

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

SUMMER 2018

The Committee for 2018/19 is:

Barclay Arnott	740500
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 2018

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.

Annual Wildflower Meadow Count

Contributed by Jez Reeve

This year three different types of monitoring were undertaken in Fairchild's Meadow to ensure that as many species as possible were recorded. Diagonal transects were done in May and June by a local recorder. Twelve 1m quadrats were recorded on 17 June by six counters and there was also a site monitoring visit by Martin Baker, the Conservation Manager for the local Wildlife Trust, to assess the status of the grassland against national criteria. He did a W-transect walk through the meadow with 20 1m x 1m quadrats.



Ragged Robin.

when the results of the 17 June were added: Common Couch, Hard Rush and Meadow Barley.

Martin recorded 22 wildflower species, of which 10 were those which had been originally sown in 2003 and 2013 as part of the meadow generation project. These were Black Knapweed, Common Sorrel, Meadow Buttercup, Red Clover, Lady's Bedstraw, Ox-eye Daisy, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Ragged Robin, Ribwort Plantain and Yellow Rattle. The recording exercise that was undertaken by six local volunteers on 17 June had the same results for the 10 sown species and recorded 11 other species. The earlier diagonal transects had picked up Cowslip, Ragged Robin, Cuckoo Flower and Hogweed, which were also observed by Martin Baker along with 7 other species.

In summary, the wildflower meadow, established in 2003, is well on its way to being added to the national store of precious sites thanks to the hard work and dedication of local volunteers, cattle and all the insects and invertebrates that it is home to. A very satisfying story so far...

Fairchild's Meadow is owned by the parish and managed by the Fairchild's Meadow Working Group for Haddenham Parish Council.

Footie, Felines and Wild Furries

Contributed by Jez Reeve

Who would have thought that my joint dislike of football and love of my cats would lead me to one of the most thrilling wildlife experiences? At least half our garden is cultivated with bees, butterflies and small creatures in mind. There are two small ponds, rough grassland, shade, piles of rotten logs and twigs, as well as statuesque *Verbena bonariensis*, open simple roses, foxgloves, lavender and a formal rose and clipped bush section.

One of the cats has had a pronounced limp since kittenhood and is a little overweight, so I asked my lovely neighbour if I could make a cat portal in our adjoining fence to make it easier for her to get around. A bit of sawing and rearranging later, a magic window was created with ramps made of old bits of decking leading up to the hole in the fence and down into the garden beyond. Since then I have enjoyed watching our two and all the neighbouring cats making a bee-line for the cat portal to round off their territorial circuits. A circular route was completed when I cut a low arch in the fence on the other side and, in a mad moment, decorated it with tiles, after a visit to the Alhambra!



So, what does for the cat population also does for the wild population. One evening during the world cup I was sitting with the cats (who are locked in at night) by the open bedroom window, as far from the manly roars on the TV as possible, when I saw the tall Rosebay Willowherb by the pond agitating in a most peculiar way. Drat, I thought, rats! I reached for the binoculars to monitor the situation and, to my delight, I saw not one, but two young hedgehogs snuffling around the logs hoovering up insects in the fading sun.

So as Brazil was making a spectacular exit from this year's football world cup tournament I was enjoying a most exciting spectacular of my own. I crept out and was rewarded with a few

photographs of the two spiny garden visitors. Had they been using the cat portals? My neighbour says that there are hedgehog poos on her side, so we assume that their nightly perambulations now include a trip up and down the decking ramps and through the cat portal. Glad to have been of service, young hoglets!



A Cautionary Tale

Contributed by Sally MacEachern

Guests were expected and the garden was overgrown and in need of attention. I dashed out to prune back the spent Euphorbia (spurge) flowers. Aware that the milky white sap is an irritant, I wore gloves and long sleeves. As I reached to cut the last of two flower stalks, sap spurted up into my right eye. Immediately it began burning.

I did my best to wash my eye out with tap water and then turned to my computer. Too late, I found advice about always wearing eye protection when handling the plants. I also found reports of severe burning, blurry vision, ulcers on the cornea and even blindness, as a result of sap in the eye. A call to 101 resulted in advice to go to A&E immediately.

So instead of mowing the lawn and preparing for guests my partner found himself driving to Addenbrooke's. A&E was threatening to overflow but I was directed into the 'fast lane' and seen after about 15 minutes. My eye was flushed with saline fluid. Between each litre staff checked the pH level of my eye and recommended another litre. Eight hours and six litres later I staggered out with a sore eye and several packets of eye drops.

While I was being treated another patient came in with Euphorbia sap in her eye, but only needed one litre of saline fluid. The staff said that Euphorbia was notorious in eye clinics but that the public was very unaware of its dangers.

Fortunately, my eye seems to have recovered completely, but I shall treat my clump of Euphorbia with great caution in the future.



Fieldfare. © Simon Stirrup. You can see the image in colour here <http://www.simonstirrup.co.uk/recentimages.htm>. You will need to scroll down a bit!

Fieldfare in the Snow

Contributed by Simon Stirrup

This image of a Fieldfare in the snow was taken in our garden earlier this year. Garden birds make interesting and convenient subjects to photograph, particularly in wintery conditions. So how was this photograph taken?

Around mid-morning on 3 March a pair of Jays hopping on our lawn looked fantastic against a white background of snow and I thought that they would make a dramatic picture. I quickly erected a small dome hide, put down a ground sheet, some rugs and cushions and scattered out some food. I grabbed a camera and lens and lay down in the hide with the lens resting on a small bean bag just above the surface of the snow and waited and waited. It became apparent that the Jays hadn't read the script. They made a few brief visits for peanuts but were not cooperative. Fortunately, as well as peanuts I had put out an apple as backup, which a Fieldfare soon found and defended fiercely from a Blackbird and other Fieldfares. I had hoped for an image with more of a distance between the Fieldfare and the apple, but this Fieldfare was not to be separated from its valuable food source.

This was the best of the images taken. I was pleased with the low angle and the contrast between the Fieldfare and its apple and the snowy background – almost a cut-out. The fact that it was bright, but cloudy prevented the snow from being a dazzling white and the soft light was reflected onto the bird's plumage to fill in the shadows.

The image was taken with a Canon 7d mark II camera, a Canon 300mm f2.8L IS lens, an ISO rating of 400 and an exposure of 1/320th second at f6.3.

I must admit that this was rather an extreme approach. In an earlier winter I set up a camera on the lawn which was pre-focused on an apple. I was then able to take pictures of a Fieldfare feeding on the apple from the comfort of the house using an inexpensive remote controller. The images were not as good, but at least I was warm and had a cup of tea to hand.

A Long Hot Summer

Early summer came with wildlife all very busy and making the most of the warm sunshine and longer days. Butterflies in particular seemed to be doing well. After rain in early June, we saw no more, with temperatures rising and becoming very warm.

6 June Early morning walk from Aldreth to the Pumping Station noting all bird and dragonfly sightings: 1 or 2 Cormorant, 1 Little Egret, Moorhen, Coot, Mute Swan pair, 10 Greylag, 4 Mallard, 1 Gadwall, Tufted Duck pair and female, Grey Partridge, Red-legged Partridge, Pheasant, 2 pairs Lapwing, 1 male Marsh Harrier, 4 Black-headed Gull, 1 Common Tern, Barn Owl, Kingfisher, Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Collared Dove, Yellow Wagtail, Skylark, Swallow, House Martin, Swift, 2 Tree Creeper singing, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, 4 or 5 Reed Warbler singing along Causeway with others along the river, 1 Sedge Warbler, Whitethroat, Blackcap, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Carrion Crow, Rook, Magpie, Starling, House Sparrow, 25 Linnet, Reed Bunting, Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting. 2 Scarce Chaser, many Azure Damselfly, many Blue-tailed Damselfly, 1 Large Red Damselfly, Red-eyed Damselfly. SS

16 June A Hobby hunting around Doghouse Field (just south of Doghouse Grove). A couple of times it dove into trees sending Wood Pigeons clattering out. SB

8 July Turtle Dove and a couple of White-letter Hairstreaks at Fairchild's Meadow. SS

17 July A Red Kite flew low over the garden today. A night moth trapping produced 50+ including Elephant Hawk Moths (*see photo below*) and a Buff Tip, which looks like a twig on a tree in the daytime. S&ID



21 July Fairchild's Meadow: 1 Turtle Dove heard, 2 White-letter Hairstreaks,

Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns, Large and Small Whites and Speckled Woods. SD

25 July On a trip around some of the droves at the weekend, even though very warm, we found some wildlife: Yellowhammers, 2 Heron (in a field), about 400-500 corvids, Corn Buntings (heard only), 3 Kestrel and 1 Weasel. 1 Painted Lady (pristine condition), Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Ringlet, Red Admiral, Peacock, and many Small and Large Whites. Many wild flowers, putting on a good show. S&ID

29 July A Turtle Dove singing by the Great Ouse to the south of Holme Fen, plus at least three Yellow Wagtails by the river bend and a heavily moulting female Marsh Harrier hunting over the field on the other side of the river. SB

8 August A Turtle Dove spotted on our bird bath (Station Road) yesterday before being disturbed. S&I



Roe deer. © Simon Stirrup

25 August North Fen: 4 Yellow-legged Gull, 75 Lesser Black-backed Gull. Long Drove: 7 Roe Deer. Adjacent to Nine Acre Wood: Long-winged Conehead. SS

Well, after the hottest Summer since '76, butterflies especially seem not to have fared well after all, with very few about recently, apart from Small and Large Whites. Dragonflies are down too. It could have been 'the beast from the east' that caused problems, but many young fledged birds of many varieties seem to have done well. Since the welcome rain came just in time for wildlife, we look forward to a good autumn.

Note: Our website wildlife reports have greatly diminished since we lost Paul Mason. Please do send your viewings to Sheila Dickerson at hadconsoc@gmail.com, no matter how insignificant/ordinary you may think them.



Hay Raking in the OBG

Weeks of sunshine and high temperatures prompted an 8am start for the summer hay raking work party on Sunday 29 July. However, a sudden change in the weather a couple of days before meant that we were raking damp grass on a cool cloudy morning – a perfect temperature for the task. A good turnout meant that we were finished in 1½ hours. Many thanks to Jez, Barclay, Chris, Sheila, June, Sally and Elver. Particular thanks to Mike, who not only cut all the grass the week before, but also turned up on Sunday morning. We were refreshed by freshly pressed apple juice from Barclay's garden and coffee and biscuits provided by Sheila. It began sprinkling with rain again as we made our way home.

On a negative note, a significant amount of dog poo made the cutting unpleasant for Mike, particularly in the lower part of the OBG, and during the rake up.

Summer in the Gallery Garden

Mid-August, with temperatures still on the rise, most creatures have retreated to deep shade. Grass is brown, leaves wilt in the savage heat, along with the human visitors who move the garden tables beneath the sheltering trees. Birds that rose early to feed in the cooler dawn light, now sleep in the cover of welcoming leaves.

The 'High Street' Swifts have left, apart from a few bewildered youngsters left to find their own way to Africa, while in the Garden butterflies flit among the brambles, pausing to soak up the sun with folded wings until a shadow moves them on. In the pond the water dwindles daily leaving the newts to hide in a few inches of water at the pond's centre.

When the human visitors leave for home, a solitary Muntjac emerges from the undergrowth scanning the Garden for danger, while young Blackbirds search the nooks and crannies for insects.

Towards evening as the sun sinks behind the tall trees, a mated pair of Tawnies hoot softly in concert and Wood Pigeons coo seductively to a darkening sky until the light has gone.

September arrives, the temperature starts to fall, so why not visit the newly refurbished Haddenham Tea Rooms for a light lunch and delicious homemade cake and meet our new catering lady Nikki, who will greet all customers with a welcoming smile.

We are open 10am to 5pm Tuesday to Saturday and 12 to 5pm on Sundays.



News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

Well, the swans didn't stay, and the Great Crested Grebes didn't raise a family, so that was disappointing. However, the Coots kept their chick and the Moorhens, after losing their first brood, kept three of the second. This might have been because the Coots, this year, were surprisingly tolerant of the Moorhens. They are usually aggressive towards them during the breeding season and even try – and succeed – to drown the chicks.

The Reed Warblers turned up as usual and filled our little enclave of the Pond with their happy chatter. We also saw Buntings, Redpoll, a Tree Creeper and a Great Spotted Woodpecker, as well as a Green Woodpecker. There have been little gatherings of Starlings and, a few days ago, I saw a group of six Sparrows and wondered whether it was the result of the pairing of the two who met on Brian's car earlier in the spring. A Magpie has also made its nest in one of the elms across the water and is a regular visitor to the garden. I know – nobody likes Magpies, but I think they're beautiful.

This has been a good year for the Bee-fly or *Bombylius major*. It's a furry insect about half an inch long with a permanently extended proboscis that visits flowers just like a hummingbird. It looks like a bee but is actually a fly. We saw plenty of them in May and June.

Brian heard a loud splash in July when it was very hot. He went quickly to the balcony to see what it was and surprised a Muntjac swimming over to the garden. When it saw him, it turned back and ran out where it had come from. We also have at least one visiting Hedgehog which must be using the cat portal between our and Jez and Chris's garden. It probably visits all the gardens around the Pond as others have seen it too.

Two days ago I found a young Great Crested Newt in a wood pile!



Bombylius major.

[By Richard Bartz, Munich aka Makro Freak [CC BY-SA 2.5 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5>)], from Wikimedia Commons.

Design Changes – a Note from the Editor

When I took over editing the HCS newsletter in October 2014 I inherited a Word template which enabled me to continue fairly seamlessly, although on a steep learning curve with Word layout. After the May 2018 newsletter I upgraded from Word 2011 to Word 2016. To my dismay, my trusty template is no longer accessible in a usable form (if only I had thought to keep Word 2011 as well!). I have not been able to work out how to do a Word 16 template, despite a number of frustrating hours. Since I use a Mac I thought I'd try Pages instead. I'm on a learning curve here too but I find it much easier to understand.

This issue is produced on Pages. I have tried to keep to the old design as much as possible but it is, of course, different. Do let me have feedback on hadconsoc@gmail.com, if you have any, and I'll hope to improve as I get more proficient.

Subscriptions were due on 1 January. If you haven't done so already, please pay promptly as it really does help.

Bempton Cliffs and Flamborough Head

Contributed by Sheila and Ian Dickerson

As bird watchers, we decided we needed to go to east Yorkshire to enjoy the spectacle that is Bempton Cliffs. For non-bird watchers, you may think, oh, that is near Bridlington, a seaside resort with fun fair etc., but that is not for us; we prefer to go to North Norfolk for that. So, in mid-June, we ventured north over the Humber Bridge, but from Haddenham via A15 is not the best route, we found!

Our b&b was well situated for Bempton Cliffs, and evening meals down on the harbour were excellent.

We first went to Flamborough Head with good weather on our side and saw our fill of Kittiwakes, so called because of their calls and very vocal too! Guillemots, Gannets, Razorbills and, of course, Puffins – they were all a delight!

We visited RSPB Bempton Cliffs the next day and saw our fill of 'seabird city' – seabirds everywhere, all nesting and many on the sea too. Very noisy!! A few had young, but we were a bit early for the majority. There were many viewing platforms and walks across the cliffs with volunteers helping to point out birds you may not have noticed. All the birds had their niches, and some very precarious. All a delight to see. So glad we went, a great experience and one to remember.

Our return journey was via Castle Howard, where we stopped and admired, before returning home. A fitting end to our trip.





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.

9 October

FASCINATING FUNGI

Peter Walker gives us an introduction to Mycology (the study of fungi).

13 November

PEEKS AT TWO THOUSAND YEARS OF THE GREAT OUSE

Jeff Hide takes a brief illustrated look at some changes in the culture, history and economy of the inhabited settlements on the fourth largest river in the UK, and their effects.

11 December

THE WILDLIFE OF MAY FARM – LITTLEPORT

Steve Mumford and friends give an illustrated overview of what has been done to create habitats that encourage birds, mammals and plant species, and their success.

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.

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