

Vol. 31 No. 2  
May 2016

SPRING 2016

The Committee for 2015/16 is as follows:

Barclay Arnott	740500
Ann Biggs	740810
John Burgess	749441
Sheila Dickerson	749443
Susan Everitt, Treas.	740352
Elver Langley	
Wendy Lanman	741138
Caroline Lee	
Paul Mason	740219
Robert Norman	740473
Chris Prescott	749038

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).

HCS Website:

[www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk](http://www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk)

## Membership information

Subscription rates  
1 Jan to 31 Dec 2016:  
Individual: £7  
Family: £12

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 7 winter talks, a saving of £2.50 per person per session.

## Ditch Biodiversity Workshop

Learn about the fascinating underwater wildlife in our area at a *free* workshop in Haddenham on 20 July. Through a whole-day workshop you will be exploring the extraordinarily rich biodiversity of the aquatic plants and invertebrates in the ditches in the Ouse Washes Landscape.



In depth training will be delivered by botanic Fenland specialist Jonathan Graham, in close cooperation with the Haddenham Conservation Society and the Haddenham Level Drainage Commissioners, amongst others. This will be a combination of presentations and hands-on handling of the many rare and beautiful aquatic plants that can be found in the area around Haddenham.

To find out more about the work done by specialists Jonathan Graham and Martin Hammond in the Ouse Washes Landscape see their excellent report available from:

<http://ousewashes.org.uk/resources/downloads/report-ditch-biodiversity-survey-ouse-washes-landscape/>

The event will take place in the Arkenstall Village Centre in Haddenham (Main Hall) on Wednesday 20 July, from 10am to 4pm. The day will include a field trip to nearby ditches of high biodiversity value in the afternoon.

Places are limited to 50 people. Please express your interest by sending an email to [mark.nokkert@camsacre.org.uk](mailto:mark.nokkert@camsacre.org.uk). Priority will be given to members of the Haddenham Conservation Society and other local interested people, so please make it clear in your email if you are included in either category.

This workshop can be offered with generous funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, distributed through the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership scheme. To find out more about the partnership's work in your area, see [www.ousewashes.org.uk](http://www.ousewashes.org.uk).

This event will be part of tens of events taking place during OuseFest in the Ouse Washes Landscape, this year to take place every day from 18 to 31 July 2016 – see <http://ousewashes.org.uk/ousefest/> for more details, or watch out for hard copies of the exciting 2016 OuseFest programme in local libraries and other venues from the middle of May onwards.



Above: Invertebrate specialist Martin Hammond sampling one of the many biodiversity-rich ditches in the Ouse Washes Landscape.  
Image © Jonathan Graham, for Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership.

Supported by  
**The National Lottery**  
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



## Chair's Report

My report consists mainly of thanks to the various people who contributed to the ongoing success and vitality of the Conservation Society during the year. So, in no particular order, thanks to:

- Sheila Dickerson, for researching and signing up speakers for the winter talks such as this evening's, and of course to the speakers themselves, who often travel a significant distance to give their talks.
- Sally MacEachern, for editing the Society Newsletter, and to all contributors.
- Tina Bone for hosting the Society's website, and all contributors to the website. The website is well worth a regular visit as it is updated with photographs of recent wildlife sightings, and news and stories that supplement those in the Newsletter.
- All contributors and helpers at the annual Plant and Cake Stall, which raised £347 last year. This year the Stall will be on the Green on Saturday morning 7 May at 9.30am. As always, all contributions of cakes and plants will be welcome.
- Haddenham Galleries for selling surplus produce from the Plant Stall.
- Mike and Gill Smith for their enormous contribution to the Society's work over many years. Their involvement will be much missed.
- Helpers at various work parties during the year in the Old Burial Ground, and in Nine Acre Wood. As always, volunteers for workdays are welcome. The work is not arduous and offers an opportunity for some exercise and socialising. We have changed the timing from afternoons to Sunday mornings, giving an opportunity to work up a good appetite for Sunday lunch!
  - The focus on the Burial Ground continues to be encouraging wild flower growth, and the Butterfly Garden.
  - The current focus in Nine Acre Wood is on opening the canopy in places to encourage growth of appropriate species at ground level.
- Ann Biggs and Wendy Lanman, for their work in preparing the laminated flower card sets which will be distributed to the Primary School. You may recall that this builds on the packs that were distributed to the Pre-School in an earlier year. The idea of these is to provide the children with an easy means of recognising local plants and animals, and hopefully help them develop an interest and appreciation of wildlife which they will sustain into later years. To fund this we have been successful in obtaining a grant from the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership.
- The other project that we had in mind in connection with the Ouse Washes Partnership was an update of



*Freda Crofts' seat in the Old Burial Ground.*

the footpath maps of the village. This remains on hold at present owing to the amount of work required. We would be interested to hear from any keen local walkers who would like to contribute to this updating.

- Mention of the Ouse Washes Partnership reminds me that there will be an all-day event in the Arkenstall Centre on Wednesday 20 July, 10am–4pm, organised by the Partnership. This will focus on the local drainage systems and the associated flora and fauna, and promises to be an interesting event (see front page).
- Mike and Karen Overall for constructing and installing the tractor seat in memory of Freda Crofts in the Old Burial Ground, overlooking North Fen towards Sutton, and to Roger and Miranda Pratt for providing the seat itself. It is an excellent piece of work. If you have not yet seen or used the seat I recommend it, and you can see how many windfarms you can count in the distance!
- Haddenham Beer Festival for their donation to funds. This was received after December and will be reflected in the 2016 accounts.
- Finally to Christine Lowery for checking the accounts, which provides a good cue for me to hand over to Susan for her Treasurer's Report.

Chris Prescott  
12 April 2016



# Hedgehogs

Information provided by Jean Shaw

Pictures by June Madge



Hedgehogs, hedgepigs or furze-pigs are Europe's oldest and most primitive mammal. They have been with us for millions of years and have co-existed with a wide variety of other animals, many of which are now extinct. This makes it even more tragic that the last 30 years has seen a huge decline in their numbers, from an estimated 30 million to under one million throughout the country. We have seen this clearly in Haddenham where reports of sightings and signs of hedgehogs – their footprints and droppings – have declined enormously and some parts of the village have not seen any at all for a long time.

Most people know hedgehogs are insect eaters but don't know that they will eat up to 25% of their own body weight in 24 hours. Roaming up to 2km in one night they visit several gardens within an area. Ten or more individuals may visit a garden over several nights which could mean that 'your' hedgehog is in fact a number of different hedgehogs. The females produce young twice a

year – in May and August – up to five in a litter and like to dig under greenhouses and sheds to make a cosy nest. They leave home at about seven weeks and disperse to find their own range. There is no more charming sight than a mother hedgehog with her hoglets following her in single file, though sadly this is a rare sight nowadays.

Reading University, in conjunction with the British Hedgehog Preservation Society, is researching the reasons for their decline. It seems to be a combination of factors, including climate change – which is disrupting breeding habits. The second litter is being born later and does not hibernate successfully. Added to this are the man-made reasons of loss of habitat, pesticides and garden hazards.

## How can we help hedgehogs in our gardens?

- Provide escape routes in ponds – hedgehogs can swim but will become exhausted and drown in high-sided ponds.
- Leave holes at the bottom of fences so the hogs can come and go.
- Keep all pea netting a foot above ground so that hogs can go under it and not become stuck.
- Slug pellets kill. If possible use an alternative, or use sparingly and pick up dead slugs and snails as soon as possible.
- Check for nesting hedgehogs and take care when mowing long grass or strimming.
- Bin bags on the ground will attract hedgehogs and they may try to nest in them and then be put out for the dustcart.
- Take care when turning your compost heap as hedgehogs may be nesting in it. The safest time to spread the heap is October/November when most of the babies will have left their mum.
- Have a shallow dish of water available for visiting wildlife, especially in hot weather.
- Leave a quiet part of your garden wild for nesting sites.
- Put a dish of dog food, cat biscuits or mealworms – but not milk – under something low so the hedgehog can get it and not the local cats.
- Finally, if you do accidentally disturb a hedgehog nesting, replace the nesting material; the hedgehog can then either repair the nest or build another nearby.
- Hedgehogs should be waking up about now and as this is the time we are springcleaning our gardens watch out for nests.



A rescued hedgehog after release in a backgarden in Haddenham.

## A Good Start to the Year

On New Year's Day Long Drove started off with a Little Egret in a nearby drain and a female Marsh Harrier hunting. Next day Barbara York observed 120 plus Fieldfares, with just 1 Redwing, feeding on the ground, 90 plus Linnets, 2 Kestrels and a male Stonechat. Flying up from a drain's edge were 2 Green Sandpipers while 2 Common Buzzards soared above.

On 19 January Robert Norman was intrigued to watch 4 Great Spotted Woodpeckers all on one electricity pole that carries wires over his orchard. They were probably having a territorial dispute but not by drumming!

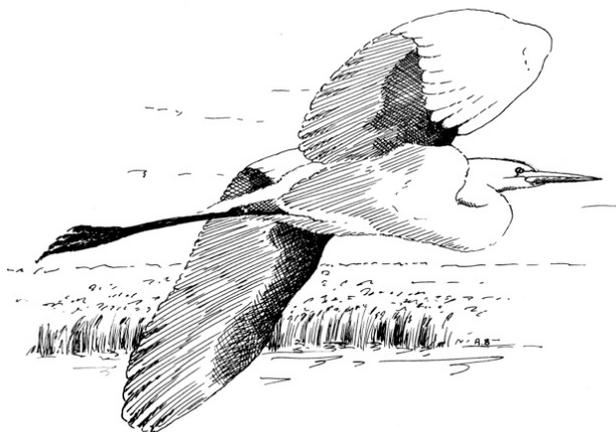
On the 23 January there was a report of a Great White Egret in company with a Little Egret in Church Fen Drain, confirmed on 27 January by three further sightings. The Great White Egret stayed for several days, wandering around several local drains and even into Cottenham and Willingham. There are some excellent photos on the HCS website. Also there were up to 3 Green Sandpipers but they were always on the move and calling.

On 27 January Jake Allsop looked out of his kitchen window on Bury Lane, which overlooks the horse-grazed fields behind, and was rewarded with 'the spectacle of a flotilla of 80 plus Common Gulls flying low and in a leisurely fashion in small groups of 4--8, going in the general direction of Aldreth. I'm pretty sure that was the total count for this batch, but who knows what I miss when I'm not staring out of the kitchen window.' This phenomenon goes on throughout the winter months and will be the subject of an article in a future newsletter. On the same day, in the Dambank/Berryfen area, there was a female Marsh Harrier and approximately 200 Fieldfares feeding in fields with some Redwings.

On 4 February 5 Bewick's Swans were in North Fen and on 6 February a Brambling flew over Aldreth. On 12 February a Short-eared Owl crossed Hillrow Causeway.

On 13 February we heard that Ninja had been singing in Aldreth since early January. Ninja is a Turtle Dove, named by the couple in whose garden he spends some of his time. Given the early date it seems probable that the same male Turtle Dove has over-wintered in Aldreth for three years running (see page 5). Johnny Rankin, an ornithologist from Suffolk who is studying Turtle Doves, had never seen a wintering specimen so he came to look at it. He is involved in a programme of satellite tracking this drastically declining species and will be talking to HCS in April 2017 as part of the winter programme of talks.

As the winter months continued, birds like Redpoll, Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting visited gardens and Pied Wagtails also searched for insect food. On 18 February our Editor saw the Egrets when out on a walk



Great White Egret by Ann Biggs.

round Aldreth Fen and also spotted a Barn Owl out on a daytime hunt.

A website posting on 6 March reported that the small birds were getting hungrier with 3-4 Lesser Redpolls and 2 Yellowhammers coming regularly to feed on the ground. 'It is good to see Greenfinches regularly on the feeders, usually 8 or so, and no sick ones so far.' The last significant report of the month was of 2 Short-eared Owls, disturbed by an Aldreth farmer while he was out cultivating. They proved a bit elusive but one was eventually photographed by Simon Stirrup and can be seen on the HCS website.

Now, in April, some early summer migrants are appearing and Corn and Reed Buntings are arriving back to take up breeding stations.



### Cake and Plant Sale

Customers came early to our stall on The Green so as not to miss out on the treats in store for them in Aldreth and, in spite of two of our most prolific plant contributors – Mike and Gill, who are moving away, and Jackie who has just moved house – not being able to bring as many plants as usual, the plant sale made £156.55. Even before we started setting up, plants and sundries had already been left!

On the cake front, thanks to Maxine and Jane's very early start and great generosity, to which others kindly added their contributions, we took £150.80.

So, a total of £307! We shall be having some interesting talks this winter, thanks to the help of everyone, not forgetting the providers of equipment, the putter-uppers or the taker-downers. A big thank you to you all.

#### Renew your subs!

Subscriptions were due on  
1 January.

If you haven't done so already,  
please pay promptly as  
it really does help.

Thank you.



Turtle Doves photographed by Rachel Moss.

## A Turtle Dove Overwinters in Aldreth

*Contributed by Paul Mason*

The Turtle Dove is something special. It is a beautiful bird with a plumage that is just like the shell of a turtle – well actually more like a tortoise's shell – mottled chestnut brown and black feathered wings and back. The rest is a warm brown pink with three black-and-white-striped patches on the side of its neck. The mature bird has a blue grey head, neck, flanks, and rump. Its breast is a pale red wine tint and the tail in flight has a wedge shape and is black with a white edge. The juveniles do not have the neck markings.

The mating flight, high and circling, is like that of the Wood Pigeon, but the undulations are less determined and are accompanied by a whip-crack of downward flicked wings. Its arrival in spring is heralded by its beautiful song, a rather deep, vibrating 'purrr, purrr'. The Turtle Dove, one of the latest migrants, rarely appears in England before the end of April, returning south again in September. However, one bird resident in Aldreth has

bucked the trend at least two, maybe three times, and has certainly stayed there for the winters of 2014–15 and 2015–16. Why can only be debated but it certainly seems to have lost the will to migrate, a fact that has intrigued those who study the bird.

In Suffolk, in the summers of 2014–15, satellite tracking devices were attached to four birds. The information from the only bird to return showed that it had wintered in Mali, West Africa. The route goes through the UK, France, Spain, Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Algeria and Morocco. What might have happened to the other three is not known. If they went through Malta, for example, then their odds on returning are slim, but if they followed their mate to western Africa then perhaps normal mortality occurred. We may never know.

Let us hail the bird (we think it's a male because it was heard singing in early March) and hope he lives long and well, feeding from food put out for chickens in their run along The Borough, which backs on to a thick high hedge, a habitat that the bird likes and of which Haddenham parish still has a reasonable supply. At this time we estimate that, thankfully, at least three or four pairs still breed locally.



## Action for Swifts in the High Street

Following the well-attended HCS February talk given by Dick Newell about Swifts both in Europe and China, moves are being made to increase the population breeding in Haddenham's High Street. Several residents have agreed to have nest boxes erected on their premises. This is in addition to the 8–10 natural sites under eaves and in roof tiles that have been used for what is likely to have been centuries.

Members of the 'Action for Swifts' team hope the boxes will be in place before the birds return from their southern Africa wintering quarters, having spent the whole time in the air hunting and sleeping on the wing. They really are phenomenal birds. We look forward to a report on a successful effort in the autumn issue of this newsletter.

## News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

All the vegetation around the Pond is green again at last and even the first floating water lily leaves have appeared. A Moorhen has been clucking gently for the last couple of days in the way they do when they have very young chicks, calling to them to come out of hiding and onto the open water, but I haven't seen any little ones yet.

There were two Greylag Geese a while ago, assessing the old Swan's nest, but they seem to have moved on. A Wren has been very busy building a nest in the clematis right next to our favourite spot to eat outside, so we shall have to find another place until the yong have hatched. It's that David and Goliath thing again!



Grey Wagtail  
© RSPB Images.

A couple of weeks ago I saw a Grey Wagtail land on one of my neighbours' balcony – the first one I can remember seeing around here. We do regularly see the Pied Wagtails, and one is even nesting in a willow tree nearby, but this was a real treat.



Harvest Mice.

Another treat was the harvest mouse Brian saw twice in the last week of April. I looked up information on it and discovered that they do nest in reeds and have become relatively rare. They are such pretty little creatures with their golden fur, big black eyes and long prehensile tail. Paul Mason tells me I shall have to provide them with some sleeping quarters made out of tennis balls with a small hole cut out and which, I presume, I shall have to attach to reeds. I just hope this little mouse escapes the cats visiting our garden.



## Readers Sometimes Ask.....?

Trying to tell one species from another, purely from plumage differences, can be difficult. Behavioural differences, however, can provide valuable clues. So, for a start, what are the behavioural differences between a Kestrel, a Merlin and a Sparrowhawk because, especially when juveniles are seen, plumages can be somewhat similarly all-over brown.

Our Editor saw an obvious bird of prey sitting on a post near to Aldreth High Bridge while out on a walk at Christmas time. She wasn't close enough to positively decide on the colour. "What did I think it was?" I asked her to tell me if she saw it fly? "Yes." Well could she describe how it flew off?

"It seemed to fly very close to the ground and was very fast." Well, there you have it. It was likely to be a Merlin. If it had been a Kestrel it would probably have risen in the air with a winnowing flight and may hover.

"Well, why couldn't it have been a young or female Sparrowhawk?"

They tend to fly away at a moderate height with a flap flap flap then glide in repeated succession. They can fly quite fast if they are chasing prey, but it would be likely to be a shortish fast flight ending in a catch or not as the case may be.

When asking these sorts of questions try to remember:

- Time of year.
- Colour if you can.
- What was it doing? How did it fly?
- Did it make any calls?

If you have a query, email it to the Editor at [smaceachern.maceachern@googlemail.com](mailto:smaceachern.maceachern@googlemail.com) and it will be forwarded to the experts. We will always try to do our best but can't guarantee. Don't be afraid to ask.

## The Hunger Months

Contributed by Jake Allsop

Traditionally, mid-January to end March is the time when food becomes scarce in the countryside and bird species that don't normally visit gardens will appear on and under garden feeders. It's a kind of desperation, but it's nice for us to see them briefly. This year, my garden has been visited only by a few Redpolls and an occasional Yellowhammer, whereas I would have expected to see Tree Sparrows and Reed Buntings as well. I know that a friend in the village gets occasional Siskins. Another hunger-month visitor is Pied Wagtail, which otherwise stays out in the fields.

Otherwise the mix is much as usual: Blue and Great Tits, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, a few Greenfinches, occasional flurries of Long-tailed Tits and the resident Wrens, Dunnocks, Robins and House Sparrows. There are always a lot of Blackbirds too, which I suspect are mostly winter visitors. Sadly, I haven't seen a Song Thrush or a Mistlethrush at all this winter (Redwing and Fieldfare only visit my garden when there is snow or when the ground is frozen). Green Woodpecker is notable by its absence this winter (though I hear it regularly), but I have Great-spotted Woodpeckers, male and female, regularly on the peanuts.

The bulkier birds include Magpie, Woodpigeon, Collared Dove, 2-3 Stock Doves and a small flock of extremely agile Jackdaws, which have learned how to peck fat out of the fatball feeders without actually perching. One oddity was the sight of a Stock Dove clinging in an ungainly fashion to a sunflower heart feeder and managing to extract a few seeds; they really don't have the feet for this feat! One bright frosty morning, there was a male Pheasant (torquatus group) on the lawn, resplendent and majestic, its white collar dazzling in the sunlight. It's not a native species, but it's always welcome on my back lawn.

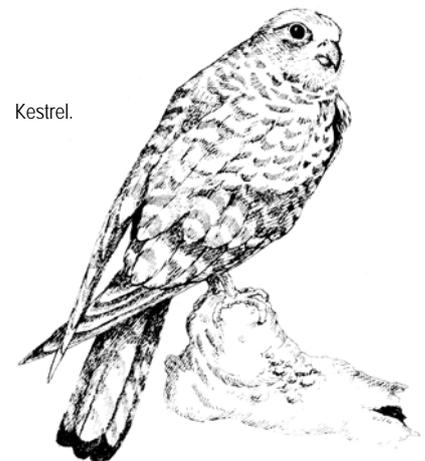
A pair of Mallard have taken up residence, and are a joy to watch as they waddle fussily from one feeder to another in search of titbits. They have completely trashed my pond, so the Heron that visits occasionally just looks in the pond with disdain and leaves after less than a minute.

My garden is under constant surveillance from Sparrowhawks, with an occasional Buzzard circling high above as well. A male Kestrel has come down on the lawn a few times, but I could not see what had attracted him.

So, nothing exciting enough to cause a bishop to kick a hole in a stained-glass window, but for me always a joy to see all the avian action from my kitchen window as I sip my morning cuppa. If you are passing, you are welcome to join me.



Spotted woodpecker.



Kestrel.

### Watch Out for These Events

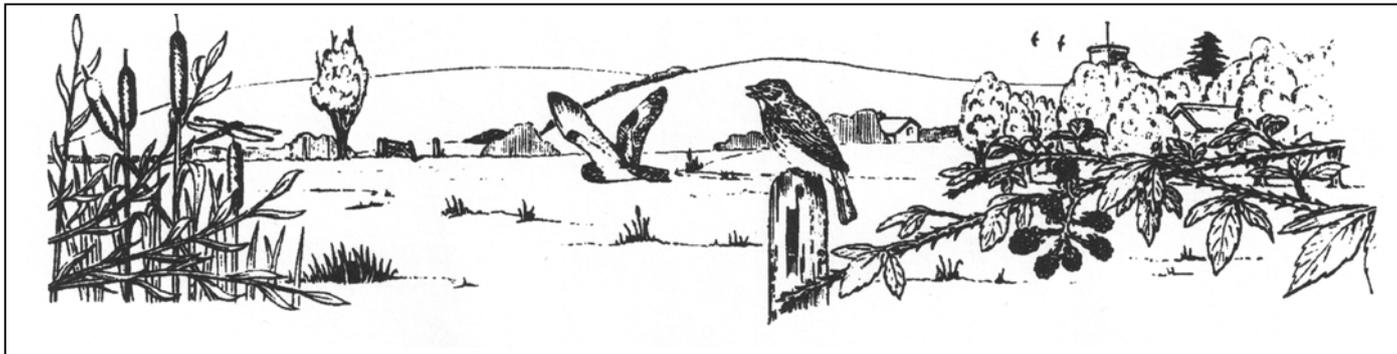
It is hoped that there will be two surveys organised in Fairchild's Meadow this summer. They are subject to weather but look out for notices around the village and on our HCS website.

1. Wildflower Survey organised by Fairchild's Meadow Committee led by Jez Reeve.
2. Invertebrate Survey organised by HCS and led by Rob Mills.

Queen's Birthday Fen Ride organised by the Friends of Haddenham on 5 June, leaving The Green at 2.00pm. Tickets must be purchased in advance by 31 May from Haddenham Galleries.

### Hot Off the Press

Many of you will have enjoyed Dr Frances Dipper's enthusiastic and knowledgeable talks at HCS, most recently on 12 April, when she talked about 'Wildlife Wet and Dry Downunder'. On 29 April her most recent book, co-authored with Marc Dando, was published. *The Marine World: A Natural History of Ocean Life* provides an insight into the existence and way of life of almost everything living in the ocean. It is available from all good bookshops and [www.wildnaturepress.com](http://www.wildnaturepress.com).



## WINTER TALKS

Indoor meetings are held at the Arkenstall Centre, Haddenham, on the second Tuesday of each month from October to May, but NOT in January, 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.*

10 May

### THE COLOUR OF HADDENHAM

Our own parish of Haddenham is full of wildlife according to local naturalist **Paul Mason**. An informative evening to end the season with.

11 October

### LIONS, TIGERS AND BIRDS OF INDIA

**Tim Loseby** – Wildlife Photographer

8 November

### A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF NORFOLK'S WILDLIFE

**Steve Cale** – Artist and Lecturer

13 December

### FACING EXTINCTION

**Paul Donald**, Principal Conservation Scientist from RSPB Sandy showcases 20 species of the world's rarest birds and the race to save them.

## OTHER EVENTS

17 July

### WORK PARTY AT THE OLD BURIAL GROUND

The annual hay rake will take place between 10.00 and 12.00. Many hands really will make for light work and an early departure for your Sunday lunch.

20 July

### OUSE WASHES PARTNERSHIP EVENT

This all-day event, from 10am–4pm, focuses on the local drainage systems and their associated flora and fauna (see front page).

*Every effort has been made to obtain copyright permission for the illustrations, but has not always been successful.  
We shall act on any information provided by readers to rectify the situation.*