

FIELD NOTES



NEWSLETTER OF THE HERTFORDSHIRE
NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Issue 19

May 2011

In this issue: Tom Gladwin reflects on 1875 Award, Nomination for 1875 Award for 2011; Herts Dragonfly Survey, Herts Bird Club Conference report, New Head at Herts & Mddx Wildlife Trust Diary Date - HNHS Autumn Meeting and AGM - Saturday 12 November at Woolmer Green Hall

'Hertfordshire geology & landscape' published

This long-awaited definitive book on Hertfordshire's geology was finally published just before Christmas. It had been first mooted as long ago as 1950, but owing to the death of the then Recorder of Geology, Percy Evans, and subsequently the many changes and revisions to scientific understanding of the complex geology of our area, this had never come to fruition until now.

Dr John Catt, the primary author and editor, joined co-writers to launch the book at Verulamium Museum, St Albans, on 14th December; followed up by another signing event the next day at St Stephens Church Hall, St Albans. Also attending were representatives of organisations who had sponsored the production of the book, including the Hertfordshire Geological Society, the Geologists' Association, Natural England, the Ver Valley Society and twenty individual donors. About 140 people attended these events, and the first printing of the book ran out almost as soon as it was issued, to be followed by a second printing after Christmas.

The photographs show Author, John Catt, signing a copy of his book (top) and Linda Smith, HNHS Secretary, with Trevor James, Chairman of HNHS, presenting a copy to John Catt



The Society is very glad to have been a party to publishing this book, on behalf of our sister organisation, the Hertfordshire Geological Society, with whom we work closely. It makes a splendid addition to the series of books on the County's natural environment that we have published over the last few years.

The book gives a comprehensive account of the geology of the County, and its relationship with a wide range of topics, including soils, ecology, agriculture, prehistoric archaeology, hydrogeology, mineral resources and building stones. As John said at the launch:

"This is a landmark publication for Hertfordshire, which until now has lacked an authoritative work on the county's geology and how this influences the landscape as we see it today. It also highlights the vital importance to modern day life of our geological resources and their exploitation."

Copies can be purchased from the HNHS, and cost £39.50 (incl. postage and packing) see the Society's website, www.hnhs.org, or contact the Secretary, Linda Smith.

HNHS 1875 Award for 2011 – nominations are open now for an outstanding Hertfordshire Naturalist. Full details and nomination forms see page 6 of this newsletter or the website.

Thoughts on receiving the HNHS 1875 Award by Revd Tom Gladwin

For a while after I was told of this presentation I was greatly surprised, and when it had sunk in quite overwhelmed.

Allow me for a moment to reminisce. My earliest memory is of sitting in a pram, probably in 1937, watching Blackbirds feeding young in a nest on a fence rail partly covered by a blackberry bush. Thus, I often wonder if our early experiences play a major part in determining our life's interests. I was fortunate in that my paternal grandfather and father, both fine naturalists, nurtured my interest in the natural world from infancy. One of my treasured possessions is a pair of chicken bones my grandfather used to grind together to call Corncrakes out of the hay meadows on Hertford Meads.



Tom receives his award from Trevor James

Every Sunday, after church and a roast lunch, regardless of the weather, we walked the countryside around Hertford. The regular signposts and events in our annual round included:

- Listening for and welcoming back the first Chiffchaffs; rarely in those days heard before the first few days of April.
- Early spring walks through Walnut Tree Walk, where my parents used to see Red Squirrels, looking for the first Stormcock (Mistle Thrush) nests.
- Spring walks to Revels Green, near Hertford Heath, to pick Lesser Celandines, which were then much less common than now.
- Walks across Hertford Meads to collect Lapwings' eggs for tea; only one egg being taken from each clutch found.
- Walks to Hertford Heath to see breeding Wrynecks, through Balls Wood to enjoy carpets of Common Spotted Orchids, and to Broad Riding Wood to see Redstarts and Purple Emperors.
- Fishing all night in the Lea and New River, listening to Nightingales and Sedge Warblers, and Water Voles as they "plopped" into the rivers.
- Dawn choruses in early June with so many participants it was sometimes difficult to single out individual choristers.

This was the countryside around Hertford, undisturbed by aircraft and road traffic noise, in which birds such as Turtle Doves, Whinchats, Yellow Wagtails, and Red-backed Shrikes were still common. It should not be forgotten that when the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and others began enumerating small bird populations in the 1960's, there had already been a big post-war decline in numbers.

In 1955 I met my lovely wife Janet. Together we have shared the adventure for the last 55 years. Along the way we have been fortunate and privileged to meet many very kind people who were prepared to share a vision and even take risks to make beneficial things happen. I would like to mention just a few.

I recall Bernard Nau, Janet and I having our first meeting with the Chief Engineer at Rye Meads who, despite his organisation's policy, permitted us to start bird ringing there in 1957. How, we might reflect, would Health and Safety view a request to trap birds around open irrigation sewage lagoons today? The Rye Meads Ringing Group, formally formed in 1960, celebrated its 50th anniversary this year. It must surely be loudly applauded for the magnificent contribution it continues to make to ornithology.

In 1969 the Chief Officer at the then Welwyn Garden City Urban District Council "extended" the duties of his office to deal with some difficult legal issues to ensure our wildlife trust acquired all the bank, riparian and water rights to the River Lea in its section through Lemsford Springs Nature Reserve, which we were then purchasing. Might I say how well Barry Trevis and his team are caring for that reserve which celebrated its 40th anniversary this year.

It was the Managing Director of the then St. Albans Sand & Gravel Co. Ltd who made the big decision to restore Amwell Quarry to nature conservation instead of the intended international rowing course, and it was with John Spreull that I visited the Otter Trust to request otters for release at Amwell. I am much saddened that this good friend didn't live to see the Amwell Nature Reserve pass into the worthy care of the Hertfordshire & Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

Other joys included working with Bryan Sage to produce *The Birds of Hertfordshire* and with Alan Reynolds and Christine Shepperson on *The Dragonflies and Damselflies of Hertfordshire*.

Thus our adventures with wildlife have involved a lot of other people who we like to feel are also embraced by this award.

Looking back to how things were, how they might become, and the initiatives that can make them happen, I ask "do we now have sufficient nature reserves, i.e. stocks of organisms, that resources now be best directed at raising the biological carrying capacity of the wider countryside?" 'Living Landscapes' has a great future.

With its recent and forthcoming publications on the local geology, flora and fauna, our society has surely provided this county with the advantage of such a fund of sound information, that it now has the opportunity to lead the way in wider conservation strategies and achievement. In the meantime to this our Society, and to you its members who have been immensely supportive over many years, I thank you for this very generous award.

Tom Gladwin

Notes from the Herts Bird Club/BTO Conference

Twin themes of Hertfordshire's wetlands and garden birds drew an impressively large audience of about 150 to Rothamsted Research conference centre on 26th March.

The conference was chaired by the new Herts Bird Recorder, David Bilcock (photo centre) with Ken Smith, Herts Bird Club Chairman (right) and Mike Ilett, former Recorder (left), discussing Mike's talk on '*Birds of 2010 – what did you miss?*'

The well presented talks covered a range of topics so there was something for everyone.

We started with a success story. Tim Hill described the practical work done by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to restore some of the county's most important wetlands to make them suitable for Bitterns and other wildlife. These included Amwell Nature Reserve, Tring Reservoirs, Stanborough Reed Marsh and Rye Meads.



The worrying story of one of the world's most endangered waders – the Spoon-billed Sandpiper – was told by Nigel Clark from the BTO. His studies have shown an unrelenting decline of this rare species from the Far East, under threat from habitat loss in South Korea and Japan and trapping for food in Myanmar.

Photograph: Chris Dee, Herts BTO Rep. and Herts Atlas Co-ordinator (left), talking to Nigel Clark, BTO.

After the break, Tim Harrison, Garden BirdWatch co-ordinator at the BTO, told us how the information collected from recording birds in our own gardens builds up into a fascinating set of statistics. This shows how familiar birds fared during the recent cold spells. Depressingly, Hertfordshire's number one garden bird is Wood Pigeon seen in almost 100% of Hertfordshire gardens.

In a round-up of progress with the Herts Atlas, Chris Dee encouraged us all to get out and get records of proved breeding to fill the many gaps in the data collected so far.

The afternoon rounded off with Graham White asking if the Lee Valley was still good for ducks. His analysis of records collected over the last decade showed the winners and losers and how the various water bodies and wetland habitats favour different species.

Many thanks to all of you who came to enjoy the day and support the Herts Bird Club and BTO.

Graham White (right) with Herts NHS Chairman, Trevor James



Notes from the Herts BRC

Ian Carle reports that he has been busy working on computerising all the data collected by the Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust's Wildlife Site survey team over the last 10 years, amounting to tens of thousands of records, mainly of higher plants, but also other species records, which will be made available to the Society's Recorders. In addition, he has been working with some of the Recorders to get their past data computerised and made accessible, notably the Hymenoptera (bees and wasps) data held by Raymond Uffen. Sorting out data and making it as fully accessible as possible is a particular aim of the Society, although we have some way to go yet.

Recording and Recorders

We reported in the last issue of *Field Notes* that there had been changes with Dragonfly and Mollusc recording, and that Fungus recording was going to be reviewed by the Herts Fungus Group.

We can also now report that there has been a change of Bird Recorder in the Herts Bird Club. The new Recorder (as from January 2011) is David Bilcock, who took over from Tony Blake after his 5-year stint in this arduous post.

David's contact details are:

71 Highfield Road, Tring, HP23 4QS. e:mail: birdrecorder@hnhs.org



Dragonfly recording – still needs your help

Remember that the British Dragonfly Society are planning to publish their new national atlas in 2013 (updating the atlas published in 1996), using records collected between 2008 and 2012. There are now **only two seasons of field work remaining**.

An immediate priority is to make sure that all of the 10km squares that are wholly or partly within Hertfordshire are adequately covered, and all of the species that are present are recorded.

To re-iterate what was said in the last *Field Notes*, the most basic information required is **species name**, **location** (preferably with a six-figure grid reference - or a post code if this is not possible), **date** of the observation, and **recorder's name**. Additional information, such as numbers, and any indication of breeding activity/success can make the records even more useful.

You can submit your records through the HNHS website at www.hnhs.org

If you are not certain of an identification it may still be possible to use your records, but please make it clear that you are uncertain, and include any photographs that you might have to allow confirmation.

Roy Woodward. - 62C High Street, Cheshunt, EN8 0AH. roy.rkwoodward@ntlworld.com

Further news on Fungus recording

Steve Kelly has taken over as leader of the Herts Fungi Group, but with Alan Outen's former duties and responsibilities in that role now shared out between several people. Alan will continue to validate and maintain the records. Several people will be involved in answering enquiries and there will be a general email address set up for the group which Herts NHS will also make use of. In that way the Herts Fungi Group will avoid anyone having too high a profile and getting overloaded with enquiries from the general public.

It is also intended that the Herts Fungi Group website will be re-invigorated so that hopefully a lot of the routine enquiries will already be answered there. Further details of the email contact and website details will be given later.

Vacant posts - Are there any keen people out there who would like to take on any of the vacant posts currently on offer?!

We need an enthusiastic entomologist to step forward to take on the role of especially the Grasshoppers and Crickets (of which we do not have an enormous number of species to get your head round!). If there is also a knowledgeable entomologist who wants to tackle the challenges of the Bugs (terrestrial ones at any rate) then we would love to hear from you! Following Pryce Buckle's retirement, too, the Molluscs remain a neglected group, at a time when climate change is likely to be affecting them.

'BioBlitz' at Bayfordbury Week-end 2 – 3 July

What is a Bioblitz? Well, It is a concerted effort over a relatively short period of time to make an inventory of an area's biological diversity. It's an audit of as many species as we can find on the site. Experts will survey the site, identifying and collecting as many species as we can over the weekend. Participants will learn how to collect or observe different groups of organisms, the importance of each species found. And amaze you with fascinating facts. The Bayfordbury estate is a County Wildlife Site with a wide range of habitats including two areas of broadleaved woodland, an historic pinetum, ancient hedgerows, rough grassland, a stream and lake.

We want you all to come along - This event takes place on 2 - 3 July 2011 at the University of Hertfordshire's Bayfordbury Campus, near Hertford. The address is Bayfordbury Field Centre, University of Hertfordshire, Lower Hatfield Road, Hertford, Herts., SG13 8LD (on the B158 from Hertford to Essendon).

Who is taking part? We have local and national experts, members of the local community, university students, school and other community groups. The Bioblitz is supported by the University of Hertfordshire, Hertfordshire Natural History Society and the OPAL Project (OPen Air Laboratories).

Activities taking place will include floral identification, insect collection, fish and plankton surveys, pond dipping, bird identification and tree identification along with a tour of the Clinton-Baker Pinetum. Overnight we will be badger watching, moth trapping with the Herts Moth Group and bat detecting.

A full program will be posted in early June.

Organiser - *Ronni Edmonds-Brown*

Herts Natural History Society – Autumn Meeting and AGM will be on Saturday 12 November at a new venue - Woolmer Green Hall.

This is a lovely purpose built hall located between Welwyn Garden City and Stevenage, just south of Knebworth. It has excellent facilities with a public address system and ample easy free car parking.

We are putting together a very interesting and wide ranging programme. Please put the date in your diary now.

News from the Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust

Judy Adams retires as Chief Executive

Around 90 people gathered in Welwyn Garden City to celebrate Judy Adams's achievements at the Trust as she retired from the role of Chief Executive in February. Judy was presented with a beautiful painting of Balls Wood. The new hide at Tewinbury Nature Reserve has been named The Judy Adams Hide in recognition of all her hard work for the Trust over the last 11 years.

Tom Day has been appointed Head of Living Landscapes, looking after nature reserves and conservation. Odette Carter has joined us as Policy and Advocacy Officer with a focus on planning. Amy Ellis (née Wheeler) and Jennifer Gilbert are both now working on new projects – Amy on Wild Stevenage and Jennifer on Connecting People with the Colne Valley.

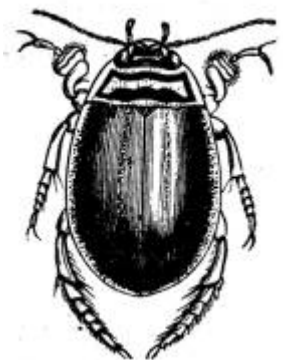
Jane Durney took over as Chief Executive on 7th March. Jane has just moved to Berkhamsted from London with her partner. Most recently she's been working on ensuring the Olympics leave a sustainable legacy, at the Commission for a Sustainable London 2012. A qualified chartered accountant, Jane spent six years at KPMG in audit and consulting. She has an MSc in Environmental Change and Management from the University of Oxford. As a keen volunteer she's been involved with Carshalton Lavender community group for six years, helping to revive historic lavender fields on disused allotments in South London. She's also been a conservation volunteer with BTCV.

"Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust has grown tremendously under the stewardship of Judy Adams. I'm very excited about this new role, taking forward the vision of living landscapes in the county that has become my new home."

Material for the next issue of Field Notes should be sent by 15th October 2011 to The Editor, Trevor James 56 Back Street, Ashwell, Baldock, Herts., SG7 5PE Tel.: 01462 742684 trevorjames@btinternet.com

HNHS Secretary and Registrar Linda Smith 24 Mandeville Rise, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 7JU. Tel: 01707 330405. secretary@hnhs.org

HNHS is Registered Charity No. 218418



Hertfordshire Natural History Society – 1875 Award Nomination Form

The name of the award commemorates the founding of the Society in 1875.

Those nominated for awards will be judged against the following criteria:-

- Contribution in a voluntary capacity.
- Recognised expertise in their field.
- Duration of contribution.
- Key achievements eg publications, papers.
- Training or educating others.
- Championing conservation/natural history.
- Nominees should normally be members of HNHS.

The HNHS Management Committee will assess nominations and make the final decision. The Awards will be presented at the HNHS AGM and Autumn meeting in November.

Please submit your nominations to:
Tim Hill, 11 Shelley Court, Milton Road,
Harpenden, Herts, AL5 5LL,
or e-mail secretary@hnhs.org

Closing date 30 June 2011

I would like to nominate the person named below:

Name:

Address:

..... post code

.....

For the 1875 Award 2011 for:*

- an outstanding Hertfordshire naturalist *
- someone who has made an outstanding contribution to natural history in Hertfordshire *

* delete as appropriate

Please give information to support your nomination.

Your name:

Your address:

Post code

Your telephone number:

Your email address: