



# Bracknell Forest Natural History Society

A society for everyone interested in nature and its conservation

## MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER Winter-Spring 2024



The year 2024 marks **Fifty Years of the Natural History Society!** Our Golden Anniversary Year will be celebrated with a outings and events through the year, so watch this space!

Over the years the Society has changed, grown and expanded into areas of important environmental concern for the whole community of Bracknell Forest. Thanks to our interaction with other groups, both locally and nationally, we can promote and influence topics of wildlife interest. We're hopeful that the Society will flourish for another fifty years – but of course this is only possible with the continued support of our Members, the huge majority of whom pay their subs regularly each year. But just in case you have forgotten to re-join, if you wish to be included in our circulation it is still not too late to play catch-up. **Our Membership fee is still only £12** and guidance for making the payment is on the penultimate page of this document.

At our December meeting **Colin Bird**, Bracknell Forest Natural History Society Member and also **Chairman of The Bracknell Forest Society** highlighted the influence of waterways within Bracknell Forest. Currently, there is much interest in this subject, even to the extent that a recent contemporary art exhibition in the Mirror Gallery at South Hill Park was devoted to our rivers and watercourses. This design, for instance, identified many of the lakes and ponds in the area – on a plank!



Following on from the Spiders talk in January, our speaker **Dr George Fussey**, who is the **Curator of Eton College Natural History Museum**, has offered us an exclusive Members Only visit to the Museum on **Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> April**. This is a free event and you should have already received more information by email.

Please note that if you wish to come along, we need you to register your interest with Heather King, our Programme Officer at the address below, by **Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> April** at the latest, so that we can gauge numbers for the visit. [bfhnsprog@gmail.com](mailto:bfhnsprog@gmail.com)

*Gill Cheetham, Chairman – March 2024*

This is your Newsletter, so if you have anything you would like included in our next issue, please send it to me at [bfnathistsoc@rocketmail.com](mailto:bfnathistsoc@rocketmail.com). Or phone me on 07773 850276

# Climate Change And Biodiversity

Following the setting up of a Climate Change Monitoring Board, Bracknell Forest Natural History Society now has representation on a joint Climate and Biodiversity Working Group. This has yet to have a formal name.

The object of the Working Group is to look at how we can measure, monitor and prevent further action to accelerate climate change within Bracknell Forest. Objectives for the Group so far are:

- Raise awareness of the group at events and on website
- Encourage small groups to start looking at recording species
- Listen and take feedback
- Work under community organised principles
- Establish subgroups
- Increase geographical representation from the South of the Borough



A series of events where volunteers are welcome to participate will be starting shortly.

We have many areas of concern and appreciate that our goals must cover all of them if possible, including gardens, urban biodiversity, engagement with nature, water pollution, fragmentation of habitats, invasive species, water resources including droughts, climate change of habitats.

We need to have a series of goals with key issues:

1. Gardens, especially the overuse of artificial turf, pesticides (e.g. flea treatments for pets and rat poisons).
2. Urban Biodiversity, including climate adaptations of habitats, water pollution, extreme weather, invasive species, flood mitigations, carbon sequestration in habitats.
3. Fragmentation influenced by the number of new developments.
4. Survey areas for species identification to measure the current position.
5. Hold a community event, to publicise and educate the public on the importance of the effects of climate change.
6. Continue 'No mow May' as an incentive to improve habitats for insects and birds.
7. Provide advice and guidelines to businesses regarding reducing their carbon footprint.

It is important that many of these activities begin with looking at what we already have and how it has been affected by recent changes to climate and environment.

Throughout this year, we can monitor current species at South Hill Park and compare the results to recordings from anything up to 50 years ago.

## HOT NEWS! Stanley the Stag Beetle Topped...!

Our knowledgeable and steadfast team was beaten into third place by Binfield Environment Group recently, at **Wildlife in Ascot's Annual Quiz Night**. Still a good position for the previous Champions to be – up against a good number of excellent teams. Well done BEG – and Stanley will live to fight another day!



## Nightingale Triangle – Brambles and Bluebells!



In the woodland, January and February have seen the Snowdrop patches appear through the leaf litter left intact since last Autumn. Some areas which we have cleared of Rhododendron Ponticum and brambles over the past few years have started to be invaded by the next generation of woodland 'pests', mostly regrowth. With Winter being a good time to get stuck into serious clearing, our volunteers have 'bramble bashed' for several months, clearing areas large enough to allow for more Bluebell planting.

Each year the patches expand through natural reproduction and by planting ever more bulbs. We are now intending to replant some of the understorey on an ongoing basis, adding carefully selected shrubs and small trees - some sourced locally and others specifically purchased.

Volunteers are always welcome to join us. **We meet at 10.00 am on the first Saturday of each month.** If you'd like to come along and help, please wear suitable heavy duty 'gardening' clothing and covered footwear. Our regular posse of volunteers remains at an average of around fifteen people of varying ages – and as well as lots of fulfilling work of all kinds (including litter picking and path tidying), there is always a warm welcome and plenty of camaraderie.

## Introducing 'Wild Bracknell'



We're all agreed, aren't we, that together it would be great if we could make our community a better place for both nature and people.

**Wild Bracknell** is a new and slightly different environment group, whose purpose is to enhance nature in Bracknell Forest and create networking opportunities for residents and supporters. Wild Bracknell organises and

takes part in projects and runs events aimed at improving nature and our wellbeing. On a smaller scale they also make suggestions for increasing biodiversity in gardens.

**Wild Bracknell would like to hear your ideas as well** - please share your knowledge, expertise and suggestions with the group, by contacting [wild.bracknell@gmail.com](mailto:wild.bracknell@gmail.com) initially. And please add your local nature related pictures on their Facebook page – **Wild Bracknell**.

## The Outfall Safari is back!

Would you like to help survey the watercourses across Bracknell Forest to identify and reduce pollution? In 2022 The Zoological Society of London did just this: using volunteers they ran an Outfall Safari along our Northern rivers and streams.



**Wild Bracknell is repeating the Outfall Safari this year and is extending it to cover every watercourse in the Borough.** This is part of a national initiative organised by the Rivers Trust and the Zoological Society of London. No experience is needed - full training will be given in a two-hour training session. Training will take place during March and the project runs from April to June.

Please email [wild.bracknell@gmail.com](mailto:wild.bracknell@gmail.com) to sign up or find out more.

## Numerous sightings on our Pagham Harbour trip

*Item contributed by Heather King. Photographs by Steve Heathcote*

During February, a group of Members were lucky to take part in an exclusive guided walk around the special site of Pagham Harbour on the Sussex coast, led by two very knowledgeable and friendly RSPB volunteers. They helped us spot and identify the birds and also brought along two scopes so we were able to get some excellent close up views.



The weather started out a little grey but the sun soon came out and it turned into a beautiful day of bird watching. A total of 29 species were spotted during our visit, including rare sightings of a female Long Tailed Duck (*picture left*) at the Ferry hide and a pair of Goldeneye Ducks at the harbour entrance.

There must have been hundreds of Brent Geese overwintering after a long journey from Siberia (*picture right*) and their soft murmurings to each other were endearing.



The high tide coming in was pushing groups of birds up into the air to find the remaining grassy tussocks still above water, giving us a chance to see their colours glinting in the sun as they flew. Other birds seen include Avocet, Curlew, Redshank, Snipe, Pintail, Grey Plover, Shelduck, Lapwing, Little Grebe and a Red Breasted Merganser. Skylarks and Stonechats were in the surrounding fields and Reed Buntings perched on the hedgerow.

After the walk and a cup of tea, some of us drove down the road to Church Norton, where we shared the shingle beach with a group of Turnstone Ducks. A late shower didn't dampen our spirits as a double rainbow appeared over the sea to end a perfect day.

## More Volunteering - Check these out!



### River Restoration Project, Warfield

Work has just started on the restoration of a section of the River Cut at Garth Meadows. Rivers 21 and Green & Active are seeking volunteers to help. The work is taking place over several weekdays during March and will consist of clearing banks of invasive species, removal of debris which clogs the flow and other associated tasks.

Anyone who would like to volunteer should email [tyler.randall@thames21.org.uk](mailto:tyler.randall@thames21.org.uk) to get an overview of the activities and then sign up online.

**Litter Picking in Bracknell Forest** This is a really serious issue within the Borough. If more volunteers are recruited for various specific areas, we can make a better effort at removing abandoned rubbish. Again, Involve's 'Green & Active' section advertises litter picks and recruits volunteers.



For more information you can call **01344 304304**, or email [green.active@involve.community](mailto:green.active@involve.community)

**Bracknell Forest Local Plan** Just to keep you in the picture, the draft Local Plan has now gone back to the Planning Inspector following the latest consultation round – and will hopefully be ratified by April.

## Have you Re-Joined?

You'll remember that The Society's Membership Year runs annually from 1<sup>st</sup> September, so your **£12 annual 2023-24 Membership subscription** became due this September, and almost all our Members have renewed.



If you haven't got round to it yet, you can pay with cash or by cheque made out to Bracknell Forest Natural History Society when you come to any of our Meetings at South Hill Park.

If you wish to pay electronically, please visit our website [www.bfnathistsoc.org.uk](http://www.bfnathistsoc.org.uk) and go to 'Membership' for full instructions/forms.

If you decide not to pay the Membership fee any more, you are, of course, more than welcome to come to any of the Meetings which appeal to you as a **Guest, for which the entrance fee is £3.**

**Please remember**, if you have difficulty getting to South Hill Park for our Meetings or a problem with access on arrival but still wish to remain as a Member, do please get in touch with Gill Cheetham at [bfathistsoc@rocketmail.com](mailto:bfathistsoc@rocketmail.com)

Finally, here is a reminder of some more websites which may interest you:

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/>  
<https://growwild.kew.org>  
<https://www.hedgehogstreet.org>  
<https://bbowt.org.uk>  
<https://www.greenpeace.org.uk>  
<https://friendsoftheearth.uk>

[tverc@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:tverc@oxfordshire.gov.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.



<https://populationmatters.org>

## **Bracknell Forest Natural History Society**

Find us on Facebook - [www.facebook.com/bfnathistsoc/](http://www.facebook.com/bfnathistsoc/)

Visit our website - [www.bfnathistsoc.org.uk](http://www.bfnathistsoc.org.uk)