

# HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

WINTER 2018

The Committee for 2018/19 is:

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All numbers are 01353

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 send them to Sheila Dickerson on [hadconsoc@gmail.com](mailto:hadconsoc@gmail.com)

Send articles or photos for the newsletter to Sally on [hadconsoc@gmail.com](mailto:hadconsoc@gmail.com)

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

## Membership information

Subscription rates

1 Jan to 31 Dec 2019

Individual: £8 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.

## Wildlife in Hillrow

*Contributed by Martha How*

We have always watched wildlife, as much as working and other life commitments allowed. We weren't twitchers and we didn't keep lists. Then one winter's day, about 15 years ago, we saw something in our cherry tree that had us scurrying for the camera and bird book. A collection of 15 extraordinary middle-large grey passerines, with crests, a dash of red and yellow colouring and a black bib. Our first Waxwings! I just had to note that down.

Since then I have made a monthly list of the fauna seen in and from our garden (flying over counts). In 15 years we have seen 60 bird species, 7 mammals and numerous insects. Our knowledge has expanded and now, as we work less, we watch more. We have 19 regular visitors: House Sparrows, Chaffinches, Great Tits, Blackbirds, Wood Pigeons et al.



*Black squirrel.*

We have a group of periodic or seasonal regulars, visiting frequently but not monthly. These include a few little gems like Goldcrest and Bullfinch, a Mallard literally knocking on our patio door one morning, a Heron oddly perching on the top of a 10m high leylandii. We see Swifts, Swallows and Martins in the summer. Occasionally a Sparrowhawk hides in dense foliage, waiting, watching, then zooming to kill. We have seen the female take a Collared Dove in the blink of an eye. The Jay visits in fits and spurts, will gobble 7-8 peanuts then fly off to eat. The Jay and Jackdaws relish cold chips and fish skins. We have little gaggles of 5-8 Long-tailed Tits which flit about appearing to chatter and giggle like toddlers.

Our plot is only 1/3 acre, we feed birds throughout the year and have bird boxes. Birds reward us by sharing their unfolding lives. Sparrows, Great Tits, Blackbirds and Blue Tits nest and rear young.

The Collared Dove regularly builds flimsy nests in the ivy, but they are terrible nest builders, so the nests often collapse or disintegrate. Last year a pigeon nest fell down from the leylandii in a high wind with a juvenile in situ and landed on our raspberry netting, 2m off the ground and very exposed. The adult continued to feed the fairly mature, extremely ugly juvenile for three days but we did not see it fledge.

We have sightings which are, for our garden, rare. Highlights are a Spotted Flycatcher, Turtle Doves in the summers of 2011 and 2012, Lesser Redpoll and Siskin in 2017 and, for the first time, a Red Kite circled low on the bluest of blue days early this autumn, the sunlight displaying its plumage in exquisite detail.

Grey Squirrels abound but for the first time, in 2018, a Black Squirrel and a pair of brown ones. I understand that the blacks and browns are melanistic greys but they appear a little smaller and have less coarse fur. Although the greys can be considered pests, there is no theatre quite like watching two to three young greys chasing each other. Up and down tree trunks, leaping between trees, whizzing along branches seemingly way too slender to support them, zigzagging across the

lawn, they are like a speedy sequence from an old Benny Hill sketch. The mammal highlight to date is a badger. A highlight for us but a lowlight for my courgette seedlings, the geraniums and the bunker where we keep the birdseed!



## You Might Have Bee Orchids in Your Lawn!

*Contributed by Wendy Lanman*

I wrote last year about the eight Bee Orchids that suddenly appeared in my lawn. This year, having examined the same area towards the end of January, I found 11! I have also heard of several other gardens in Haddenham where people have had the joy of seeing them appear, so I believe there are probably many more just waiting to be discovered – as long as they are found before they are mown down.

Lots of other lovely flowers have appeared spontaneously in my lawn: violets, primroses, daisies of course, even cyclamen. The lawn is never treated with chemicals and only mown once every two weeks on a

relatively high setting of 1 inch, which leaves the base of small flowers intact and able to grow again. When the orchids appear, I keep the grass around each one cut to at most 2 or 3 inches. This enables the rest of the grass to be strimmed without harming the flowers.

It does mean that the lawn is a little untidy for a few months until the orchids have died and spread their seed in July, but it's so very worth it, especially as, nationally, there are fewer and fewer of them. It can take well over eight years for the seeds to germinate, with the aid of a fungus, and produce a flower.

The life cycle of these orchids is fascinating. Try searching 'life-cycle of Bee Orchids' and then opening [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com) 'The Bee Orchid: Nature's Mimic' or, for the most detailed information: [first-nature.com](http://first-nature.com) 'The Nature and Biology of Orchids' by Sue Parker.



*Bee Orchid leaves as they appear in January-March. They are approximately 5cm across.*



*Bee Orchid in flower.*



*Damselflies.* © Simon Stirrup. You can see the image in colour on <http://www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk> latest news and then scroll back to June.

## Mating Blue-tailed Damselflies

*Contributed by Simon Stirrup*

This image of a pair of mating Blue-tailed Damselflies was taken by the Old West River in early June last year. Dragonflies and Damselflies are a common sight during the summer months but are not always easy to approach. So how was this photograph taken?

Early in the morning on 3 June I was walking along the Old West River in dewy, warm and overcast conditions when I came across these mating damselflies. Their 'wheel' shape and isolated position on a grass head made a strong composition.

The first challenge was to take a macro image with minimal equipment. With macro photography, the depth of field is critical, as it becomes rapidly shallower as you reduce the subject distance, and the high magnification means that any motion by the subject or camera will ruin a photograph. I didn't have a flash or tripod with me. However, the combination of reasonably strong, flat light and almost windless conditions suggested that a picture was possible. I had the benefit of technology too as my 100mm macro lens is image stabilised, which allows subjects to be photographed at a slower shutter speed than would be otherwise possible. Fortunately, I had my trusty heavy-duty, black rubbish bag with me and was able to kneel down awkwardly, view the Damselflies at eye-level and frame the image. I was pleased with the composition, but there were distracting grass stems immediately behind the Damselflies.

The second challenge was to have both Damselflies in focus against an unobtrusive, out of focus background. I positioned the camera so that the plane of the sensor was parallel with the Damselflies to reduce the depth of field required, and used my coat to temporarily flatten the grasses, so that they would not appear in the picture. As the Damselflies were preoccupied, I was able to take images with a range of apertures to try and keep both the Damselflies in focus and the background out-of-focus. F8 was a good compromise as it provided the necessary depth of field and a sufficient shutter speed to freeze the slight movement of the grass stem, and hand-hold the camera without having to increase the ISO and risk adding grain to the image.

It was particularly satisfying to take the image because it resulted from an unexpected encounter and was achieved with minimal equipment. Ideally, I would have preferred a cleaner background and more droplets of dew – maybe next time.

The image was taken with a Canon 7d mark II camera, a Canon 100mm f2.8L IS lens, an ISO rating of 400 and an exposure of 1/320th second at f8. And not forgetting a black rubbish bag!

## Great Ouse Valley – Proposed AONB

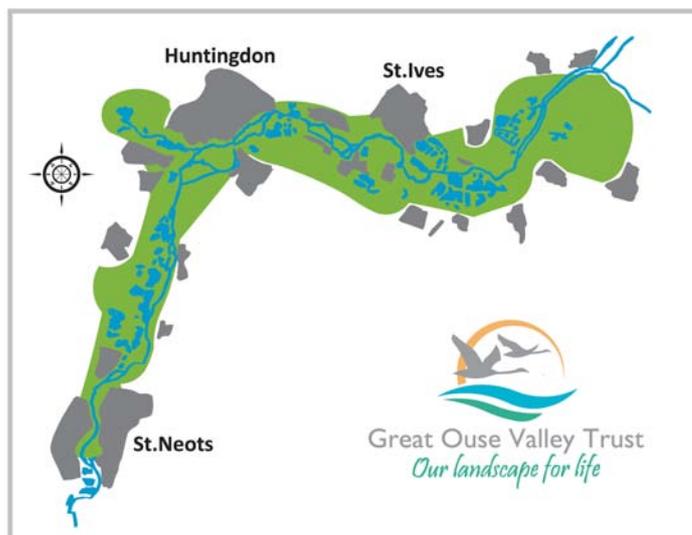
Contributed by Alan James, Chair CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

The lower Great Ouse Valley stretches west from Earith towards Huntingdon Racecourse and then south to St Neots (see map) and beyond. This distinct landscape is home to great flood meadows, large lakes, wildlife sites and idyllic footpaths.

A group from neighbouring parishes bordering the Great Ouse came together in 2013 and discussed the need to protect and enhance this valuable area of the Great Ouse Valley. This group applied to Natural England to designate the Great Ouse Valley an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). However, decreasing funding and resources at Natural England mean that a decision has yet to be made and may not be made for some years.

Currently within the valley there are about 1,300ha of man-made lakes formed by sand and gravel extraction. This will increase to over 2,000ha of water over the next 20 years (the Norfolk Broads has a total area of 915ha of water). There are six sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSI), two Wildlife Trust reserves and 24 County Wildlife sites. There is a large RSPB reserve at Fen Drayton. The area is contiguous with the Ouse Washes – a RAMSAR site of international importance. It joins with the Old West River and Rothschild Way passing Aldreth on to Wicken Fen.

We in CPRE consider that the English lowland landscape is significantly under-valued. The valley of the Great Ouse, with its partly wooded slopes and wide meadows rich in native flora, its historic small towns and villages, its large areas of lakes and



wetlands which attract much wildlife, is comparable with other areas of lowland AONB such as the Stour Valley. As such, it should be recognised and protected. We therefore supported the establishment of the Great Ouse Valley Trust at its launch in Godmanchester on 22 September 2018. The Trust has been set up to champion the Great Ouse Valley, to raise awareness of its value and benefits, and to ensure that it is properly recognised in Huntingdonshire, in wider Cambridgeshire and in East Anglia.

CPRE will continue to support the Great Ouse Valley Trust. We also believe that it is important that Natural England is properly resourced to enable it to carry out the important work of protecting and enhancing this country's natural heritage.

For more information see: <http://greatousevalleytrust.org.uk/>

## Elm Search



The Conservation Foundation is inviting the public to help identify mature elm trees still growing in gardens, parks and the countryside that have survived

Dutch Elm disease. The Foundation believes that more have survived the devastation of the 1970s than is commonly thought.

Contributors can upload sightings onto an interactive map, along with photographs of tree details such as bark and leaves to help experts reliably identify species.

It is hoped that records will build a clearer picture of the UK's current elm population and enable scientists to find out why some individuals have natural resistance. For more information see [conservationfoundation.co.uk/elms/](http://conservationfoundation.co.uk/elms/)

## CPRE Star Count 2019

The CPRE Star Count will take place this February, when they will be asking you to look up at the night sky and tell them how many stars you can see in Orion. You can do this from anywhere in England. They will be accepting results taken from Saturday 2 February until Saturday 23 February, but the best time to do the count is from 2–9 February, when the moon is smallest, so the skies are darkest! The results will help CPRE to create a new map to show how light pollution affects everybody's views of the night sky. For more information: [www.cpre.org.uk/starcount](http://www.cpre.org.uk/starcount)

## Haddenham Swifts, 2018 Season

Contributed by Jake Allsop



Swift entering nest box. Photo © Judith Wakelam

Every season differs. The first birds to return are the breeders, and they typically arrive at their breeding site in the first days of May. Then they often disappear again for several days, but no panic, they have gone off to feed before starting the serious business of egg laying, incubating, and raising their young. But every year the pattern differs slightly, which is when worried queries arise: *'What's happened to my Swifts?'* Last year, there was a weather catastrophe on their coastal route up the western Sahara. This killed a lot of birds and delayed the arrival of the survivors.

But they did come eventually and occupied their nest sites – maybe a nest box on your house, or on the top of the house wall via a gap at the back of the soffit. From the Green to the start of Aldreth Road, there are 30-35 sites available to our Swifts, with maybe 15 actually being used. Once the adults are in condition and their two to three eggs are laid, incubation will take about 20 days, and the fledging period is about 40 days.

The next event, about two weeks later, is the arrival of the non-breeders. They will be searching for a suitable nest place that they can use the following year. As the season progresses, the sky fills with parties of Swifts whirling round, as well as single birds bringing food back to their young. If you are very quick, you might see the bulging throat (where the pale patch is) of an adult bringing a bolus of 200-500 insects for the chicks.

Trying to assess the number of breeding pairs is quite a challenge. There are a few sites in the High Street where the house owners know the Swifts are in occupation: one has visual access to the three nest sites, another can hear the birds in the six boxes, and so on. In other cases, you might see birds entering a box or nest site, but with no further evidence that they are breeding. So, our High Street estimate of 15 is really a guesstimate. Elsewhere in the village, we know of three to four other places where Swifts are seen entering suitable cavities, so about 20 breeding pairs seems a reasonable estimate.

There is another way of trying to estimate the size of the breeding population, and that is to take the highest number of Swifts seen in a screaming party, and apply a bit of statistical jiggery-pokery to account for breeders and non-breeders. It's not easy, because both adults feed the young, but often one goes foraging while the other stays with the chicks. What's the highest number you have seen in the sky in, say, early July? My count was 40.

For further information, visit [actionforswifts.blogspot.com](http://actionforswifts.blogspot.com). Also, watch the press for details of Swift Awareness Week activities in Ely and Cambridge in mid-July.



## Mild Start to Autumn

After a very mild autumn with temperatures up to 15°C mid-November and a Song Thrush heard singing at the back of Station Road, it became cooler and unsettled. Three Egyptian Geese were spotted at Hinton Reservoir, which was very unusual. Buzzards were becoming bolder on edges of gardens, and on a mild day, two Red Admirals were spotted in John Burgess's Aldreth garden. On 1 January, there were three Bullfinches in John's garden in the same tree as last year!

**13 September** An early morning walk from Aldreth along the ditch bank to the West River: 25+ Lapwing in flight, 1 Heron, 1 male and 2 female Reed Bunting, and, by the bridge, a Kingfisher flying from one bank to another. SM

**11 September** Lesser Spotted Woodpecker on the bird feeder in a private garden in Haddenham. Really good record. SD

**27 October** A big surprise at the weekend was an adult female Fallow Deer crossing the road to the east of Earith Bridge, at 11.45pm. Very good, but brief views of it. Identified by large size, whitish hind legs and long tail (for a deer) with distinctive black and white tail pattern. SS

**31 October** The Brinks, Aldreth: 2 Snipe flushed, 1 Marsh Harrier, 3 Roe Deer. SE

**6 November** Dambank: 1 Yellowhammer, 2 Reed Bunting, 5 Chaffinch, 2 Kestrel, 50+ Starling, mixed flock of 500+ Linnets and Goldfinch, 5 Mute Swan. Long Drove: 2 female Sparrowhawk, 100+ Fieldfare, 1 Corn Bunting (heard), 2 Mute Swan. I&SD

**19 November** A very handsome Buzzard on a telegraph pole next to our garden in Station Road (*see below*). S&ID



**1 December** Bramley Grange late morning: 80-100 Fieldfare, 1 Barn Owl, 2 Buzzard, 6 Pheasant, 100+ mixed flock of Gulls, including Black-headed, Lesser Black-backed, and a few Common, 11+ Moorhen, 3 Coot, 40+ Mallard, 16 Tufted Duck, 2 Little Grebe, 100+ Wigeon, 6 Pochard, 40+ Greylag Geese, 2 Egyptian Geese and 1 Cormorant. I&SD.

**24 December** Nine Acre Wood: Tawny Owl mobbed by a Green Woodpecker, a Great Spotted Woodpecker, 4 Blackbird, 2 Chaffinch, 1 Robin and 1 Great Tit. Old West River: Little Grebe and Little Egret. SS

**9 January** Cool, bright and breezy day down on the droves. Clayton Bridge: 46 Mute Swan. Long Drove: 4 Roe Deer, 3 Corn Bunting, 3+ Reed Bunting, 50+ Goldfinch in a mixed flock, 2 Kestrel, 1 Skylark and 50+ Starling. Foulmire Drove: 2 Kestrel, 250+ Lapwing, up to 10 Fieldfare, 200+ Starling and 5 Corn Bunting. S&ID.

**24 January** Up to 3 Jays have been regular visitors during the recent cold weather. SS

**24 January** 1 Coal Tit singing in the garden, plus Green and Spotted Woodpeckers seen in the last few days. BY

Very cold now, as we draw to the end of January, with more Blackbirds and Starlings about in gardens – all arguing as usual! Little Owls are reported in the Orchard, otherwise not much variety of birds about, but I did hear a Dunnock in song this morning on the hedge. Hoping to see some colour in the form of Snowdrops, Aconites, etc about soon.

Please send sightings of any flora and fauna to Sheila Dickerson 749443 or at [hadconsoc@gmail.com](mailto:hadconsoc@gmail.com)

## Paul's Legacy

After the sad loss of Paul Mason (one of the founders of HCS) last year, we wanted to have a special occasion to celebrate him.

We are in the process of arranging a special meeting this coming December with a few of his friends to talk about different interests of the many he had in the natural world. We are also arranging a celebrity speaker to give a presentation too! Details, when finalised, will be in the next newsletter.

## News from Guppy's Pond

*Contributed by Wendy Lanman*

Well, I suppose the news this time is: not much news. I haven't seen any Great Crested Grebes; a young Mute Swan came, left, came back and left again. I haven't seen any Kingfishers for a while, nor have I seen a Great Spotted Woodpecker. However, I have been rather busy doing other things and haven't spent a lot of time looking out of the window, so maybe it's more due to a lack of my looking.

There are plenty of other birds – three Moorhens are under the bird feeder every day, picking up the seeds the smaller birds drop from the feeder. The Magpies come too, as well as several Blackbirds, Robins, Starlings, Dunnocks, Long-tailed, Great and Blue Tits, one Pied Wagtail at a time (a pair nested under our neighbour's balcony a couple of years ago), Green Woodpeckers, Goldfinch and House Sparrows.

Coots are swimming up and down, busily preparing for the breeding season, which will soon be here, and I saw a Cormorant this morning. Mallards are back, often in little groups of four or five at our end of the pond, so it looks as if, at last, their numbers are growing back to what they used to be.

The RSPB Big Birdwatch will be happening in a few days' time (26-27 January) and I shall be sitting in front of a window, watching 'properly', so I might be able to add a few more.



Eurasian Coot. Photo: Duhon

## Thoughts from the Gallery Garden

*Contributed by Ann Biggs*

Grey days, a mild winter so far, little sun to brighten the garden.

I remember a winter some years ago. Snow lay deep in late November, drifted high in the corners of the garden by blizzard winds. After the storms, a blue-sky day with frost glistening in the sun, each late autumn leaf wearing a snow cap. A white blanket covered the pond as I searched for signs of last night's visitors. Footprints of Badger, Muntjac and Fox showed they had fed on low hanging berries that still decorated the garden edges. Pheasants, with signs of that long dragging tail, had scratched at the snow looking for breakfast.

By 10am my studio feeders had attracted a crowd. Starlings squabbled over the fat balls, Goldfinches 'hogged' the niger seed, Long-tailed Tits, fluffy balls of feathers with a lollipop tail, scared away the solitary Coal Tit.

Today, in 2019, my feeders stay full. Visitors are few, hedgerows have food in abundance. But in Europe, snow has smothered the land, could the Beast from the East return, giving us a late winter? We wait...

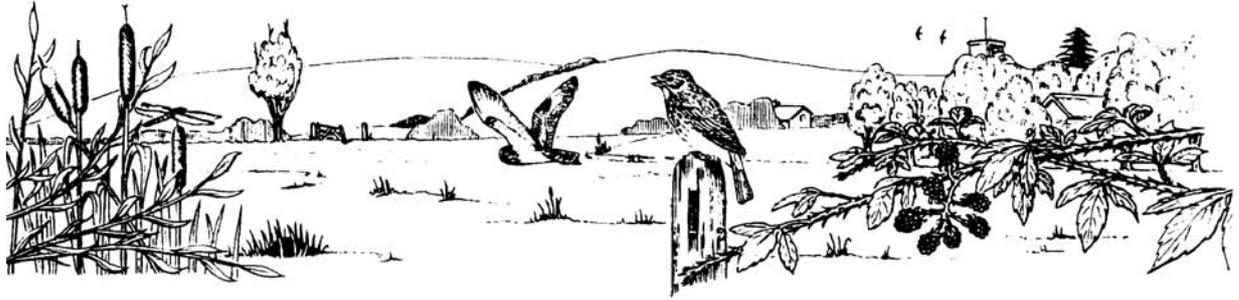
Meanwhile in the Gallery, the Cafe offers hot drinks and food, such as freshly baked scones, jacket potatoes and soup. Open Tuesday to Saturday 10-5pm and Sunday 12-5pm.

Our programme of workshops and talks kicks off with one not to miss: Saturday 23 February 5pm, a talk by Wayne Hollingsworth who grows and supplies tropical plants for the TV and film industry – *Game of Thrones* and *Jurassic Park* to name but a few...

See you there.



Fighting cock pheasants. Artwork by Ann Biggs



## 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 pm.  
Members free. Non-members are very welcome for a nominal £2.50 fee.  
All are welcome to stay for a free drink and a chat after each talk.

12 February

### **WATER VOLES OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

Ruth Hawksley of the Wildlife Trust can tell us how these delightful endangered creatures are doing after ongoing conservation help.

12 March

### **ISLANDS – A CELEBRATION**

Simon Stirrup, our own wildlife photographer, with an illustrated look at Islands of the UK.

9 April

### **WILDLIFE OF MERSEA ISLAND**

Dougal Urquhart, Senior Ranger, will give us an insight into this special island on the Essex coast. Short AGM beforehand.

14 May

### **GRAFHAM WATER**

Gregory Belcher of the Wildlife Trust shows us how this reservoir has been colonised by wildlife, being designated an SSSI in 1986.

### **BRING AND BUY CAKE AND PLANT SALE**

The Green, Saturday 4 May, 9:30-11:30am (tbc)

The weather has been kind to us so far this winter and has made it quite easy to split plants and pot up self-sown seedlings ready for the annual HCS sale, so we should have an interesting variety to offer, especially if you can bring some from your gardens too.

Judging by its growth already, there will also be plenty of rhubarb – a lot fresher and cheaper than in the supermarkets. So do come and buy some from us.

Cakes and biscuits – and probably jam and chutneys – will also be available. It is really quite exciting to see what people bring and really heartwarming to witness their generosity.

Alastair and Hazel Hull always kindly take whatever plants are left after the official sale on the Green and sell them from the Craft Centre for us, so, if you can't make it on the day, have a look there.

