

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

SPRING 2019

The Committee for 2018/19 is:

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Ann Biggs	740810
John Burgess	749441
Sheila Dickerson	749443
Susan Everitt, Treas.	740352
Elver Langley	740583
Wendy Lanman	741138
Caroline Lee	361678
Robert Norman	740473
Chris Prescott	749038

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

Send articles or photos for the newsletter to Sally on hadconsoc@gmail.com

HCS website:
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.

'Fabulous, chimerical blooms'

Contributed by Barbara Grafton

Naturalist and author Richard Mabey writes with passion about 'fabulous, chimerical blooms, with their velvet bodies and sculpted pink wings'. He is clearly a Bee Orchid fan, as are we.

We had two Bee Orchids (*Ophrys apifera*) appear for the first time in our back garden last year, and two have popped up this year in a slightly different place. We are now able to differentiate their grey-green rosettes from other low-growing wild flower leaves such as Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*). It wasn't too hard, then, to spot about 20 Bee Orchids in a small corner of Feast's Green in mid-April. It is excellent news about a species that is declining across England and is not locally common.



Ribwort Plantain (left), Bee Orchid (right).

Like all wild flowers, Bee Orchids are protected under Section 13 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), so they must not be uprooted. However, these orchids only flower once in their lifetime – and their flowers can be the result of between five and eight years of growth – so it is vital that they are never picked.

It is a vast underground network of mycorrhiza fungus we must thank for the presence of the Bee Orchids. Without being parasitic on the fungus, the seeds would be unable to germinate.

The stems, when they appear, will be about 10-15cm tall and as for the flowers, they will be a delightful combination of pinky-green upper petals, three rose-pink sepals, and a furry brown lower section that looks remarkably like the body of a female bumblebee. To male bees,

the flowers also smell like a female bee, which encourages them to land on the flowers. Just in case no suitable insect pollinator passes by, the Bee Orchid can also self-pollinate. If we are lucky, each stem could produce as many as ten flowers.

For the autumn edition I will write an update on how the Feast's Green Bee Orchids fare this summer. The Parish Council's contractors won't be mowing the patch until the flowers have seeded and died back in late July, so hopefully we will see a bumper crop and be able, with Richard Mabey, to 'celebrate the inexplicable, extravagant mimicry of the self-pollinating bee orchid'.

Nine Acre Wood

Contributed by John Burgess

A work party in January saw a happy band of brothers (and one sister complete with greyhound) armed with pruning equipment, walking the woodland paths. The annual objective is to maintain access for the tractor with grass cutter and just keep a communal eye on progress.

The scalloping of the figure of eight path some years ago has seen a vigorous resurgence of the understory; the coppiced trees have strong shoots and a welcome hole in the canopy lets the light flood in to the grass where the other low growing vegetation has re-established itself.

I walked into the wood the other evening; the aromas, birdsong and serenity really stirred the senses, a perfect antidote to a world of chaos.

Interestingly, at the edge of the path was a dead tree completely devoid of bark, wood boring beetles have mined between the bark and the softwood,



detaching the outer layer and leaving their network of tunnels exposed.

So lace up your boots, turn off the TV, exercise your legs and lungs and reconnect with nature.

Spring Thoughts from the Gallery Garden

Contributed by Ann Biggs

A bird called me from my studio one day this spring. On lazy wings a Buzzard spiralled above the trees, calling seductively to another. She, a dot in the wide sky, held her place, watching as paired Jackdaws drove him from his purpose and stilled his voice. For a heartbeat she waited his return before the blue sky claimed her.

Love was in the air: a stormcock (Mistle Thrush) threw out his challenge from the topmost branches of a tall tree; the delicate 'butterfly' display of a Greenfinch lured his mate to join him, but the Wren silenced them all as his song poured out, his body quivering with effort to impress his tiny lady.

Down in the Garden, a quieter passion, as Orange-tip and Tortoiseshell butterflies danced in shafts of spring sunlight, a Bee Fly flirted with Comfrey and, beloved by children, Dandelion and Daisy added colour to new grass around the pond.

The Garden in spring is a tiny Eden for you to sit in and enjoy your lunch or afternoon tea from our Tea Shop, open from 10am to 4.30pm Tuesday to Saturday and noon to 4.30pm on Sunday.

Future events at the Gallery for you to enjoy:

'Folk from Near and Far' – Music from the World – Thursday 20 June

'Fire and Ice' – Music and words from Steve Bingham and Jeremy Harmer – 27 June

Wayne Hollingworth – Palms and Ferns for the Film Industry – 29 June

Cambridge Open Studios every weekend in July. Studios and Galleries will be open, as well as various 'pop up' events in the Garden.



Wren by Ann Biggs.



Roe Deer. © Simon Stirrup. You can see the image in colour on <http://www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk> latest news and then scroll back to August 2018.

Roe Deer

Contributed by Simon Stirrup

When the editor suggested that a mammal image might be an appropriate subject for this article, I realised just how few photographs of mammals I have taken in general – let alone locally. Almost all my mammal images have been a by-product of photographing other subjects. Apart from the ubiquitous Rabbit, my encounters with local mammals are rare and unpredictable. Sadly, I see many more dead Badgers and Foxes than live ones and my only local sightings of Otter and Polecat have been as road kills.

Deer are the obvious exception. Muntjac Deer are regular in the Parish and occasionally appear in our garden, looking large and exotic. My attempts to exclude them have been a failure. Each sighting produces a mixed response; delight but dread about what has been eaten. Several times I have been able to photograph them with a 300mm lens from a downstairs window. The other species of deer that is increasingly seen is the Roe Deer, which is a personal favourite. They are typically wary and hard to approach.

This image of a sub-adult Roe Deer was taken locally in late August last year. So how was this photograph taken? The photograph was the result of a chance encounter and was taken at 6:30 in the morning as I drove along Long Drove. Wildlife is often tolerant of people in cars, but not Roe Deer in my limited experience. This individual was relaxed as it was sat some distance from the road. Consequently, it was necessary to use a 600mm lens to obtain any image at all. The lens was rested on a bean bag for stability. Despite using a 'big' lens the deer is still small in the frame and normally it would not have been worth photographing. However, the combination of the deer with the round straw bales makes a strong composition and the warm early morning light gives an interesting atmosphere. This is an extreme example, but it is worth remembering that it is not always necessary for the main subject to dominate an image.

The image was taken with a Canon 7d mark II camera, a Canon 600mm f4L IS lens, an ISO rating of 250 and an exposure of 1/250th second at f4. And not forgetting a bean bag!

Ely Cathedral launched the Cathedral Environment Group on 3 April and began working towards the Eco-Church Award. Initial actions/successes include litter picking around Ely on the first Saturday of the month, recycling the aluminium bases of the 86,000 candles that the cathedral uses in a year and switching to fully recyclable cups, saving some 11,000 cups a year from going to landfill.

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 in particular for arranging for Mike Dilger to visit and speak in December as part of the Paul Mason memorial.
- 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 £301 last year. This year the Stall will be on the Green on Saturday morning 4 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.
- Helpers at various work parties during the year in the Old Burial Ground, and in Nine Acre Wood. As always, volunteers for workdays are very welcome.
- To Steve Hawes for the Conservation Society posters.
- And to Christine Lowrey for checking the accounts. Before I hand over to Susan for her Treasurer's Report, a quick word about Nine Acre Wood.

Issues and work this year:

- We have had discussions with Haddenham Drainage Board regarding the timing of cutting the banks of the various ditches that are under their supervision, with a view to optimising the chances of wild flowers.
- We are making enquiries of the Land Registry and Haddenham Parish Council regarding the fact that the Aldreth Ponds site appears to have been registered to a private individual. We will keep you updated on these issues.

Upcoming events:

- There will be a visit to May Farm near Littleport on Sunday 28 April at 11.00am. Many of you will have been here in December when Steve Mumford gave his talk. Details in *Village Voice* and on the website.
- There will be an evening bat walk guided by Barbara York on Friday 10 May in Fairchild's Meadow at 8.20pm.

Chris Prescott
9 April 2019

Paul's Legacy

On Tuesday 17 December we will be holding a special meeting for all, in the Main Hall of the Arkenstall Centre. (This will replace our normal second Tuesday of the month meeting.) We will have three speakers to talk about their time with Paul Mason (about 10 minutes each). They will be followed by Mike Dilger, a broadcaster and naturalist, known to many people, from *The One Show*, who will give a talk. He is an excellent speaker. There will be an interval of 30 minutes for festive refreshments before Mike concludes the evening with questions and chat. The time is not yet confirmed but will probably be 7.00–10.00pm.

Please make a note in your diaries of this special event, which is free



Plant and Cake Sale

In spite of the cold and windy weather, the Eel Day in Ely and it being a bank holiday weekend, we made £247.80 – plants £121.10 and cakes £126.70. Maxine made the majority of the cakes, so she really deserves the biggest of thank yous. Everyone else who helped or brought things to sell also deserves a big thank you.

The weather remained miraculously dry until just before our time was up. Seeing the black clouds closing in on us a few minutes before the end of the sale, we hastily packed up and delivered the unsold plants to the Galleries (where they are now for sale) and got thoroughly soaked in the process. But it was well worth it. See you next year – and please will more cake makers step forward.

Visit to May Farm



Inspired by the December 2018 HCS talk given by Steve Mumford, G's Biodiversity Officer, 14 HCS members gathered on G's May Farm for a three-hour walk on 28 April – a day of sunshine, showers and a very chilly wind.

Steve began with a brief overview of the farming operations. May Farm is 2,300ha. Its core business is mushrooms. Production began in 2012 with 12 tunnels and has expanded to 48 tunnels that produce 170 tonnes of mushrooms a week, mostly for Tesco. The packing operation produces 1 million packs of radishes from Senegal and Spain every week. G's employs about 340 people there, 225 of whom work on the mushroom side. The mushroom cycle is 17 days long, from filling the tunnels with compost through three phases of picking

to cleaning the tunnels and starting again, working 365 days a year.

Steve Mumford has, almost single-handedly, made mammoth efforts to boost biodiversity on the site. Over six years 49,000 trees and 29,000 shrubs have been planted, all by hand. The 71 species of tree are all natives. There are 3km of hedgerow – the idea is to link planting to form wildlife corridors – and an arboretum. Sadly almost 27% of the planting died during the dry spell in 2018. In addition to planting, he has created ponds and marshes, attracting water birds, 21 species of damselfly and dragonflies plus numerous water voles. The water is carefully regulated, with dirty water from the mushroom plant being recycled and cleaned.

Feeding stations have helped boost the population of introduced Grey Partridge and other birds. When someone spotted a Barnacle Goose, it brought Steve's bird species count up to 144. Other wildlife-encouraging projects include a deluxe swift hotel, a hibernaculum for grass snakes and a pollen and nectar mix area, which attracted up to 80 Clouded Yellows last year, amongst many other butterfly and insect visitors.

Steve's efforts have won G's a number of environmental awards. We can only hope that the company continues to build on his work when Steve moves on to a new phase of his life in the near future.

Little Prickles

The Conservation Society wishes to congratulate the Year 5 and Year 6 pupils of Robert Arkenstall School who have recently won the Tycoon Enterprise 750 competition, organised by the Peter Jones Foundation, and received their certificates and trophy at Buckingham Palace.

The idea of Tycoon Enterprise is to raise awareness of enterprise and business skills in schools. The team had to create a business plan and budget, and came up with the idea of designing and making hedgehog ornaments from old books. These were made during school lunchtimes and breaks, and were sold at the school itself, Haddenham Pre-School Christmas fair, Haddenham Library, Ely Christmas Fair, Tesco and Sainsbury.

The Project raised £1,700 in profit, which went to the RSPCA, the British Hedgehog Preservation Society via their Haddenham representative Jean Shaw, and to the School.

You can read more here: <https://www.peterjonesfoundation.org/meet-the-tycoon-2018-finalists/> and in the June *Village Voice*.

Congratulations from Haddenham Conservation Society!



Changeable Weather for Local Wildlife

After a very cold January/early February, warm spring weather at the end of March brought a rush of Chiffchaff, Comma and Red Admiral, Peacock and Holly Blue butterflies. Insects such as Bee Flies, small Bumble and Queen Bumblebees, Honeybees and even Wasps benefitted from the spring flowers, especially the Hellebores, which they seem to love.

5 February Wildlife seen at Hinton Reservoir: 1 Cormorant, 22+ Mallard, 13 Tufted Duck, 50+ Wigeon, 14 Pochard, 2 Little Grebe, 28 Moorhen, 10 Coot, 2 Canada Geese, 19 Greylag Geese, 2 Herring Gull, plus numerous others and 1 Kingfisher. Other birds seen: Up to 40 Fieldfare, 2 Redwing, 2 Chaffinch, 2 Robin and 1 Buzzard. S&ID

13 February First pair of frogs in amplexus (mating position) in the pond, plus a Peacock butterfly sunning itself. BY

17 February Reed Buntings regularly feeding on softbill seed on the patio. Best news: a pair of Mistle Thrushes appear to be about to nest in the ash at the bottom of the garden – first Mistle Thrush record for a couple of years. JA

8 March Round the Doves this morning. Dambank: 50+ Fieldfare, 1 Skylark, 2 Mallard, 1 Kestrel, 4 Mute Swan, 1 Cormorant, 3 Buzzard, interacting and calling together. Long Drove: 1 Wheatear, 57 Mute Swan, 1 Buzzard in tree, Skylarks (heard), 1 Kestrel, 2 Mallard, 7+ Pied Wagtail, approx. 250 each Common and Black Headed Gull, 60+ Stock Dove, 8 Wheatear (in same field as gulls), 50+ Starling, up to 20 Goldfinch and 3 Reed Bunting. Better result than this time last year! S&ID

9 March Long Drove: 5 White Wagtail. SS

Fallen Kestrel

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

On 20 April we had just started to drive out when our neighbour Jackie Robinson appeared in the gateway with Poppy, her greyhound, on her lead in one hand while with the other she was gently clutching a Kestrel against her chest. Her face spelt out a very clear 'Help!'

She told us that she had found the bird flapping on the ground in Fairchild's Meadow and got to it just in time to stop Poppy from dealing what could have been a fatal blow.

Jackie, very rightly, decided that she would take it to the Raptor Centre, so we found a suitable box, left the lid slightly ajar and covered it with a cloth.

29 March Hinton Reservoir: On a sunny spring morning with a light breeze, we had 20 Greylag Geese, 4 Little Grebe, 4 Tufted Duck, 5 Mallard, 4 Coot, 9 Moorhen, 1 Cormorant, 1 Common Gull, 1 Green Woodpecker and 10 Fieldfare. Station Road: 1 Chiffchaff, 1 each Comma, Brimstone and Red Admiral. S&ID



30 March Blackbird nest in our garden (Photo © Simon Stirrup). SS

8 April Long Drove: 1 Ringtail Harrier. SS

15 April First two Swallows around the garden today; also our first Orange-tip butterfly. S&ID

22 April Flat Bridge area: 2 Great Crested Grebe, 1 Little Egret, 1 male Pochard, 3 Gadwall, 2 Mallard, pair Shoveler, 1 Snipe, 1 Sand Martin, 1 Kingfisher, 4 Roe Deer. Aldreth: 1 Yellow Wagtail flyover. SS

29 April 2 Short-eared Owls in area of Old West River. CB Bullfinch near path side of Fairchild's Meadow. CL

After a very warm spell over a late Easter, we seem to be back to changeable with average temperatures. Birds are nesting and starting to feed young, the Swallows are back, and we can look forward to the Swifts and know summer is really here!

Once at the Raptor Centre, they examined the bird and found that it was a female, that she had eggs in her abdomen and that she might be egg bound, so they kept her in and fed her while watching over her. Once she had laid an egg, she recovered well, and Jackie collected her and released her back into Fairchild's Meadow.

I happened to speak to a member of another Raptor Centre that day and he told me that Kestrels are very vulnerable. They spend so much energy hovering that, unless they get enough to eat, they can fall through starvation and exhaustion. He also told me that Kestrels are not suitable for falconry. Some people, having found one on the ground, try to train them but this always ends in the death of the bird.

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

The most prominent event at Guppy's Pond this spring was the Pike Fight. Yet another example of what can lie under those still and tranquil waters.

It sometimes alarms people that there are these huge Pike in the Pond, and they wonder whether it would be best to 'get rid' of them so that they do not destroy the other inhabitants. So, I spoke to fishermen who assured me that the Pike did a great job of keeping a balanced population in the pond. They eat their own, so keep the Pike population down as well as the other fish. It is true that they also take waterfowl, but we have a fairly steady population over the years. The Pike also keep the pond clean by taking weak and ill fish or fowl. If I am wrong, please let me know.

This spring we have had Reed Buntings and Great Spotted Woodpeckers visit the feeders. A couple of House Sparrows have taken up residence in the box Blue Tits had been using for a few years. This is under the carpport and I get a right telling off whenever I hang out the washing!

Tufted Ducks have visited the pond, the couple of Great Crested Grebes are still here, but I haven't

seen any young yet, the coots at our end have four chicks, but the Moorhen's chicks seem to have disappeared. Four Greylag Geese come and go, and a Grass Snake has just been spotted swimming in the water.

Pike Fight

Contributed by Alan Gardner

On 8 March my neighbour Brian phoned to say that he saw a lot of splashing in Guppy's Pond. My immediate thought was that someone had fallen in the Pond. I rushed around to his house to see a true 'survival of the fittest' battle.

In the water was a large Pike, its jaws tightly around an older Pike (I think). Very close by were another four or five Pike busy catching smaller fish. The dominant Pike did not let go, and we could see the gills of the older fish still moving. We were surprised that none of the other Pike were trying to take their share of the dying fish! Quite some time later the Pond was charm itself; in the distance was the now dead fish and no sign of the other Pike. The carcass remained intact in the pond for more than a month and a half before it disappeared under the pond weed. Nothing ate it.

Bat Walk

When Jez Reeve asked Barbara York, a local bat rehabilitator, if she would lead a bat walk around Fairchild's Meadow they envisaged a dry, sunny evening; the reality was a cool, rainy evening. Undeterred, over 30 bat enthusiasts gathered by the top gate in the gloom on 10 May. Barbara began with an overview on the evening's quarry.

The exact number of bat species in the world is unknown but they divide into two main groups: fruit/nectar bats and insectivorous bats. There are 17 species resident in the UK, all insectivorous. About 95% of UK bats are pipistrelles. Once thought to be a single species, the pipistrelle is now known to be two species: the Common Pipistrelle (photo) and the Soprano Pipistrelle, and they echolocate at slightly different frequencies, the Soprano having a higher frequency, hence the name. A pipistrelle can eat 1,000-3,000 midges and mosquitoes per night. Last year the much rarer Nathusius' Pipistrelle was recorded in Haddenham for the first time. Brown Long-Eared, Noctule, Daubenton's and Natterer's bats have also been recorded in the parish but are much less common than pipistrelles.

For successful feeding, bats need warmth, trees, mature hedges of native species and natural water; this makes Fairchild's Meadow a good site. A top tip is to search on the leeward side of hedges if there is a bit of wind, as bats will feed on the sheltering insects.

We set off in the gathering dusk to walk around the perimeter of the meadow, hopefully holding two bat detectors aloft, but with low expectations of seeing or hearing any bats. So, there was great

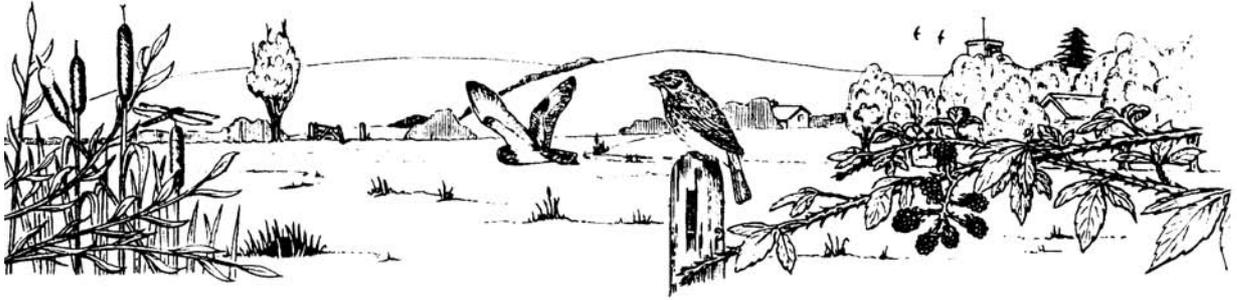


excitement when we not only heard a Common Pipistrelle but actually saw it. As we made our way along the hedges back to our starting point the detectors picked up more Common Pipistrelles, as well as a couple of other (Myotis) bats – most likely either Daubenton's or Natterer's bats, or perhaps one of each; there is no way of knowing for definite as their calls are almost identical.

A lot damper, but also a lot more knowledgeable, we agreed it had been a very worthwhile event. A collection was made and the proceeds will be donated to bat conservation.

Thanks to Jez for organising the event, hopefully there will be more in the future.

If you want to support the protection of our bats, or find out more, look at the Bat Conservation Trust website <https://www.bats.org.uk>. If you find an injured bat phone the Bat Helpline on 0345 1300 228. Membership of the Cambridgeshire Bat Group <http://www.cambsbatgroup.org.uk> costs £8 per household.



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.

8 October

HEDGEHOGS IN YOUR GARDEN

Paul Wyer of the Beds, Cambs and Northants Wildlife Trust

12 November

A YEAR AT HOLME DUNES

Gary Hibberd of the Norfolk Wildlife Trust

17 December

MEMORIAL TO PAUL MASON

Friends of Paul plus Mike Dilger (*The One Show*)

Note: NOT the second but the third Tuesday of the month.

OTHER EVENTS

Early September, a Sunday tba

BOATING DAY ON GUPPY'S POND

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

