entrance and now we are requesting the county dog warden to visit and catch the culprits. A £1000 fine could be the consequence!

Can anyone suggest any further measure we could take to try and educate the irresponsible few? Any suggestions to any Conservation Society member please.

Meanwhile could we please urge the majority of responsible dog owners using the area to take every opportunity to advise the irresponsible few of their social duties.

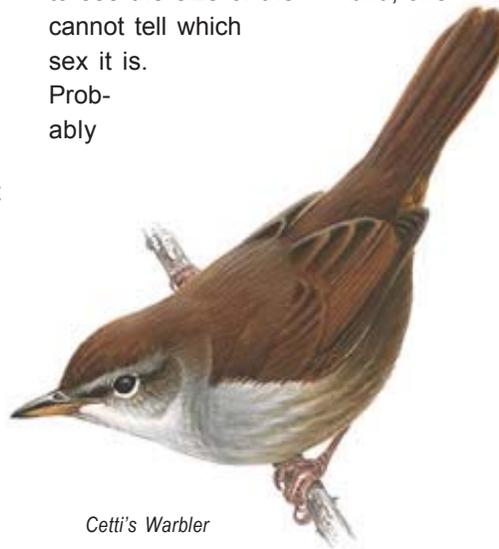
Contributed by Mike Smith, the second title added by Editor



An Up-Down, Very Hot, Cold, Very Dry and Extremely Wet Period Confounds our Wildlife

As we all know, it's been a strange time lately weather-wise - drought, extreme cold, hot; we have had the lot, including lately a heck of a lot of "rain-drought". Wildlife doesn't know whether it is coming or going. The winter visiting birds didn't know when to go back to their breeding grounds in northern climes and summer visiting birds that breed here are only creeping back in dribs and drabs. But let's start at the beginning, on Jan 1st. At Bury Fen Corner there were 100+ Fieldfares, several Chaffinches and two Bramblings coming down to scarce puddles to drink, and two Kestrels and a Common Buzzard further along Dambank. One species that had not been observed before Christmas was Stonechat, but two spent about two weeks at the southern end of Long Drove from the 11th of January. A flock of 50+ Yellowhammers and 50 Goldfinches were on Galls Fen on the 11th, together with 80-100 Fieldfares, another Stonechat and so many Carrion Crows that they were difficult to count because they kept moving about and mobbing a Common Buzzard. On the same day approx. 150 Linnets were feeding at the junction with Claytons Drove and Long Drove and were an obvious target for the Merlin that had been noted there for several weeks. On the 13th, Whooper Swans (two adults and four juveniles) flew over Aldreth in the morning and were then seen in a field north of the Earith/Haddenham Road. There were also approx. 35 Great Black-backs loafing in a field along Dambank Drove, plus two pairs of Grey Partridges. Roe Deer are becoming commoner in the fens now and winter is the best time to see these shy animals because they have less cover. Four were seen by

Claytons Drove by Simon Stirrup on Jan 31st and five a week or so later not far away, all of which seemed to be horned males. Let's hope they don't become a pest. It's been a good winter for seeing hunting Hen Harriers, with both sexes seen on occasions and a "Ringtail" was noted by Jake Allsop near to Hog Hill Drove on Feb 1st. Ringtail refers to either a first or second year male or adult female. Unless one is close enough to see the size of the bird, one cannot tell which sex it is. Probably



Cetti's Warbler

the same bird was seen there again in early March. On the same February day a Peregrine Falcon was observed over Dambank and two days later a flock of 200 Stock Doves were feeding on nearby land. There could very well be a connection as the latter can be good prey for the former. By the time the very cold weather set in birds were coming into gardens more for food; on Feb 9th two nice Tree Sparrows were in Jake's garden and numbers built up to five two days later, accompanied by seven Yellowhammers. On the 11th Fieldfare numbers in Robert Norman's orchard were estimated at a staggering 5000, opportunistically feeding on fallen apples, accompanied most unusually by a Snipe seen

actually poking its long beak into an apple. Was it feeding on the fruit flesh or had it discovered insects in there? On 1st April a new Kestrel nest box was put up on the edge of NineAcre Wood. It was kindly made by Jake Allsop and erected by John Burgess and Barclay Arnott. Residents moved in a few days later ... a pair of Jackdaws! A Little Owl box, also made by Jake, was installed in the edge of Petrus Wood. Talking of Little Owls - a phone call from a Hillrow resident led to Jake taking an injured one to the Raptor Centre at Somersham. Hopefully it will be restored to good health and released where it was found. No April fooling was going on when, also on the 1st, Ann Biggs heard a **Cetti's Warbler** at Guppy's Pond. This is a first for Haddenham parish. On 5th April the first spring migrating Wheatears appeared in Galls Fen when four were seen and Great Spotted Woodpeckers were drumming in several places around the village. We are likely to have at least one and possibly two pairs of Coal Tits breeding this year and Goldcrests could be nesting in conifers close by the Primary School. Of all the ducks that breed in our fen drains Gadwall are very unusual, but a pair was noted on 9th April by Simon Stirrup in a drain off Cross Drove. Mallards are numerous every year and one or two pairs of Tufted Ducks breed annually, but Gadwall ... well, that's never been recorded before. From the 10th around eight Wheatears could be seen in two places (four + four). They stayed right up to the start of the very wet weather, but as it was almost impossible to get out again for several days we don't know if the birds stayed or went. A report was received on 14th April that there had

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been a Cuckoo at Guppy's Pond on March 31st which is an extremely early date but the observer was positive about it not being a Collared Dove which emits a sort of backward ooo-cuck call. The 14th April saw a Swallow back on its breeding station of Station Road. After the rain subsides what can we expect? Well, all those incoming summer migrants of course! Spring flowers showing well in Fairchild's Meadow were a carpet of Cowslips and Cuckooflower in the wet places, although Lesser Celandine seemed to struggle this year. Dog Violets were visible in the wooded areas. Out on the fen an early Pennycress plant was in flower along Long Drove. (See website)

About That Cetti's Warbler

We hear all too often that bird species are declining, but sometimes there is a good story. A Cetti's Warbler is a good one. This very common European continental bird first arrived in England back in 1973 in Kent where it bred. Since then, despite surviving years with very hard frosts, it is now spreading, mainly across the southern half of the UK. However, it is rather a skulking dark brown bird and likes water edges with overhanging trees and bushes. Although it is a shy bird and difficult to see, it has a remarkable call/song which can be heard some distance away. It almost shouts at you with a loud "Witch witch-a-witch-a witch-a" gradually tailing off. When you hear one coming from the waterside undergrowth, you certainly know it's very different from any other bird song. The Guppy's bird doesn't seem to have stayed this year, but it has been once, so anything can happen from now on.

Illustration taken from the RSPB website.



Garden Pests as I See Them

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

I tend both an allotment and a garden, don't use any pesticides -



and only very occasionally have damage caused by 'pests' (Brian being the worst one - I just hope he doesn't read this).

Mostly the damage I notice leads me on to an interesting discovery, like the rose leaf sawfly I observed a few years ago or, this year, searching for lily beetles (before any damage); the numerous red beetles I discovered on the lilies after the first two were actually ladybirds. I can't find any lily beetles: have the birds eaten the adults and are the ladybirds eating their grubs?

I have seen wasps eat caterpillars so I leave them well alone. Whenever, in the past, I have been stung, it has been my fault by trapping them accidentally (under my chin once when I felt a tickle!). I haven't been stung since I learnt to move slowly when they are around

and keep my mouth shut (which Brian thinks is a great advantage, but then he insists on flailing his arms around at great speed whenever he sees a wasp).

Slugs, snails, beetles, ants and aphids feed the birds and small mammals so, as I'm very happy to have those in my garden, I don't mind the odd 'chomp' or two on my plants. The whole cycle seems to keep numbers under control.

Another great advantage is that my shed and my garden contain very little poison (I have some rather enthusiastic



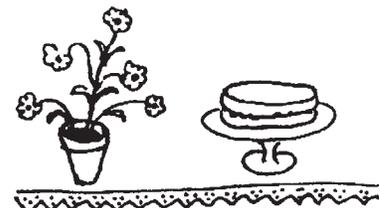
bindweed) and I can spend the money saved on more plants - or maybe a rather nice bench to admire them from. Not having to constantly hunt down all the 'pests' to eradicate them, I also have time to sit and watch. All these pests - and that includes me - have a role to play in the great scheme of things.

Plant and Cake Sale

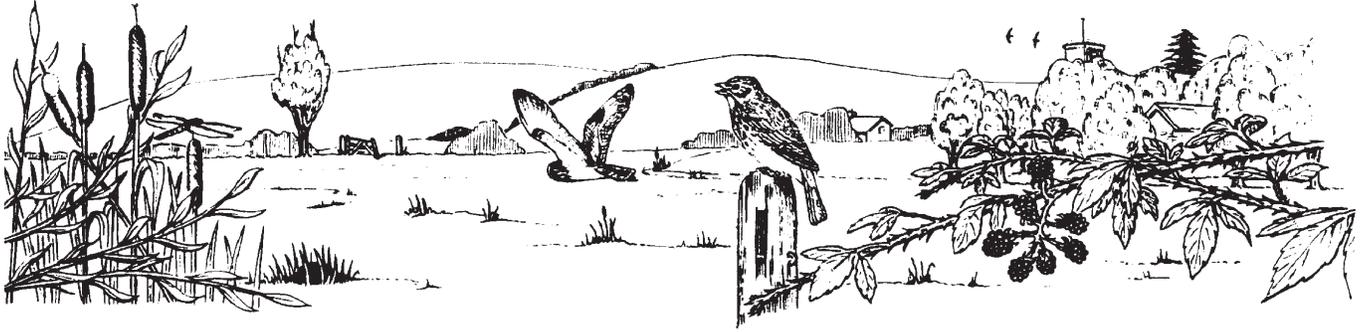
We have shattered all previous records! Over £415, cakes and plants combined - the cakes beating the plants to the gatepost.

You have been fantastic, all of you who spent hours slaving away in the kitchen or the garden, or helping out on the day - many, many thanks.

The plants we offered were really good, interesting and great value. As for the cakes, well - they were a feast for the eyes even before they were tasted. Our little stall has gained something of a reputation.



We sold the few cakes left over (probably due to the combination of cool weather and bank holiday week end) to the Arkenstall Centre. The unsold plants are now on offer at The Galleries so, if you didn't make the stall on The Green, you might still be able to pick up a bargain there.



SUMMER EVENTS

MOTH TRAPPING AND BIRD RINGING EVENTS

Date and time to be announced

If you would like to participate, let Paul Mason know (740219) and he will call you when the time is right. These events are held at very short notice because they depend on weather conditions,

JUBILEE DAY

Tuesday, June 5
Recreation Ground

HCS will be joining other groups in the village and will have a stand promoting the Society and various events we are hoping to hold during the year. Come along to see what we have to offer - and support us!

BOATING DAY ON GUPPY'S POND

Early September - a Sunday tba - 2:00-4:00 pm

Our yearly chauffeured boating day. Look out for the yellow posters nearer the date.

WINTER TALKS

Indoor meetings are held at the Arkenstall Centre, Haddenham, on the second Tuesday of each month from September to December, and February to April at 8:00 pm.

Members free. Non-members welcome for a nominal fee.

All welcome to stay for a (free) drink and a chat after each talk.

Don't forget that the Winter talks now start in September!

Just in case the Newsletter isn't published in time, look out for the yellow posters around the village from end of August.