
FIELD NOTES

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2010 The International Year of Biodiversity (IYB)



Some thoughts from Tom Gladwin

The IYB is the United Nations programme to increase awareness of the importance of biodiversity to the global ecosystem and humanity in particular. The IYB has its origin in the agreement reached by some 200 countries in 2002 to reduce the decrease in biodiversity by 2010. The countries involved meet in Japan in October to report on progress, if any, and to set revised targets and plans for the future.

At least 110 species are known to have been lost from the United Kingdom in the last 100 years. The UK's Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which was implemented in 2004, has the conservation of 1,150 species and 65 habitats as its aim. The BAP is quite visionary as it includes species-rich man-made habitats such as orchards and hedgerows. It is further encouraging to note that the National Trust has taken the initiative in seeking to protect and conserve old orchards and, indeed, to create new ones. Many other organisations have responded to the importance of biodiversity. These include the charity Caring for God's Acre (CfGA), which is supported by the Church of England's national environmental campaign "Shrinking the Footprint". About half of the C. of E.'s 12,000 churchyards already run biodiversity projects.

IYB in the UK is being coordinated by the Natural History Museum, with the support of Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), with the participation of several hundred other organisations, including the Wildlife Trusts and natural history societies. Many events are planned, especially on and around the 22nd May, which has been designated The International Day for Biological Diversity (see www.biodiversityislife.net). During the week Friday 18th - Sunday 27th June, which has been designated "Cherishing Churchyards Week", many churches will be organising events to celebrate the natural riches of their churchyards. Several churchyards in the St. Albans Diocese are known to contain over 100 species of native plants.

What have we lost in Hertfordshire during the last 100 years? I recall bird species, such as Wryneck, Whinchat and Red-backed Shrike, that bred commonly during my youth, and, despite objection, the loss of old orchards to high density residential development in my home village of Digswell. I remember the huge flocks of finches, buntings and sparrows that graced this area 60 years ago, and the many floristically rich meadows lost to intensively farmed monocultures. Like others, and with great sadness, we have noted the decline in the numbers of moths and other insects appearing in our traps. In addition, what losses have there been that we are not aware of? The fact is that the biological carrying capacity and biodiversity of Hertfordshire has been and continues to be seriously depleted. For the first time in my memory no Willow Warblers nested in the well-wooded area around Digswell in 2009.

Whilst human activities continue to threaten our diminishing wildlife resources we do nonetheless have the capacity to turn things around for the benefit of future generations. This is evident, for example, from the massive achievements of the Hertfordshire & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, supported by our own society.

In seeking to continue to recover the situation we need to be aware of what biodiversity should mean at the local level. In general the greater the number of species linked in any eco-system the greater its stability. Thus the primary objective of nature reserve management should surely be to optimise the number of species occurring in each habitat type. BAPs on the other hand tend to target individual species and management for these, e.g. Bitterns, can sometimes result in a net loss of biodiversity. It is important, therefore, to take account of potential losses as well as gains before deciding and implementing schemes of management.

We have our reserves, the reservoirs from which we hope wider areas will eventually be repopulated with wildlife. Perhaps, therefore, the biggest challenge is to raise the biological carrying capacity of the wider countryside and the arable areas in particular.

Revd. Tom Gladwin

A note from the Chairman

It was with some trepidation that I took on the role of Society Chairman from Peter Delaloye last autumn. Being Chairman can seem to some to be a bit of a sinecure, but I think Peter would agree with me that you can quite often feel a bit exposed! Peter performed his public (and less public) duties with great aplomb, and led the Management Committee ably.

The article above, contributed by our very long-standing member Tom Gladwin, shows that the challenges the natural world faces are quite considerable. The 2010 targets, set in 2002 by a possibly rather over-ambitious (might we say somewhat naïve?) government have failed to be met. To many of us that was no great surprise. The pressures brought about by ever-increasing

development, more and more lavish lifestyles, and especially from land-use changes encouraged by affluence and a loss of the need for most people to work the land, have all contributed to these difficulties. Climate change, of course, is now the most evident result of all this – caused largely by our rather profligate use of fossil fuels.

The Herts NHS has a special role to play – beyond what would have been conceivable by our founding fathers (and mothers). It is down to us and our fellow-naturalists in other organisations to document the detail of the wider environment. Without the contribution we make in identifying and systematically (or even casually) recording wildlife, we would have no idea at all how these pressures are actually impacting on our environment. We would not know that Sundew once bedecked bogs near North Mymms, or that Great Bustards bred on vast chalk grasslands near Royston, and nowadays would not be able to identify important wildlife sites or remaining communities of threatened species.

It's all very well making a private note of these though – our main contribution has probably been to bring all this information together in such a way that we and others can make proper use of it. Now, with computers and the Internet, we have unimaginable power to document the natural world and present a picture of change as it happens. There can be no escape by those who would deny the impact of environmental degradation.

So, I think it falls to us to get ever more well-organised to bring our records together, to establish high quality databases, and to make these data available where they can count, whether that be in future management of land, or in influencing government policy.

Keep up the good work, and bring along new generations to carry it forward.

Trevor James

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SOCIETY ACTIVITIES

Notes from our Secretary, Linda Smith

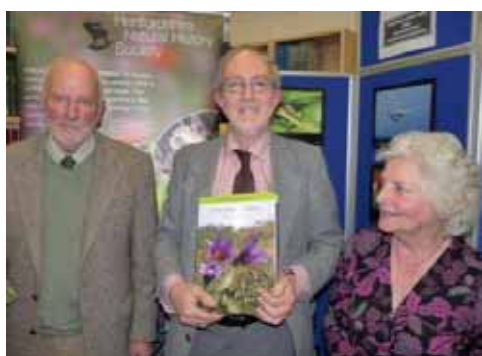
Flora of Hertfordshire published

Congratulations are due to Trevor James and all those in the Herts Flora Group on the publication of the latest HNHS book – *Flora of Hertfordshire* in December. It is a fantastic achievement, representing over twenty two years of work, and is a major contribution to the natural history of the county.

We hosted two book launch events for participants in the Flora Survey, sponsors, and those who had bought copies of the book. Over 50 people joined us at Hitchin Museum and Art Gallery on 7th December and 70 came to the event at the Manor House at Chiswell Green (new home of the Royal Entomological Society) on 9th December.



Sir Simon Bowes-Lyon with Trevor James, signing his book at Hitchin Museum



Herts Flora major contributors Gerald Salisbury and Shirley Watson with Trevor at Chiswell Green Manor

Publication was only made possible with generous financial and/or practical support from many people and organisations. We received over £16,000 of sponsorship plus a loan of £2,000, and practical help with design work and publicity. Our thanks go to everyone who contributed, including the

Botanical Society of the British Isles, British Geological Survey, the Environment Agency, Hertfordshire Biological Records Centre at Hertfordshire County Council, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, London Natural History Society, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, LTD Design Ltd. and 18 generous individual HNHS members.

HNHS and Herts Bird Club website development

The new websites are proving a great success and a new focus for society activity with well over 100 visitors per day. During March we had almost 4000 visitors to the site (one third new and two thirds returning visitors), with 12,000 page views. Thousands of bird records have been submitted through the on-line system and, thanks to the dedicated team of moderators, the most interesting sightings appear on the webpage within hours, or sometimes minutes. The 'recent sightings' and 'places to visit now' pages are very popular and are helping people choose where to go to see and record wildlife.

On-line Submission of Records

You can now also enter your records of mammals, amphibians, reptiles and dragonflies through the 'record submission' page on the HNHS website and view recent sightings on the 'species groups' page.

See: www.hnhs.org

Ringling the changes

The Herts Bird Club conference on 20th March focused on 50 years of bird ringing in Hertfordshire, and was attended by over 120 people. Chris Dee highlighted the amazing amount of information on bird migration and behaviour gathered over the 50 years at Rye Meads. Robin Cole told the story of the development of the new nature reserve at Tewinbury. Peter Delaloye highlighted the most interesting birds ringed in his Hertfordshire gardens over 50 years (he must have started ringing as a baby). Finally Phil Atkinson from the BTO gave a fascinating account of the pioneering BTO and RSPB work in West Africa to understand what happens to migrants in winter and how changes to the habitats there (caused by both humans and climate) are affecting survival. It was an excellent afternoon. More details can be found at www.hnhs.org/birds/news

Get involved with the Hertfordshire Bird Atlas 2007-2011

Herts Atlas organiser, Chris Dee, reports a successful, yet weather-affected winter season for the Hertfordshire Bird Atlas and urges you to get stuck in to fieldwork for the third breeding season. As spring arrives and brings with it our summer migrants, April is the ideal time to start seeking breeding evidence for some of the resident species. As the season progresses and warblers establish territories you can move on to looking for signs that they are nest-building and later feeding young. When wildfowl broods emerge you can add those species to your list of confirmed breeders. Further details and updates on the winter fieldwork are in the March 2010 Hertfordshire Bird Atlas Newsletter, which is available to download from www.hertsatlas.org.uk

Gravel firm supports Tree Sparrows

The future of the Tree Sparrow colony at Tyttenhanger received a boost in January with a donation of £500 to Herts Bird Club from Lafarge Aggregates & Concrete UK, the gravel company who operate the site. Handing over the cheque, Lawrence Cooper, Lafarge area manager, said: "I'm pleased we've been able to support the club with this donation, especially as 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity, which Lafarge is supporting globally. We hope that the work of the Herts Bird Club will continue to raise public awareness of the importance of protecting and assisting rare and endangered species of birds and enhancing biodiversity." The money will provide supplementary winter feeding and additional nest boxes. Read more about the success of the Tree Sparrow project at www.hertsbirdclub.org/news.

HNHS book bargains

All our books are available from HNHS Secretary, Linda Smith, 24 Mandeville Rise, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 7JU. Telephone: 01707 330405. All prices include free postage and packing:

Flora of Hertfordshire by Trevor J James, 2009, hardback, A4 size, 528 pages. Includes all our wild flowers, grasses, sedges, ferns and trees, and where to find them, plus introductory sections, full colour. Cover price: £49.50. **HNHS price: £45.**

The moths of Hertfordshire by Colin Plant, 2008, hardback A4 size, 544 pages. Includes all 1523 species, both macro- and micro-moths, distribution maps, flight charts and introduction. Cover price: £45, **HNHS price: £35.**

Dragonflies and damselflies of Hertfordshire by Alan Reynolds, Tom Gladwin & Christine Shepperson, 2008, softback, 144 pages. Cover price: £14. **HNHS price: £9.**

The mammals, amphibians and reptiles of Hertfordshire by Michael Clark, 2001, softback, 312 pages. Cover price: £20. **HNHS price: £10.**

The birds of Tring Reservoirs by Rob Young, Jack Fearnside and David Russell, 1996, softback, 136 pages. Cover price: £7.50. **HNHS price: £4.**

The breeding birds of Hertfordshire by K. W. Smith, C. W. Dee, J. D. Fearnside, E. W. Fletcher and R. N. Smith, 1993, hardback, 316 pages. Cover price: £22. **HNHS price: £8.**

Linda Smith (secretary@hnhs.org)

Material for 'The Hertfordshire Naturalist 2010'

Material for the next issue of the '*Herts Naturalist*' is being collected and work will start on compiling it in May, for publication in late summer/autumn. Apart from the usual reports on recent records of note from Recorders, the editor would appreciate contributions from you ordinary naturalists. Don't feel you have to be an expert (whatever that is) to make a contribution. Notes from your local special site are equally welcome. Contributions do need to be written so that they conform broadly to the general style of the journal (see past issues as a guide), including the layout of references etc.

Please send contributions, hard copy or electronic, to the editor, at 8 Redwoods, Welwyn Garden City, Herts., AL8 7NR (email: stuart.warrington@nationaltrust.org.uk)

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Notes from our recorders

Two types of terrestrial algae, often mistaken as fungi

As Recorder for Fungi, I am often sent specimens to identify, although sometimes the things I receive are not fungi at all. Among the specimens I am sent are galls, leaf mines, lichens (which, although true fungi, are generally not dealt with by mycologists), algae and various inorganic things that people believe to be fungi.

In the last couple of years a frequent enquiry has been about the proliferation of orange growth on the trunks of trees. This is often a cause of concern to the finder, who fears that it may be some pathogenic fungus species threatening the survival of the trees.

There is no cause for alarm. The orange organism is NOT in fact a fungus but an alga called *Trentepohlia*, of which there are at least five species in Britain, although the identification of the individual species is not easy. This is essentially a filamentous green alga (i.e. it contains chlorophyll and carries out photosynthesis) but the strong orange colour, caused by high amounts of carotenoid pigments, masks the green of the chlorophyll in the same way as various other pigments do so in brown and red seaweeds etc. The organism is merely using the trees as a substrate and will also occur on rock faces.



Trentepohlia on oak tree

Photo: Alan Outen

Up until about 12 years ago *Trentepohlia* species were considered rare, at least as free living organisms, mainly because they are in fact intolerant of sulphur dioxide pollution, as is the case with many epiphytes (organisms growing on trees), e.g. many mosses, liverworts, lichens and some ferns. The decline in sulphur dioxide levels in the atmosphere has seen many epiphytes starting to reappear across south-east England, some of which have not been recorded for 100-150 years. For example some species of mosses and liverworts, which were last seen in Bedfordshire or Hertfordshire in the 1880's or even earlier, are now making a remarkable recovery, with a rapid increase in the numbers of records. I don't remember back that far and no one else does either, but it is possible that *Trentepohlia* may also have been common in the past, though it was not so identified.

Thus, far from being a threat to the trees it is an indicator of cleaner air! It seems especially partial to Oak but is not host specific and so can also be found on several other tree species. I first saw it in Scotland 17 years ago and recorded it in both Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire some six years ago. It is undoubtedly spreading fast now in both counties. At Chorleywood Common, for example, it is abundant and I have had several enquiries about it at this site alone.



Trentepohlia – detail

Photo: Alan Outen

I mentioned above that *Trentepohlia* species were considered to be rare, at least as free living organisms. In fact they are one of the principal algal partners in lichens especially in lichen genera such as *Graphis*, *Graphina*, *Opegrapha* etc., all of which are also currently spreading. Another common algal partner of lichens is the blue-green alga *Nostoc*, which, as a free-living organism, can appear as dull gelatinous olive-greenish brown colonies to 5cm across, but often in profusion on wet lawns, gravel paths etc. following periods of heavy rain. This is yet another species that often attracts attention from people who think it is a jelly fungus.

Alan R. Outen



Nostoc on grassland. Photo: Alan Outen

Lichen résumé for 2009

Lichens continue to fare well on younger trees now that sulphur dioxide levels are lower, particularly smooth bark species, which are developing attractive mosaics. *Arthonia radiata*, once a rarely recorded species, is now widespread in the county.



Arthonia radiata at Flamstead Photo: Andrew Harris

Twig species tolerant of or encouraged by eutrophication are also doing well, with the beautiful *Physcia aipolia* turning up in many places and *Ramalina fastigiata* (informally called the 'fanfare of trumpets') discovered on a field maple at Flamstead.

Pyrrhospora quercina - an ancient woodland species has been found on a veteran oak at Hitch Wood. Of the more slowly spreading woodland species, which were probably more typical of the original flora, *Graphis scripta*, the Scripture Lichen, was surprisingly abundant in Hitch Wood - numerous thalli appeared to be present on the lower trunks of many hornbeams and some beech.



Graphis scripta at Hitch Wood Photo.: Andrew Harris

A good variety of lichens was found in a survey of the Commons Nature Reserve, Welwyn Garden City. A preliminary survey of 'Heartwood Forest' was curtailed by autumn storms, so it is hoped to continue it this year. I have some 50 lichen species in my garden - a case of biodiversity equals recorder effort perhaps!

Andrew Harris

Where to now with plant recording?

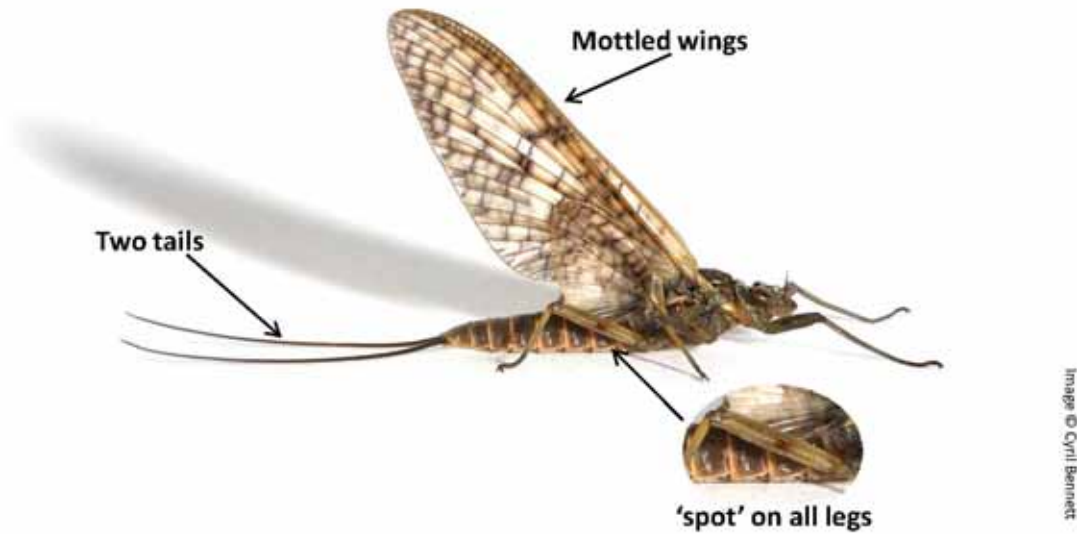
At the launch of the *Flora of Hertfordshire* last year, I mentioned that, between the completion of the text (around early September) and publication (in December), I had had records of some five new species of plant that had been found in the County! Since then, the total is nearer eight (I am losing count!). That rather startling statistic should alert folk (if they needed alerting) to the fact that we have never finished keeping track of our natural environment, and plant recording has not finished with the *Flora*!

The London Natural History Society has now launched its own new *Flora* project, see www.lnhs.org.uk This will encompass a fair chunk of our area, especially the bits of Greater London that were once Herts., around Barnet and Totteridge etc, and Potters Bar. The LNHS Area (a 20 mile radius from St Pauls) includes much of the south of our county up to Welwyn Garden City and Hertford, so we will somehow need to re-visit some of these areas (including places like the lower Lea Valley, the Colne Valley down from Watford and so on), so we can pick up species that were not apparent when we last went there. Please contact me if you feel like taking up the challenge.

Trevor James

Our Mayfly Recorder, Judy England, has asked us to include the following:

Have you seen a March brown?



For anglers, the March brown (*Rhithrogena germanica*) is one of the most iconic mayfly species. However, it is under threat across Europe and it's thought that the UK may be a stronghold for this species. We need your help to discover where the March brown is found in the UK. The relatively large (13-15mm) adults typically emerge en-masse from rivers around lunch time in March and April. If you see a hatch of these distinctive insects please send the following details to the address below.

Date	Approx. number	River/nearest placename	Grid ref (if known)

If you can provide a digital photograph of a specimen please send it to info@ephemeroptera.org.uk

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Email: _____

Send records to: Ephemeroptera Recording Scheme c/o Buglife Scotland, Balallan House, 24 Allan Park, Stirling, FK8 2QG. Email: info@ephemeroptera.org.uk

News from Welwyn Hatfield's woodlands

There has been a considerable amount of woodland management going on recently in some of the County's most important ancient woodland SSSIs. Welwyn Hatfield Council have been undertaking extensive work in both Sherrardspark Wood and Northaw Great Wood, with a view to improving their overall quality (and achieving, in the jargon of Natural England, 'favourable conservation status').

The aim in the case of Sherrardspark Wood has been two-fold – to remove substantial areas of non-native *Rhododendron* that were planted in the earlier 20th century; and to thin mostly oak in other areas to encourage further natural regeneration. A spin-off of some of this work has been the opening of substantial glades and widening of rides, especially towards the northern side. Heather has regenerated well in one area, but it will be interesting to see what else turns up – both in terms of plants and other wildlife. Ken Smith has already taken advantage of the felling of a few larger oaks to acquire samples of dead wood from the canopy to see what insects emerge – giving an insight into the food resource available to his beloved woodpeckers.

At Northaw Great Wood, the aim has been focused on glade re-creation (it used at one time to be wood-pasture, so open space is a major potential feature of the habitat), as well as broadening rides to link these together.

Butterfly monitoring has been going on at both sites to measure impacts on, for example, the White Admiral. Please visit these woodlands, enjoy them and report your observations of wildlife, especially in these managed areas.

Chris James

The up-to-date list of County Wildlife recorders on our contacts page

See our meetings page for all the Wildlife events coming up in the next few months



The 'Blue Ride', Northaw Great Wood, after clearance, 2009

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Material for the next issue of Field Notes should be sent to the Editor by 15th October 2010

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