

N E W S

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

L E T T E R

Vol. 26 No. 1
February 2011

WINTER 2010

The Committee for 2010/11 is as follows:

Barclay Arnott	740500
Ann Biggs	740810
John Burgess	749441
Freda Crofts (Hon. President)	
Susan Everitt	740352
Wendy Lanman	741138
Brian Lanman	741138
Jane Marsh	740680
Paul Mason	740219
Robert Norman	740473
Chris Prescott	749038
Gill Smith	741662
Mike Smith	741662
Andrew Threadgold	740650
Barbara York	741624

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).

Membership information

Subscription rates

1 Jan to 31 Dec 2011:

Individual: £8

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 Brian Lanman, 1 The Pond, Haddenham, Ely CB6 3XG.

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).

Exciting Plans for Year Ahead

For some time now the Committee has wanted to create some more publications such as a "Wildflowers of Haddenham" and similar books on the dragonflies and butterflies found in our parish. However, to make them meaningful they would need to be printed in colour. An update of the "Birds of Haddenham" would have been another target book, but now that so many bird photographs have been taken, that volume also would need to be in colour.

One problem would have been higher costs of colour printing and the other is that, under the present national financial climate, there just is not anywhere where we could get grants to produce books of the quality we would desire. So we had to think again. How could we disseminate the large amount of knowledge we had about our wildlife, and where could people find it for themselves?

Over the next year we do intend to publish some more local walks where many of the wildflowers can be found, but, in the main, we can do these ourselves with a bit of desktop publishing. We also want to produce some identification cards for the younger members of our community and maybe the school might find them useful.

We came to the conclusion, however, that the best way we can do much of what we desire is to set up our own HCS website. We have space on the village Haddenham.org site, but we do have to share it, quite rightly, with other village interests. We need much more room to include the many photos we have so we set about creating our own website. The committee does not include anybody with the necessary expertise so we asked at the winter monthly meetings for a volunteer. A member, Tina Bone, came forward. Tina and her husband David do not live in the parish, but, as others, like to come in from nearby places because they enjoy what we do and appreciate the quality of our winter meetings. Tina is an artist, has her own website and offered to host ours and to construct it with all the detail supplied to her.

This is now ongoing and the site is being built. For a time it was not uploaded to the net while the front pages were installed, but now it is and you can log on and watch it grow. As yet you will not find it in any search engine such as Google, but, in about a month, it will be there. In the meantime, type the following into a blank new email: www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk and then click on it. Once you have brought it up put it into your Favourites section.

There will be an About us section, which has been completed, along with Aims and Objects. Details of winter and summer programmes will be there along with Latest News, Publications available, Your Views and Comments, Committee Members and Officers. All these will come over time and then a Photo Gallery for birds, wildflowers, insects, fungi and other interesting items, fen views and habitats. Photos will be those taken in the parish and by members. Species Lists will follow later.

So, you see, it will be an exciting time ahead.

From a Productive Autumn to a Bleak, White Winter

Redstart by Ann Biggs



At the beginning of September the Hobby family described in our last issue were still around, but eventually the parents deserted the two young; they had to learn their own survival techniques. We must hope they survive their stay in Africa and return next year. As they went our first winter visitors arrived in the form of 300+ Lapwing and 125+ Golden Plover on 5th Sept along Long Drove - seen by Simon Stirrup - and the following day there were, along Back Drove and Foulmere Drove, approximately 3300 Lapwings in three fields and about 500 Golden Plovers. Strangely, two Snipes were in the field with them.

Then a great find on September 9th was a smart passage male Common Redstart at Aldreth found by Barbara York. It stayed until the 12th. Around the same time in Aldreth fens six Marsh Harriers, three Common Buzzards, two Hobbies and a large female Peregrine to the west towards Willingham/Earith road were recorded by a visiting birder (D Poyser). During the rest of September Kingfishers were noted on the Old West River and Green Sandpipers foraged along the muddy edges of the local fen drains.

Also, an unusual bird for Haddenham started appearing at several garden feeding stations. The Coal Tit is arguably a bird that likes conifer forests as in Thetford Forest in Norfolk. However, from here on they were seen in several Haddenham gardens in Duck Lane, Station Road, Bury Lane and High Street. Another was in Aldreth so it will be interesting to see how long they stay.

On Sep 28th along Dambank

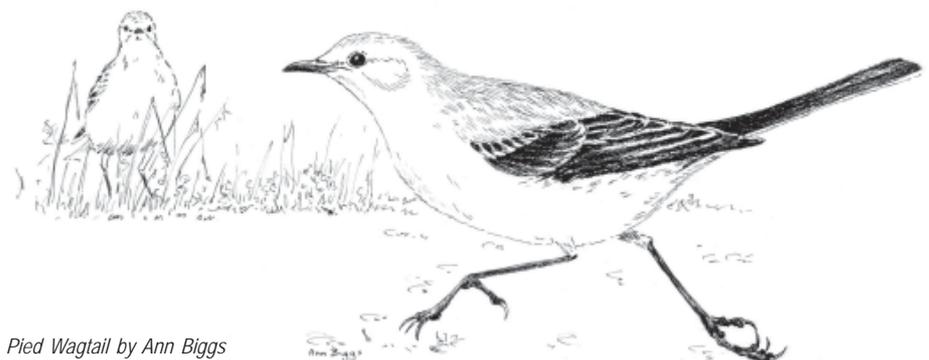
about 50 Linnets, two Kestrels, 500 Lapwings, plus three Grey Partridges were noted, and two Cormorants perched on fencing around the farm reservoir. Three Bramblings flew over two days later. On Oct 8th in a Duck Lane garden, two Siskins, two Jays and a late singing chiffchaff. (Barbara York). On Oct 10th Simon Stirrup had a quick look around and reported: "Not much, but I did see a distant Hen Harrier, six Corn Buntings (haven't seen any for ages) and a flock of 50 Goldfinches plus a few Redwings. I've seen a couple of Chiffchaffs around Aldreth. The previous weekend we saw a colony of bees with a nest in tree hole near Flatbridge. I don't remember seeing a colony of wild bees at a nest before in

the UK"

On Oct 21st a co-ordinated Migration watch was carried out between 07.00h and 10.45h and flying birds were counted, all going roughly SW. The wind was from the SW and there was a hard frost. 2/8 thin cloud (more vapour trails than anything). Counts were as follows 1247 Fieldfare, 222 Redwing, 1 Blackbird, 1 Song Thrush, 6 Greenfinches, 106 Chaffinches, 2 Bramblings, 3 Goldfinches, 31 Linnets, 16 Meadow Pipits, 2 *alba* Wagtails, 69 Skylark (some probably local), 606 Woodpigeons, 6 Yellowhammers, 6 Reed Buntings, 1 Lapland Bunting (this is new for the parish), 1 Peregrine moving fast high to the SW, 1 Merlin low to the south, 2 Sparrowhawks to the W, 1 Common Buzzard (local), 2 Kestrels (local). In the fields, 78 Golden Plovers, 80 Lapwings and 4 Roe Deer to the south of Sutton. (This count was made by Dick Newell, Monica and Owen Marks). This was a grand effort carried out by very keen knowledgeable birders.

On Oct 25th at Aldreth, near The Boot, 100 Lapwings and 35 Golden Plovers were present, but best was a large female Sparrowhawk on prey in an open field being harried by 7 Magpies and 3 Crows. Along Dambank were 4 Corn Buntings, 2 Reed Buntings and several Linnets. A Kestrel was resting on the power lines. Along Long Drove 150+ Lapwings and 300+ Fieldfares, plus 1 Jay - which is surprising for out on fen.

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Pied Wagtail by Ann Biggs

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North of Hillrow Causeway about a 1000 Lapwings were flying.

Oct 30th North Fen saw 2 Merlins and large number of Fieldfares. In Church Fen drain was a Green Sandpiper.

On the 3rd of November in Galls Fen about 350 Fieldfares were drinking with numbers of Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Chaffinch and Yellowhammers. Also, Mistle Thrush and 1 Redwing. Back Drove/Foulmire Drove: so many Lapwings/Golden Plovers that we couldn't count them. They were flying around in an excited manner which probably meant that they knew a predator was around and they wished to confuse it. On Nov 7th Coal Tit still visiting the garden for sunflower seeds and Simon Stirrup saw 83 Stock Doves in a field along Long Drove at the w/e. On the 14th, David Hopkins saw approximately 100 Corn Buntings were in a field along Long Drove. Another look 2 days later didn't find the buntings, but a Merlin obviously knew they were there and they knew he was so they didn't show themselves! On Nov 15th "Dambank Drove. Lapland Bunting, 1 mile west of Aldreth flew WSW over at 3.15pm" was recorded by a visiting birder on a website called Rare Bird Alert.net.

Nov 20th at the village Sewage Plant: 10 Pied Wagtails and 4 Meadow Pipits dodged the rotating arms. Later, along Houghill Drove, a flock of 30-40 mixed finches. The surprise find, however, considering there was now ice and snow everywhere, was a Grey Wagtail by a muckheap.

On Dec 16th. Barbara York had another Brambling in her garden and, later, a Goldcrest.

The weather was now pretty extreme and a surprise was to see 11 Lapwings fly south along Aldreth Road. Obviously disoriented by the lack of habitat on which to forage they were just looking for any likely place. Most, along with Golden Plovers, had gone far south to seek a better and warmer place. ...

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

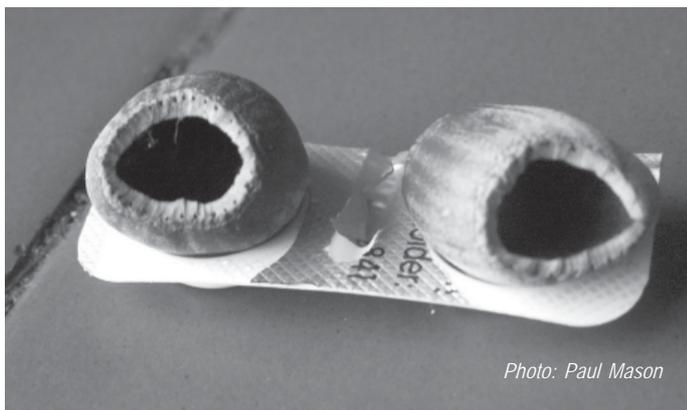


Photo: Paul Mason

We gave the greenhouse a thorough clean in October and found a small pile of hazelnut shells which had been gnawed open at the top with little tooth scratches around the edge of the hole. After eagerly consulting one of my wildlife guides and Paul Mason, we found out that these had been opened by a bank vole - water voles and mice open them in the side. The discovery tied in nicely with Brian having found a baby bank vole in the garden a couple of years ago.

Throughout the icy weather we have fed the birds, including the ducks and swans, as the pond was completely frozen over and the grass covered in snow. Even the coots came to feed and one moorhen regularly perched on the anti-squirrel caged seed feeder, just getting its head through the bars to reach the openings, while the other members of its family waited beneath to catch the spilled seeds.

I enjoy examining footprints in the snow and noticed two tracks of neatly printed paw marks on the frozen pond, two together slightly to the left, then two more slightly to the right about a foot further away - foxes. This was confirmed when Alan Gardener said that he had seen two foxes on the ice and Mike Smith told me that one had been on his balcony very early one morning, watching his grandchildren have an early breakfast. That had made their day!

Birds are usually a great pleasure to watch, but not when they are chiselling huge holes in your new hardwood windows and bargeboards. Jackie Robinson, who lives in Hinton Hall, has been the victim of what had previously been a very welcome visitor on her lawn: a green woodpecker. One of her neighbours had a similar experience last year and it is, apparently, a relatively common occurrence in the US. Any ideas of how to prevent this behaviour would be most welcome!

Buds are swelling now, plants are beginning to grow and the swans are starting to defend their territory against newcomers - everything, including me, can smell spring in the air.

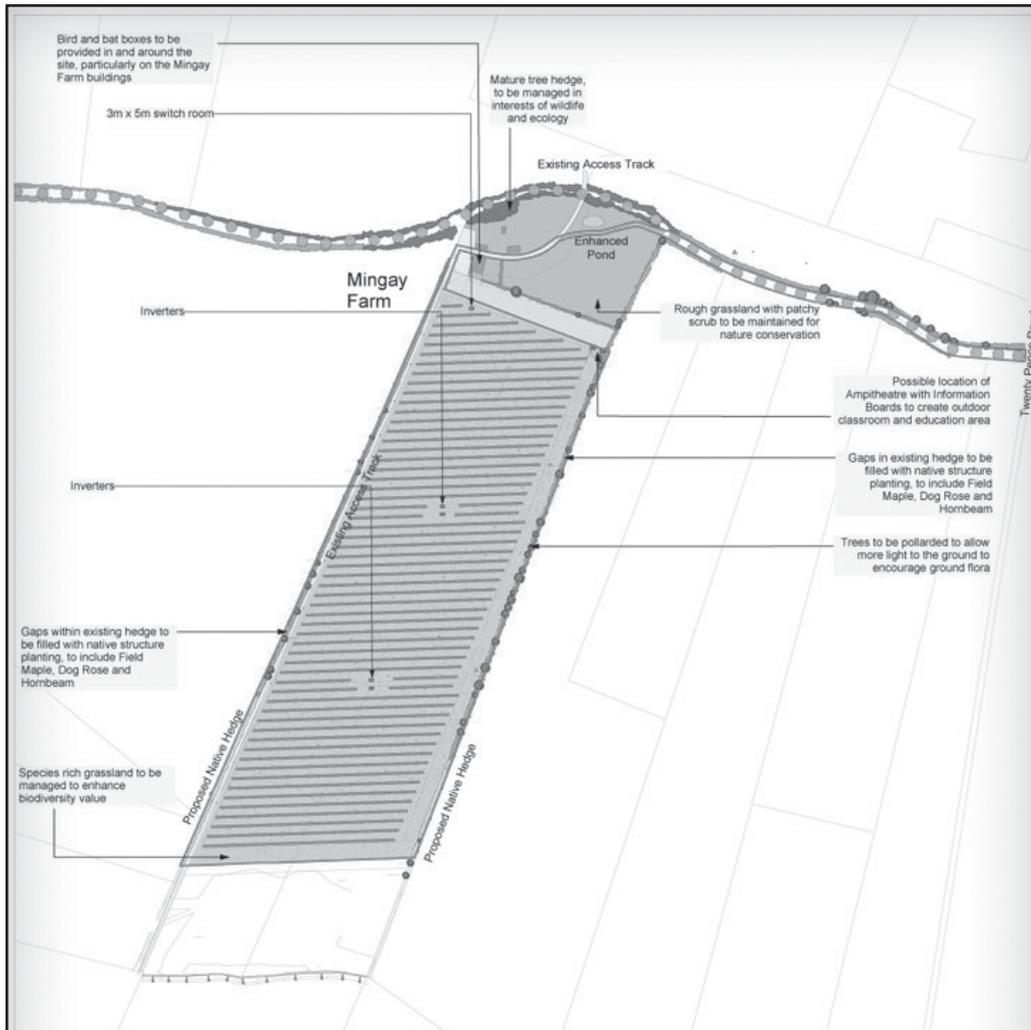


... It was on Dec 27th that 23 Waxwings were found feeding on berries in Aldreth by Simon Stirrup. Next day there were only 5, but 30-40 Redwings were feeding on the ground as well as about 400 Fieldfares there and in The Borough. 2 Bewick's

Swans flew by and along Dambank were 2 Corn Buntings with 50+ Mute Swans around Flatbridge Farm Reservoir.

So the old year ended, but those Waxy birds stayed over into 2011 so we shall find out more next time.

Proposed Solar Farm Should Help Wildlife



robust set of hedges will further enhance the area's visual amenity for both residents and visitors alike as well as improving the site's importance for nature conservation.

Careful maintenance of the hedges over the period of time the solar farm will be in operation, and beyond, will ensure that they continue to thrive. Well shaped, the hedgerows will provide shelter from the wind and a range of habitats for a variety of wildlife, from mammals at their base to birds in their upper reaches.

More extensive areas of species-rich grassland will be created as a direct result of the proposed solar farm and through the change from an intensively farmed arable field. The addition of field and hedgerow margins through the site will help to develop

Many of our members will have already heard about a nearby proposal for what may be the country's second solar farm to be constructed on Mingay Farm land in Wilburton. This is south of that village and adjoins the Haddenham parish eastern boundary. HCS was invited to comment on the potential wildlife aspects of the situation and Nick Sutton, on behalf of the company involved (Abbey Renewables), has written the following which shows that they have taken on board some of HCS's suggestions.

"Development of the Wilburton Solar Farm and the implementation of the environmental management plan will bring a range of environmen-

tal benefits to the site and its surroundings as well as social benefits to the local community.

It is expected that works to implement the environmental management plan could commence as soon as construction of the solar farm begins. Strengthening of the existing field pattern of the site through the filling of hedgerow gaps would start to take place in the first winter after erection of the solar panels begins.

The current pattern of variably maintained hedgerows would be replaced with a well connected, well managed set of hedgerow field boundaries that will reinforce the site's landscape character. Such a

new habitats including area species-rich planting that will be visually attractive, but also important for attracting insects and invertebrates which in themselves will provide a feeding resource for birds and animals.

Bird and bat activity on site will be encouraged to increase from its current low levels through the creation of new feeding resources. However, the provision of bird and bat boxes across the site, both in the adjacent farm buildings and in trees, will allow the nesting and roosting sites that should ensure the resident populations expand and help further species to move onto site."

Chips & Peas are Good for Yellow Wagtails!

Contributed by Paul Mason

Black and White Pied Wagtails are with us all year round and Grey Wagtails occasionally winter, but the Yellow Wagtails are one of the great delights of all the birds breeding in our fens every summer. When they arrive back in spring after the long migration journey from the wetlands of sub-Saharan Africa they are an absolute delight to find. They seem to arrive back on one day early in April and that coincides, in our fens at least, with the time farmers are planting potatoes. More often than not they know when the black fen soil is being disturbed by the machinery and this turns up invertebrates and worms and the bright yellow birds flit hither and thither chasing the great supply of food to replenish their energy after the long journey. Usually, a group mostly consists of about 11-16 specimens and divided between the brilliant males and the slightly duller females. While it is possible that others will join later and some may move on elsewhere the number usually tallies with the pairs found later actually breeding locally. On many occasions they arrive back in company with Wheatears and White Wagtails, both of whom later move on further north.

Fen crops seem to be good for Yellow Wagtails to nest in as watches have found that they like the emerging pea crops and sometimes young sugar beet. The nests are very well hidden, even in what might be looked upon as open crops, and the

only way to find them, but not approach, is to watch closely from a hidden position. Even then you will not be led to the final place used - only to where they land. After which they creep through the growing plants to the nest. In 2010 it was believed that we had 11-12 pairs breeding, which is not bad considering the species is regarded as declining nationally.



Very occasionally a close look at some of the birds can reveal that one might have a head which appears a pale blue. The species as a whole is widespread, from Spain to China, but each of the 17 races has a slightly different plumage, usually involving the head colour. Ours is of course pure yellow, but sometimes one with a blue head will turn up and this may have come from Spain or northern France. Because they are all of the same basic family they will interbreed with ours and we have noted this on at least two occasions. They were both blue headed females with all yellow husbands.

Sometimes, if one is very lucky,

the courting display of the male can be watched and to see that is an experience to be amazed at for such a small bird. Twice I have watched as a male will fluff up all his feathers, wag his tail up and down, shake his head in spurts, run round and round in small circles, bow up and down and all this to a female usually half hidden in the grassy verge of a clear space along a fen drove. When first seen it looks so comical, but of course it has a clear purpose. It doesn't always work and I have seen a male fly off after obviously not giving a good impression to a lady.

Later it's also fascinating to watch the families moving along the concreted roads as the birds flit in and out of the grassy verges hawking flies and other insects and constantly wagging those long tails. So keep eating those mushy peas with your

chips and keep the Yellow Wagtail population going in our parish.

Photo: Yellow Wagtail by Ian Dickerson



Subscriptions

Subscriptions were due on
1st January.

Please pay promptly:
it really helps!

Thank you.



WINTER TALKS

Indoor meetings are held at the Arkenstall Centre, Haddenham, on the second Tuesday of each month from October 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.

8 March

BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

We tend to relate these points to our own surroundings. Haddenham's own *Dr Kathy MacKinnon* travelled the globe with her work for the World Bank dealing with these problems. That is what we shall hear about tonight.

12 April

INSECTS - A CLOSER LOOK AT THEIR WORLD

Insects are able to adapt, deceive, and disguise their behaviour, but not many know how they do it.

David Elcombe knows them well and will tell us.

Preceded by a short AGM.

OTHER EVENTS

Saturday, May 7 - 9:30 - 11:30 am
The Green

CAKE AND PLANT SALE

The annual Haddenham Conservation Society fundraising "bring and buy" stall - just in time for you to stock up with plants for house and garden, vegetables included. Don't throw away any surplus offshoots from your own gardens: bring them to the stall instead, they are sure to make someone happy.

Then reward yourselves with one (or several) of our delicious cakes.

All proceeds will go towards speakers' fees at the winter talks.