

WYCOMBE

WILDLIFE



WILDLIFE GROUP

NEWS

no. 26

APRIL 1998

The Countryside Centre, Bassetsbury Manor, Bassetsbury Lane, High Wycombe, HP11 1QX
01494 536930

IN THIS ISSUE

Welcome to WyWG's new team of Project Officers	61
Update	
Farewells and new of Project Officers past	62
MoreWild Words	
Further poems from our school's competition	63
Wildlife Notebook	
Wildlife at Brands Hill Avenue	64
Wildlife Gardening	
Observations from a first floor flat	65
Wildlife ID	
Spring butterflies	66
Wildlife around Wycombe	
Flora & fauna of the Rye	67
Penultimate	
Nature Conservation down-under ?	68
wildlife WATCH report	
Winter highlights	69

Wildlife Notice Board

Welcome to our three new volunteer Project Officers who were appointed on the 13th January and have now taken up their duties.



Ian Nesbitt aged 35, was a building estimator before taking a Biology degree at the Royal Holloway College, University of London.

Two years ago he spent a month in Russia, assisting an Ichthyologist with his research, though he spoke no Russian! Communicating with

us should hold no terrors after that.

Nicola Frost is 22 and was an assistant woodland ranger for



the Cornwall Wildlife Trust before coming to Wycombe.

She studied Ecology at Lancaster University and is keen to become involved in WWG's work with local schools

and WATCH.

Tim Iliett has a first degree in Earth Studies from Aberystwyth University.

He followed this with an M.Sc. in Coastal Zone Management from Bournemouth University. He is



We wish all our new team members a happy and successful time working with the Group. Pat Morris

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Wycombe Wildlife Group is a voluntary organization the **OBJECT** of which is to further the ecology and knowledge of the urban and fringe areas of High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire; to conserve, protect, restore and create wildlife habitats; to encourage colonization and survival of all plants and animal life in such areas and to promote the education of the public in matters pertaining to wildlife and its conservation.

Within Wycombe District the Group aims to :

- ✦ Survey and map wildlife habitats.
- ✦ Protect important wildlife sites.
- ✦ Study wildlife sites and associated flora and fauna.
- ✦ Manage wildlife sites and associated flora and fauna.
- ✦ Stimulate public interest in wildlife & its conservation.
- ✦ Encourage wildlife gardening.
- ✦ Co-operate with other groups of similar aims.
- ✦ Promote the objectives of the Group.
- ✦ Encourage active participation in conservation of all persons and groups and provide appropriate training to that end.

(A detailed copy of the aims is available on request)

Wycombe Wildlife News is published 3 times a year to promote the Group's activities and inform members & public of its progress.

Editor : Pat Morris
Produced by : Maurice Young
Printed by : Rank Xerox
 THE DOCUMENT COMPANY

Illustrations by :
 Pat Morris, Frances Wilding
 and Rachel Buss

Farewell to Fatima and Jo

Sadly, we had to say goodbye to **Fatima Patel** and **Jo Thorn**, the two remaining Project Officers of our previous Project Team, at the end of February. Although Jo will continue to support the Group occasionally, whilst still in the area. Fatima has left to go to Australia. She will be visiting several National Parks, while working with the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers. Ultimately she would like to become involved with the Australian and New Zealand Scientific Exploration Society. She plans to be away for a year.

We wish her every success with her new venture, and thank both Fatima and Jo for their loyal support over the past year.

News of Past Officers

Elaine Tague has also gone "Down Under" on a three-week mammal survey in the Yarra valley, 80 miles NW of Melbourne, counting possums and other mammals. She will be back at her post at **Calvert Environmental Education Centre** in mid-April.

Jo Hale Congratulations to Jo Hale, Project Officer in the early 90's. She has moved to join the **Environment Agency** at Winchester, where she has been appointed **Team Leader, Customer Services**.

Report :

Winter Highlights 1997/8

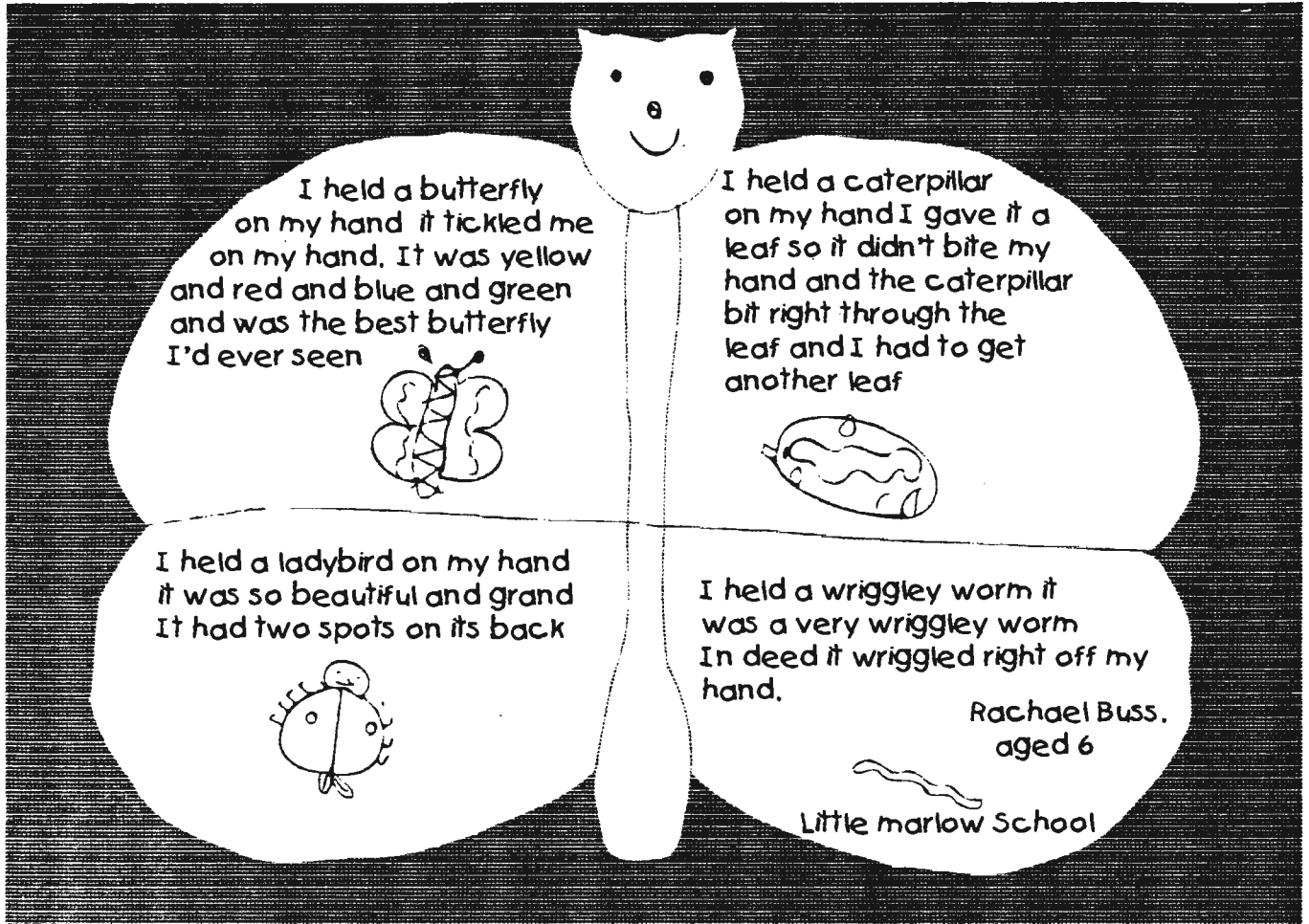
The highest temperatures ever recorded for January brought butterflies out from hibernation on the 9th & 10th of the month, and plants into flower unusually early. Another spell of very warm weather enticed even more butterflies out on the 13th February, plus bumble bees.

Siskins have provided a highlight in the winter garden : most people have witnessed them on their nut feeders. From 2 to 8 siskins have been present in my garden daily since min-January. A carpet of violets have brightened up the ground under foot.

Frogs have not been so plentiful this year (they have all gone to Irenke's) and spawn has been more sparse. The date of the frogs appearance (12th Feb) was not a record - 2nd February in 1994 and 5, but my frogs do seem to emerge a day or two earlier in my South East facing garden than for other Committee members. Tadpoles were already swimming about by the third week of March (21/03/98).

Pat Morris

Views expressed in the newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Group. For the purposes of management of the Group membership information is held on computer. Any members who object to their membership details being held in this way should notify the secretary.



Caterpillars on Stinging Nettles

As I run through the woods.
The tall, dark Christmas tree shaped leaves sting my legs.
As they sting my legs the rain drops start to drip
dripping off the leaves,
to create a tiny puddle on the floor.
Leaves rustle in the wind.
They rustle like they are dancing to the
winds tune.

The caterpillars on them black as soot,
look like they have not eaten for years.
So still they look like they are glued to the
nettle.
They do not look up at you,
as they do not move.
As I look at caterpillar I wonder does the nettle
sting them? and why they don't move.

Helen Taylor
aged 12
Spinfield School

I Couldn't Be Bothered

My mum told me to tidy the garden,
But I couldn't be bothered.
My dad said mow the lawn
But I couldn't be bothered.
My sister told me clean out the fish,
But I couldn't be bothered.
My aunt told me pick up the litter,
But I couldn't be bothered.
After a while the garden was messy:
Rubbish was everywhere,
The grass was long and weedy,
The fish had died.
I was disgusted at the state
I had left the garden in.

Charlotte wood
aged 12
Foxes Piece

The three poems above entered in our Wild Words Poetry Competition for schools were commended.p



Winter Wildlife '94 - '98 52 Brands Hill Avenue

Having kept a record of the wildlife that visits my garden since 1994 I thought it would be interesting to compare the winter quarters (January to March) of these 5 years. The following are some of the highlights :-

Frogs : We saw our first frogs arrive on the 16th February 1994 and produce spawn on 1st March but were less pleased when on the 17th March ice had to destroy our 10 year old carp due to the frogs over enthusiastic mating tactics - it seems they were happy to attach themselves to anything that moved !



Siskin
(*Carduelis pinus*)

On January 28th last year I had the horrible experience of finding 15 dead frogs in the Rockery Pond when tidying up after the severe frosts. They clearly died through lack of oxygen, so this year I have been very careful to keep a frost free area with an ice-cream carton. The large pond which had a heater in it to do the same job still had one or two casualties and one or two frogs had deformities due to Red-leg disease that was prevalent in 97. This year was another bumper year for frog spawn, on the 21st February in the Rockery Pond and vast amounts in the Large Pond nearly a week later on the 27th but with no signs of frogs or spawn in the little pond for the first time ever. Nature certainly seems to have compensated for last year's losses.

Birds : They are undoubtedly the stars of the winter quarter coming in greater numbers and more visible due to the bare trees and coming closer in search of food. Numbers have varied little over the years varying between 20 and 28 different species each month, every year throats up its own excitement. 1994 saw my first Blackcap, a Mistle Thrush, 2 Gold Crests and a Sparrow Hawk. 1995 my first Brambling, 5 Jackdaws together, a Gold Finch and on the 8th January a clear imprint of a Sparrow-Hawk on the dining room window. In 1996 I saw a Grey Wagtail, 2 Robins, a Garden Warbler and my first pair of Mallard, who proved not to do as much damage as feared and provided much amusement. Sadly they did not return last year but instead I had a Mistle Thrush and a



Reed bunting
(*Emberiza scboeniclus*)

male Reed Bunting. This year saw 1 Siskin arrive in January and 5 in February - every year gets better ! This year has also been excellent for Finches of all varieties - sadly my prize-winning photo of 5 Gold Finches on a Globe Thistle has not materialized as we seem to have lost the whole film !

Irenke York



A welcome in

WYCOMBE'S

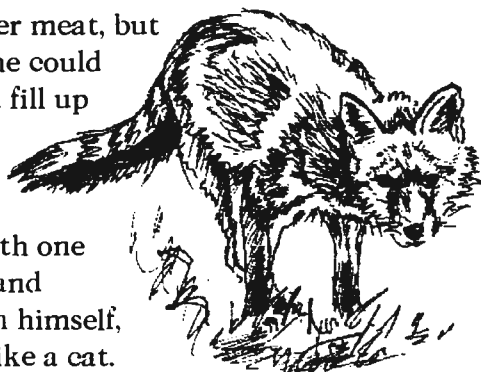
WILDLIFE GARDENS

The fox appeared to be wearing elegant, knee-high black boots with pointed tops. He was sitting on the grass, quite relaxed watching my bedroom window. He knew that food often came from there - not ideal food like chicken or other meat, but still food that he could eat, and helped fill up an empty stomach.

As I looked he leaned back with one foot in the air and started to clean himself, meticulously, like a cat.

There was plenty of time - it had only just got dark, and the whole night stretched ahead. I threw the food out, and he jumped, startled, and ran a few steps away, then slowly came back and started his usual walk around the food, sniffing carefully before starting to eat with delicate bites.

I had been hearing some rustling in the bushes for some time, but there are always noises at night. This rustling came nearer, and before the fox had settled down to his meal, a small badger



The Fox & the Badger

Observations from a first floor flat

came lumbering through the fence - he too knew there was some food to be had here. He also started walking in a wide arc around the food, and the fox with almost audible frustration, moved a respectful distance away and sat again watching mournfully as his supper disappeared. Occasionally he glanced up at my window as if to say "Why are you letting this animal eat my food?"

The badger, a noisy eater, as always took his time, snuffling and slurping around the whole area, until the last crumb had been noisily engulfed, then he wandered away. The fox hurried over to the site of his stolen supper, the picture of dejection. Nothing left ! With one reproachful look at my window, he melted away like a shadow into the hedge.



I thought it was interesting that the fox always knew when I was there and didn't seem very bothered, but the badger never thought to look up, until one night when I threw a peanut butter sandwich right on his nose !

Mary Williams

Kites in Wales

Near the end of a visit to Wales in February we decided to visit a farm at Rhayader where, we were told, they feed red kites daily. After a contretemps at Llanidloes, where the signpost pointed completely in the wrong direction, we got to Llanidloes and eventually had the farm in our sights.

The good news was that it was a lovely day and there was a splendid marked walk round the hill farm (about an hour and a half to go round) - the bad news - they did not feed the kites until 2 p.m. and they did not serve food. So we decided to go on the walk and stay for the red kite feeding. A Mars bar & a cuppa had to substitute for the Sunday roast. We got back to the hides, from where the kites could be viewed about 1.30p.m., no signs of the kites. It was two minutes to two before the first kites appeared - they are obviously good time keepers ! We could hear a tractor and the farmer turned into the field distributing fat and meat, right in front of our hide - luckily for us.

The cameras started whirring and amongst a melee of crows six kites appeared swooping and diving but never landing. also with my 300mm lens and 400 ASA film, (won in the WyWG competition) I decided to try a get some pictures of the birds as they swooped, paused and turned, close to the ground - and that was another roll of film gone. Mr Kodak would be happy.

Michael York



Spring Butterflies

“April showers bring May flowers”, and the flowers herald the appearance of our butterfly season. Butterflies and moths pass the winter in any one of their four life stages, eggs, caterpillars, chrysalis or adult insect according to the species. I will take you through the first months of the butterfly year and tell you about the ones you should be able to find locally. We started our year this time in February with record temperatures, but more often in

March with the appearance on warm days of butterflies that have spent the winter in hibernation, most noticeable is the bright yellow male Brimstone (the female is virtually white), but we can also see the Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and Comma as they search for any nectar sources. In early spring these insects go in and out of

hibernation depending on temperature, and on into April and early May and then when the temperature & conditions are right lay their eggs, having lived six to eight months before they perish.

The next species we can expect to see are the true spring butterflies, they will have spent the winter as a chrysalis and only emerge as adults once the days are long enough and warm.

A bright blue butterfly flying through gardens in early April sunshine is the Holly Blue, its caterpillars live on holly flowers in the spring and when these have completed their life-cycle the second, late summer brood live on ivy blossom. About every four years the numbers of this insect build up until it is really conspicuous and then a parasitic wasp catches up with it causing the numbers to drop dramatically the next season, the few survivors then gradually rebuild the population all for it to happen again. A few days later we may encounter the Speckled Wood butterfly, small size, brown with yellow spots on its wings. This is mostly a woodland species where it will find dappled sunlight to bask in, but it also finds its way into larger gardens where it can breed on various shrubs.

We have now moved into mid-April when another very noticeable butterfly emerges, the Orange Tip. It can be seen patrolling roadsides and hedgerows looking for its food plant Jack-by-the-Hedge where it lays very large (for a butterfly) orange eggs. The male has the very striking orange tips to its wing but the female does not and can easily be confused for the next species to appear - the first ‘white’ butterfly - the Green Veined White. This is not a garden pest, it has very attractive and delicate markings along the veins of the underside of the wings and its caterpillars live out in the hedgerows on various field cresses.

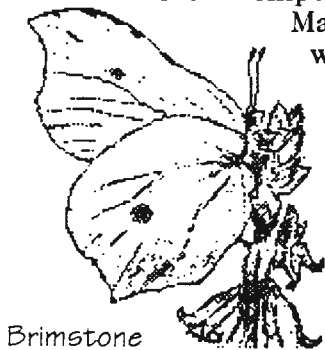
Early May brings our next arrivals the real ‘cabbage’ whites, Small White and Large White emerge, familiar to everyone. Why not grow a few nasturtiums and move any caterpillars from your cabbages to these where they will live quite happily.

Mid-May now brings butterflies which need much more specialized habitats and food plants to survive. You will need to go to local areas of chalk grassland - Coombe Hill, Pulpit Hill, Whiteleaf Cross or the Prestwood Picnic Site to see Small Copper, Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak, and Duke of Burgundy Fritillary and, by late May, the now sadly misnamed Common Blue. The onset of summer brings many more species, often in greater numbers, but that is another story.

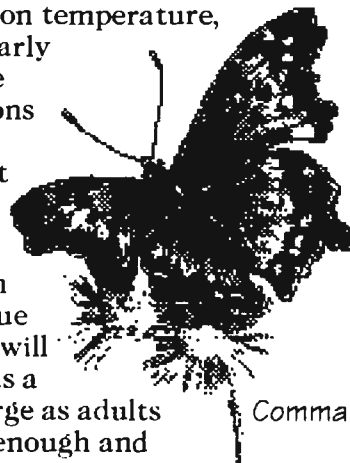
I hope you will keep an eye out for these butterflies they really are a welcome sight for seeing them means that winter has passed and we can look forward to summer.

Butterfly Conservation organize a number of field trips for their members to see butterflies. If anyone is interested in coming along please give me a ring on 01494 444158.

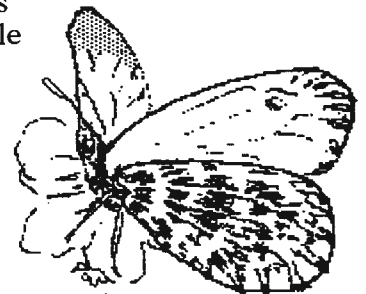
Ron Beaven.



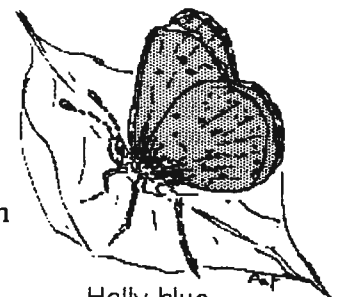
Brimstone



Comma



Orange tip



Holly blue



Flora & Fauna of the Rye and its immediate surroundings

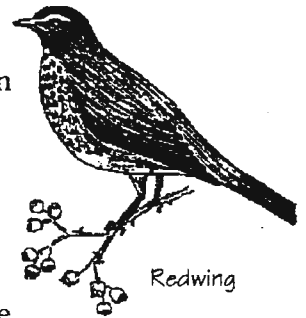
Many public open spaces in our towns & cities are "green deserts" from a wildlife point of view, supporting few species of native flora and fauna. The Rye is different, however, offering a wealth of wildlife interest throughout the year, the intensively-managed grassland areas being more or less completely surrounded by wildlife habitats ranging from wetland to woodland.

The open grassland of the Rye has few plant species but supports large numbers of birds in winter when flocks of blackheaded gulls appear. When redwings have eaten all the local supplies of berries they too arrive in large numbers looking for worms.

On the south side of the Rye, the Dyke provides a good easy circular walk with plenty of interest all the way. Grey wagtails often breed on the Rye and these and the more common pied wagtail can be seen, the former sometimes on the moored boats at the western end of the Dyke. Swans, mallards, coots and moorhens regularly breed here and little grebes and tufted duck are a common sight in winter. The mature limes at the back of the Dyke support large clumps of mistletoe - a prominent feature in winter when the trees are without their leaves. This area is an excellent place to watch and listen to birds.

Nuthatches can usually be seen and the distinctive rattle of the mistle thrush's

alarm call is regularly heard. During the spring and summer the easily recognizable call of the chiff-chaff will be heard, together with the beautiful song of the blackcap, a bird usually heard far more than it is seen. House martins often skim over the water on a summer's day, goldcrests may be seen working their way through the yews & conifers and the blue, great, coal and long-tailed tits are a common sight. If you are lucky you may see a heron standing at the water's edge.



Redwing

Wild flowers growing under the trees at the back of the Dyke include lesser celandine, cuckoo flower, coralroot bittercress, ground ivy, bugle and lords & ladies. The underwater plant, marestail, can be seen growing in the clear water of the Dyke and gipsywort grows at the water's edge. An unwelcome and invasive plant called the New Zealand pigmy weed or Australian swamp stonecrop, *Crassula helmsii*, also grows in the Dyke and requires regular control to prevent it choking the whole watercourse; there is as yet no case of its complete eradication from a site where it has appeared

On hot summer days, blue damsel flies are a common sight on the Dyke and as dusk falls, Daubenton's bats appear flying low and fast over the water. A number of bat boxes have been placed on the trees to provide roosting and breeding sites for these protected mammals. As darkness falls, the many fish in the water can easily be seen if you use a torch with a good beam. With patience you may be able to spot perch, pike, tench, roach, and carp.

Roger Wilding,
illustrations
Frances Wilding



Mallard



Swans



Nature Conservation Down-under or whatever happens to all the old Project Officers ?

Greetings from Christchurch (Dorset that is) where I have been extremely busy since last November. Thanks to the solid grounding I received in Wycombe I have settled in well in my new post as Countryside Warden and continue to ride on my usual wave of enthusiasm and good humour

I work in a small, close-knit and enthusiastic team that has an excellent history of achievement and high expectations. A busy programme of events is held throughout the year including a high profile Local Ecology and Arts Festival (LEAF) during Environment Week, which has everything from lectures, workshops, live music to a 1000 strong bike ride and new for 1998, a 24 hour eventathon (well I never).

Of the thirteen SSSI designated sites within the Borough, two - Stanpit Marsh (large freshwater, brackish and saline marsh) and St. Catherine's Hill (lowland heath), are in Council ownership along with a variety of smaller woodland, grassland and wetland sites.

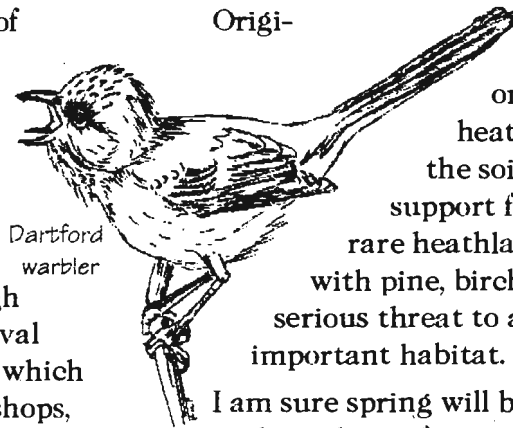
The main roles in my post are to continue the practical conservation of the sites but also to try and increase public awareness and community involvement through task days, WATCH and wildlife related events (sound familiar ?). I have mainly been focusing on the heathland site during the winter as most of the residents, including all six British reptiles and important bird species are inactive or absent. I have been fortunate enough, however, to spend some time observing Dartford Warblers. These small, elusive birds which are resident all year, are fascinating to watch as they flit amongst the heather searching for insects.

With 15% of our heaths being lost to scrub invasion every decade the main priority on the site is to maintain and expand the open heath by

controlling the invaders through regular practical task days. Having spent countless hours bashing Wycombe's dogwood I thought I had finally escaped; only to be met by the ultimate scrub nightmare - Rhododendron.

Originating in SE. Asia this highly invasive plant not only out-shades the native heathland plants, but poisons the soil and offers little, if any, support for the insects upon which rare heathland species rely. Along with pine, birch and bracken it presents a serious threat to a globally important habitat.

I am sure spring will bring with it a host of exciting surprises and challenges. I have still got a lot to learn and a long way to go but I will never forget my time at Wycombe. I am very grateful for being given the experience as a platform for future achievements and the initial chance to prove myself.

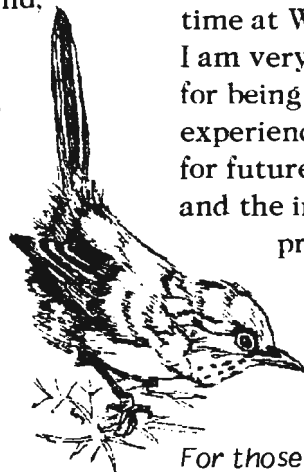


Dartford warbler



Cetti's warbler (Cettia cettii)

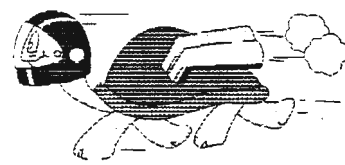
One of the species Robin hopes to see at Christchurch



Dartford warbler

Thank you all. **Robin Harley**

For those who think they can stand some more of Robin's enthusiasm and good humour the Group is organising a trip down to Christchurch to visit Robin and his reserves (see the programme for details) - let's challenge him to show us all 6 British reptiles and regale us, in his inimitable manner, with their natural history, conservation status and management while we are there !



Maurice



It is sad to say goodbye to Jo and Fatima but we have 3 new helpers : Nicola, Ian & Tim, and a very exciting programme for the summer, including a visit to one of our ex-leaders, Robin Harley, and his new **Wildlife WATCH Group** in Dorset in July. We will be visiting heathland, joining a minibeasts safari and have an hour on the beach before a fish & chip supper and home. Before then we are having breakfast with the birds and other mammals at the Sheepridge Nature Reserve in May. As well as listening to birds on this small Wycombe Wildlife Group Reserve, we will be checking mammal traps and pond dipping. Breakfast of cereals, croissants, fruit juice and drinking chocolate will be supplied.



We will, again, be visiting the **Calvert Environmental Educational Centre** for the annual camp, this time for 2 nights. Hopefully this year the weather will be better and we will be able to hear the nightingales. Other activities include bat detecting, earth walks, night tales, pond dipping & bug hunts. In September we will be visiting Calvert again for a family day **Celebrating Wildflowers**, there will be an artist, probably a mad professor and other

activities. The day is being funded by an **Eastern Wildflowers** grant, and to encourage groups in the region to attend (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire) free transport is available.

Elaine Tague

Wildlife WATCH is the environmental group for children aged 8-12 years.

Three equally exciting activities were held this Spring, featuring bird watching at Little Wittenham, a garden bird workshop at Rayners School, Penn when bird feeders were made, and most recently, scrub bashing at Brush Hill LNR, Princes Risborough.

Any children wishing to join **Wildlife WATCH** should contact Elaine or the Project Team at the **Countryside Centre** on 01494 536 930.

Two talks given by the National Trust

A talk entitled "The National Trust & Nature Conservation" attracted 20 people to Bassetsbury Manor on February 9th 1998. Illustrated by excellent slides supplied both by the speaker Mr Mike Watts and the National Trust, it covered most areas of Britain and most types of habitat.

We thank Mike for an entertaining and pleasant evening. Many thanks, also, to Neil Harris, National Trust Warden at Hughenden, who came along at very short notice, on 14th October, 1997 to substitute for Mike when he was prevented from coming by illness. Neil's talk covered most conservation techniques at Hughenden and at Wicken Fen, where he had previously been employed.

Both talks were fascinating & covered quite different issues

Pat Morris

Are you like me and don't go far on bank holiday week-ends ?

The why not join me and come along to
Grange Farm, Grange Farm Road, Widmer End
where **Glyn Onione** has established
"The British Native Species Centre".

BBONT, South Bucks Region are organising events there 11am - 4.30pm on 2nd, 3rd, 4th May 1998, . *Maurice Young*

Would you like to join us ?

If so complete this application (or a photocopy) and send to :
WyWG Membership Secretary
c/o, The Countryside Centre,
(see front page for the address)

I / We wish to join **WyWG**
Name :

Address :

Tel. no.

Amount enclosed, (please circle)
£5 (Individual/Family/School member)

£2.50 (Student or Retired Person)

WILDLIFE NOTICE BOARD

Did You See ?



Early butterfly sightings

Brimstone - Flackwell Heath (9/01/98)
 Small Tortoiseshell - Hughenden (9/01/98)

Comma - Sands Bank & Cock Lane
 coppice (13/02/98)

Peacock - Cock Lane coppice (13/02/98)

Bumblebees - general (13/02/98)

First flowers of the year

Annual mercury - Hicks Farm Rise
 (23/12/97)

Lesser celandine - Hughenden (9/01/98)

Nettle-leaved bellflower - Pat's (9/01/98)

Snowdrops - Marlow (12/01/98)

Primrose - Sheepridge (12/01/98)

Other species sightings

1st frog - Pat's garden (12/02/98)

1st frog spawn - Pat's garden (21/02/98)

2 Grey Wagtails & water vole

- Loudwater School (24/02/98)

Hedgehog - Pat's garden (9/03/98)

Sparrow hawk - Pat's pond (18/03/98)

The WyWG Contact list:

Chairman & Newsletter Editor:

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Treasurer: Jean Johnson, 01494 816231

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James Donald, 01494 445334

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wildlife WATCH: Elaine Tague, 01494 536930

Biological surveys: Angus Idle, 01494 563673

Education Officer & Assistant Editor:

Maurice Young, 01628 472000



MEMO - COPY DATE Friday, 31 JULY, 1998

GOODS FOR SALE

Car stickers - £1 (inc p & p)

T- shirts Cream or blue M/L/XL/XXL

£6.50 - less if you buy them at meetings

Sweatshirts - Navy with white logo S/L /XL

£16.50 (£15 at meetings)

Contact the Countryside Centre to order

Names of Contacts for Wildlife Groups in Wycombe District

BBONT	Berks, Bucks & Oxon Naturalists' Trust	(Oxon Office)	01865 775476
	South Bucks Region, Vol. Reserves Manager	Maurice Young	01628 472000
BNA	British Naturalists' Assoc., S. Bucks Branch	Marion Hussey	01494 488336
BTCV	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers	Marion Lyon	01494 536930
BBG	Bucks Badger Group	Mike Collard	01494 866908
BTO	British Trust for Ornithology (Regional Rep)	David Hughes	01844 275472
BC	Butterfly Conservation	Ron Beaven	01494 444158
BBC	Bucks Bird Club	Arthur Brown	01628 604769
CPRE	Council for the Protection of Rural England	Tom Cotton	01844 345183
CWP	Chiltern Woodlands Project	John Morris	01494 565749
EN	English Nature (Thames & Chilterns Team)	Corina Woodall	01635 268881
SWS	Saunderton Wildlife Sanctuary	Margaret Baker	01844 342188
STT	St. Tiggywinkles	Les Stocker	01844 292292
SL	Swan Lifeline	Tim Heron	01753 859397
TVMG	Thames Valley Mammal Group	Ian Saunders	01734 344127
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature	Valerie Lambourne	01494 443761
WDC	Wycombe District Council Ranger Service		01494 421824
	Steve Crosby, Ian Butterfield & Julie Hopton		



For other groups or if you have any queries about BATS contact the Countryside Centre,
 Bassetsbury Manor, Bassetsbury Lane, High Wycombe, HP11 1QX. 01494 536930