

*BRITISH NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION*

**Hertfordshire Branch**

***BULLETIN No.147***



Rustling End – 29<sup>th</sup> June 2024

examining the moth trap

*Photo: Andrew Harris*



Waterford Heath –24<sup>th</sup> March 2024  
watching *Andrena* bees  
*Photo: Paula Shipway*



Burleigh Farm - 18<sup>th</sup> May 2024  
Phil hoping for a good catch  
*Photo: Julia Warren*

# **BRITISH NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION**

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### **BULLETIN 147**

March – September 2024

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## EDITOR'S BIT

I am making the finishing touches to the bulletin during a welcome respite from the June heatwave. It makes me appreciate how valuable our long-standing field meetings will be in charting the effects of climate change on nature. I have been out early during the heat and been enthralled by the song of Corn Buntings. Farmland wildlife is under such pressure; it was heartening for Herts BNA to visit Greys Farm see all that Edward Darling has been doing for conservation. My own interest in nature owes much to the knowledge of the late Trevor James and, in this edition, you can read about an exhibition in tribute of him and I was also encouraged by the warmth and enthusiasm of Pat Robinson for whom an obituary also appears here. It is a privilege to be part of a group of people with a shared love of nature.

*Andrew Harris*

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**TRIBUTE TO TREVOR**

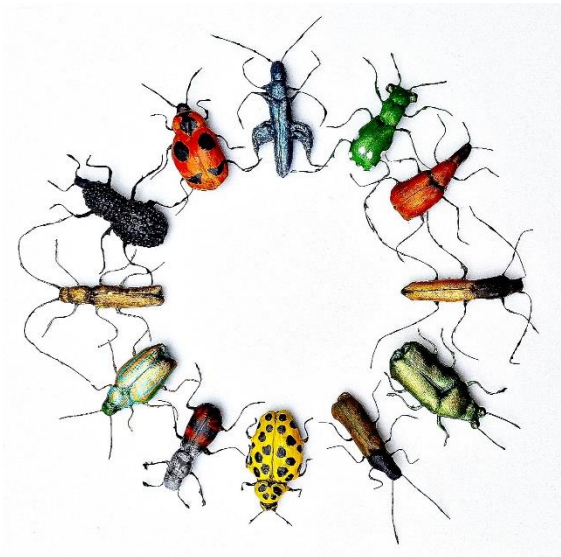


The Eastern Region Textile Forum (a group of artists working across the UK Eastern Region) held an exhibition at St Albans Museum and Gallery last autumn (2024). Titled 'Passion, Determination, Vision' the exhibition profiled and celebrated individuals who had made outstanding contributions to their fields of endeavour.

Artist Frances Green chose Trevor James because of her own interest in natural history and awareness, through June Crew, of Trevor's very significant achievements. The work produced with the permission of Chris, comprised a portrait, in cheesecloth, of Trevor as well as a series of textile/mixed media beetles. Each beetle was exhibited isolated from the others drawing attention to the erosion of habitat which provides such significant challenges to native beetle species today.

The work received considerable positive comment, drawing attention not only to Trevor's publication 'Beetles of Hertfordshire', but his many wider accomplishments.

*Frances Green*



**OBITUARY**

**Mrs Patricia Robinson (Pat, a.k.a. Kerry's Mum) 1934 - 2025**

Long-standing members will remember Pat coming along to an occasional field meeting with Kerry when Kerry was leading a fungus foray. Pat was pretty good at finding and identifying the larger fungi and she enjoyed the company of like-minded people enjoying the beautiful things to see in our countryside.

Most of all, Pat loved flowers and she and Kerry shared the enjoyment of their garden in Baldock packed with attractive shrubs and unusual plants, many of which Kerry had established from seed. In her later years, after Parkinson's disease had made it impossible for her to join walks and outings, she loved nothing better than to sit in the garden if the weather was kind, or in their lounge if it was less kind, watching everything that was happening in the garden, loving the different shapes and colours and waiting for the birds to turn up at feeders.



Pat (right) with Kerry and dog Pepsi at Sherrardspark Wood in 2007

Pat passed away on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2024 after her long illness, stoically borne. Kerry and her sister, Glenda, shared her care with great love and devotion. Even though time has gone by, they will still be missing her and we send our warmest condolences to them both as they continue to get used to life without her.

*Chris James*

FIELD MEETINGS

## WATERFORD HEATH

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> March**

We met at Vicarage Lane car park, it was a bright sunny day, but with a cold wind and 10 degrees. There were 17 people. David and I had recced the walk twice, but Waterford Marsh was under water in places. So, David and I took the group onto the North Heath. Before leaving the car park, I pointed out the leaves of several orchids, which were not identified. (Have to return when in flower). Ladybirds were found by Alison, some sheltering in the vegetation, and one 24-spot, on a post.

**Plants:** Italian Alder, a grafted medlar (which Simon pointed out having been previously shown by Trevor James), Sweet Violets, Mallow, Dandelion, Daisies, Carlina Thistle, Biting Stonecrop, Thyme-leaved Speedwell, Field Speedwell, Common Stork's-bill, Cudweed sp., Whitlow Grass, Lesser Celandine, Dog's Mercury, Bluebells, Green Alkanet, Ivy-Leaved Speedwell, Ground-ivy.

In Foxleys, a "hanging wood" above the River Beane, there was Greater Stitchwort, Red Dead-nettle, carpets of Wood Anemone, Bluebells, Early Dog-violet, Goldilocks Buttercup, Cow Parsley, Bush Vetch and in damper places Marsh Marigolds.

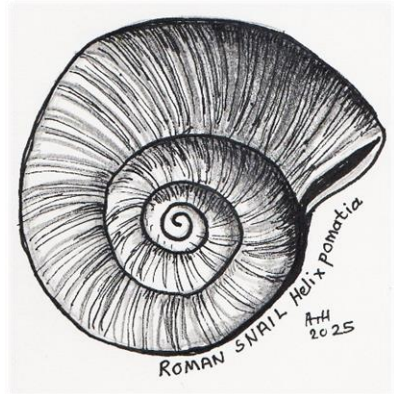
We stopped for lunch in the churchyard at Stapleford, where Andrew found the leaves of Meadow Saxifrage. After lunch, we walked along Church Lane. Along the sunny side of the lane were colonies of Mining Bees *Andrena* sp. ('Simon told us that there are 50 species so it was difficult to name these without further identification').

**Butterflies:** Comma, Brimstone, Peacock.

**Birds:** Jackdaw, Jay, Carrion Crow, Red Kite (6+), Kestrel, Buzzard, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Goldcrest, Chiffchaff, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Green Woodpecker yaffling.

In Lower Stonyhills Woods we found Primroses. Skylarks filled the air with their songs. Roman Snails were abundant on the site, Alison found several alive, not just their shells.

Paula found some lichens: *Lecanora muralis*, *Phaeophyscia orbicularis*, *Punctelia subrudecta* all on flint. On sandstone memorials in the churchyard: *Lepraria incana*, *Psilolechia lucida*.



Thanks to everyone for sharing their knowledge with the group. Everyone agreed they had enjoyed a good day out.

*Rose and David Seabrook*

## **KIMPTON**

### **Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> April**

On a blustery day our walk began with an amble on the footpath that weaves through the centre of Kimpton and emerges onto a small village green with an ancient apple tree and almost fallen old cherry possible the remnants of an old orchard. The grass had been left to grow and a sign said that wildflower seed had been sown. We only saw a few Cowslips in flower but at least the longer grass will provide a habitat for invertebrates. Also seen were Brimstone and Peacock butterflies and Peter spotted a Seven-spot Ladybird *Coccinella septempunctata* on some Purple Sage edging the path in a garden. A very pretty picture.

Walking past the church and crossing the Hitchin Road we then entered a massive arable field with a crop of wheat growing. The footpath took us uphill through this desert towards Hoo Park Cottages and at last we heard Skylarks as we watched them rise and fall. Another bird wheeled across the sky, possibly the early arrival of a Swallow.



We reached a mature hedgerow bordering the desert and headed right towards the cottages passing a clump of *Euphorbia* possibly *E. platyphyllus*. While the botanists amongst us studied the plant a few took advantage of a well-positioned bench nearby with views to the south. Also along this hedgerow was an enormous suckering ancient lime tree and there was some debate over the species. Rhoddri showed us an Orb-weaver spider nearby.

We wandered on to Hoo Park where an ancient pollarded oak tree stood sentinel. Bulbous Buttercups *Ranunculus bulbosus* and Meadow Foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis* were in flower in the grassland. We edged past Hoopark Wood which was carpeted with Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* in flower and swathes of emerging Foxgloves *Digitalis purpurea*. A Tawny Mining Bee *Andrena fulva* settled on a bramble leaf.



On to Pollard Wood where there was a large stand of mature Box trees *Buxus sempervirens* and a chalky dell with Elder *Sambucus nigra*. Rhoddri found a Badger sett in the dell with several entrances. Peter produced a leaf with what appeared insect eggs attached, it turned out to be Arum rust *Puccinia sessilis* which commonly affects *Arum maculatum* and Ramsons *Allium ursinum*.

We spotted two hares on our way to cross a Portland stone clad brick bridge designed by Sir William Chambers c.1764. The bridge spans a diverted arm of the River Mimram. Scanning the surface of the stone Peter found a bagworm grey in colour to blend with the lichen. Turning right we followed the River Mimram eastwards towards Rye End Farm and up across a fallow field full of arable weeds, including Field Pansy *Viola arvensis*, a joy for the botanists.

We stopped for lunch with views south towards Ayot St Lawrence and watched a Red Admiral butterfly chase a bumblebee. A 22-spot Ladybird *Psyllobora vigintiduopunctata* was noted on a nearby leaf.

Returning to Kimpton we passed by Christmashill Wood carpeted with Brambles, Bluebells and Foxgloves.

**Butterflies seen not noted above:**

Brimstone, Peacock, Orange Tip x 2, Tortoiseshell x 2

**Birds seen or heard:**

Buzzard, Blackcap, Coal Tit, Pheasant, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, House Sparrow, Chiffchaff, Skylark, Yellowhammer, Kestrel, Wren, Red Kite, Carrion Crow, Great Tit, Robin, Jay, Mallard x 3, Blackbird, Willow Warbler, Jackdaw, Feral Pigeon, Canada Geese

*Julie Wise*

## **PANSHANGER PARK**

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April**

Fifteen members met at the War Memorial in Birch Green to look for fungi and other wildlife.

The first fungal species we found was the common Turkey Tail *Trametes versicolor* growing on a willow stump. Soon after we found two rusts; *Puccinia sessilis* on a living Lords-and-Ladies *Arum maculatum* leaf and a more interesting one *Puccinia conii* on a Hemlock *Conium maculatum* leaf.

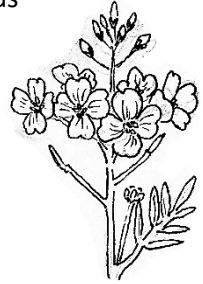
Along the path we found leaves of Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* affected by Hawthorn Leaf Blight *Monilinia johnsonii*. The affected leaves dry, curl-up and normally have a sweet smell. Apparently, the sweet smell of this species is a strategy to attract insects that might spread the conidia. In our leaves, the smell was very weak but I suspect the cold weather could be the reason.

Peter found a single fine specimen of Glistening Inkcap *Coprinellus micaceus* growing on grass nearby.

“The catch of the day” was a small group of St George’s Mushroom growing on a grassy area by the path. They were a bit old but the typical farinaceous smell was still there. That is an important feature to check for anybody planning to foray this mushroom to eat, as it is very similar to a young Livid Pink Gill *Entoloma sinuatum*, a poisonous species. In the same area we also

found several Brittlestems *Psathyrella* sp. and a group of Bald Inkcaps *Parasola leiocephala* also growing on grass. Those are closely related to proper inkcaps but their gills do not deliquesce on ageing.

We found the typical “burnt” fruitbodies of King Alfred’s Cakes growing on a fallen Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* branch and a patch of deciduous wood stained by Green Elfcup *Chlorociboria aeruginascens*. In the afternoon, the main find was a group of Spring Toughshank *Gymnopus oclor* on a grassy area at the wood edge.



**Plants:** notable species identified by Alla are as follows:



Cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis*  
Common Whitlowgrass *Erophila verna*  
Marsh Cudweed *Gnaphalium uliginosum*  
Wild Strawberry *Fragaria vesca*  
A Pepperwort *Lepidium* cf. *heterophyllum*  
Changing Forget-me-not *Myosotis discolor*  
Barren Strawberry *Potentilla sterilis*  
Weld *Reseda luteola*  
Danish Scurvygrass *Cochlearia danica*  
Rose Campion *Silene coronaria*  
White Campion *Silene latifolia*  
Keeled-fruited Cornsalad *Valerianella carinata*  
Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*

**Birds** were not in in great numbers but we were very pleased to see a small group of Lapwings flying up and down at Forty Acres, an open area with a small pond protected by a fence. We saw a Red Kite and two Common Buzzard flying high while we were having lunch. Also noted Carrion Crow, Ring-necked Parakeet, Blue Tit, Blackcap (song), Song Thrush (song).

The low temperature didn’t make it a good day for insects either, but Peter identified Longhorn Moth Caterpillar *Adela reaumurella* and Devil’s Coachhorse *Staphylinus olens* under a decayed log.

*Claudi V. Soler*

## WESTON HILLS

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> May

We met on the edge of Baldock for Finn Harrigan to show us around Weston Hills local nature reserve with its areas of chalk grassland and beechwoods. Much of the morning was spent looking around the lower ground of the north-eastern part of the reserve. Here there is a mosaic of scattered scrub interspersed with species-rich grassland including Adder's-tongue Fern. Much attention was given to this area with much interest being given to insects.

Haw Goblet *Monilinia johnsonii* (an Ascomycete fungus) was found on Hawthorns. The bushes were well-covered with a range of lichens, though these were common species typical of nutrient enrichment. Of more interest was a weathered gate where the timber had been colonised by *Ramonia interjecta* - a species with few records which has only recently been found in Hertfordshire. This is not surprising, however, as the body of the lichen looks little more than black gunge. Set within this, the bowl-shaped fruiting bodies are quite attractive having something of the lustre of oystershell and the colour having the hint pale salmon. They are, however little larger than a pin head, so it is not surprising that there are so few records.

We had, at that point, left the open area as the trail led through an area of thicker scrub with large patches of Dogwood. The party then continued through woodland heavily shaded by the thick canopy of Beech trees. On the edges of the dense woodland were Sanicle, Twayblade and Black Bryony. We then ascended Gibbet Hill where there was a second area of chalk grassland where the short turf was very species-rich. This made a very pleasant vantage point for lunch and there was even a bench!

That was the furthest point of the walk, though we had not gone far, it was worth spending the time on a species-rich site looking at it in detail. A rewarding meeting. Thank you, Finn, for organising it.

Leader Finn Harrigan, text Andrew Harris

A selection of insects recorded by Finn: Scarlet Tiger (caterpillar) Chequered Weevil, Common Leaf-weevil, Common Froghopper, Pied Shield-bug, Green Shield-bug, Mottled Dingy-brown Click Beetle, Spotted Crane-fly, German Scorpion-fly, Small Yellow-girdled Tenthreda.

## **BURLEIGH FARM, LANGLEY**

**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> May**

Number of Members 10

The meeting was around the footpaths of Burleigh Farm by kind permission of the Pateman family, who greeted us warmly. The weather started cool for the time of year with dampness in the air but gradually improved as the day progressed, ending with warm sunshine.

The first thing to take our notice was a small group of Swallows flying over the meadow by the farm and I suspect they are nesting in one of the farm buildings. Upon entering the meadow, it was striking how much Pignut was growing, forming a white haze in places. Alla mentioned that this plant can be an indicator of both ancient meadow and ancient woodland. Red Clover was in flower too and we noted on our return that this was the only place it was seen all day.

Leaving the meadow the path descended a short hill with arable crops either side with Common Restharrow and Small Toadflax being two notable plants



Crucifer Shieldbugs Photo: Phil Barron

in the field margin. At the bottom of the hill a few insects were spotted, with several mating Crucifer Shieldbugs (left) on the Garlic Mustard and a striking Wasp Beetle (one of the longhorn beetles) with its black and yellow markings. Progressing up the hill at the edge of a small wood were large quantities of

the very elegant Wood Melick grass, an indicator of ancient woodland. Some Hawthorn was inspected with some conjecture as to whether it was Midland Hawthorn, or perhaps a cross between Midland and Common, I believe there was no definitive answer to this.

Progressing along two sides of another field several Hares were admired and two had a quick boxing match. Never having previously seen this behaviour before, this was a bucket-list moment for me! The Hares were visible to us almost all day whenever we looked over arable land.



The footpath turned into a green lane and we could peer over the barbed wire at the huge numbers of Green-winged Orchids, which have increased massively in numbers over the recent decades due to careful land management. By the side of the path were a tiny group of Early-purple Orchids with just one flower spike which was over. This tiny group of orchids was pointed out to me on a walk with Brian Sawford in the 1980s and they come up in the same place every year. Sanicle was growing nearby too.

During the morning, we kept spotting a few Soldier Beetles (*Cantharis* sp.) of differing types and both Red-headed and Black-headed Cardinal Beetles were compared and contrasted. We had Andy with us who took an interest in a group of bright galls on Field Maple leaves caused by midge *Aceria macrochela* and there was just one Oak Apple spotted.



Black-headed Cardinal Beetle: Photo Phil Barron

Lunch was taken sitting near Hertfordshire's rarest plant: Greater Broomrape, which looked magnificent. The weather was beginning to warm up and an occasional butterfly and day-flying moth were seen as we entered Burleigh Meadow, which has long interested botanists. Plants here are too numerous to mention but Petty Whin, Lousewort and Heath Speedwell caught my interest. By now the dampness on foliage had disappeared and so I started to wield my insect net: not just any insect net, but the previous owner was Trevor James! I swept up dozens of 16-spot Ladybirds, some grasshopper and cricket nymphs and caught one of the Red-and-black Froghoppers which had been seen around most of the day.

Leaving the meadow behind us we returned to Burleigh farm, stopping briefly to look at a Hawthorn covered in Brown-tail moth cobwebs.

Many thanks to the Pateman family!

### **Lepidoptera**

Green-veined White Butterfly, Mother Shipton's moth, Silver Y moth, Meadow Longhorn moth

### **Birds (20)**

Blackbird, Blackcap, Blue Tit, Carrion Crow, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Collared Dove, Dunnock, Egyptian Goose, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Jackdaw, Kestrel, Pheasant, Red Kite, Robin, Skylark, Swallow, Wren, Yellowhammer



**Plants:** too numerous to mention!

*Phil Barron*

## **BENINGTON AND THE RIVER BEANE**

**Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> June**

11 members

This was a repeat of a walk I led in December 2021 so we expected to find much more wildlife.

We were fortunate with the weather which was pleasantly sunny as eleven of us met in the car park of Benington Village Hall. We walked west through a meadow with very tall vegetation following recent rain, the main grasses here were Soft-brome, Meadow Foxtail, Yorkshire-fog, Rough Meadow-grass, Tall Fescue and some Meadow Barley together with Meadow Buttercup, Lesser Stitchwort, Red Clover, Common Sorrel and a few lovely Bee Orchids. Many birds were seen or heard including Goldcrest, Nuthatch, Song Thrush, Blackcap, Chaffinch, Wren together with Sparrowhawk and Heron spotted in flight. Some insects were active with Small Heath and

Meadow Brown Butterflies, the attractive Yellow-barred Longhorn moth, Blue Damselflies and an inquisitive Broad-bodied Chaser Dragonfly.

We dropped down to a plank bridge continuing west and up through a meadow with good views of Benington Lordship and some most impressive veteran Pedunculate Oak trees. We were spotted by a large herd of bullocks who were fortunately scared off by much arm waving. Continuing on to Lordship Farm, we were pleased to see Speckled Wood, Orange-tip and Brimstone Butterflies with 7-spot, 22-spot and Harlequin Ladybirds. We followed the newly surfaced footpath out of the farmyard and through a gate with Hubberts Grove Wood on our left and an arable field on our right. The footpath continued on down between two wood banks; it was difficult to negotiate with loose rocks and tree roots and would no doubt become a narrow stream after heavy rain. Enchanter's-nightshade and much Yellow Archangel were present in the wood and Chris spotted an obvious deer track crossing the track with Fallow Deer slots.

The footpath crossed the Walkern Road and dropped down through arable fields to the River Beane with flowering Yellow Iris and Reed Sweet-grass. The path turned north at a solitary Field Maple and following a large hedge on our left. The fruits of the Blackthorn was badly infected by a fungus causing Bladder Plum Gall and nearby was a Spindle covered with the webs of the Spindle Ermine Moth whose caterpillars had stripped it of leaves. A folded leaf of a Lesser Burdock hid a spider protecting a web possibly containing developing eggs which Alla thought might be a Nursery Spider. We followed the river through horse-grazed meadows to a ford then across the Walkern Road to a track going east with grassy banks on both sides. We were happy to use these as seats for our picnic stop. The banks had a rich vegetation with Marjoram, Meadow



Vetchling, Agrimony, Burnet Saxifrage, Field Scabious, Hop Trefoil, Hawkweed Oxtongue and many Broomrape parasitizing the Knapweed. Rose and Alison spotted two Ravens overhead making their deep croaking call and later the more melodious Skylark.

We joined the road again going towards Walkern Hall. This had wide grassy verges on each side; young Lime trees on the north side and open views of cow-grazed grassland on the south. As we walked south towards Benington

we startled a Hare which quickly ran off across the field. We joined the tree-lined drive with a crop of Field Beans to the east and then a path going alongside the crop hosting very many Blackfly. The path became a Public Byway with the deep mud churned up by off-road motorbikes - not so pleasant to negotiate- but leading to the surfaced Duck Lane and the village duckpond. True to its name it supported a number of Mallard and a Moorhen being very protective of its chick. At the side of the footpath above the pond we were puzzled for a few minutes by an unusual hawthorn which we concluded was a Broad-leaved Cockspur Thorn *Crataegus prunifolia* with glossy leaves and long red thorns. Returning to the car park, two more insects were seen - a Bishop's Mitre Shield-bug and a 24-spot Ladybird.

A very pleasant day, full of 'finds'.

*Jean Williamson*



**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June**

6 members

Having joined Paula for the recce for this meeting, I deputised as leader since Paula was sadly not well enough on the day.

Despite a very wet and unpromising start to the day, five intrepid members joined me; Rose and David, Alison, Jean and Mike

The southern slopes of Northchurch Common are partly clothed with scrub and secondary woodland, but this was not particularly dense, creating favourable conditions for lichens and some of the branches are festooned with them. We particularly admired an old multi-stemmed Hawthorn, hoary with lichens. The scrub is interspersed with open areas of bracken. Paula and I also discovered an enchanting glade just off from the path, where the grass had been naturally grazed to a lawn, probably by both deer and rabbits. There was a variety of low-growing plants within this such as Mouse-eared Hawkweed and Thyme-leaved Speedwell. Alas with it so wet, it might not have not been so enchanting a place to linger, so I carried on. We passed

wonderful gaunt Elder bushes cloaked with moss shiny with dampness including Silky Wall Feather-moss *Homalothecium sericeum*.

We paused to admire some King Alfred's Cakes as we continued onwards across the undulating terrain, there were sticky ups and slippery downs to negotiate until we reached a high point surmounted by a grove of Wild Cherry trees, admired on previous BNA meetings. They seem to have originated as suckers from a very old mother tree at the centre. Where footfall had suppressed the cover of Bracken, there were patches of Sheep's Sorrel, indicating that parts of the common were quite acidic though it was on the Chilterns.

We then reached the lane serving Norcott Hill Farm. Over countless years, the lane had been worn into a holloway where it descended the hill. The steep sides had much Wood Melick and there was Grey Sedge on its margins. We took a pathway close to the railway line for a short distance. Although the clouds had parted, the vegetation was very damp and the weather looked as though it had more tricks to play. Alison checked the impending rainstorms on her phone app and we could see ominous clouds spreading from across the other side of the Tring gap. Hirundines were flying high in the windy gusts preceding the storms. A Dunnock with a caterpillar perched on the fence bordering the railway and a Garden Warbler flew into a small plantation as trains thundered past. At the end of this section we came across Milk Thistle *Silybum marianum* and this was much admired though one eye was kept on the clouds building-up for the next storm.

We walked along a slope and, although some of the elements of chalk grassland were missing, there was much Fairy Flax, Bird's-foot-trefoil and some Wild Basil and Hedge Bedstraw. There was also some Field Madder indicating the ground had been disturbed. It was somewhere just before this that we saw some Llamas on the recce; I cannot remember seeing them this time, but, just then, all became a little invisible. Yes, the rain came and didn't it fall! BNA members became phantom figures battling up the hill in a deluge.

However, nothing lasts forever, and it was not long before the rain abated, we entered the shelter of a wood and looking like drowned rats, we found a picnic spot on a fallen ash. I showed the tree-like fronds of the moss *Thamnobryum alopecurum* to the group.



From there we passed the manicured frontage of Tom's Hill, squelched across Aldbury Common and came upon the ancient boundary bank of the common topped by marvellous Beech trees. These were much admired as a combination of layering and coppicing countless years ago had resulted in some remarkably shaped, multi-trunked trees. We counted eleven stems arising from the base of one immense Beech.

We were soon out on to the open area of Northchurch Common; this had been cultivated in the war years, and the sward had a neutral character with grasses such as Crested Dog's-tail and Yorkshire-fog along with clovers, Bird's-foot-trefoil and Grass Vetchling. However, Sheep's Sorrel, again on the edge along the path, showed the natural acidity of the soils which cap the tops of the Chilterns. Nearby was the dainty annual grass Squirreletail Fescue.

It was drying up and now came the climax to the walk, just as we were nearing the end. The group were intrigued by some tiny moths fluttering around the oak trees on the edge of the grassland. These beautiful little creatures were identified as Green Oak Tortrix, *Tortrix viridana*. Alison attempted to photograph them. We then saw several Longhorn Moths *Nemophora degeerella*, on the bracken with incredibly long antennae.

So, despite the rain, the walk ended on a high note. Thank you to my dedicated companions who braved such a wet morning and thank you to Paula for devising and doing the groundwork for the route with its good views (when it was not raining) and interesting sightings.

*Andrew Harris*

**Birds:** Stock Dove, Red Kite, Buzzard, Kestrel, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Carrion Crow, Jackdaw, Great Tit, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat, Swallow, House Martin, Skylark, Wren, Robin, Dunnock (with food) Blackbird, Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Yellowhammer.

**Insects:** Meadow Brown, Burnet Companion, Green Tortrix Moth, Longhorn Moth *Nemophora degeerella*,

**Mammals:** Roe Deer

## RUSTLING END

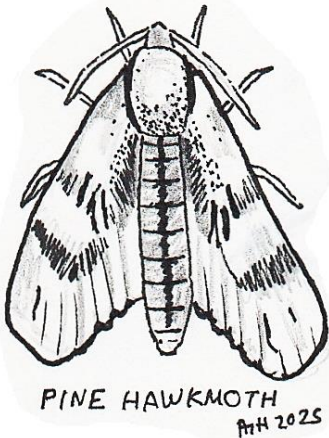
### Moth event and local walk

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June

Nothing at Rustling End Cottage has become an annual event, so the traps are put out the night before and the group eagerly awaits the unveiling the following morning.

We put out two traps and checked their contents.

Not the best results this time, there seemed to be few species and not great numbers of any.



We did however have a conundrum when we believed that a Great Oak Beauty *Hypomecis roboraria* had been identified thanks to Peter. Unfortunately, we didn't save the moth but let it go and for verification we would have needed views of its underwing to differentiate it from a Willow Beauty *Peribatodes rhomboidaria*. There are many oak trees surrounding the cottage so it may well have been a Great Oak Beauty. Other significant moths caught in the trap included the Pine Hawk-moth *Sphinx pinastri*, Large Yellow Underwing *Noctua pronuba* and Common Footman *Eilema lurideola*.

After our trapping session and a spot of lunch in the garden we set off on a circular walk following the footpath alongside Hollays Wood to Three Houses Lane and back to Rusling End.

A Muntjac ran across the field as we walked and in the margin of the arable field Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*, flowered. The local farmland is managed regeneratively so there are always herbal lays supporting large numbers of bees and other invertebrates to enjoy. A Marbled White butterfly *Melanargia galathea* flew across in front of us as we walked by Local Wildlife Site, Rustling End Cottage meadow.

We briefly entered Hollays Wood which had been coppiced a few years before and Alla identified Remote Sedge *Carex remota*, Wood Meadow-grass *Poa nemoralis*, Soft Sedge *Carex disperma* and Pil Sedge *Carex pilulifera* growing. A Small Skipper butterfly *Thymelicus sylvestris* was spotted and shortly after a Southern Hawker dragonfly.

Rose pointed out a herd of Fallow Deer running west across the field from the woodland. No doubt disturbed by us. A Jay screamed and the sound of Skylarks high above us could be heard. A pair of mating Marbled White butterflies, a Ringlet and Small Heath came into view.

It was interesting to see the regrowth of vegetation after the damaging fire to Hollays Wood and surrounds in the summer of 2022.

The fire destroyed over 100 acres of crops, hedgerow and woodland and local residents were evacuated. The pines in the woodland were destroyed, but fortunately most of the oaks withstood the heat and flames. Where the pines were destroyed a swathe of Foxgloves *Digitalis purpurea* flowered, with Rosebay Willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium* and Broom *Cytisus scoparius* and Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre* emerging. At the edge of the woodland, we found Meadow Fescue *Schedonorus pratense* and Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristata* and saw a Large Skipper butterfly *Ochlodes venatus* perched on a large sunny nettle leaf.



The sunny south facing verge along Three Houses Lane supports numerous grassland plants including Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, Rough Chervil *Chaerophyllum temulum*, Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, Wild Basil *Clinopodium vulgare*, Betony *Stachys officinalis* and Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*. As we walked along the lane a Blackcap and Whitethroat called. A Buzzard soared overhead. Painted Lady and Speckled Wood butterflies swept along the verge.

Julie Wise

## **COLLEGE LAKE, TRING**

**Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> July**

It was a warm dry day as eleven of us set off from the car park at College Lake in Buckinghamshire to meet up with two volunteers there - Alan White and Barry Watson - who, with other volunteers, maintain the arable weeds' nursery for Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust.



The arable weeds' nursery was started by Val Atkins (who I recall showed us round the nursery many years ago on another BNA ramble). It was Val's late husband Graham who founded the nature reserve in the 1970s. Before that College Lake was part of quarry 3, one of three quarries feeding the Pitstone Cement Works. College Lake was never sprayed with herbicides and when soil was moved around the site after the quarrying ceased, rare arable weeds surfaced. Val realised that to save them they would have to start the nursery. She wanted to create a cornfield as it would have been in the 1940s and 50s.

We were told that arable weed seeds are currently harvested in August and September at College Lake, and cleaned and sorted in November and December ready for sowing. Arable weeds have a hard seed and depend on frost to soften their seed coat ready to take in water and germinate. Some are sown directly into the cornfield, the heritage wheat there having been grown from grain found in the thatch of a local building. Other seed is germinated and nurtured in the nursery and seedlings in plugs are transplanted in spring.

The year had been a disappointment though, so far as germination of arable wildflower seed in the field was concerned. Last November, the field was shallow ploughed and this and the wet winter which followed and also the lack of frosts were probably the reasons for the failure. A lot of Black-grass came up too which caused a problem. Thousands of seeds of Corncockle, Poppy and Cornflowers and seeds of the rarer flowers too had been sown on the field, but none came up, except for Thorow-wax. Even plant plugs from the nursery didn't survive. This year College Lake will experiment by shallow ploughing one half of the field and deep ploughing the other half.

We were given a tour of the nursery by Alan and Barry and shown the arable weeds that are currently being cultivated there – a list of all these arable weeds, kindly provided afterwards by College Lake, can be seen at the end of this report.

One of the rarest plants nurtured at College Lake is the Field Cow-wheat. This did not come from the reserve but from just eight seeds received from Rothamsted Research (previously known as Rothamsted Experimental Station). Today it is found in several places in the reserve and is thriving.

Barry took us to look at the first field (we walked in an anti-clockwise direction around the reserve) and there we noted not only the arable weeds, those that did manage to germinate, but other plants in flower too such as Black Bindweed, Wild Carrot, and Broomrape - seemingly growing on clover. We walked alongside the line of fields which were full of flowers including some arable weeds, but also many other chalk loving plants such as Pyramidal Orchids.

At the far end of the reserve, we came to the 'Hectare', a field in which farming implements of years gone by were displayed. We had lunch here on a fallen tree trunk and then explored the field itself. Again, it was full of flowers and we noted Bristly Oxtongue, Hop Trefoil, Cornflower, Selfheal, and more Field Cow-wheat.

Woolly thistle was growing near the 'bus shelter' and there was Common Centaury too, along with Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera*.

Passing through the planted woodland which included specimens of Box we came to a grass clearing full of Rough Hawk's-beard, with more Common



Centaury and Pyramidal Orchids. Claudi photographed a fine example of Dwarf Thistle in flower.

We now came to the west side of the reserve, which I call the birding side as there are good views of the lake and several bird hides here. There was a small group of people near one of the hides including a photographer with a long lens mounted on his camera. So, as there seemed to be something interesting going on, we cheekily asked what it was and were shown where the Common Sandpiper and Redshank were that they were watching. We noticed Gadwall and Tufted Duck too, also many Greylag and Canada Geese.

From another hide, by a pond with Greater Spearwort and Wild Marjoram. Rose drew attention to a Cetti's Warbler and also a Reed Warbler, both singing. (Earlier she had heard a Chiffchaff too).

From another hide we had good views of two raft platforms put out for the terns, and there were indeed Common Terns there together with young.

By the path alongside the road, we admired the long line of Melilot in flower and I collected specimens of two grasses, False-brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum* and Smaller Cat's-tail *Phleum bertolonii* to add to my collection of pressed grasses- thank you Jean for identifying them for me.



We arrived back at the car park a little before 4pm. Only six made it back, the other five had left us at various times of the day.

It had been a wonderful day. The wildflowers and arable weeds (in the nursery at least) were most impressive and we were very lucky to have had the kind help and guidance provided by Alan and Barry.

**Species lists**

**Butterflies** (not many): Marbled White, Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Small copper, Ringlet, Gatekeeper (a few in one area so perhaps a hatching was taking place) and Speckled Wood

**Arable Weeds**

Common Name	Scientific Name
Blue Pimpernel	<i>Lysimachia foemina</i>
Broad-fruited Cornsalad	<i>Valerianella rimosa</i>
Round-leaved Fluellen	<i>Kickxia spuria</i>
Sharp-leaved Fluellen	<i>Kickxia elatine</i>
Corn Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus arvensis</i>
Cut-leaved Germander	<i>Teucrium botrys</i>
Common Hemp-nettle	<i>Galeopsis tetrahit</i>
Large-flowered Hemp-nettle	<i>Galeopsis speciosa</i>
Corn Marigold	<i>Chrysanthemum segetum</i>
Cornflower	<i>Centaurea cyanus</i>
Corn Cockle	<i>Agrostemma githago</i>
Corn Cleavers	<i>Galium tricornutum</i>
Dwarf Spurge	<i>Euphorbia exigua</i>
Field Gromwell	<i>Lithospermum arvense</i>
Field Cow-wheat	<i>Melampyrum arvense</i>
Field Penny-cress	<i>Thlapsi arvense</i>
Field Pansy	<i>Viola arvensis</i>
Wild Pansy	<i>Viola tricolor</i>
Horseshoe Vetch	<i>Hippocrepis comosa</i>
Larkspur	<i>Consolida ajacis</i>
Night-flowering Catchfly	<i>Silene noctiflora</i>
Pheasant's-eye	<i>Adonis annua</i>
Rough Poppy	<i>Papaver hybridum</i>

Common (Field) Poppy	<i>Papaver rhoeas</i>
Yellow-juiced Poppy	<i>Papaver lecoqii</i>
Long-headed Poppy	<i>Papaver dubium</i>
Prickly Poppy	<i>Papaver argemone</i>
Spreading Hedge-parsley	<i>Torilis arvensis</i>
Shepherd's-needle	<i>Scandix pecten-veneris</i>
Small Toadflax	<i>Chaenorhinum minus</i>
Thorow-wax	<i>Bupleurum rotundifolium</i>
Upright Goosefoot	<i>Chenopodium urbicum</i>
Venus's-looking Glass	<i>Legousia hybrida</i>
Wild Candytuft	<i>Iberis amara</i>
Weasel's-snout	<i>Misopates orontium</i>
Interrupted Brome	<i>Bromus interruptus</i>
Darnel	<i>Lolium temulentum</i>
Corn Parsley	<i>Petroselinum segetum</i>
Common Fumitory	<i>Fumaria officinalis</i>
Small-flowered Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus parviflorus</i>
Sainfoin	<i>Onobrychis viciifolia</i>
Keeled-fruited Cornsalad	<i>Valerianella carinata</i>
Tufted Vetch	<i>Vicia cracca</i>
Perfoliate Pennycress	<i>Thlapsi perfoliatum</i>
Corn Chamomile	<i>Anthemis arvensis</i>
Broad-leaved Cudweed	<i>Filago pyramidata</i>

### **Other plants seen**

Dragon's-teeth, Dark Mullein, Spiny Rest-harrow, Greater Knapweed, Agrimony, Red Clover, Bird's-foot-trefoil, Yellow-wort, Oxeye Daisy, Common Spotted-orchid, Eyebright sp., Red Bartsia, Kidney Vetch, Wild Parsnip, White Helleborine (in fruit)

*Mike Demidecki*

## GREYS FARM, THERFIELD

Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July

17 members

On a beautifully warm morning we met in the yard at Greys Farm, Therfield, by kind invitation of Edward Darling. There was a light breeze to cool the air and a few clouds dotted around an otherwise blue sky – a perfect summer's day.

Edward first gave us a brief introduction about his management on a large part of the farm to encourage wildlife, especially farmland birds, and the establishment of his charity 'Red List Revival' before moving us into his 'Time Meadow'. Here, he explained the rationale of the shapes that have been created on a field that was once in arable production and then pastured for sheep. Different areas were gradually ploughed and cultivated, then spread with flower-rich hay taken from nearby Therfield Heath (Nature Reserve and SSSI) and from the experimental chalk grassland plots that were established on the farm by the Institute for Terrestrial Ecology back in 1972. Edward told us that some 'shapes' have been more successful at growing wildflowers than others. Each shape is cut at different times to encourage spring or summer flowering and to prolong the flowering season for insects.

Members spent about 1½ hours in this area gradually moving between the various plots, examining the plants and looking for insects. In places there was abundant Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, Greater Knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, both Hop Trefoil *Trifolium campestre* and Black Medick *Medicago lupulina* (it was useful to observe the distinguishing features), Common Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* and Hedge Parsley *Torilis japonica*. False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* was dominant in many areas.

Despite the good weather, butterflies were rather few and far between during the morning but we did see a few Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Marbled Whites, Small Skippers, a single Brown Argus, a single Common Blue, a single Peacock and a single Large White.

Amongst other insects here, we also found one or two Forest Bugs *Pentatoma rufipes*, a few Common Red Soldier Beetles *Rhagonycha fulva*,

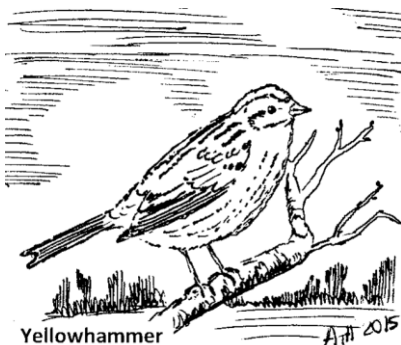
Marmalade Hoverflies *Episyrphus balteatus* and an ichneumon wasp (not identified). Before he left us, Phil Barron also recorded some more species.



*The Time Meadow seen from the air photo courtesy of Edward Darling*

Very few birds were recorded – no ‘small’ birds at all in fact. This seemed to reflect the regional situation with many people grimly reporting the lack of small birds this year. (Edward’s BTO recorder had noted that birds on the farm were 30% down on previous years.) But overhead, we had single Red Kite, Buzzard and Kestrel, along with a couple of Woodpigeons. In the distance we heard Green Woodpecker.

Kerry and Claudi disappeared to look for fungi in the tree belts surrounding the meadow and, after a very enjoyable wander, the rest of us moved off to a different part of the farm, following a mown access track through a wide field

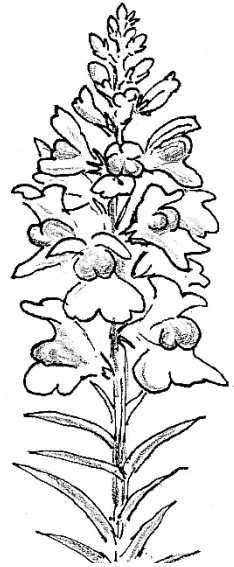


Yellowhammer

margin sown with a mixture of fodder clover, sainfoin and chicory. The margin lay adjacent to a crop of Mustard and something else that remained unidentified until someone found it on their phone app – Buckwheat! From here, we at last heard some small birds: Blackcap (1), Yellowhammer (1) and Skylark (1)! But no-one had seen or heard any Swallows, House Martins or Swifts.



We arrived at the 1970s trial plots and once again split up into small groups to walk between them along the mown grass paths. It was clear to see straightaway that these plots had been there for a long time: many plots had accompanying anthills of the Yellow Meadow Ant and some different species of plant. These included Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, Perforate St John's Wort *Hypericum perforatum*, Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, with occasional clumps of Sainfoin *Onobrychis viciifolia*, Meadow Crane's-bill *Geranium pratense* and Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*. There were quite a few Knapweed Broomrapes *Orobanche elatior* dotted about. We also noted that some Cowslips *Primula veris* were still in flower – at the same time as the usually late-flowering Common Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris*. Alla was busy compiling a list to update the county botanical records. Phil caught a few moths: Dusky Sallow, a Shaded Broad-bar and a Straw-barred Pearl.



**Common Toadflax**



**Shaded Broad-bar**



**Dusky Sallow**



**Straw-barred Pearl**

*Photos: Phil Barron*

We also found a Six-spot Burnet Moth, a Silver-Y moth, 2-3 Chalkhill Blue butterflies, male and female Brimstones, a Large Skipper, a Small Heath and a Comma. But only about five Honey Bees were counted during the morning despite all the plants flowering in the plots.

Kerry & Claudi re-joined us and after a very congenial picnic lunch sitting in the middle of the trial plots, Chris returned home and Julie led the group around other fields in the afternoon:

We wandered in the herbal lay areas and invertebrate numbers picked up. We discussed the hedgerow management and why there were no ponds and we looked at the large green Swift box barn. (See more information at <https://actionforswifts.blogspot.com/2017/04/headroom-experiment-at-greys-farm.html>)

Lucky to have her own meadow, Julie was especially interested in the following:

- Looking at the chalk grassland plants and how relatively quickly a meadow can be produced with seed hay taken from interesting local sites;
- There was a lot of False oat-grass which appeared dominant but it didn't seem to be a problem in establishing a diversity of herbs. (My favourite area was the far corner of the Time Meadow full of the most interesting chalk downland plants. Rather good to see how well this was doing as I was involved in the seed collected from Therfield Heath.
- Seeing how large the field margins are and how all arable farms could have these.

The group then returned to the farmyard where Alison & Lucy attempted to buy a takeaway beer from the brewery only to find there was none available as the brewery were holding a private party! We left around 3pm after a very enjoyable visit.



**Other insects** recorded by Phil Barron: Common Malachite beetle, 7-spot Ladybird, 14-spot Ladybird, 24-spot Ladybird, a nursery-web spider and leaf mines on beech of a beetle *Orchestes fagi* and of a moth *Stigmella tityrella*. He also identified the gall of *Tetraneura ulmi*, the Elm Sack gall aphid - on elm.

**Fungi at Greys Farm, Therfield – Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> July recorded by Kerry Robinson & Claudi Soler**

(Most of these are ‘crust’ fungi. Many do not have English names.)

<b>Species name</b>	<b>Substrate</b>
<i>Pluteus salicinus</i> (Willow Shield)	On old fallen deciduous log
<i>Amylostereum laevigatum</i> (Yew Duster)	On barkless conifer wood
<i>Ceriporia reticulata</i>	On fallen deciduous wood
<i>Ceriporiopsis</i> (=Gleoporous) <i>pannocincta</i> (Green Porecrust)	On fallen deciduous wood
<i>Cristinia helvetica</i>	On old deciduous stump
<i>Haplotrichum</i> state of <i>Botrobasidium</i> <i>aureum</i>	On old deciduous wood
<i>Lachnella villosa</i> (a discomycete)	On old nettle stem
<i>Peniophorella praetermissum</i>	On old deciduous wood
<i>Peniophorella pubera</i>	On barkless deciduous wood
<i>Ramaria stricta</i> (Upright Coral)	On deciduous stump
<i>Scopuloides rimosa</i>	On barkless deciduous wood
<i>Sidera vulgaris</i> (=Skeletocutis <i>vulgaris</i> )	On old conifer wood
<i>Tomentella</i> sp x 2 unident	On deciduous wood

<i>Myxarium grilletii</i>	On barkless deciduous wood
<i>Bisporella sulphrina</i> (Sulphur Disco)	On fallen beech branch
<i>Chaetosphaerella phaestroma</i>	On fallen branch
<i>Diatrype stigma</i> (Common Tarcrust)	On fallen beech branch
<i>Gloniopsis praelonga</i>	On old <i>Rosa</i> stem
<i>Hypoxylon fragiforme</i> (Beech Woodwart)	On fallen beech
<i>Hyaloscypha aureliella</i> (= <i>stevensonii</i> )	On barkless conifer log
<i>Leptosphaeria acuta</i> (Nettle Rash)	On old nettle stem
<i>Mollisia cinerea</i> (agg) (Grey Disco)	On fallen deciduous wood
<i>Nectrai cinnabarina</i> (Coral Spot)	On fallen twig
<i>Xylaria polymorpha</i> (Dead Man's Fingers)	Around old beech stump
<i>Cercospora mercurialis</i>	On living Dog's Mercury leaves
<i>Tiphragmium filipendulae</i>	On living dropwort leaves *
<i>Enteridium lycoperdon</i> (False Puffball)	On decaying wood

\*a specimen of this was sent to Kew for confirmation as it is a very rare species.

*Chris James and by kind permission of Edward Darling*

## WHEATHAMPSTEAD AND THE LEA VALLEY

Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August



Admiring veteran Hornbeams

*Photo Andrew Harris*

Thirteen of us gathered at the spacious car park in Wheathampstead and from there we made our way along a short back street to the river.

We soon came across a grassy bank and looked at the identification features of two dandelion lookalikes - Common Cat's-ear and Autumn Hawkbit – that had colonised the grass in profusion as well as Dove's-foot Crane's-bill. Urban weeds were also scrutinised, but once we arrived at the bridge, our attention turned to the river with its gravelly bed and with Water-cress flowering at the margins of the channel. Nearby a small tree hosted the crusty lichen *Lecanora carpinea* with pruinose fruits looking like jam tarts with a generous dusting of icing sugar. A Greenfinch was in the bushes, a Little Egret flew over and Merle heard a young Buzzard.

There was the sound of families enjoying the river in the warm weather, but this did not disturb insects around vegetation on the banks. Here Wild Angelica attracted Honeybees and an assortment of hoverflies.

One oak had the lichens *Hyperphyscia adglutinata*, *Arthonia radiata*, *Lecania cyrtella* on the trunk.

Our path gradually ascended the valley slope and, as the river became more distant, we passed a veteran Field Maple of colossal size for this small statured species. Ancient layered Hornbeams of wonderful shape were also admired; this must have been the remnant of an old hedgeline.

Emerging from the underpass beneath the Cory Wright Way, we came across another veteran; a Pedunculate Oak with big burrs and epicormic growth. We then followed the Ayot Greenway which is mostly like a green tunnel underhung by trees. A fallen twig sported an attractive mass of a shaggy lichen *Ramalina farinacea*. A more open stretch of the railway line was at risk of being overtaken by scrub; there remained a small patch of rabbit-grazed grassland with Harebells, Hop Trefoil and Mouse-ear Hawkweed. Wild Basil and Field Scabious were also present. Wild Strawberry leaves and Agrimony were found nearby. Sadly, much of this habitat was being engulfed by brambles which is a shame though the blackberries were tasty! Another small area on the margins of the old track bed had Common Cudweed, Stork's-bill, Weld and Lady's Bedstraw while Thyme-leaved Sandwort grew along the edges of the made-up path.

Several of the party found a good seat while waiting for the botanists!

The route became shady again and Enchanter's-nightshade was plentiful beneath the trees. The delicate white flowers are certainly enchanting. In due course, we reached the picnic area. With two tables and some logs, there was just sufficient space for the group to have lunch, though some of us had to share a log with brambles! There had been no wasps about until I started eating my lunch when one buzzed around me with all the aggravation of a swarm. Leaving the pleasures of brambles and wasp, I joined Alla who was investigating the opposite side of the track. Here we found Lady Fern at the base of a Wild Cherry in a small Hornbeam woodland with the dry remains of Bluebell flowers beneath the trees.

Upon resuming the walk, a Bank Vole was found that had apparently been run over. We then left the Ayot Greenway to drop down and return by a path closer to the river. David drew our attention to a Jersey Tiger Moth fluttering about the corner at the parting of the ways. There was much Himalayan Balsam as we drew closer to the river.

A field sloping down to the path held some botanical interest with Lady's Bedstraw, Bird's-foot-Trefoil and one patch of Common Centaury growing on the grassy margin, while Musk Mallow and Black Nightshade had colonised its ploughed centre. Hoverflies were attracted to Ragwort flowers. The path then led between areas of tall grass and, above us, oaks grew on the crest of valley side. A Kestrel was seen perched on electricity pole, interesting enough, until we gazed with amazement as a Gannet flew over!

On the hardened surface of the path, Merle noticed several excavations of mining bees. The path turned a right angle and came back to the underpass. Retracing our steps, members paused once more to admire and photograph the veteran trees. Two Banded Demoiselles were dancing along the edge of the Lea as we recrossed it to return to the car park.

**Damselflies and dragonflies:** Banded Demoiselle, Common Hawker.

**Butterflies and moths:** Green-veined White, Gatekeeper, Jersey Tiger

**Hoverflies:** Marmalade Fly and a small drone fly

**Other insects/galls:** Robin's pincushion, Harlequin Ladybird, Honeybee, Wasp (of species unknown, but a persistent and annoying one!)

**Birds:** Woodpigeon, Gannet (!!!), Buzzard, Kestrel, Little Egret, Moorhen, Magpie, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Blue Tit, Chiffchaff, Robin, Wren, Greenfinch, Linnet, Goldfinch.

*Andrew Harris*



## KING'S MEADS

Saturday 24 August

4 members

Despite it being a miserably wet day, the small contingent who braved the weather made the best of it with a fruitful circular walk starting from the King's Mead pub.

We walked along the chalk grassland of Chadwell Bank, which afforded good views of West and East Pools. On the water, below the flurry of Sand Martin activity, there were Coot, Cormorant, Little Egret, Gadwall, and Pochard.

We continued west along the shaded track and out into the open expanse of Little Mead. A lone female Slow-worm was found sheltering under a refuge mat. Plants included Hemp-agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*), Wild Mignonette (*Reseda lutea*), Weld (*Reseda luteola*), Musk Thistle (*Carduus nutans*) and Greater Burdock (*Arctium lappa*).

Before heading to Park Mead, Simon Knott suggested a detour into Mead Lane Industrial Estate. While this may sound like an odd place for a wildlife walk, there are a number of planted Rowan (*Sorbus* sp.) trees. The abundance of berries makes this a favoured spot for birds, which has led to the well-established presence of Mistletoe (*Viscum album*) on these trees!

Within Park Mead, Simon took us to an area of wetland where cattle have created a disturbed, muddy habitat that has allowed some rarer plants to take advantage. Here we saw Celery-leaved Buttercup (*Ranunculus sceleratus*), Marsh Yellow-cress (*Rorippa palustris*), Oak-leaved Goosefoot (*Oxybasis glauca*), Pink Water-speedwell (*Veronica catenata*), Red Goosefoot (*Oxybasis rubra*), Redshank (*Persicaria maculosa*), Toad Rush (*Juncus bufonius*) and Trifid Bur-marigold (*Bidens tripartita*).

After a stand-off with some bullocks trying their best to intimidate (unsuccessfully), we passed the gauge house. This marks the start of the New River, which branches off from the River Lea. This gauge house boasts an eel pass to allow eels to safely circumnavigate the structure.

Heading east along the River Lea, Simon pointed out the saline zone that has developed beneath the A10 overhead. This has resulted in a number of plants and even specialist invertebrates being recorded here.

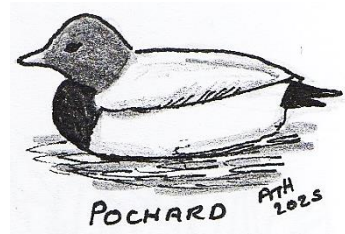
We crossed the railway line, admiring a lovely Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*), and traversed the dense stands of Great Willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*) in Mill Mead to our final stop at the White House Sluice. Here, the thriving Water Vole population in the meads is largely due to the complex network of minimally-managed ditches, providing a safe haven from Mink and other predators.

Thank you to those who came along, and to Simon for his incredible knowledge of King's Meads!

*Rhodri Gruffydd*

**Birds:** Cormorant, Coot, Gadwall, Pochard, Sand Martin, Little Egret, Long-tailed Tit

**Reptile:** Slow Worm



**Plants**

*Eupatorium cannabinum*

*Armoracia rusticana*

*Reseda lutea*

*Reseda luteola*

*Galium verum*

*Carduus nutans*

*Arctium lappa*

*Lycium barbarum*

*Lycopus europaeus*

*Persicaria maculosa*

*Oxybasis glauca*

*Bidens tripartita*

*Rorippa palustris*

Hemp-agrimony

Horse-radish

Wild Mignonette

Weld

Lady's Bedstraw

Musk Thistle

Greater Burdock

Duke of Argyll's Tea-tree

Gypsywort

Redshank

Oak-leaved Goosefoot

Trifid Bur-marigold

Marsh Yellow-cress

**Plants (continued)**

<i>Ranunculus sceleratus</i>	Celery-leaved Buttercup
<i>Juncus bufonius</i>	Toad Rush
<i>Veronica catenata</i>	Pink Water-speedwell
<i>Oxybasis rubra</i>	Red Goosefoot
<i>Stachys palustris</i>	Marsh Woundwort
<i>Sparganium emersum</i>	Unbranched Bur-reed
<i>Angelica sylvestris</i>	Wild Angelica
<i>Frangula alnus</i>	Alder Buckthorn
<i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	Purple Loosestrife
<i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>	Great Willowherb
<i>Linaria vulgaris</i>	Common Toadflax

## **WEST OF LETCHWORTH**

**Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> September**

**13 Members**

The weather was a sunny “T-shirt” type of day with a gentle breeze. The starting point was the Hitchin Garden Centre and the route went along the well-surfaced Letchworth Greenway path, to the railway, looping around a circular copse and returning the way we came. The landscape offered significant views to the west, over arable fields, towards the chalk hills of Bedfordshire. The local soil was chalky and my hope for the day was to find some interesting arable weeds. I decided to carry a large insect net on the walk (once owned by Trevor James) which came in useful, but meant that taking notes was awkward, so I am reliant somewhat on my limited memory.

The most impressive insect to enter my net came right at the end of the walk, but more about that later. There were plenty of Shieldbugs caught in the net, all fairly common: Dock Bug, Box Bug, Turtle, Hairy, Bishop’s Mitre and Green Shieldbugs. Some leaf-mines found were Apple-Leaf Miner moth *Lyontia clerkella* plus various others I knew could identify later including the only two found on Buckthorn - the long gallery of *Stigmella catharticella* was right next to the tiny “spiral with an arm” of *Bucculatrix frangutella*. In Hertfordshire

both moths are largely confined to the north-east. Another (very small) leaf-mine of note was found on St John's-wort caused by moth *Euspilapteryx auroguttella*: this mine is reported on average about twice a year in Herts, largely I suspect because it is difficult to spot.



Mine of *Stigmella catharticella*



Round-leaved Fluellen

Finn found an orange-looking rust on Red Bartsia there seems to be a chance that this rust is *Coleosporium tussilaginis*, and, as with other rusts, has a complex life with alternating hosts including Scots Pine and some of the hemi-parasites such as Bartsia and Eyebrights as well as other species. Although not numerous there was a nice selection of butterflies seen over the course of the day: Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Common Blue, Brown Argus (I think), Small Copper, Red Admiral and Meadow Brown.

Birds were notable by their absence, a few Woodpigeons, Chiffchaff, Chaffinch, Robin, and a pair of high-flying Ravens. There must have been other birds but I'm afraid I wasn't "tuned in" to them.

Plants which took my notice were some of the arable weeds I had been hoping for. These plants were best admired by getting down on all fours and unfortunately not everyone was able to indulge in this activity, so a few of the more common plants were picked to be admired by all. My favourite plants were Round-leaved Fluellen, Small Toadflax and Dwarf Spurge. A few plants also seen included Fairy Flax, Field Pansy and Wild Mignonette. Glandular Globe-thistle *Echinopsis sphaerocephalus* was also a good find.

Robin's Pin-cushions were abundant and an unusual gall spotted was Hawthorn Button-top gall, affecting the ends of the shoots of a young plant.

A couple of spiders caught people's attention and a chunky Four-spotted Orb-weaver was a favourite, and another well-marked spider turned out to be a Bordered Orb-weaver. Herts is on the northern edge of the range of the latter species, with less than ten Herts records.



Four-spotted Orb-weaver



Bordered Orb-weaver

By the end of the day an impressively diverse collection of wildlife had been seen but there was one group I haven't mentioned yet: grasshoppers. Finn found a Roesel's Bush-cricket earlier in the day, but just near the garden centre Andrew spotted something moving in the short grass of the overflow car park: a Desert Locust! There were many expressions of amazement as people were called back from their cars to come and see this spectacular creature, which must certainly have escaped from the garden centre.



*Text and photos: Phil Barron*

## **FUNGUS FORAY AT MARDLEY HEATH, NEAR WELWYN**

**Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September**

**12 members**

It was a rather cloudy start as we gathered in the public car park off Heath Road for a morning focussed on fungi. Kerry Robinson and Claudi Soler were both present, much to my relief! I was happy to gently 'shepherd' people around one of my favourite Hertfordshire woodlands, leaving the searching and identifying to these very expert mycologists.

Mardley Heath is an interesting site: in early times it was oak and hornbeam wood-pasture used for grazing local livestock. It was then enclosed with two local Lords of the Manor owning various parts of it (and apparently arguing about who was felling whose trees!). During the next 200 years or so, trees were planted, including Beech, Sweet Chestnut and some 'pines' and some were harvested. Rhododendron was also (unfortunately!) planted, probably as game cover. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, it was acquired by a gravel company and the centre of the wood excavated leaving pits on the north and south sides of Heath Road. The north pit was partially filled with waste before the whole wood was passed to Welwyn council. Some of the area was used for new housing but the rest was left unrestored and resembling a moonscape of gravel heaps and holes. It was absolutely perfect for scrap car activity and scrambler bikes!

However, a 'fringe' of original oak and hornbeam woodland remained around the perimeter, including over 50 old pollarded hornbeams. Birch rapidly colonised the open areas and many of these trees are now 60 years old – so becoming mature and starting to fall over. Oak started to germinate under the cover of the birch. By the year 2000 most of the scrap car activity had ceased but the area was still popular with bikers and this erosion activity helped to keep open sandy/gravel banks that became interesting for mining bees. The wood was an actively evolving habitat with several temporary ponds, small grassy clearings and a 'field' developing very ruderal vegetation, also good for insects, on the old landfill area (still marked on the OS map as 'disused workings').

So this was the area that I aimed to give the BNA group a flavour of during our visit. Mardley Heath is well-known as a good site for fungi – Kerry has led many forays here both for us and the Herts Fungi Group – so we hoped to find some interesting species.

We started off in the flat, open area below the car park where there were areas of short grass, longer vegetation with bramble and some clumps of planted shrubs (a nod to ‘landscaping’). We spent a while here searching the undergrowth and finding several species including the milkcap that is associated with hornbeam *Lactarius circellatus*, the Coconut Milkcap *Lactarius glycosmus* (it really does smell of coconut!), the Miller *Clitopilus prunulus*, Brown Rollrim *Paxillus involutus*, the Chemical Knight *Tricholoma stiparophyllum* (with its strong smell) and the Green Brittlegill *Russula aeruginosa* before moving into adjacent birch woodland. There wasn’t a lot to find here, apart from a Devil’s Coachhorse beetle under a log by the dried-up pond, so we moved on to the ‘field’, hoping to find more species of grassland. But again, several of the species that are usually here had not appeared yet, and the area had not yet been given its autumn cut so wasn’t easily accessible. It was a thicket of Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*, one or two clumps of Horseradish *Armoracia rusticana*, some Hawkweed Oxtongue *Picris hieracioides* and a few plants of Perforate St John’s-wort *Hypericum perforatum*. We kept going westwards toward the noisy end of the wood next to the A1(M) into a pleasant glade with open ground and birch trees. Here, at the far end under willows, we found Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*, Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre* and a small bush of Tutsan *Hypericum androsaemum*.

From here we climbed up out of the north pit and searched under part of the oak/hornbeam ‘fringe’ along Heath Road before proceeding on to the south side of the site through over-mature chestnut coppice (not usually very interesting for fungi) and down a slope into what the locals call the ‘Cathedral’ – an area with sloping sides planted with beech which was now quite tall with bare ground beneath. We looked here for fungi, too, before I encouraged the group to scramble up a steep slope to see one of the old pollards, in this case a beech. Originally, there had been two of these magnificent old pollards here before one of them partially collapsed and had to be made safe. Quite a while was spent here marvelling at how the remaining tree had stayed upright following years of excavation of the roots



by local children - to make a cave beneath it! A group photo was called for – and taken.



Photo Mike Demidecki

From ‘Two Tree Hill’ (now One Tree!), we found our way into the South Pit, by which time the sun had at last come out. This pit is another open area with scattered oaks, goat willow, clumps of heather with gorse and thorn scrub. After a wander round admiring the heather and looking for insects (none), we spread ourselves on two benches for our picnic lunch and Kerry left us to return home to look after her mother.

After lunch we ambled slowly along the track back to the car park. The only additional fungus of note that I can claim to have found was the Horsehair Fungus *Marasmius androsaceus*. Kerry had recorded a respectable number of fungi, including many very small things that most of us don’t even know exist, let alone know where or how to look for them!

Thank you, Kerry and Claudi, for finding fungi and showing us quite a lot of them. Kerry’s list includes a rare crust fungus that she found in 2022. She couldn’t identify it so sent it to Kew who told her it was a first record for the UK. It was still growing where she found it two years ago.

**Birds recorded:** Robin, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Long-tailed Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch and some Jackdaws.

**Lichens:** Paula and Andrew found a couple of interesting species!

**Fern of note:** Lady Fern

*Chris James*

Fungi recorded by Kerry Robinson

Latin Name	English Name
<i>Clitopilus prunulus</i>	The Miller
<i>Gymnopilus penetrans</i>	Common Rustgill
<i>Hebeloma sacchariolens</i>	Sweet Poisonpie
<i>Hypholoma fasciculare</i>	Sulphur Tuft
<i>Inocybe geophylla</i>	White Fibrecap
<i>Laccaria laccata</i>	The Deceiver
<i>Lactarius circellatus</i>	A milkcap
<i>Lactarius glycosmus</i>	Coconut Milkcap
<i>Lactarius subdulcis</i>	Mild Milkcap
<i>Lactarius tabidus</i>	Birch Milkcap
<i>Leccinum cyanobasileucum</i>	A brown Bolete
<i>Paxillus involutus</i>	Brown Rollrim

List of fungi (continued)	
<i>Pluteus cervinus</i>	Deer Shield
<i>Pluteus salicinus</i>	Willow Shield
<i>Russula aeruginea</i>	Green Brittlegill
<i>Russula fragilis</i>	Fragile Brittlegill
<i>Tricholoma scalpturatum</i>	Yellowing Knight
<i>Tricholoma stiparophyllum</i>	Chemical Knight
<i>Xerocomellus chrysenteron</i>	Red-cracking Bolete
<i>Daedalopsis confragosa</i>	Blushing Bracket
<i>Ganoderma australe</i>	Southern Bracket
<i>Haplotrichum conspersum</i>	[ID'd by Claudi]
<i>Mycoacia uda</i>	A toothed crust fungus
<i>Peniophorella pubera</i> (=Hyphoderma)	A whitish crust fungus
<i>Piptoporus betulinum</i>	Birch Bracket
<i>Stereum hirsutum</i>	Hairy Curtain Crust
<i>Trametes versicolor</i>	Turkey Tails
<i>Xylobolus subpileatus</i>	A crust fungus new to Britain in 2022
<i>Scleroderma citrinum</i>	Common Earthball

List of fungi (continued)	
<i>Scleroderma verrucosum</i>	Scaly Earthball
<i>Annulohypoxylon multiforme</i>	Birch Woodward
<i>Erisyphe circaceae</i>	A mildew on Enchanter' Nightshade leaves
<i>Erisyphe depressa</i>	A mildew on Burdock leaves
<i>Erisyphe heracleid</i>	A mildew on Hogweed leaves
<i>Hymenoscyphus imberbis</i>	A tiny white Discomycete on twigs
<i>Lachnum pudibundus</i>	Another tiny white Discomycete on willow
<i>Lasiosheararia spermoides</i> (=Ruzenia)	An Ascomycete – clusters of tiny black balls
<i>Microsphaeria alphitoides</i>	Oak Powdery Mildew
<i>Rhytisma acerinum</i>	Tar Spot on Sycamore
<i>Uncinula bicornis</i>	A powdery mildew on Field Maple
<i>Xylaria polymorpha</i>	Dead Man's Fingers
<i>Melampsora hypericum</i>	An orange rust fungus on Tutsan
<i>Phragmidium bulbosum</i>	A rust on Blackberry

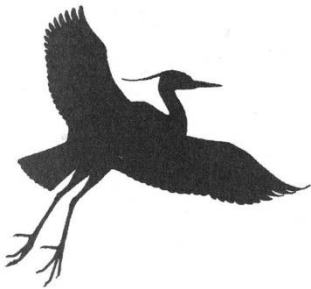




Northchurch – 15<sup>th</sup> June 2024  
Identifying Milk Thistle as storm clouds build  
*Photo: Andrew Harris*



Greys Farm – 27<sup>th</sup> July 2024  
Edward Darling tells members about his meadow creation  
*Photo: Julia Warren*



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