



Bracknell Forest Natural History Society

A society for everyone interested in nature and its conservation

MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER Summer 2024



As most of you are aware, the Society has been in existence for fifty years this Summer. Among the ways we have been celebrating this impressive record, we will be planting a suitable tree to commemorate our Golden Anniversary, in the grounds of South Hill Park.

Succession Planning I am looking to form a small subcommittee to look at how the Society can survive and prosper for at least the next fifty years! Please let me know if you'd be like to contribute to this very important plan – just email me initially at the address below.

To complete our Meetings Programme this year, the talk by Jacopi Calevo from Kew Gardens last month, on the effect of Climate Change upon our British native orchids, is a relevant topic to illustrate where we find ourselves after fifty years... facing dramatic changes in climate and locality. And to read about the results of our own local **Orchid Ramble**, which we held on the Saturday after Jacopi's talk, see page 6.

The Biodiversity Action Plan for 2024-29 has been out for public consultation. In due course, the Society will be actioned to undertake a number of important environmental tasks, to be completed during this period.

Needless to say, we're hopeful that the Society will flourish for another fifty years – but of course that is only possible with the continued support of our Members, the huge majority of whom pay their **£12 Membership Fee** regularly each September. So please take this as a gentle reminder that we'll expect your payment in cash at our September Meeting/AGM on 16th September. Or if you wish to pay online nearer the time, the guidance for payment is on our website.



Our **Facebook** page has been updated, so please like and comment on our postings if you are a user of social media.

Gill Cheetham, Chairman – July 2024 This is your Newsletter, so if you have anything you would like included in our next issue, please send it to me at bfhistsoc@rocketmail.com.
Or phone me on 07773 850276.



A very special day

Our Members' visit to the **Eton Natural History Museum**

A report by our Programme Officer, Heather King

On a Sunday towards the end of April, a number of our Members enjoyed an exclusive look around **Eton Natural History Museum** before it opened to the public. The present site opened in 1895 and the collection is used to teach students biology, geology and curation skills, many of whom go on to study Natural History at university.



The Curator George Fussey gave an introduction and brief history before opening cabinets and drawers to let us peek at the many treasures in the collection not usually on show. We browsed around the 17,000 specimens, including fossils from the pre-Cambrian era, Thackeray's collection of birds, Hinks herbarium, birds eggs, shells and marine life, ethnographic collections from Borneo and the Amazon, and an overstuffed ancient platypus called **Fattypus** (see *third row down, left*)!

A quick walk across the road and we were in the **Museum of Antiquities**, also opened up just for us. The items on display covered a vast geographical and chronological frame: mummified remains from ancient Egypt; pots from Knossos on Crete; Greek ceramics; cuneiform tablets from Mesopotamia; tools and weapons from the Thames and flint axes dating before homo sapiens. We felt privileged to look at these fascinating collections and came away with a sense that there was a lot more discover in future visits.



Summer volunteering opportunities

You probably know about Involve's brilliant **GREEN & ACTIVE Volunteer Group**, which gives everyone in Bracknell Forest the opportunity to get out and about helping in conservation and biodiversity tasks throughout the area. They've just sent us their huge and very varied list of activities for the Summer period – do please click on the link below to see if there's anything you'd like to volunteer to help with. Your involvement will be much appreciated.

[https://mailchi.mp/69aad415991/april-june-rota-9378951?e=\[UNIQID\]](https://mailchi.mp/69aad415991/april-june-rota-9378951?e=[UNIQID])



Nightingale Triangle

Through Spring and early Summer, planted areas of our beautiful woodland have flourished. Bluebells, Campions, Cowslips, Vetches, Foxgloves and Holly trees adorn the edges.

In an attempt to thicken the Bagshot Road side of the woodland we have layered existing Holly branches and transplanted self set seedlings to make the thicket denser, thus reducing noise pollution and traffic fumes.

Hazel, Ferns and Solomon's Seal are now planted in an area which has been cleared of Ponticum Rhododendron; this too will extend the range of planting and improve habitats. Our stalwart band of volunteers generally meet at the woodland for a 2-3 hour **Work Party on the first Saturday of each month at 10.00 am**, so do please join us if you feel so inclined. The postcode for your satnav is **RG12 9SB**.



SPOTTED IN OUR PATCH...

Stink Horn - A fungus smelled long before seen! They appear randomly in the woodland and are instantly attractive to pollinating flies. The smell is similar to rotting meat!

Our 'resident' **Sparrow Hawk**, brought down by attacking crows and magpies. Thankfully it soon recovered and resumed its task of hunting for small birds.



Bracknell Nature Partnership Visit

During June we hosted a visit to Nightingale Triangle by members of **Bracknell Forest Nature Partnership**. They were given a guided tour of the woodland with explanation of how we have achieved our current status.

The woodland is a credit to all who have volunteered over the last six years to make it a safe haven and pocket of green in such an urban environment.

During the visit it was suggested that we may have **Firecrests** in the treetops. This is a dramatic likelihood - as they are very secretive.

Autumn 2024 Talks Programme – PREVIEW

As usual, we have a terrific programme of illustrated talks coming up for September to December this year. Read on – you're sure to be impressed, and we hope to see you at as many events as possible!



16th September: SWAN LIFELINE

Following our AGM, **Cindy Smulders** from Eton's Swan Lifeline will tell us about the vital work they do to rescue and treat sick and injured swans and return them to the wild as soon as possible.

Pollution and human activities are affecting swans and other wildfowl, but the centre provides education and training services to empower communities, Fire and Rescue Services, Police and volunteers to make a difference and help our wildlife.

21st October: FLOWER RICH HABITATS OF WESTERN CRETE

Dr Brian Ferry of Royal Holloway College has visited the key spots in Europe for wildflowers for many years and he will be sharing with us the rich variety found in Western Crete. Plant communities range from lowland and coastal, wooded landscapes up to high altitude alpine regions, with some mountain gorge landscapes near-vertical.

With such a wealth of habitats it is not surprising that the native flora of Crete exceeds that of the UK – with nearly 10% endemic to the island.



18th November: FROM WALKING WITH WOMBATS TO RESCUING A KOALA - an Australian Wildlife Odyssey

Maria Island, Tasmania, has become an island reclaimed by wildlife. BBC Wildlife Magazine author and wildlife photographer **Ross Gurden** will illustrate his experiences on this island and will also share with us his time travelling across the vast continent of Australia, in search of its unique and varied wildlife.

16th December: SAVING THE STONE CURLEW

The Stone Curlew is a special bird of the North Wessex Downs where it breeds in small numbers. This summer migrant naturally chooses to nest on downland, but usually has to opt for arable farms instead. Bird expert **Keith Betton** explains how efforts to help this rare species have worked and explains more about its secretive lifestyle.



We take to the Thames TO CELEBRATE OUR 50th ANNIVERSARY



On a lovely sunny Saturday at the end of June, a number of us issued forth for a **celebratory riverboat cruise** from Caversham Bridge right up through beautiful *Wind in the Willows* country to Mapledurham Lock and Weir.

This was the way the river should be, tranquil and stunning – but with lots going on, both in human and birdlife terms!



We spotted the usual suspects going about their business, such as **Swans and Canada Geese, some Egyptian Geese and a few Greylags, plus a number of Cormorants**, one of which had perched on a post in the water to watch our progress.

A Heron was walking on the riverbank, and some **Sand Martins** were seen flying into drainpipes leading down into the river – presumably having chosen this unusual spot to build their nests.



After the cruise we repaired to The Griffin pub across Caversham Bridge for an excellently prepared lunch and pleasant conversation.

There's no doubt that this was a brilliant outing, thoroughly enjoyed by all!

Gill's Orchid Ramble



The BFNHS's Orchid Recording programme has fallen into abeyance over the last couple of years – but it goes without saying that it's always a good idea to keep records of what we have and where it is in the Borough, bearing in mind that we have three distinct types of soil and habitat regions, from acid Bagshot sand in the south to chalky scree towards the north, with clay and loam in-between.



It's difficult to plan a botanical ramble and have guaranteed success. Orchids are very seasonal, regional, prone to climatic change, and often affected by grazing, theft and vandalism.



However, having walked the three sites Gill had in mind over a period of two weeks, she was fairly confident that we could make our informative and attractive morning stroll worthwhile, and perhaps combine the results with another 'Citizen Science' operation.

Remembering that our speaker on Orchids and Climate Change, Jacopo Calevo from Kew Gardens, had only the previous Monday recommended that we protect habitats wherever possible, we're just going to divulge that on the three sites we visited, **we recorded Marsh, Bee, Common Spotted, Twayblade and Pyramidal Orchids, Broad Leaved Helleborines and several hybrids of Marsh Orchids - some in very large numbers!** We must do this again another year...



Developing a Vision for Bracknell Forest's Community Climate Emergency Strategy

We were, of course, represented at the second annual **Bracknell Forest Climate Change Summit**, hosted by Susan Halliwell, Chief Executive of Bracknell Forest Council and Mary Temperton, Leader of the Council and Chair of the **Joint Climate Action Board**. This well-attended gathering was held by courtesy of 3M in their magnificent conference facilities, on 8th July. Nearly two hundred delegates participated, and were soon involved in providing recommendations to help develop a vision for a **Community Climate Emergency Strategy** by JCAB Facilitator Samantha Gibbins. Watch this space – we'll keep you posted! Timing-wise, the **Vision Statement** is scheduled for publication on Friday 19th July – with the draft **Strategy** itself following by the end of the year.



You may already be aware of **WILD BRACKNELL**, a recently formed local environmental group whose purpose is to enhance nature in Bracknell Forest and create networking opportunities for residents and supporters.

Their current strapline is ***'Together we can make our community a better place – for both nature and people'***. The group organises projects and runs events aimed at improving nature and our health and wellbeing – and on a smaller scale they can also make recommendations for laying out gardens.

They would like to hear about any ideas you may have as well - so please share your knowledge, expertise and suggestions – and especially nature-related pictures - on their **Facebook page: Wild Bracknell**. Or drop them an email at wild.bracknell@gmail.com

And finally, here is a reminder of some 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>
<https://populationmatters.org>



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.

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