



SPELTHORNE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



www.snhs.org.uk

Hon Sec Gordon Freeman. 45, Lansdowne Road, Staines, TW18 1HH Tel: 01784 453402

Newsletter: Liz and Roger Whitaker, The Hollies, Middle Hill, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0JG
Spring/Summer 2024

Dear Member

Welcome to the Spring newsletter. Thank you to Richard Robinson, Marion Rider, Philip Cribb and Peter Clifford for their contributions to the newsletter.

Future events

Saturday June 15th at 10:30am. Bedfont Lakes, private nature reserve area. Led by the ranger Stephen Bishop. Meet at the car park Clockhouse Lane TW14 8QA. What3words 'dangerously,sits.agenda'

Friday June 21st at 8:45pm. Chobham Common for Nightjars. With Andi Roy. Meet at the Roundabout carpark Chobham Road. Bring torch, insect repellent and binoculars. Grid ref. 965648.

Saturday July 13th at 10am. Frays Meadow Farm Uxbridge. With Robert Spencer from the London Wildlife Trust. Rare wet grazing meadows designated a SSSI. Meet in Colne Valley Regional Park Visitors Centre. Sat nav UB9 5PG. Café, toilets, small charge.

Sunday July 28th at 10:30am. Feltham marshalling yards for plants, butterflies GNH. With Phil Cribb. Meet in Pevensey Road by Hanworth crematorium. Grid ref. 122732.

Saturday August 3rd at 10:00am. Staines Moor SSSI. With Phil Cribb. Meet in Moor Lane just before the bypass bridge. Grid ref. 031723. What 3 words 'deputy.leave.reveal'.

Sunday August 11th at 10:00am. Ranmore Common for Adonis Blue Butterfly and plants etc. With Phil Cribb. Meet in the NT carpark Ranmore Common Road. There is a small charge for parking for non NT members. Grid ref. 142504.

Wednesday September 4th at 7:15pm. Ash Link LNR. Evening bat search. With John Maxen. Meet at the end of Nutty Lane at the entrance to Ash Link reserve. TW17 0RQ. What 3 words 'watch.wacky.bubble'.

Saturday September 7th at 10am. Chobham Common for Marsh Gentians, late summer plants and dragonflies. With Marion Rider. Meet in Staples Hill car park Chobham Common. Grid ref. 974648.

Previous events

Saturday March 2nd Annual Spring Social Evening including Raffle and an illustrated Talk by Dr David Jones Dept of Entomology, Natural History Museum, London

How Tropical Rain Forests Work.

Dr Jones has spent many years studying rainforest and savanna systems including as much as 5 years in the field in many parts of the world. He is one of the top 6 world experts on termites.

The talk focused on the importance of insects – especially termites and ants – in making the rain forest work.

One of the defining features of a rainforest (as compared with a temperate forest such as we generally have in the UK) is that the rainforest does not have an open canopy and consequentially has little in the way of ground cover plants. This means that the main process that takes at ground level is the removal of plant material that comes to earth. Historically the study of this process tended to focus on the seemingly significant activities of mammals, birds and other herbivores. However, research has shown that just 37% of material is processed in this way with the other 63% simply decomposing. This led to research being focused on the decomposer systems.

What was soon realised was that there were a multitude of insect species involved in this process and one of the key tasks would be to identify and count the insects involved. We were shown how this was done through surveying methods with counting bags, which trapped insects so that they could be accurately identified by experts at the NHM. In addition, analysis was carried out of the gases released by the decomposition process at different levels – not all of this takes place on the ground as some trees capture plant debris that decomposes part way up the tree.

One of the outputs of this work was to estimate the relative contribution of different genera to the biomass of the rainforest – literally the weight of the creatures concerned. This led to the remarkable conclusion that ants (of which there are around 22,000 species) made up about 22% of the total, termites (~4,000 species) a further 20% and earthworms (~6,000 species) around 8% of the total. The ‘large’ creatures (i.e. mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians) in total contribute less than 10%. The balance is made up of other invertebrates and insects.

In terms of absolute numbers of creatures, ants and termites each make up around a third of the total with typical densities being 8,000 ants and 10,000 termites per m².

The life cycle of termites was described. Of note compared with other insects is the fact there are both king and queen termites and that the queen changes the ratio of soldiers/workers/fliers as required to retain the correct balance. All termites eat dead material – although 1% of species do eat live plants and these are the pests. Termites live in mounds and we were shown examples of mounds of different shapes and sizes, including some up trees. In total, termites can process up to 45 tonnes of soil per hectare per annum – accounting for some 60% of the dead wood in the tropical rain forest.

The impact of ants was also described. As noted earlier there are many species – some up to 1¼ inches long in Borneo. They are the most important predators in both the brown foodwebs (below ground) and green foodwebs (above ground). Some species farm aphids. One of the curiosities of leaf-cutter ants is that there are three types of ants – large ones that carry the leaves, medium sized ones that do the cutting and small ones that ride on the leaves to protect against parasitic flies.

Ants generally live in underground nests; we were shown a picture of one at least 10m across which had been excavated.

In an experiment it was estimated that ants removed 52% of rainforest resources (carbohydrates, proteins and seeds) whereas other invertebrates removed 26% and vertebrates 24%. In the absence of ants the latter two groups did not remove any greater percentages so it was concluded that the ants must be performing a unique service.

We were shown some of the methods needed to access the tree canopy to study the bird's nest ferns which contain aerial soil. These also contained ants, centipedes and snakes with the same species dominant as on the forest floor.

The importance of insects in pollination was described. It is estimated that a third of our food is dependent on specific pollinators. A whole range of insects - both diurnal and nocturnal – are involved in the pollination of a wide range of plants, with many instances of plants and insects evolving to their mutual benefit. It is estimated that bees pollinate 80% of flowering plants with flies pollinating 30%, butterflies and moths 20%, wasps 5% and others 4%. Wind pollination takes place in around 10%. Note that these percentages add to more than 100% as some flowers are pollinated by more than one means.

In the context of the tropical rainforest examples were shown of fig wasps (*Agaonidae*), which are responsible for pollination of figs and of the giant honey bee (*Apis dorsata*) which creates large nests in trees. Sadly, bees are in decline everywhere.

The talk concluded with an area of concern and an area of success.

The area of concern became evident in research carried out by Dr Jones in Sumatra where tropical rain forest is being cleared for production of commercial crops. A specific study of the number of termite species in the different stages of the destruction of the forest showed that there were 34 species in primary rainforest, declining as trees were replaced by softwood tree crops until there was only a single (pest) species in the final farmed land. The removal of trees leads to greater variation in temperature which is not favourable for these species. It is typically oil palm plantations that result in SE Asia and soybeans and cattle grazing in South America.

The area of success relates to tigers, where conservation effort in the rainforest has led to increases in numbers. Up to 2010 the tiger numbers in Asia (India, Nepal, Thailand etc) were declining rapidly in line with the reduction in the area of rainforest in their habitats with a low number of around 2,000 with only around 3% forest cover. Efforts to restore and protect the forest habitat appear to have led to an increase in tiger numbers from around 3,200 in 2015 to 4,500 in 2022. Clearly this is encouraging but demonstrates that significant efforts are required if progress is to continue.

The talk concluded with questions from the floor.

A specific question asked about the differences between ants and termites: among the differences are that ants have 'elbowed' antennae while termites have segmented antennae. Also the range of sizes of ants encompasses the range of sizes of termites.

It was noted that there is a vast range of sizes and shapes of termite mounds, with some mounds potentially containing millions of termites.

In summary, a fascinating well-presented talk about an important but less familiar aspect of the rainforests.

Richard Robinson

**Wednesday 13th March 8:15pm. Derek Stimson from the British Deer Society
British Deer.**

This talk, by Derek Stimson of the British Deer Society, was given at the Society's meeting on 13th March 2024.

The British Deer Society was founded some 60 years ago with the aim of studying the welfare and management of the British deer population, which had expanded significantly over the previous years. Derek is the Chairman of the South East England Branch of the Society and we were entertained with a comprehensive set of photographs of the various deer species together with a physical display of examples of deer antlers and feet.

The talk started with some historical background; deer have been around a long time and appear in cave paintings, showing that the ancient populations used deer as a source of food as well as providing skins and antlers for other uses. In more recent times deer have appeared on coats of arms and in the 18th century hunting in 'deer parks' became a popular pastime for the gentry. During and after the two World Wars the deer parks were in a poor state with deer successfully spreading more widely across the country to an extent that in some places they were regarded as vermin. The Deer Act in 1963 brought in rules about how deer could be managed in the wild.

It should be noted that deer in a deer park are regarded as wild whilst those that are farmed are not wild. Worldwide there are around 40 species of deer, all (except the water deer) with antlers and all establishing territories/mating hierarchies by rutting. The focus of the talk was the wild deer of Great Britain, of which there are 6 species.

Each of the 6 species was covered, from smallest to largest. The smallest is the **(Chinese) water deer** (*hydropotes inermis*) which was introduced to the Whipsnade/Woburn area around 1890. This has no antlers but instead has tusks which fold back into the mouth. It is solitary, except in the mating season, and is around 50cm high (at the shoulder) and weighs around 18kg. It lives in watery areas and can have between 2 and 5 young at a time – often providing food for foxes. It is in fact now endangered in China – with some 10% of the world's population being in the UK.

Of similar size is the muntjac – strictly the **reeves muntjac** (*muntiacus reevesi*) – which hails from the Far East and China. Again these were introduced to Britain (Woburn) and have flourished to the extent that they are often seen in urban areas – even in Wapping and Bethnal Green in suburban London. They are known as the 'barking deer' because of the sound they make. They feed on the bramble understorey in woods and are also a solitary species. They can be distinguished from water deer by having a curved pig-like back rather than a high rump. Bucks have antlers whereas water deer do not. Apparently they provide the best venison – tasty and mild – but are not a commercially viable source of venison.

The next largest deer is the **roe deer** (*capreolus capreolus*) – one of the two native species. This has been very successful and is a browser of vegetation. A distinguishing feature is white spots on the nose and 2 or 6 point antlers. They have a red/russet summer coat becoming greyer in Winter. They are up to 70cm high and weigh up to 20kg. They differ from the other species in that they rut in July/August rather than the Autumn but the hinds have the ability to delay the development of the young deer so that they are born in April. Usually they bear 2 fawns – with one being insurance against predation.

Slightly larger is the **fallow deer** (*dama dama*) which was introduced to Britain by either the Romans or the Normans. As such it is regarded as naturalised rather than native. These deer tend to live in herds in woodland areas and graze vegetation at night. They have spectacular palmate antlers – these have flat surfaces resembling the palm of a hand at the tip rather than just a point. There are many different colours of fallow deer – ranging from white to nearly black – although most are orangey-brown with pale spots. They are up to 85cm high and weigh up to 80kg for a buck and 45kg for a doe. Fallow deer rut in October and usually have just one fawn. They have caused agricultural damage by sitting on crops when dog walkers pushed them out of their woodland habitats in the daytime.

The next to largest deer is the **Sika deer** (*cervus nippon*) which was introduced from Japan to Brownsea Island in 1860. They soon escaped and have established themselves around Britain. They are up to 85cm high and weigh up to 60kg (stag) and 40kg (hind). They can and do cause crop damage and are sometimes farmed. Sika typically have 6 or 8 point antlers. They have distinctive white patches – which are actually scent glands - on their hind legs and display flaring rump hairs when alarmed.

The largest deer is the other native species - the **red deer** (*cervus elaphus*). It has long been associated with man and is present in various habitats. There are significant herds in Scotland, the New Forest and Exmoor and others in the Lake District and Thetford Forest. Stags can be up to a metre high and weigh up to 190kg. They generally stay in single sex groups and are well known for their rutting displays in Autumn. However, they are the source of agricultural damage.

It was noted that deer have generally been very successful in increasing their numbers, but at some expense of interfering with agriculture. This led to the need for the Deer Act to provide for the management of herds and this is carried out by trained cullers (of whom Derek is one) who are also tasked with checking herds for diseases such as foot-and-mouth. Fallow and red deer in deer parks are the main focus of this activity. Females and males are culled at different times of the year although there is no restriction for muntjac as they are classed as an invasive species.

The talk concluded with questions from the floor.

The question of 'how many females per male'? was posed. It seems that the answer is as many as possible and can be up to 10.

As to the suggestion that lynx be re-introduced to control deer, Derek believed this was not likely to work as sheep would probably be an easier prey for the lynx. In general, the spaces that deer occupy in the UK are not big enough for the introduction of such predators – it is different in Europe where wild lynx remain.

In summary, a most interesting talk which provided a lot of information about species that we probably don't know as well as we think we do!

Richard Robinson

Wednesday April 10th Molesey Heath Local Nature Reserve – A Natural History Journey through the seasons. Ben West who leads nature walks and wildlife watching from “Where the Wild Things Are” gave an overview of the various habitat types found at Molesey in Surrey and the fungi that might be found there.

Molesey Heath is a 45acre Nature Reserve which is a former industrial / landfill area and Ben lives close by. Part of the site is owned by Bretts. There is a mosaic of habitats including rough grassland, scrubland hawthorn, bramble, a woodland edge, plants and trees with the Rivers Mole and Fleet, ponds and reservoirs. Litter can be a problem. Many slides were shown of flora and fauna found on the reserve and here some of them are listed.

Plants and trees

In spring and early summer can be found Coltsfoot, Hazel, Lesser Celandine, Goat Willow, Ash, Cherry, Bramble, Dandelions, White and Red Dead Nettle, Asparagus, Lords and Ladies, Hogweed, (not to be confused with Giant Hogweed and Hemlock). There is also Hawthorn, White Bryony, Bluebells, Green Alkanet, Hedge Cranesbill and Hedge Woundwort.

In late summer Grass vetchling, Clover and in damp areas Ragged Robin and Purple Loosestrife can be seen. Hops also grow here with Horseradish and Dogrose, (late summer rosehips can be gathered to make rosehip syrup medicine). There are Elder trees and you can make elderflower cordial and also elderberry syrup from the berries for coughs. Pyramidal and Bee Orchids can be seen. With Mugwort, if you leave the flowers on your pillow it causes vivid dreams. Fennel can be used to make tea.

High Summer you can find Chickory, Mallow, Teasel, Kidney Vetch, (provides food for the small blue butterfly).

Late summer Wild Carrot, Yarrow, Prickly Lettuce and Mullein, in water Fool's Watercress and by the autumn appear crab apples.

Insects and Invertebrates

In the spring can be seen Common Brimstone, Orange Tip, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood and Green Hairstreak Butterflies

By summer Cockchafer, Rose Chafer, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Flower Beetle, dragonflies Broad-bodied Chaser. Moths Hebrew Character, Grey Dagger, Jersey Tiger, Elephant Hawkmoth.

High summer Large Skipper, Small Heath, Ringlet, Brown Argus, Gatekeeper, Marbled White. Dark Bush-cricket, Carder Bee, Wasp Spider eating grasshoppers, Black-tailed Skimmer Dragonfly, Emperor Dragonfly, Migrant Hawker, Common Darter and Emerald Moth which lays eggs on willow bark

Late summer /autumn Ivy Bee, Willowherb Leafcutter Bee, Pebble Prominent Moth, Clearwing Moth,

Hoverflies, Mini Hoverfly, Batman Hoverfly, Hornet Mimic Hoverfly, Brown Hairstreak, Purple Hairstreak.

End of Season Convolvulus Hawk-moth - a migrant from north Africa.

Birds and Birdsong

Grey Herons by the Fleet River, Blue Tits, Wrens, Teal, Blackcap, Whitethroats, Reed Warbler, Robin, Blackbird, Cuckoo, Dunnock, Meadow Pipit, Linnet, Red kites, Tawny Owl, Egret, Water Rail and Kingfisher.

Reptiles and Amphibians

Smooth Newt and Grass Snakes. Common Frogs, Moor Frogs that have spread from Romney Marsh and are noisy.

Fish

Pike, Perch, Chub, Bream, Carp and Barbel.

Mammals

Field Vole, Roe Deer, Muntjack, Badger, Hare, Mink, but no Water Voles.

Galls

These are an adaption and swelling of a plant tissue for insect eggs or fungal presence. The larvae of an insect are found inside and include Oak Apple gall, Robin's Pincushion, Silk Button Spangle Galls. The Oak Marble Gall can be used to make ink.

Fungi

Jelly mushroom, St George's Mushroom, Dryad's Saddle, Fairy Ring Champignons, Field Mushroom, Giant Puffball, Parasol Mushrooms, Stubble Rosegill, Shaggy Inkcap, Field Blewit and Velvet Shank.

A very interesting and well-illustrated talk.

Questions

Answers

Man made channels were built to stop the River Mole from flooding.

Squincancywort can be invasive species and rely on volunteers to clear it.

There is a small amount of Ash dieback but nothing major.

Inconsiderate dog walkers can be a problem.

Wednesday April 17th FIELD VISIT Cabrera Trust Riverside walk for spring flowers with Marion Rider

The walk round Cabrera woods this morning proved successful.

Around 15 of us went on the walk, cold but dry!

It's about an hour walk laid out by the Cabrera Trust and we were introduced to the history of the woods by Philip Beesley a member of the Trust.

Plants found along the walk are Herb Robert (*Geranium robertum*), Red Dead Nettle (*Lamium purpureum*), Ground ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*), Hedge woundwort (*Stachys sylvatica*), Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), Yellow archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon* ssp), Common figwort (*Scrophularia nodosa*), Ivy leaved speedwell (*Veronica hederifolia*), Lesser celendine (*Ficaria verna*), Wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), Creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), Common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Moschatel (town hall clock) (*Adoxa moschatellina*), Dogs mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), Lords and Ladies (*Arum maculatum*), Skunk Cabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*), Ransoms (*Allium ursinum*), Bluebell (*hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Wood Avens (*Geum urbanum*), Barren strawberry (*Potentilla sterilis*), Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), Wood sorrel pink naturalised, Opposite leaved golden saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*), Common dog violet (*Vioila riviniana*), Cleavers (*Galium aparine*), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), Elder (*Sambucus nigra*), Rough chervil (*Chaerophyllum temulum*), Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*), Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), Pignut (*Conopodium majus*), Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*), Hemlock waterdropwort (*Oenanthe crocata*), Greater stitchwort (*Stellaria holostea*), Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolate*), Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), Oak (*Quercus robur*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), Horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), Pendulus Sedge (*Carex pendula*)

Birds seen here are the Jackdaw, Green woodpecker, Blackbird, Jay, Thrush, Robin, Chiffchaff, Magpie, Blackcap, Wren, Great tit, Blue tit and Nuthatch.

Marion Rider

Walk on Chertsey Meads 28th April 2024 Lead by Philip Cribb

A wet, windy and cold morning did not auger well but the rain stopped just before 10am and five hardy souls set out to explore the wildlife of Chertsey Meads.

By the carpark, we examined the marshy depression where Brown sedge (*Carex disticha*) grows, one of its few Surrey localities. Bulbous and Creeping buttercups were coming into flower here, brightening the sward on a cloudy day. Across the first road, we headed for the species-rich patch where Meadow saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*) and Salad Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba*) in full flower. The good news is that the saxifrage, formerly occupying an area of about 100 sq. m. is spreading and the patch is now about 30 x 20 m in extent. The Salad burnet is also spreading and now a common plant in the drier raised patch of the Meads. We then headed to the second carpark and riverside to examine the evidence of the pipeline restoration undertaken by Shell. Most of the line of the new pipe is sparsely covered by grass and weeds, such as dock. Two areas are currently water-filled shallow depression. If left they might develop into interesting environments for aquatic and marsh-loving species.

Andi Roy, the former Spelthorne Biodiversity Officer (now with Runnymede Council), showed us two plants of the nationally rare Summer Snowflake or Lodden lily (*Leucojum aestivum* subsp. *aestivum*). One was in flower down by the Thames in deep shade. We all felt that the latter vernacular name was, by far, the most appropriate, celebrating its hanging white bell-like flowers. Most records of this species are of garden escapes (subsp. *pulchellum*), a larger, coarser plant.

In the main orchid areabetween the river and the first electricity pylon, we found plentiful Salad burnet, Dandelion (*Taraxacum vulgare*) and Clustered Bellflower (*Campanula glomerata*), the last just coming into flower. Clustered bellflower is typical of chalk grassland but the Thames brings down clacium carbonate so that, when it floods, the seasonally wet grassland here becomes amenable to calcicoles (lovers of chalk and limestone soils).

A Skylark was singing its heart out here, probably celebrating the cessation of the rain.

On the far side of the pylon, we saw that Meadow Cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*), not yet in flower, is slowly invading the grassland. A careful search uncovered the cryptic Adder's-tongue fern (*Ophioglossum vulgare*), forming here small colonies. Some plants had fertile fronds on them. On the track that runs parallel to the extensive reed bed we found more Adder's tongue, despite the ground being waterlogged. With some trepidation, we approached the second colony of Meadow saxifrage, expecting the worst because the pipeline had gone straight through the colony. We were, however, pleasantly surprised. Half of the colony had survived mor-or-less intact. The soil cover over the pipeline surprised us because, there were many small flowering plants of the saxifrage scattered over a length of about 50 metres, extending the colony. This has been made possible because Meadow saxifrage reproduced by both seed and by bulbils around its roots. Our plants probably came from germinating bulbils. Here, and along the roadside across the Meads, an unusual yellow-flowered Wild turnip (*Brassica rapa* subsp. *campestris*) grew in some profusion. It is an archaeophyte (an ancient escape from cultivation, and is declining in the country.

Reaching the road, the walked down it for a few yards, noting that Shell had cleared a lot of scrub and trees by the roadside as part of their compensation for disrupting the Meads with their pipeline work. In a shallow pond, Andi spotted some white-flowered plants growing in shallow water amongst the Comfrey (*Symphylum officinale*) and sparse Reed (*Phalaris arundinacea*) around the edge of the scrape. Our excitement grew as we realised that opening out the reed-bed here had allowed Lodden Lily to flower here. We counted 20 plants of this nationally rare plant. As a wild plant in England, it is largely confined to the upper Thames catchment where it is a great rarity.

Thus, despite the weather, the walk was a wonderful success. It is not often that a natioanl rarity is discovered on a Sunday morning stroll!

Philip Cribb



Lodden Lily

Wednesday May 8th Society AGM and members photos.

Phil Cribb started the meeting with a short talk on **“Spring in Gargano.”**

He presented slides from a botanical tour he recently led in the Gargano peninsula in the Italian region of Puglia. The Gargano peninsula is a limestone massif of elevation up to about 1000 m, jutting into the Adriatic Sea. Phil spent most of the tour based in Monte Sant’Angelo, a religious centre in the south, with 2 days at the end in the coastal town of Peschici. The weather in Monte Sant’Angelo was unusually cold (2 – 9 °C), which helpfully prolonged the period for which plants stayed in bloom.

The peninsula contains limestone gorges with euphorbia scrub grazed by goats, sheep and some cattle. It also has extensive beechwoods, where a population of wolves has returned.

Phil’s group was particularly interested in plants that are rare in Britain but occur commonly in Gargano. Examples were woad and purple gromwell and the prostrate broom. *Aubrieta* is commonly found on rocks.

Orchids are the great speciality of Gargano, with a total of 80 species recorded, 47 of which were seen on this trip. The group visited orchid-rich meadows, where white asphodel was also present. One field contained 25 orchid species. The orchids shown included the green-winged orchid, the pink butterfly orchid, the lizard orchid and the Italian (or naked man) orchid, which is very scarce in the UK except on Sandwich golf course. Also the sawfly orchid, Bertoloni’s bee orchid and the Apulian late spider orchid. Other flowers seen were the Venus’ looking glass, star of Bethlehem and salsify. Insects included the scarce swallowtail butterfly.

Another common habitat is grazed open woodland with iris- and orchid-rich slopes. *Iris lutescens* has 2 distinct colour forms – yellow and purple. Orchids seen included the Gargano early spider orchid, spectacled bee orchid, few-flowered orchid, lady orchid and Roman orchid. Asphodels are found in deciduous woodland.

The trip finished on the coast. The slopes around the Lago di Verona lagoon are very rich in flora and fauna. Phil showed the giant peacock moth, which is the largest in Europe. The cliffs of Peschici Bay are also rich in endemic plants.

Following the AGM, **members' slides** were presented by **Marion Rider, Ken Cole** and **Phil Cribb**.

Marion Rider presented slides from her visit in 2023 to the Outer Hebrides, with photos also from places in Yorkshire and the Scottish mainland that she visited en route. She started with pictures of puffins, razorbills, gulls and gannets from Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs in Yorkshire. These included a video of puffins billing, and shots of gannets showing the dark eye colour believed to indicate recovery from bird flu. Then a visit to the Dundreggan Rewilding Centre in Affric, near Loch Ness. It does rewilding in the sense of working to re-establish forest which had been eliminated by excessive numbers of deer, with a tree nursery and visitor centre. Marion saw bog myrtle, slender St. John's wort, heath spotted orchids and the golden-winged dragonfly.

They took the ferry from Ullapool to Stornoway, spending time on Lewis, Harris and Noth Uist. The weather was blue skies, giving unusually dry conditions, which caused some concern locally. From the Lewis coast, Marion showed slides of marsh orchids, heath spotted orchids, marsh cinquefoil, common lousewort and marsh lousewort. They also saw the magpie moth, nesting shags and the red-throated diver. On the Harris coast, they explored the machair, which is a landscape formed from crushed shells thrown onshore by storms, and which is therefore calcareous, in contrast with the acid bog further inland. This makes it species rich. Marion showed slides of the lesser meadow rue, lady's bedstraw, wild carrot, tufted vetch and corn marigold, as well as the yellow bumblebee.

Ken Cole showed slides of fossils discovered below the cliffs on the shore of Sheppey Island. The cliffs are composed of London clay and were laid down 51 – 53 million years ago (Eocene epoch), when Britain was in the current location of the Mediterranean, and the climate was similar to Florida. The fossils shown included the Xanthopsis crab, teeth from ancient shark species and fish vertebrae. There were also fossil seeds, which are hard to preserve, since they rapidly crumble to dust, given their content of carbon and pyrites. Finally, ken showed a picture of the disgraceful landfill dumping which was meant instead to be builders' rubble to shore up the cliffs.

Phil Cribb showed a few slides from the SNHS walk on Chertsey Meads on 28th April. Plants found included the adder's tongue fern, the meadow saxifrage and the Loddon lily, which is increasingly rare. The meadow saxifrage had surprisingly not been negatively affected by the pipeline works that passed through one of its colonies, since it had reappeared in soil that had been removed and spread elsewhere.

Peter Clifford

Wednesday May 29th Visit Kempton Park Nature Reserve Lead by John Maxen.

A late spring and autumn visit to this site has become a regular occurrence by the society. 12 members gathered on this sunny but cool and windy morning for walk to the bird hides.

From Paul Jackson Hide could be Pochards, Tufted Ducks, Swans with signets, Coots, Moorhen, Great Crested Grebe and a number of Corvids. A young Blue Tit was seen on a bird feeder and also a Magpie in flight.

There seemed to be less plants in flower than this time last year but some of those seen in flower were Dog Rose (*Rosa canina*), Birdsfoot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Common Vetch (*Vicia sativa*), Dyer's Weed (*Reseda luteola*), Dove's-foot Cranesbill (*Geranium molle*), Cut-leaved Crane's-bill (*Geranium dissectum*), White Campion (*Silene latifolia*), Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), Wood Avens (*Geum urbanum*), Creeping Cinqufoil (*Potentilla reptans*), Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) and Lesser Stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*).

At the second hide where there are reeds and less open water, here we saw a Magpie flying from out the reeds and a Kestrel hovering close overhead. At the third hide there were Pochards, Tufted Ducks, Great Crested Grebe, Coots and Mallard. But a lovely surprise was the appearance of a little Egret which is a white species of heron now becoming a common sight.

As we made our way back to the entrance, we stopped to look at the recently created pond to find it alive with activity. A number of Common Blue Damselflies were in the process of mating, The blue males were clasping the female green brown in colour while in flight. A wonderful sight to see. There was also a dragonfly hovering close to the water which was identified as a male Broad Bodied Chaser having a broad pale blue abdomen. These are often the first dragonfly to colonise a newly created pond. A great finish to an enjoyable morning.

What to look out for during the Summer Months

After a wet May we are approaching the early Summer. June is the month when bird song continues including the Cuckoo. Swallows may be seen coming in over the southern coasts. Resident birds like the Blackbird and Robin should be in the middle of their brood, while House Martins, Sand Martins and Willow Warblers create their territories. Adders and Grass Snakes will be out of hibernation. Flowers now come into their own including Orchids. Where there are flowers, you will find insects in search of nectar including Bumble Bees and Queen Wasps. On sunny days Butterflies come out including the Orange Tip, Peacock, Brimstone and Holly Blue and at night moths attracted by house lights. Dragonflies and Damselflies should start to be seen. Badgers and Moles can be seen and may be able to spot a Hedgehog which is becoming more of a rarity as well as Frogs and Newts. Broad leaved woodlands are worth a visit as they burst out and also to see the variety of wild flowers, the blossom of the Hawthorn, Cherry and Apple trees combined with the birdsong. Grey Squirrels may be seen in the branches building their dreys with twigs. As we approach midsummer with long hours of daylight, a visit to the coast can be rewarding to see the bird colonies. June is probably the best month of the year to enjoy the wide range of wildlife and flowers. It is also the time of year when Bat species are active near old buildings and rivers on warm summer evenings at about 9pm.

WILDLIFE RECORDING IN SPELTHORNE

Martin is no longer receiving wildlife records. Richard Robinson has now taken on that role as the society would still like to receive any records that our members have of the wildlife they see or find within the Borough to add to the Societies database. Also any records that are made on Society visits to other areas, these records are passed to the local Natural History Society or to the Local County Recorders as appropriate.

All records are wanted, but they need to have a minimum of information for them to be valuable.

WHO - Who made the original observation and the name of the person who made the identification if different from the original observer.

WHAT - An unambiguous name for the specimen, preferably the scientific binomial if possible.

WHERE - A reasonably accurate location. preferably as a minimum 6 figure map reference.

WHEN - The date of the original observation.

Any other information that seems appropriate such as the Sex, Stage, i.e. larvae, Quantity etc., if appropriate, can be added. A spreadsheet can be provided for those that find them useful, phone and it can be emailed to you. (See **Wednesday 13th December** Christmas Social Evening, above with Richard Robinson's comments).

Please pass your records to Richard Robinson in whatever format is convenient to yourself.

Email : recorder@snhsociety.org.uk if possible, Royal Mail or just a phone call. More information can be found on <https://www.snhsociety.org.uk/recording/>. Thank you

Ash Link Local Nature Reserve

Ash Link is now formally recognised as a Local Nature Reserve. (Local Nature Reserves are a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949).

Work Group

The Society’s nature conservation working group “The Friends of Ash Link Local Nature Reserve” (FOAL) has continued to meet and carry out works including tree planting and pond clearance.

The next newsletter will be out during late summer 2024.

