

# Chichester Natural History Society

Registered Charity No 259211



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## NEWSLETTER No 200 May 2021

### FROM THE CHAIR

Good Morning.

As the country emerges from our “battle” with Covid 19, I am looking forward to enjoying this summer and really appreciating the wildlife in our local area. Whilst it will be great to have all restrictions removed, I hope that we do not lose the increased community spirit and politeness that developed during the lockdowns.

Our first summer field outings have started and have proved very popular. Indeed, the limited space available on each walk, combined with the heavy demand from members, has meant that the field outing organiser’s husband has had to miss out! However, I am hopeful that I can attend the next outing, when numbers will not be limited. Alongside the summer field outings, we will also be carrying out our annual surveys of the ecological succession at Medmerry.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind members that we have three pieces of equipment available for members to borrow. We have two types of Bat detector available, a static one and a handheld device. If you would like to book a slot to borrow either of these please contact Linda Smith. Following on from last year, I will be carrying out some bat surveys around the NT North Wood, using the handheld detector. If you would like to accompany me, please drop me a line. In addition, we have a camera trap that can be used to record nocturnal wildlife in your garden, please contact John Kelsall if you wish to borrow this.

The Society’s committee has now selected a range of new projects to make use of the remaining legacy donations. Details of these exciting activities can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

With the restrictions during the last 18 months, it has been difficult to have the opportunity to chat to members, consequently the position of deputy chair remains unfilled. It is very important that this role is filled quickly so as to ensure smooth transition at the end of next year, when the Society’s rules require me to stand down as chair. If you would be prepared to take on this role please contact me. It does not require much time and is a lot of fun!

Dr. Christian Hance.

[chair@chichesternaturalhistorysociety.org.uk](mailto:chair@chichesternaturalhistorysociety.org.uk)

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## MEMBERS

### **New Members**

We welcome the following new members:

Mrs Karen Guy      Mr Martin Troy      Mr B and Mrs G King-Smith

### **2021 Photographic Competition – Theme Garden Wildlife**

Entries will be displayed at the Members' Christmas Meeting in December 2021 if COVID restrictions allow the event, otherwise entries will be displayed on the CNHS Website.

Please send your submissions to [web-master@chichesternaturalhistorysociety.org.uk](mailto:web-master@chichesternaturalhistorysociety.org.uk) by 1 December 2021.

### **Sightings**

Please enter any observations in the sightings book on lecture evenings or add them to the blog on the website.

### **Membership Badges and Car Stickers.**

These can be obtained at lecture evenings at £1 for a badge and all members receive a free car sticker.

**Camera trap** – available for members to borrow, from John Kelsall (01243 788092). A number of members have used it this year.

**Laser tree range finder** – available for members to borrow, from Helen Dignum. Used for tree surveys at West Dean Woods and Bishops Palace Gardens in 2020. (07526 765968)

**Bat detectors:** automated and handheld. Available to borrow from Linda and Ken Smith. (01243 786079)

## EVENTS

### **Speaker Meetings**

We do not yet know what COVID19 restrictions will be in place come September. But we are assuming that it may be possible to resume ChiNats indoor meetings in some form. We have therefore reserved the meeting room in anticipation, otherwise the meetings will be broadcast on Zoom.

All evening events will be held on the first Wednesday of the month from September to April in The Pallant Suite, Masonic Hall, South Pallant, Chichester PO19 1SY. Doors will open at 6.30 pm and lectures begin at 7.15pm. The events will be free to members and cost £3 for non-members.

We do not yet know whether we will be allowed to serve refreshments at the meetings but remember to bring your own coffee/tea mug.

**Wednesday 1 September 2021 – Lecture evening, more details later**

**Wednesday 6 October 2021 – Lecture evening, more details later**

**Wednesday 3 November 2021 – AGM and short presentations from members on their wildlife highlights discovered during lockdown.**

**Wednesday 1 December 2021 – Members' Christmas Meeting**

### **Field Outings**

In line with the 'Roadmap out of lockdown' announced by the government on 17<sup>th</sup> May, the Society aims to continue Field Outings. Any further dates and activities will be advertised in the monthly emails.

**Prebooking is essential:** please email: [Outdoor-events@chichesternaturalhistorysociety.org.uk](mailto:Outdoor-events@chichesternaturalhistorysociety.org.uk) for this and any other events advertised in the monthly email newsletter.

**Monday 14<sup>th</sup> June 10.00am. A Morning Walk at Slindon. Leader David Hart.**

Meet at **Grid Ref SU 950085**. A walk going up Puck Lane, into Nore Wood and with a picnic at the Folly. Leader will be David Hart who will meet members at the car park at the bottom of Puck Lane. Hopeful of seeing orchids, fine views and good weather! (Bring a bag or similar to sit on for picnic if ground wet and note that there is some uphill walking and that the chalk can be slippery underfoot).

Please pre-book by Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> June.

Directions – approx. 6 miles east of Chichester on the A27, take the turning north (signed Aldingbourne Centre). Travel just over a mile towards Eartham and then turn right (signed Slindon), parking is on the left after half a mile. David will direct to further nearby parking if necessary.

**Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> July, afternoon. Rock pooling at Felpham, Leader Jenny Etienne.**

Further details will be circulated in the monthly email newsletter.

The Society's field outings will be run in the following manner:

- Pre-booking essential, with confirmation of members' up to date contact details.
- Participants must not have tested positive for Covid 19 in the last 14 days, be exhibiting any symptoms nor awaiting test results.
- Social distancing of 2 metres is recommended.
- No sharing of binoculars or other equipment
- Members attend at their own risk.

**Medmerry Survey – 7<sup>th</sup> Year**

We plan to continue with our annual wildlife and botany surveys at Medmerry RSPB reserve this year. We have added extra dates to cater for poor weather or repeat surveys to cater for extra groups. The maximum group size is fifteen. Each survey session lasts about two hours with little walking required.

We encourage anyone interested in recording wildlife to attend. The sessions are open to all, no matter what your level of expertise, as guidance and encouragement will be provided. We shall use the Society's equipment, but hand magnifiers, binoculars and reference books will always be useful.

We aim to have a celebration tea after the last survey in September, usually held at a local teashop or garden centre.

**Please book directly with Philippa Arnott on [philippa.arnott@uwclub.net](mailto:philippa.arnott@uwclub.net) or phone 01243 575345.**

- Pre-booking essential, with confirmation of members' up to date contact details.
- Participants must not have tested positive for Covid 19 in the last 14 days, be exhibiting any symptoms nor awaiting test results.

All surveys will start at 13:00, meeting at the RSPB Earnley Car Park at Grid Ref SZ 816 968, post code PO20 7JL, and then car-sharing to the appropriate survey site.

Friday June 4	DAFOR – survey of abundance of wild flowers
Friday June 11	2 <sup>nd</sup> DAFOR or reserve day for bad weather
Friday June 18	Quadrat survey of wild flowers
Friday June 25	2 <sup>nd</sup> Quadrats or reserve day for bad weather
Friday July 2	Early dragonflies
Friday July 9	2 <sup>nd</sup> Early dragonflies or reserve day for bad weather
Friday August 6	Grasshoppers and bush crickets
Friday August 13	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grasshoppers and bush crickets or reserve day for bad weather
Friday September 3	Late dragonflies
Friday September 10	2 <sup>nd</sup> Late dragonflies or reserve day for bad weather, Celebration Tea

## **CNHS Legacy Projects Report**

The newsletter has previously detailed the support for local Natural History projects, made possible by the Legacies kindly donated by two anonymous donors. There were still some available funds so the CNHS committee met on Zoom in March 2021 to allocate further legacy funds towards project ideas submitted by members.

### **Further work on Northwood Pond – David Hart**

As I am sure members will remember that one of our earliest Legacy Projects was a donation of £2000 to the National Trust Slindon Estate for the creation of a pond within the area known as 'The Rise of Northwood'. Sadly the original design of the pond had several faults and failed to retain water. The remedy was to dig out the clay, line the pond with sand and install on top of the sand a butyl liner at the cost of £800. The Committee decided to donate this amount of money as part of our commitment to the Rise of Northwood.

Unfortunately it has now been decided that the pond will be fenced for the protection of wild-life, mainly from uncontrolled dogs. Hopefully the work will commence the week beginning 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021. We will keep members informed.

### **Owl box for Maybush Copse – David Hart**

Another of the many other interesting project proposals was put to the committee by Denise Bowerman asking if we would consider supporting a delightful small nature reserve called Maybush Copse at Chidham.

I spent an interesting two hours being shown around the Reserve by Stephen Jackson, a committee member of the Friends of Maybush Copse. He explained that many years ago the Reserve was a clay pit, producing bricks for the building industry, then a proposed building site, but rescued in the nick of time by a few like-minded folks in Chidham to become a Nature Reserve.

The Friends of Maybush Copse work closely with Peter Hughes of the Chichester Harbour Conservancy and jointly we decided that a tawny owl box would be a suitable addition. It was readily agreed by the committee to donate £150 to cover the cost of an Eco-friendly tawny owl box (made of recycled plastic and said to last up to 20 years).

Chidham is a beautiful area and I highly recommend a visit to Maybush Copse.

### **Chichester Wildlife Meadows – Sarah Hall**

Proposal for a wildflower meadow in Chichester, probably Summersdale area. This is a joint project, working with Sarah Hughes, Community Wildlife Officer for Chichester District Council. Sarah Hughes is liaising with Hyde Martlet who own the best proposed meadow site by Winterbourne Rd and Summersdale Rd. CNHS would donate funds to purchase plug plants of various wildflower species to create a haven for insects and other wildlife. We will seek the involvement of the local residents' association.

### **Refurbishment of Beaky's Pond, Dell Quay – John Kelsall**

We are contributing to the Chichester Harbour Conservancy's refurbishment of Beaky's Pond. The work involves some dredging and installation of a dipping platform. The pond is situated north of Dell Quay just past the yacht yard. The Conservancy use it as an Educational resource and want to extend the use for disabled access and use.

## **Moth Trap – Christian Hance**

Insects are declining at an alarming rate, e.g. a study based on German Nature Reserves suggested a 75% decrease over 27 years (Hallmann et al 2017). The Society has decided to increase our study of one order of this class of UK fauna and has purchased a moth trap so that members can study these fascinating nocturnal insects.

We have purchased a Skinner moth trap and accessories. To assist members in identifying the many different species we propose to run a series of events during the summer. We would like members to volunteer to have the trap set up overnight in their garden and to host other members the following morning for an identification session. Tony Burnand, one of the Society's moth experts, has kindly agreed to lead these sessions enabling many members to increase their knowledge.

Please contact Christian Hance if you wish to host a moth evening/morning this summer.

## **A new tool for analysis and interpretation of the results from ChiNats Bat Recording Project.**

The Society has agreed to subscribe to the new 'Acoustic Pipeline' system offered by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) for analysing and storing our bat recordings. The system provides the infrastructure to allow audio recordings (wav files) of bats and other creatures to be uploaded to a secure server maintained by the BTO, to be processed to find, identify and verify biological sounds, and to return results back to the Society. The cost will be about £100 per year plus a one-off cost of £300 to upload the existing records.

At the start of the ChiNats project we were fortunate to be given free access to software developed by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) to analyse the bat calls recorded and identify the bats. However, this is only a semi-automated process. The data from each session must be uploaded onto Ken and Linda Smith's computer and fed into the BTO classifier programme. Each file recorded is analysed and given a suggested identification with a confidence threshold, this takes a couple of hours of computer time. In a typical night with say 1000 recordings each result must be checked manually against the threshold and accepted or rejected to compile the list of bats present through the night. This takes us another hour or two for each set of recordings.

There is also a significant issue of safe storage of the data. At present we have data for three years totalling 1800 Gigabytes stored on the ChiNats freestanding hard drive and backed up on Ken and Linda's own free standing hard drive. (2020: 550 Gigabytes of data stored in 430,972 files; 2019: 521 GB in 384,907 files and 2018: 602GB in 540277 files).

The other advantage is that the results are shared with the National Bat Recording Scheme and shared with the Sussex Biological Records Centre. This data sharing was not possible previously.

Ken and Linda have been testing the new Acoustic Pipeline, the recordings from the bat detector can be uploaded directly into the BTO system and the results are returned within a few hours in an easily accessible form.

## **Memories for newsletter #200**

Thank you for your response to my appeal for memories about your memories of CNHS to celebrate our 200<sup>th</sup> newsletter.

### **Happy Memories**

**Richard and Anne Williamson:** Among our wonderful memories of being with Chichester Natural History Society is Oliver Buckle's talk in 1964 revealing the mysteries of the sex life of orchids. Another memory is dawn on May Day 1968 when twentyfive of us listened to eight nightingales singing within two hectares. The Thorney Island walk was our highlight of the year when 30,000 dunlin wheeled back and forth over Pilsey Island like a murmuration of white starlings. My own memory is organising the 'Web of Life' (my own original phrase which got taken up by many!!) series of talks for 1970 Conservation Year – and of course designing the original logo for the Society. And dear little Gwen Rouse – who did so much in the early days. Every best wish Anne --- and Richard Williamson

**Dee Bowerman:** It seems extraordinary that we were celebrating Fifty Years of Nature in 2013 and now 2021 we are celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> issue of the Newsletter – where have those years gone? So many things have changed in the past few years but happily the beauty and diversity of this stunning area stays the same. So many events to look back on and savour the memories, Field trips to Iping Common for the Nightjars, Langstone Marshes for the migrating birds, Medmerry for the meticulous recording, Pub lunches and a wide spectrum of interesting Talks and Lectures during the winter months. Two wonderful Natural History trips to look back on – Guernsey April 2016 and Isles of Scilly April 2018, thank-you to the hard-working Committee and all the members who make CNHS a lifeline for so many of us, long may it continue.

**Philippa Arnott:** I have many happy memories since joining Chi Nats soon after we moved here in October 2008. My time as Secretary when Rosemary Marshall was Chair; setting up the food table at the Christmas parties; working with Rosemary helping local primary schools improve their wildlife areas with funds from the Legacy Education project; helping to set up the Medmerry surveys, also with Rosemary and my husband John with which I am still involved; being with the team who found the famous Norfolk hawker – 1<sup>st</sup> record for Sussex! Happy days with many more to come I'm sure.

**Ann Griffiths:** I remember when I was Chairman, a speaker did not turn up. I dashed home and collected a slide talk that I had previously prepared and after a hiatus of about 20 minutes (when all members had a chance to chat informally!) I returned and delivered the talk! From then on I or another member always had a reserve talk and slides with them at meetings! (Ed. And this happened again rather more recently when our Bar-headed Goose speaker didn't arrive from Exeter in January 2020.)

**Terry Timblick:** High spots have been the hedgehog handling evening, Michael Blencowe's panoramic survey of Sussex Wildlife Trust outposts and hearteningly diverse activity, and the way Mike Perry, as chair, made our County Hall committee room venue a place of monthly delight, full of his naturalist's experience and good-humoured leadership through each meeting. Happy memories continue to pile up under current management and ambitious programming!

### **Memorable Field Trips**

**Daphne Flach:** It must have been sometime between late March to June a few years ago we were on a Field Outing from The Dover car park and were returning on the track near the Angmering Park Stud Farm. I just happened to look down and see a bee (as I thought) flying slowly and it landed on the top of my boot. It stayed on my top boot laces and I drew the attention of the member walking nearby. She said it was a Bee Fly. I hadn't even known there was such an insect with its long proboscis, never mind seen one! I always remember that incident and thinking if I hadn't joined the Chichester Natural History Society I would have missed out on so much about Nature.

**Jim Bagley:** Many years ago on a walk around Pagham Harbour a keen new member decided he would get a better view by walking out on the slippery mud flats. He did not get far! The next we saw was him lying flat on his back in one of the channels. Frantic efforts to regain his composure only made things worse. He and his binoculars were completely covered. On the walk back the drying mud made him look as if he came from outer space. He did not think comments about getting plastered whilst out bird watching were particularly funny.

Thank you to **Gill Hance** for retrieving this Field Outing report from our CNHS Archives.

**CHURCH NORTON Friday September 19<sup>th</sup> 2014. Leader: David Hart**

Nine-thirty. A slightly chilly early-autumn morning, hazed by mist. The ancient church dreams under its steep, tiled roof. The grass glistens after the overnight rain. Bright flowers splash colour on the best-kept graves. Little by little the car park fills. All 12 of us arrive by 9.45, our jolly banter and quiet tete-a-tetes pierced at one point by a series of urgent pulsing cries as an unidentified small dark shape hurtles overhead and into the trees – put up, we could only guess, by a raptor. At 10.00 exactly a last car arrives. It is Chris Shimwell, a reporter from the Chichester Observer, here to write a piece on us and the sightings we make. He is soon making notes of sightings of his own – half a dozen Wide-Eyed Twitchers and a couple of Green Anoraks, in truth both common sub-species in wildlife groups.

David Hart, who is to lead us, bids a brief hello and then we are through the churchyard and at the harbour's edge. Our first proper sighting is right there in front of us: 50 or so Brent Geese in the hazed middle distance. Behind them, hunched as umpires, 12 egrets stalk. We turn right and negotiate a queasy boardwalk, slippery where the chicken wire has come adrift. I scribble as we go. I am no birder – not much of a naturalist, really, though I do know a bit about this and that – and so rely on others to call out what they see or else on friendly, helpful, whispered asides. A leucistic curlew, here apparently for the second year running, causes some excitement. I make a note of it and of a rather squeaky robin that sounds as if it could use some WD-40. Other species soon show themselves: oyster catcher, heron, redshank, widgeon then, suddenly, there's an "Ooh, a kingfisher" and a "No, look – two!" We whirl and glimpse them, blue splinters in the eye. The group forms and reforms constantly, now in twos and threes, now in clutches of four and five, each one cocooned, rapt in its own interests. A spotted flycatcher comes and goes, likewise a blackcap, a magpie, the mandatory blackbirds and a thrush, some rooks and crows. We see redshank, a sandwich tern, a great-crested grebe plus swallows and house martins. A turnstone flicks and stabs at the rim of the tide. One group pauses at a pond off to the right, interested in five shapes on the water that seem difficult to identify. Glasses swivel, scopes zoom. "Mmm, teal I think!" A squadron of Brents, the second of the day, straggles overhead. The sun, long bleary-eyed behind the mist, finally wakes up and comes out. An "Oh!" and an "Ah!" and a sudden focus downwards: centaury, a bright starburst of pink, right at our feet.

At 11.30 we head inland. At once, on a wooded path, a hand goes up and voices fall. We talk in whispers as though in church. "Wait, wait" –but no, the Cetti's warbler that someone heard keeps itself to itself. I keep scribbling away all the while: kestrel, sparrowhawk, cormorants, a buzzard; green woodpecker, wheatear, red legged partridge and a possible wryneck in a distant tree. The raucous gull gang, of course: common, herring, black headed and black-backed. Along the way we note two dragonflies (the migrant hawkler and the common darter); three butterflies (the clouded yellow, the speckled wood and the comma) and a bunch of bush-crickets (Roesel's, the long-winged cone-head and the speckled). **And oh yes, a different sighting – a naked person sunning on the shingle two hundred yards away. The shameless, through their scopes, identify a male. "A man? Are you sure?" Another twiddle of a scope and a moment's concentration. "Oh yes, a man. No doubt about it." Got to get these identities right. Brian Clarke.**

## **Brian Hopkins: How Prince Phillip [and the Queen], whilst unaware, aided by my research in Nigeria.**

Three weeks after we were married, June and I arrived in Nigeria on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1955. I soon decided to undertake research in Olokemeji Forest Reserve, about 37 miles from the university in Ibadan. I had selected suitable research sites in the forest and savanna by mid-March 1956. Both were 50 x 50 m and had a suitable tree for climbing. I decided ladders were impracticable in the forest: a rope ladder was needed.

Prince Phillip [and the Queen] had visited the university on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February. 'We walked to . . . Hall as it was quicker than driving . . . and then having to walk through the police cordon. . . . [The ceremony] was all over very quickly . . . We were at the end of a row and had a good view of the procession leaving . . . we are not likely to see them so close again in England.\*' The security 'cordon' had been a long rope supported at intervals by posts.

A few days later I went to see the Maintenance Officer to enquire from where he obtained the rope for the cordon: he gave the rope to me! 'Brian made his rope ladder, much interest shown by other members of the department.' 'We then went to the forest and tried to put a rope up a tree with a home-made bow and arrow but were not successful.' This was always a difficult task and often took about an hour.

On my next birthday, June took the photograph shown below. It was later used in a 'Looking Back' series on the back cover of the *British Ecological Society Bulletin* with the editor's quirky caption (*left*).

\* All the quotations from June's *Journal* now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

## **LOOKING BACK**

This time we are looking back on Brian Hopkins climbing a rope ladder up a *Ricinodendron heudelotii* tree to take readings from the tree stratum in the forest; Olokemeji Forest Reserve, Nigeria; 27 January 1957.

No ecologists were harmed during the taking of this photograph, which was clearly taken before the invention of helmets, safety harnesses and protective boots. And let's not even think about the poor chap who went up the tree in order to put the rope ladder in place.

Just to reassure any health and safety experts watching, Brian Hopkins assures us that he climbed to a height of no more than 100 feet to take his samples.

*Photo: Brian Hopkins*





## **FIELD OUTING REPORTS (see our website for field trip photos)**

These field outings were run in groups of six on successive days for COVID compliance.

### **Burton Mill Pond, 19, 20, 21 April 2021**

#### **Walk around Burton Mill Pond April 2021 Team 1**

On a lovely spring morning the requisite 5 members joined Jim Bagley for a morning walk around Burton Mill. This was the first walk after lockdown 3 so we were all looking forward to a nice sociable (distanced) event. There was no wind so decisions had to be made about how many layers of clothing were required but as the morning warmed up layers began to be removed.

Around the car park we had goldfinch, nuthatch and blackcap and on Burton Mill pond had coot, tufted duck, greylag geese and mallard (Jim saw some ducklings earlier).

Once in the woods we had great tit, jackdaw, lots of wren, blackcap and chiffchaff with pheasant and rook calling. Song thrush and blackbird were spotted and the dead tree had a buzzard before it took off to investigate the newly planted vineyard. We also picked up blue tit and the call of a stock dove.

Black Pond had a few mallards and a couple of Canada geese, while in the trees were jay and woodpigeon.

We reached Chingford Pond which looked fairly deserted but we had mute swan, gadwall only before eagle-eyed Tony (through a scope) found little grebe and great crested grebe.

Back into the woods we had a rowing jay with a buzzard before coming out on to the heath where we had yellowhammer. Also added were kestrel and chaffinch.

On the way round we encountered several orange-tip and brimstone butterflies. The woodland clearings have bluebells showing through and we also identified celandines, violets, primroses, cuckoo flower, marsh marigold and stitchwort. Returning to Burton Mill pond we added moorhen and down the spillway were grey and pied wagtails. A magical morning to get us back in the swing of thing and many thanks to Jim and the company.

*John Kelsall*

#### **Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April – Burton Mill Pond, ‘Team’ 2, Leader Rodney Wildman**

What a joy to be meeting up again, and on such a beautiful morning!

From the car park, members could clearly identify the song of Robin, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Song Thrush. A view over Burton Mill Pond revealed Great Crested Grebe, Coot, Canada and greylag geese. Entering the Newpiece woods, we noted Whitethroat, Blackcap and Chiffchaff and our Leader spotted two Roe Deer away to our right. The deer posed beautifully for their audience.

It was interesting to hear about the recent, very evident, ‘gardening’ throughout the Reserve which is helping to maintain a diverse range of habitats. We were shown the pollen sacs of a male yew and were intrigued to hear about the dispersal which occurs at such a specific time each year (February 25<sup>th</sup> was quoted). Other plants pushing up were Red Campion, Wood Sage, Greater Stitchwort, Ivy-leaved Speedwell as well as the joyful Bluebells and Celandine.

Passing through an elaborate Victorian gate, we saw a male Brimstone (the first of several) and then surprised a young rabbit as it popped up from a burrow next to the path. Whilst admiring the ancient avenue of Chestnut trees we added Dunnock, Great Tit and Buzzard to our list as well as Orange Tip and Small White butterflies. I think I’ve now distinguished between Jackdaw (with the ‘piercing eye’) and Crow (with ‘sleek legs’) with thanks to Maria, both spotted in the gnarled trees. Passing the boggy area, there was Cuckooflower (or Lady’s smock or several other possible common names!) Garlic Mustard and the tail end of a Common Lizard.

Approaching Chingford Pond, we were entertained by a pair of Grey Wagtail at the overflow and a shrill Wren to our left. On the pond were a female Grebe, Tufted Ducks, a Mute Swan, a pair of Gadwall, several

Mallard as well as more Canada Geese. Heading back through the Alder Carr (a waterlogged alder wood I learnt) below the dam, we noted Marsh Marigolds, Wild Garlic and Wood Sorrel (which we were tempted into tasting) in addition to Primroses and Dogs Mercury. Two Jays flew away from us and Blackbird, Chaffinch and was that high pitched squeal a Rail? We clambered over the spreading Badger set and were shown an English larch with last year's and this year's cones.

Towards the end of our list came three Mistle Thrush, Stock Dove and Alternate-leaved Saxifrage. There were three Exmoor ponies grazing on Welchers Common and a rustle through the dry leaves together with a slim, writhing tail could have been an Adder or was it a Slow worm? Walking in single file down the road to our cars, our last sightings were a feisty pair of male Brimstone in the bluebell wood, the chattering of a reed Warbler and two Dead-nettles, both White and Red. What a mixture of spring wildlife we had seen. Many thanks to Rodney Wildman (and Maria) for his leadership and pearls of wisdom and to my fellow Chi Nats members both for their friendly company and sharing of knowledge.

*Gill Hance*

### **Burton Mill Pond 21/4/21 Walk 3**

On a morning of bright sunshine and blue skies, David welcomed Gabrielle Abbott (new member), Diana, Heather and Peter to Burton Mill Pond. Straight away we recorded wren, robin and dunnoek whilst we were still in the car park. The pond yielded great crested grebe, tufted, mallard and gadwall duck, coot and greylag geese. After some discussion it was agreed that the bird calling from the reed bed was in fact a reed warbler but not quite his full song yet. Jackdaws were calling overhead. Soon after entering the woodland another lengthy discussion ensued – what was the bird calling from low dense cover? Again it wasn't in full song yet but finally it gave the distinctive call of a nightingale, and as it flew away the tell-tale long rufus brown tail confirmed our thoughts.

Orange tips, small and large white butterflies were busy darting around. We wandered on past the newly planted vineyard towards the old chestnut trees. Mistlethrush and song thrush were heard. On Black pond Egyptian geese with two goslings, also Canada geese and delightful young coots. Little else was seen until we arrived at Chingford pond where we added dab chicks (little grebe). Moving on to the conifer woods, green-spotted woodpeckers were heard along with stockdove. We all safely navigated the badger setts. The only bird seen at the farm buildings was a pied wagtail. We were disappointed to find the boardwalk at the bog was closed as we were hoping to see lizards. Heading back towards the road, a very fast, low flying kestrel shot past us, a complete opposite was when a very lazy red kite circled us. A buzzard was heard calling in the distance, goldfinch and long-tailed tit were feeding high in a birch tree. As we walked down the road, nuthatch was heard calling but not seen. Back at the pond, Diana was determined to find a heron (without luck) but whilst looking, a kingfisher flew past. Finally the grey wagtails did not disappoint – the male sat high on a telegraph pole watching us and waiting for us to leave. He had insects in his beak so we were obviously close to the nest site. We had a final total of 41 birds along with many plants that have already been reported on walks 1 and 2.

David thanked those present for their company and good humour. A thoroughly enjoyable morning.

*Heather Hart*

## **Iping Common 10, 11, 12 May 2021**

### **Monday 10 May – Iping Common Walk 1**

Monday presented a challenging bird-watching morning on Iping Common. The wind was blustery and black clouds threatened from time to time. As it happened, we had some sun and did not get wet. More importantly the birds kept hidden away in the shelter of the bushes and we had to rely on recognising snatches of song more than sighting. This of course is good practice at this time of year when we have forgotten the songs from last spring. From time to time the bird book came out trying desperately to interpret a description of the song.

Starting In the carpark we had robin, carrion crow, heard great tit, blackcap and saw a small group of swifts flying over. From the cars we walked a clockwise route, starting first left down the slope through dense gorse bushes to the small pond in a boggy area fed by a small stream. This is good for dragon flies in summer. Today no birds or insects but very attractive with reed islands and crystal-clear water. We continued west across the open heathland area. Here multi stemmed silver birch trees looked attractive with their fresh leaves but few birds except blackbird, robin, wood pigeon, great tit and a buzzard circling. Eventually the path climbs to a higher level with more gorse. Here we heard chiffchaff, willow warbler, whitethroat and wren singing and jackdaw also seen. From here the path turns north and east to follow the strait line towards the car park with gorse on both sides. This is normally the area for Dartford warblers and stonechats but sadly none seen. Here I vote the best view of the day was a group of linnets – a female appeared to keep her eye on us from a perch on a small tree – possibly had a nest nearby.

*Sylvia Gill and Tony Nevard*

### **Tuesday 11 May – Iping Common Walk 2 – Leader Jim Bagley**

Five members joined Jim Bagley for a morning walk on Iping Common which is west of Midhurst. The morning was overcast and threatened rain. It did, however, improve as the morning went on. Although the trees and gorse were green with spring growth, the ground cover still looked in winter mode with little new growth and it was very dry. In the car park we heard Chiffchaff-Blackbird-Robin-Chaffinch and Blue Tit. The usual Woodpigeon and Crows flew over and Jackdaws called in the distance. As we walked west along the high path we were lucky to see a Yellow Hammer in a birch tree. In the same area we noted a Wren-Great Tit and distant Willow Warbler were calling. We met a fellow birder who was doing a survey of the heath. He said he had found a Tree Pipit, which we did not see. He then showed us an area that was good for Dartford Warblers. We watched and waited, but to no avail! There was a busy footpath close by and our only compensation was a Swallow and a nearby Willow Warbler. In the same area a Woodlark was high up singing his fluty song. He suddenly closed his wings and dropped like a stone and at the last second landed on a dead birch tree. As we moved off we found two beetles on the path, studies showed that we had both a Dor beetle and a Minotaur. Most attractive insects! The same member who knew his beetles was also knowledgeable on fungi. He identified two tree dwelling species namely *Pecioporus beltrinis* and *Tramstead Versicolor*. On the way back we disturbed a pair of Stonechats. They were quite agitated so we assumed they had a nest close by. As we got nearer the car park a Sparrow Hawk was flying high overhead.

Although I would have hoped to see more species it was a most enjoyable morning and a small group of six is where everyone gets involved. Thank you for joining me!

*Jim Bagley.*

### **Wednesday 12 May – Iping Common – Walk 3**

The likelihood of drizzle receded and five members enjoyed a lovely walk mostly in sunshine, requiring some clothing adjustment during the morning! There was no leader as such so it was a joint effort. After a fly-by Buzzard in the car park, we set off on the extreme left-hand path, to the accompaniment of Chiffchaff and Blackbird. Our fourth bird, just a little way along, was a Dartford Warbler, soon to be enjoyed by another, so a pair together probably breeding in the vicinity. Good views of the colours, and cocked tail, were had in a small Scots Pine. Then Gill heard a Cuckoo! The bird was heard again on and off, but not

seen. We easily resisted the temptation to go home at this point, and as we walked past the pond and round towards the central spine path we saw a Buzzard flying very low through the Silver Birch, eventually spotted on a mature tree sitting on a low branch, before finally taking off away from us.

A Pheasant called and a few Crows were seen, followed by the two-tone call of a Great Tit, the sound of a Wren, and in the distance the yaffle of a Green Woodpecker: a single Yellowhammer was found at the top of a tree. We then had a conundrum as confident warbling notes emanated from a group of smallish Silver Birch. Originally thought a possible Nightingale we finally identified it as a Blackcap, certainly one in fine voice.

Robin, Rook and Blue Tit were seen, and we admired the Bluebells and groups of Greater Stitchwort: alongside the chestnut coppice there were Foxgloves aplenty. We next identified Willow Warbler song, with one or two more further on, and a Song Thrush sang his repeated refrain. Near the summit of the reserve two Blackcaps were seen in flight, with good views of the male by a dead tree. Both Large and Small White butterflies were spotted.

Along the main path back towards the car park a Whitethroat was seen perched on top of gorse, and a little further along a bird which we identified as a Lesser Whitethroat. Another Yellowhammer gave close but speedy views in a tree after crossing our path, and finally ... we had a pair of Stonechats, again atop the gorse. Well nearly finally... sitting down for our packed lunches we heard a Great Spotted Woodpecker. In all, twenty bird species. It was a lovely morning in great company.

*Diana Zeuner*

## **Birdsong**

Learning birdsong can be a challenge for many of us. Sussex Wildlife Trust recently ran a webinar called "An Introduction to Birdsong", which is now available free on YouTube. The birdsong recordings they used were all from a free website called [www.xeno-canto.org](http://www.xeno-canto.org) which is a website for sharing bird sounds from around the world. Just search for a bird species and listen to the many recordings which have been uploaded. *Helen Dignum*

## **FROM THE EDITOR**

Our rule of six field trips have been popular and we are all looking forward to meeting up with CNHS members at this summer's field trips and surveys, as well as the prospect of warmer summer weather with more flowers, birds, insects and other wildlife to find.

Thanks for our reporters for their contributions to the Newsletter. We always welcome articles on any natural history subject for the newsletter so if you have something please send it to me for publication. It does not have to be about an exotic location – it could just be a wildlife event in your garden. All reports and articles should be sent to Helen Dignum at [helendignum@protonmail.com](mailto:helendignum@protonmail.com)

**Deadline for articles for Newsletter 201 is 21 September 2021**

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