



Bracknell Forest Natural History Society

A society for everyone interested in nature and its conservation

MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER – Spring 2022



January found us still in the shadow of Covid - dark days with not much going on outside. However, having a woodland garden at this time of the year is a great a privilege. Although many of the winter flowering species are not native to the British Isles, they contribute immensley to cheering up the miserable times and providing essential nectar to insects and small mammals, as well as filling the woodland with delicious scents.

Even on quite gloomy days bees are active in Mahonia and Clematis. Since the beginning of February, the days are lengthening and Snowdrops are evident in profusion - and Aconites and Crocus, too.

I'm sorry to have to give you the sad news of the death of **Ian Marsh**, one of our long-term and most active Members until very recently. Ian's family have requested that any donations should be given to Age UK in his memory – and we will be organising a collection for a small permanent tribute to Ian, from the Society.



For those of you who may have missed **David Attenborough's Green Planet** on BBC1 on recent Sunday evenings, do watch it on iPlayer. It's a delight for anyone who is interested and concerned about the plant biodiversity of our planet. You'll be amazed by the fantastic photography, the like of which has never been seen before.

National news reports that **Avian Influenza (bird flu)** is now evident in the United Kingdom. We need to be aware that we may see dead or dying birds and it brings it home that we must keep our feeders clean and sanitised. There is plenty of information available on the internet if you are not sure of the best way to clean your feeders.

MEETINGS in the Recital Room at SOUTH HILL PARK

We have been holding indoor Meetings, with the necessary restrictions in place, on our usual third Monday of the month since September. These have been well attended by Members, and we look forward to seeing more of you over the coming months.

With best wishes to everyone.

Gill Cheetham, Chairman – February 2022

PS Sightings in my garden – and beyond

I have regularly had an overwintering male Black Cap in my garden - I believe that he is feasting on the small black berries of a large Myrtle, and the odd insect lurking on my majestic Mahonia. Song Thrushes and Blackbirds also like the Myrtle.

Over...



I also spot the occasional Brambling and quite often a small gang of Siskins (*pictured*) come to visit, along with all the usual birds which flock to the bird feeders at this time of year. Amusingly, Chaffinches are trying hard to learn how to cling to the sunflower heart feeders - but have to be content with pulling out the occasional seed, and leave the rest to the more agile species. And two recent visits to Savernake Lake have revealed a pair of Grey Wagtails and a healthy looking posse of Mandarin Ducks.

Swinley Forest



Recently our friends at **Wildlife in Ascot** hosted, and kindly invited our Members to, an online meeting with guest speaker **Des Sussex**, who has now taken up residency as Conservation & Biodiversity Officer at the Crown Estate in Windsor.

Des described his plans for updating and improving forestry, habitats and recreational facilities within Swinley Forest and The Great Park. Having visited Swinley recently I was impressed by the amount of action the forest has been receiving.

However, I have concerns about the welfare and future of the **ancient Lime avenues and circles**, as they contribute to habitat and provide feeding places for many overwintering birds - and are part of our history. Des says that there are no plans to remove these ancient giants, but they require some structural attention as the vast clumps of Mistletoe clinging to the tops have made them unsteady and unstable. The Mistletoe can be thinned and dangerous limbs pruned back.



Former planting of a Eucalyptus plantation - although unsuitable for the soil and area - means that it will eventually disappear. Interestingly, for now fronds from the trees are being collected for the floristry industry.

Our woodland restoration project - Nightingale Triangle



Since January of this year we have been able to really get stuck into our Winter work at Nightingale Triangle, with a good turnout of volunteers at both **monthly Work Parties** – and also with a day from **Bracknell Conservation Volunteers**.

With everyone's help we have been able to remove a great deal of the Ponticum Rhododendron growing down the front slope. Left unchecked, this plant would completely take over the slope and enclose the bank with its invasive growth..

Although best done in the Autumn, it has been just possible to brush cut and thoroughly rake the bank. We have been collecting different species of shrubs to enhance its appearance – and the habitats, of course. We have decided to plant it in an 'edge of the woodland' manner – and plug plants grown from seed and donated plants are now planted in situ.

Inside the woodland, quite a few areas of excess brambles have been removed and with two good bonfires to dispose of brash all outstanding burning had been complete for now.

From March to September working in the woodland is normally reduced to allow for peaceful bird nesting and small mammal home making – and Spring flowers are already appearing alongside the main path.





STOP PRESS

Nightingale Triangle – after the Storm

The woodland at Nightingale Triangle has thankfully survived Storm Eunice fairly well, with most of the managed parts intact, although unfortunately some of the gardens on Firlands took a punishing. And in the furthest corner a clump of large Scots pines took the impact of the storm. As they fell, they took some smaller trees with them, and the path is now blocked. A new challenge!!!



Gillian Martin Tribute



We are very pleased to be able to tell you that three beautiful trees have been planted as a tribute to Gillian Martin. Most of you will remember Gillian, who sadly passed away in 2018. She was a stalwart member of our team and totally dedicated to the welfare of everything that affected the biodiversity of Bracknell Forest.

The trees have been planted in **Elizabeth Close**, on a mound overlooking Bagshot Road. Gillian would have approved, as they are two oaks and a hornbeam - intended to grow to magnificent size and status. These trees are worthy replacements for forest trees that have been removed from roadsides as they have reached dangerous proportions.

The trees were planted by **Bracknell Forest Rangers**, our **Biodiversity Officer Marlies Boydell**, and myself, representing the BFNHS. They were substantially planted and will form part of the Ranger-led care of newly planted trees. In time a commemorative plaque will be placed on the site. We have to thank Marlies for arranging the purchase and siting of the trees. I am happy to accompany anyone who wishes to see them - by taking a short walk from Nightingale Triangle.

Our March Meeting: The Plight of the Orangutan



Monday 21st March, in The Recital Room at South Hill Park...

This is an illustrated talk not to be missed. **Tony Buckle**, volunteer at the **Samboja Lestari Orangutan Sanctuary** and **Lesley Bradbrook** from **Borneo Orangutan-Survival UK**, will describe the biology of Orangutans and the environmental threats posed to them from deforestation and palm oil plantations.

They will describe the important work being done at the Sanctuary to save these iconic apes - and you can help raise funds by taking part in the raffle for a toy orangutan, during the evening.

And here's a quick reminder of some websites which may interest you:

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/>

[https://www.hedgehogstreet.org › help-hedgehogs › helpful-garden-features](https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/help-hedgehogs/helpful-garden-features)

<https://www.growwilduk.com>

<https://bbowt.org.uk>

TVERC collects, analyses and shares geodiversity and biodiversity information in Berkshire and Oxfordshire to help people make sound decisions about how to develop and manage land sustainably and where to direct wildlife conservation work. See more at tverc@oxfordshire.gov.uk



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