

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

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SUMMER 2017

The Committee for 2016/17 is:

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Ann Biggs	740810
John Burgess	749441
Sheila Dickerson	749443
Susan Everitt, Treas.	740352
Elver Langley	
Wendy Lanman	741138
Caroline Lee	361678
Paul Mason	740219
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, please send them to Paul Mason, 13 Aldreth Road, Haddenham (740219).

HCS Website:

www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk

Membership information

Subscription rates

1 Jan to 31 Dec 2017:

Individual: £7

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.

Clearing up the Problem

In July a problem occurred in the New Cut Drain near Aldreth that takes all the excess rainwater from land above the fen-edge level and diverts it straight to the Old West River via a channel that runs between banks alongside the Aldreth Causeway. This is because in times of persistent heavy rains it would otherwise increase any tendency to flood the flat fen fields.

The problem was a case of pollution by run off of sediment coming from the storage of sugar beet in long white plastic sheeting. The rotting beet was intended

for use in an anaerobic digester that creates energy for converting to electricity.

Thankfully, partly maybe to HCS raising public awareness and contacting the Environment Agency, which is responsible for monitoring the water quality in New Cut Drain, a fast clear up of the problem removed a threat to the wildlife living in or using the water environment. Although the spillage was not the local Haddenham Drainage Commissioners' responsibility, members of its staff did help to rectify the problem at the request of the land owners, and a strong pump able to suck up the concentrated solution was also brought in.

The Environment Agency says it will continuously monitor the ditches

and drain. Hopefully the sediment will be flushed out and diluted with rainfall and wildlife will return to normal. An inspection of the outfall into the main river has been undertaken and the small fish that usually occupy the gravelly outflow are back on station. So Kingfishers, sometimes seen perched on a nearby low bridge, will now continue to be able to catch a meal.



Standing Orders

Subscriptions are due on 1 January each year. From January 2018, family membership will be £12 and single members £8.

It would be very helpful if members filled in a Standing Order to that effect. You will find a copy enclosed in this newsletter.

Please be sure to send the completed form to your bank or building society, and not to me!

Susan Everitt, Treasurer

Wildflower Meadow 2017

Contributed by Jez Reeve

From the spring onwards the wildflower meadow changes. Sometimes the field seems to be completely covered in the yellow of Cowslips and Meadow Buttercups. Another time it appears to be full of thistles, which are really purple Knapweed flowers. The trick of doing the wildflower count every year is to spend time looking for the seed heads of flowers that have gone over as well as those that are in full bloom. However, the timing of the count means that not all species will be recorded every year. And then there is the weather. Every year there is a different combination of rain and sun that encourages some and slows up others.

Over the last few years we have been recording the grasses species alongside the flowers to get a record of how the meadowland is developing. This year we split the field into two halves, putting cows on the upper part to graze and stomp in the seeds from plants such as Ragged Robin, which has gone over by the time the annual wildflower count takes place at the beginning of July. We recorded the lower half in random one-metre squares to ensure that our eyes were not 'choosing' the best areas for wildflowers. In two hours with six people we were able to collect information from eight squares.

In 2006, at the beginning of the project to turn this agricultural field into a wildflower meadow, it was necessary to sow the desired species, initially with an old seed drill. Random sections of the field had been



Knapweed predominates this year.

denuded of grass to encourage seeds to take. The results were variable, and so a few years later the field was re-sown by hand. Now it is more or less impossible to tell where these re-sown sections were, as the wildflowers and grasses have spread. The Conservation Manager for the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire has said we should look to see whether we can have the meadow registered as a County Wildlife Site on its own merits. This is a real success. Sometimes patience has its own reward.

Thanks to Stephen, Lydia, Clare, Chris and Chris who did the count this year.

Inventory plots: 1 x 1m plots survey in Fairchild's Meadow

Date: 2 July 2017 10:00–12:30

Conditions: Bright, warm and sunny

Square: TL 4695/7685

Domin scale: Ranges from 1 = 1% cover to 10 = 100% cover

Surveyors: Stephen Fairchild, Lydia Hill, Chris Prescott, Clare Presnell, Chris Ray, Jez Reeve

Domin scores by alphabetical 1x1 metre plot

Wildflower species	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Common Knapweed	8	6	8	7	7	7	7	5
Yellow Rattle	2	4		4	4	4	4	3
Red Clover	2		3	3	2	3	4	5
Creeping Buttercup		2	3	3		2	4	3
Common Bird's-foot Trefoil	1	1	1	3	2		4	
Lady's Bedstraw	1		4				4	
Sorrel	1		1			2	4	1
White Clover	1	1	2	3				
Meadow Buttercup	1	2			2			
Common Mouse Ear		1				4		
Meadow Vetchling	2		3					
Creeping Thistle				3		1		
Hawksweed							3	
Yarrow							3	
Self-heal				1				

Grass species	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Rye Grass – perennial	6		6	5				1
Common Bent Grass	1	7	1		4	1		
Red Fescue	2	5	1		2	1	1	
Yorkshire Fog	2		1	3	2			2
Black Bent		3						
Sweet Vernal Grass								1
Meadow Barley								1
Meadow Broom?							1	
Cock's-foot							1	
Prickly Sow Thistle								1

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

The Great Crested Grebes did bring up a family – four stripy chicks that they carried around on their backs at first. They were all safe while that was happening but, as they got bigger and swam around on their own, it got more dangerous. Three of them disappeared, one by one. The fourth, however, is still here and thriving. None were afraid of being watched at such close quarters and they all swam around happily just a few yards away. What a privilege for us!



Great Crested Grebe

For a few days during August we were visited by a Little Grebe. Much more secretive than its cousins, it would quickly dive and hide whenever we appeared, so it was a special treat to be able to observe it quietly when it hadn't been aware of our presence.

The Kingfishers regularly visited, sometimes two together, so they must have a well-established nesting place nearby. The Coots had two broods, but only one chick from the first brood has survived. None of the Moorhen chicks did.

I found another Potter Wasp's nest and watched Leaf-cutter Bees fill the hollow tubes of our balcony railings with leaf cutouts for most of July and August. Bees and Bumblebees have been foraging on the flowers in the garden and we have had swarms of Flying Ants – the Green Woodpeckers will soon be at work making funnel-shaped holes in the lawn to get at the ant eggs.



Messing around in boats on Guppy's Pond.

Boating Day

Surprisingly, given the weather, which was a mix of showers and sunshine, we had about 20 'customers'. The first family even went out while it was raining – that just shows how hardy people are in Haddenham. The rowers were kept busy non-stop for the whole two hours, the Kingfishers duly made appearances and everyone thoroughly enjoyed the event. So, very rewarding for the organisers. Our very special thanks go to Liam Dower and Barclay Arnott for putting so much effort into rowing people around.

Have We Lost...?

Contributed by Paul Mason

Amongst all the good news there is always some not so good. There appear to have been no breeding Spotted Flycatchers in Haddenham this summer. The Cambridgeshire population is said, as a whole, to have been falling for several years now but the Haddenham birds hung on. After giving us a bit of concern last year, a pair was eventually found to have reared at least two fledglings. We do not know where that nest was but it was not in the traditional place – a hole in an 18th-century, 4.5m-tall wall, covered in Ivy-leaved Toadflax. At some time, some years ago, a brick had been dislodged and a pair of Spotted Flycatchers had reared many young in a beautiful garden surrounding.

The village was home to many more pairs in the past. In the 1950s and 1960s there were an estimated 10-12 pairs in many back gardens and old orchards. The Flycatchers are very friendly birds and, while not tame, would make use of places like garages, hanging flower pots, old greenhouses and sheltered outhouses. People could walk by and the brooding females wouldn't flinch. So, in 2016, hoorays were the order of the day when we found half a family hunting insects from trees around Guppy's Pond by the houses. So where did they nest?

Almost at the same time, two more were found flitting from trees in Robert Norman's orchard about a mile away. This could have been the other half of the family, or was it perhaps a different one altogether? Intriguing.

The Turtle Doves that frequented Aldreth gardens seem not to have returned this year. We had 1-2 males sing to the north of Haddenham but no others were found in the parish. Later three birds, of which at least two were juveniles, were seen on a power line in North Fen. Were these from those singing birds breeding off North Fen Drove? We shall never know but let's hope so.

Mistle Thrush numbers are getting low around the parish too. Their disorganised March song is heard less often now. Occasional ones are seen and a pair did breed somewhere near Aldreth Ponds last year. It is not thought that they have disappeared but they are said to have declined nationally for unknown reasons. Song Thrushes come and go but do not use the same sites yearly. If we had a wet rainy summer their numbers would increase, along with garden slugs and snails, but 2017 was basically dry in spring and the July rains were too late.

Warbler numbers were about average with Common Whitethroat being the commonest and the Lesser



Spotted Flycatcher seen in Haddenham three to four years ago.

Whitethroat was just that....lesser. But that is normal anyway. Is that what they call an oxymoron? Woodpeckers, both Green and Great Spotted, made their presence felt by yaffling and drumming with vigour, especially in the orchards. We believe Tree Creepers bred at Guppy's Pond/Hinton Hedges. At least they were present and calling but to prove breeding is always hard.

Corvids, as always, did well and flocks of young Crows and Jackdaws, numbering around 1000, were marauding around on fen fields by Dambank in July and August. There must have been an ample supply of wireworms, leatherjackets and other nasties so these youngsters were doing some good.

We think our Hobbies bred this year but were Common Buzzards less successful? Possibly! Kestrel breeding was difficult to assess and a number of young Marsh Harriers were observed along with one male. Sparrowhawk young have been recorded but not many yet. Owl success is not recorded just now but we are informed it's a good Bank Vole year so Barn Owls usually take advantage. There are magnificent pictures of young Little Owls on the HCS website www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk

Summer Work Party

The weather gods were kind, giving us a couple of dry hours between hefty showers, for the 23 July hay rake in the Old Burial Ground. The rain of previous days meant that the grass and vegetation were heavy to lift but, on the plus side, easy to roll together with a rake. Many thanks to Chris, Wendy, Ralph, Bang, David, Mike, Imogen, Barclay, Maxine and Sally for storming through the work in well under two hours and to Sheila for providing welcome refreshments. We were rewarded by the sight of a red kite soaring overhead as we worked.



A Strange Summer Good for Autumn Fruits

No two summers in wild Haddenham are ever alike but some summers are stranger than others. That may sound like gobbledegook but is nevertheless true. Most years the seasons are similar in weather patterns. April-May-June showers-flowers-sun! Not 2017 however. April dry, May dryer, June dryer still but then came the rains in July. All that dry then the wetter July, with one spell of almost 24 hours of gentle rain, brought forth an unusual mixture of flowering plants, some of which are almost never seen in such quantities. The rain was being soaked up like a sponge and very little reached the fen drains. It was probably too late to fill out the wheat crop seed heads but would have come just right for sugar beet, potatoes and what farmers regard as weeds. I'm talking Fat Hen, Mugwort and Perennial Sow Thistle, the latter not being one of the prickly leaved sort but a softer yellow-flowering one. Other sow thistles are Prickly Sow Thistle, which has a row of spines down the centre back of the leaves, and Smooth Sow Thistle, which tends not to grow in crops.

Other wild flowers also did well, such as all three bedstraws – Hedge, Marsh and Lady's – the latter strongly evident, especially along the Grunty Fen (Ely Way) Road margins, North Fen Drove, where Hedge Bedstraw grows and the Marsh variety growing in the New Cut Drain water channel especially in the stretch behind Woollen Farm land. A favourite of mine, Germander Speedwell, had an excellent year in the Old Burial Ground and along the old railway line to Wilburton. There was also a long patch of bright yellow Common Toadflax along Long Drove.

Strangely however, the plant growth in the fen drains was late and featured only Arrowhead and Broadleaved Pondweed well. Water Plantain struggled and no Dropwort or Water Violets were to be found. The rare Fan-leaved Water-crowfoot was just that...rare. In fact non-existent, but Common Water Crowfoot was to be found in Church Fen Drain. If we had held last year's Fen Drain Workshop this year the botanical expert leader Jonathon Graham would have wondered where the rare examples of milfoil and pondweed had gone.

Why was this so? I would suggest that the water in the drains was colder than normal due to the cold, dry conditions persisting early in spring. I'm not sure that I can remember a year like it. In July the persistent rain made



Pluteus aurantiogossus, found by Guppy's Pond.

up a lot up but the land soaked it up (blotting paper is called to mind) and little, if any, of that water reached the fen drains. Lesser Water Parsnip appeared late in August just by Dambank Bridge and this was a first record for the parish list. It's commoner than the rare Great Water Parsnip, which our drains are famous for.

A plant that I don't remember occurring before was White Melilot. Several specimens were growing. One along The Boot road margin was about 1-1.2m high and full of scented white flowers that bees love. In olden times it was grown as a honey crop and, as it was a relation of vetches and clover, it transferred free nitrogen into the soil, making it an old-fashioned natural fertiliser. Perhaps someone had grown White Melilot in times past and the seeds had been stored in the ground. This year conditions were right and it germinated. Anyway it made quite a display. Another unusual find was two specimens of Common Spotted Orchid on Lakes Drove near Aldreth.

Butterflies had a good time too with many Brown Argus, Common Blue, Small Copper and Small Heath on the wing along the New Cut Drain bank. On the many Buddleia bushes around the village there were Red Admirals along with Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells. The white varieties gardeners love to hate – Large White, Small and Green-veined Whites – were strongly in evidence. Hummingbird Hawkmoth day-flying moths had a very good year.

Because the land was damp and the conditions muggy and close, conditions were right for several interesting fungi to appear. Wendy found a moderately rare specimen called *Pluteus aurantiogossus* (sorry no common name), a distinctive orange red cap that stood out on a rotting log. It was by the entrance to Guppy's Pond-Hinton Hedges track. Later found in a Bury Lane garden and on a public space in Lester Drive was Slender Brittlegill, another uncommon species. Some other more common types were found on rotting piles of woodchips in the Old Burial Ground under the Lime trees.

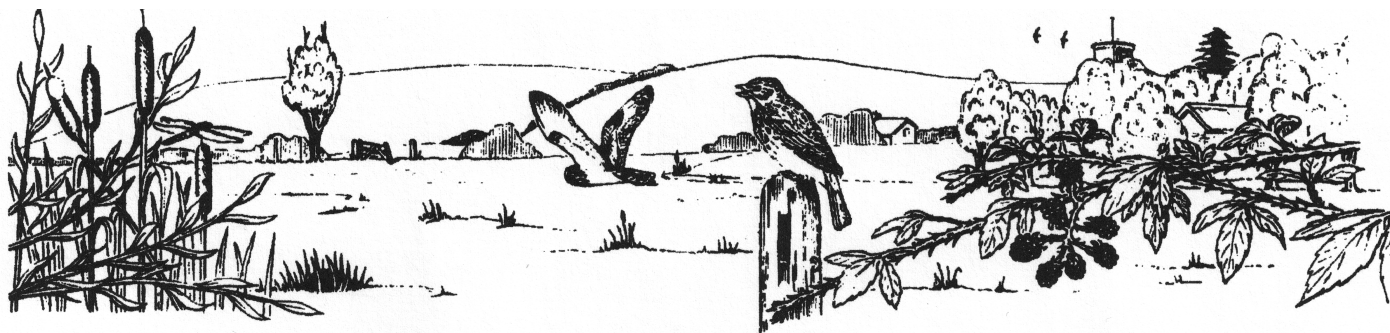
It was also obvious that it was going to be a great natural fruit harvest with many Sloes ripening up in hedgerows, along with a superabundance of Blackberries in evidence and a mass of acorns on some of the more mature Oak trees. A single tree near Bedlam Farm looked totally weighed down.

All in all, a very interesting floral and fungal summer and approaching autumn.

See a lot of pictures of things found this summer on our website www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk



Slender Brittlegill.



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 8:00 pm.

Members free. Non-members welcome for a nominal fee.

All welcome to stay for a (free) drink and a chat after each talk.

10 October

A NIGHT IN THE LIFE OF A BADGER

Peter Pilbeam has studied these enigmatic mammals and gives us an insight into their nocturnal behaviour.

14 November

SOUTH GEORGIA – BIRDS AND WILDLIFE ON AN ANTARCTIC ISLAND

Professor Andrew Clarke experiences, through stunning photography, the fauna of an isolated sub-polar landmass.

12 December

BRITAIN'S OFFSHORE ISLANDS – OUR OWN GALAPAGOS

Dave Horsley asks what exciting and unusual wildlife exists around our island shores.

13 February

BATS IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Anthony Mould knows what we have and explains more about our winged mammals.

13 March

BLAKENEY POINT

Ajay Tegala is the Coastal Ranger on this unique headland. Come and find out why it's his dream job and possibly the best.

10 April

FACING EXTINCTION – 20 SPECIES ON THE BRINK

Paul Donald from Birdlife International graphically explains why, and what is being done to bring them back to safety.

8 May

WICKEN FEN – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Dr Peter Green is voluntary co-ordinator for this famous local nature reserve. It has a great history, a vivid present and a promising future. Let's learn about it tonight.

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We shall act on any information provided by readers to rectify the situation.