



Bracknell Forest Natural History Society

A society for everyone interested in nature and its conservation

MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER – Winter 2022

We are very happy to welcome a number of new Members who have recently joined the Society, and the many others who are returning. We have an excellent talks Programme set up for the coming months, which we are sure you will enjoy.

Our first meeting of this season, ***Discovering the Purple Emperor*** - a talk by Matthew Oates, a specialist adviser to the The National Trust and Butterfly Conservation, showed these elusive creatures in a new light: more common than you realise - aggressive and hauntingly beautiful. Matthew has spent more than 20 years seeking out the Emperors, and recording the data he has unearthed, for posterity. For instance, some Emperors like to feed upon excrement, while others prefer sap from the common Oak (*Quercus Robur*). Smaller trees of Salix-Goat Willow and Poplar are essential for egg laying and shelter. Their caterpillars, being heavily predated, feed mostly at night – and they are, of course, badly affected by heavy rainfall and scrub clearance.



Although there was a lot of rain during November, it was very mild generally - so bees and birds have been active later than usual. For instance, one of our volunteer Friends of Nightingale Triangle, who lives near the woodland, has recently reported the visitation of ten redwings to her garden.

Many areas have been waterlogged and have even been attracting waders. The mainly wooded nature of Bracknell Forest and lack of large rivers generally prevents large scale flooding, but recent studies show that effluent has been discharged into local (mostly piped) rivers.

'Thames Water figures show that in 2021 a total of 213 overspills of sewage and pollution occurred in six patches of water across the Borough.' **Source – Bracknell News**

The rivers affected are The Blackwater, The Cut and The Bullbrook. Thames Water has stated that they have finance and permissions to start work on preventing future spillages. These rivers are considered to be mostly 'dead' as they are piped. The lack of fish shows that Kingfishers, once frequently seen on the Bullbrook, have not been seen for many years.

Onwards and upwards! Our AGM was cancelled as it was due to be held on 19th September, the date of the late Queen's funeral. Instead, we decided that it would be less disruptive to the current programme to send the information by email to our Members. We asked for some response and approval of the AGM Minutes, Reports and Finances. A show of hands at our November meeting also gave us a mandate to continue into 2023; ad there were no changes in the Committee. However, this does not exclude offers of participation by our Membership on surveys, volunteering at the woodland, technical support - or simply helping on talk evenings when Committee members may be absent.

With best wishes to everyone for a very happy Christmas and an excellent New Year

Gill Cheetham, Chairman – December 2022

News from the Woodland

Recent bad weather forced our **Nightingale Triangle** November work party to be cancelled, but we had a great turnout again at our December one (thank you everybody), and got loads done! Work over the coming Winter months will continue with tasks such as repositioning and marking out pathways, Ponticum Rhododendron clearance, removal of self set saplings of invasive species and planting out woodland flowers and shrubs which will flower in the Spring and Summer months.

It's been a magnificent autumn for **fungi**. All the pictures of these little beauties (and many more) have been taken within the woodland in the past few days..



You'll remember seeing the pictures of the huge damage done to a number of the big trees in Nightingale Triangle following Storm Eunice in the Spring.

Thanks to the work of a team of fully equipped stalwarts, the three Scots Pines which were uprooted at the time have been skilfully cut up and no longer restrict the back footpath. A brilliant job, lads – thank you!

A team of **Bracknell Conservation Volunteers** will be coming for a day to help us in the Woodland on **Tuesday 10th January**. Their increased manpower will enable much more clearance and controlled planting at the top of the bank, to replace the Ponticum with a thicket of British native shrubs and small trees.



Flooding in the underpass

The excessive rainfall caused a substantial flood in the underpass next to Nightingale Triangle. An electrical fault within the drainage system resulted in pump failure. Water backed up by natural drainage from reinvigorated natural streams added to the already growing lake which encroaches upon the woodland bank and prevents access from all walkways and steps.

Ancient maps show the presence of a bog with many springs in this area – and it is now thought that construction of the underpass in the 1960s and 70s may have underestimated the fact that we now face climate change.

Interestingly, former waterways are possibly going to attempt to re-establish themselves. Locally, streams and a small river fed into the now drained lakes. Water pumped into tankers has been fed into the dry ditch running through the woodland in an effort to 'soak away' the excess. It has become obvious that two 'wells' we found within the woodland some years ago have always acted as soakaways.

Saving Records for the Society

Work is continuing on species recording, both from the past and from the present - Moths 1985-93, Birds and Plants of South Hill Park 1972-74 and Plants of 2014, for instance. Once recorded on our website and other national resources, they will be available to anyone who wishes to study them.

Extra information about the species within our Nightingale Triangle woodland has now also been added. However, it would be very useful to have a more detailed study of the woodland... volunteers to undertake insect, plant and fungus studies are welcome to join us. And would anyone be able to undertake a twelve month study of **The Birds of South Hill Park**?

The ever-increasing threat of Bird Flu

As we all know, Avian Infuenza is of major concern this Winter. See below for some links covering more government information and guidance. This is going to affect migrant birds in particular, and we may see evidence within the Borough.

[Bird flu \(avian influenza\): latest situation in England](#)

[Notifiable animal disease cases and control zones](#)

Detailed guidance:

[Bird flu: rules in disease control and prevention zones in England](#)

[Bird flu \(avian influenza\): how to prevent it and stop it spreading](#)

The 'Running Out of Time' Relay



To mark the handover from COP26 in Scotland to COP 27 in Egypt, an international relay was organised across 18 countries over 40 days, covering 7,767km from Glasgow to Sharm El-Sheikh. **On 7th October, a strategic baton handover took place at Lily Hill Park.**

Included in the photo are: Cllr Dorothy Hayes MBE - Bracknell Forest Council (left), Samantha Gibbins (orange top – the incoming runner), Cllr Ankur Shiv Bhandari, Mayor of the Borough of Bracknell Forest (centre right), Sharon James (lime green top - the outgoing runner).

Item by courtesy of The Bracknell Forest Society.

About our 2023 Programme – and more!



As previously, our indoor Meetings will continue to be held each month in the Recital Room at South Hill Park up to and including June of next year - and a trip to the **Blashford Lakes Nature Reserve** (near Ringwood, Hants – pictured) is being arranged for 12th February.

Trips and walks which were cancelled during last Summer because of the excessively hot weather are to be reinstated during Summer 2023. We'll be in touch with Members regarding locations and routes, as the year progresses.

The 'Green Walks' organised by the **Bracknell Forest Nature Partnership** will be continuing into 2023, details of which will be available on Bracknell Forest Council's website and it is hoped that the Society will arrange a few of them, as part of the initiative. Leaders are always welcome!

Our Membership Year

As most of you will be aware, our Membership year runs from September until August, with the **price remaining at £12 per individual**. Our Membership number currently stands at nearly fifty, which is really pleasing - and it is really good to see how many people have rejoined since the pandemic stopped us in our tracks... We always welcome new Members and Visitors are also welcome, with the **Visitor price remaining at £3**.

Please pay your subscription if you have not already done so, either by cash or cheque on the night of our gatherings or preferably Bank standing order – **Bracknell Forest Natural History Society, 03481989, 30-91-11**. Or let us know if you wish to discontinue your Membership.



Here is our reminder of some websites which we think may interest you

<https://www.growwilduk.com>
<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/>
<https://www.hedgehogstreet.org>
<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

This is your Newsletter, so if you have anything you would like to be included in our next issue, please send it to your Editor Gill Cheetham:
bfmathistsoc@rocketmail.com

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