



# THE MAGPIE

August 2016

## The Newsletter of the Milton Keynes Natural History

Welcome to the latest edition of The Magpie. This issue concludes Colin Docketty's travelogue of Malaysia, while Julie Lane bemoans the lack of butterflies on her buddleia. I may be able to console her a little here as during "heatwave" of the final few days of August, I counted four tortoiseshells and a beautiful red admiral on my buddleia almost every day- so maybe things are not as bad as they seem.

If you have any observations or thoughts on this subject, please e-mail them to me at [jehandford@gmail.com](mailto:jehandford@gmail.com) for inclusion in the next issue. Similarly, if you have had a stonking summer of wildlife, either at home or abroad and would like other members to read about it, let me have your contributions by December 1<sup>st</sup>. Thank you to all who have contributed to this issue.

Have a good autumn everyone!

### Buddleia bushes - where have all the butterflies gone?

I have only seen one butterfly on my buddleia this year!! I have a 'Royal red' buddleia in my garden and this year I have seen a solitary red admiral on it so far. I have looked at other buddleias in other people's gardens and they to seem devoid of their normal visitors.

When I think back to 20-30 years ago all buddleias were teeming with a wonderful array of small tortoiseshells, peacocks, red admirals, large and small whites etc. I know that over the years the population numbers of all these butterflies has plummeted. We are way too tidy in our gardens, the humble nettle has been removed from many of its usual haunts, agricultural practices and climate change are playing their part etc.

But I am left with a question? Is it just a bad year for butterflies or is there something going on with buddleias? I have seen butterflies around, in small numbers I admit but non on the buddleias. Are they turning to other plants for their nectar or is it just my imagination? Does anyone else have any thoughts or observations on this?

**Julie Lane**

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## Many Visits to Malaysia Part 3

This final part of my travels around Malaysia concerns Sabah. Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo are two of the thirteen states of Malaysia. I was staying in the capital, Kota Kinabalu. Just outside of town was a nice lodge with many waterbirds including purple heron. I spent some time at the Mount Kinabalu National Park, staying in the youth hostel, but I did not climb the mountain. It is excellent for birds but many are difficult to see, but I managed to spot a white crowned forktail, scarlet sunbird, black sided flowerpecker and black throated barbet, as well as many other species. The food was excellent and freshly cooked to order. Breakfast consisted of fish porridge, for lunch fish soup and for dinner sweet and sour fish. Freshly baked cakes were delivered every day to accompany afternoon tea.

I then visited Poring Hot Springs, where I wished to visit a butterfly house. The food here was very limited: rice with a few bits and pieces and mugs of tea was all that was available.

I then travelled to the Eco Lodge, hoping to see birds from the pitta family. To reach the Eco-Lodge there is a short flight on a 50 seater propeller aircraft, followed by a two hour journey in a four wheel drive. The paths were too steep to walk, but I did manage to see a few species of flower pecker from the lodge grounds. Unfortunately, the lodge staff were very unhelpful and unfriendly, the food was terrible and consequently this part of the trip was a bit of a disaster. Luckily as it was a non-escorted tour it wasn't too expensive.

I ended my trip in Singapore, once a state of Malaysia before it gained independence. This small heavily populated country does have many green spaces for wildlife and here I saw a black bittern, a species I had seen nowhere else, as well as five species of kingfisher.

**Colin Docketty**

## News from the Blue Lagoon

### **Birds**

A dabchick was seen or heard during breeding season, but no young were observed. A pair of nesting swans failed to produce any young, although they were more successful in previous years.

### **Butterflies**

Following last year's recolonization by the grizzled skipper, unfortunately only one of these insects was observed this year which could be due to poor weather, however, wild strawberry, the larval food plant, was in plentiful supply. Dinky skipper and small blue were seen as usual.

**Colin Docketty**

## Upcoming Events

**There is to be a one-day conference on Amazing Insects and Spiders run by the Bedfordshire Natural History Society on Saturday 5th November at the Millennium Country Park in Marston Moretaine. It will focus particularly on species found on the Greensand Ridge with presentations from seven UK experts.**

**Further information available at [www.bnhs.co.uk](http://www.bnhs.co.uk)**

## Groan Corner

Another side-splitter from Paul Lund:

**How many badgers do I need to collect before I've got a sett?**

You should be on the telly Paul.....

## Summer Wildlife Around the Area

Spring was unfortunately wet (particularly Tuesdays) providing unfavourable weather conditions for getting out there and recording species. However, some of our members fortunately appeared to be in the right place at the right time and passed on their observations.

**Mammals** – Otters have appeared again on several occasions at Great Linford Reserve and a Mrs Martin of Great Linford on 31<sup>st</sup> July was fortunate to photograph a large dog otter with a fish on the canal towpath. One was also recorded in April at the Stony Stratford Reserve. Also in April, Chinese water deer were seen in Magna Park near Kingston and a water vole observed in Lodge Lake near Loughton.

Several of the members are involved with our 19<sup>th</sup> year of recording dormice at Little Linford Wood and the surrounding area. Sadly, for the first time we have failed to find any in the boxes in the main wood during our May to July box checks. Our only success was one found in the adjacent Gayhurst Wood in May and one in June in a hedgerow running north from Gayhurst Wood beside the M1 Motorway. I have reported this to the Peoples Trust for Endangered Species to whom our records are sent annually. Do you recall from the previous edition of “Magpie” I mentioned a dog called Charlie being trained to sniff out dormice winter nests; well, we have been offered its expertise. This should be interesting!

**Birds** – The majority of these records were supplied by the North Bucks Birders.

By April the swallows, martins, swifts, common terns and most of the regular warblers were present locally, but a few of the less common birds were still being recorded passing through.

During that month a pair of garganey, a black swan and a mandarin duck were noted at the Great Linford Wildlife Reserve with reports of a gannet flying through. One other unusual bird on that site was a purple heron, positively identified from an image taken by a birder from one of the hides.

Other unusual sightings around Milton Keynes included a black redstart, a ring-necked parakeet, and an osprey flying over Campbell Park. The new

Floodplain Forest Reserve at Manor Farm attracted yellow wagtail, an osprey, a grasshopper warbler and wood warbler. The highlight of the month was a pair of black-winged stilts. This is the first record of this species locally since 1988. Finally, a pair of ravens were recorded in Howe Park wood along with a breeding pair of tawny owls.

During May an Arctic tern was seen at the Floodplain Forest Reserve, Old Wolverton, together with a hobby; at Willen Lake black Terns, Arctic Terns and sanderling were recorded. A curlew and a turtle dove visited Great Linford Reserve. Mid-month another osprey was observed flying over Bradwell Lake.

In June it was confirmed that the peregrine falcons nesting at the MK Dons Stadium had reared three chicks. They appear to be still using the old crow's nest rather than the platform installed for their use. Also during the 24 hour BioBlitz at Great Linford Reserve a female redstart was ringed while a young fledgling was also ringed in July, raising the possibility that this species may have bred in or around the Reserve. During July a pair of black-tailed godwits and a pintail duck appeared at Great Linford Reserve and in August a ruff, an osprey and common redstart were recorded at the Manor Farm Floodplain Forest Reserve and on the 9<sup>th</sup> August a great white egret.

Cuckoos appear to have had a better season too, with up to four present at Great Linford Reserve and birds calling at the North Bucks Way, Willen Lake and the Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve. It was at the Floodplain Reserve that a juvenile cuckoo was discovered being fed by a pair of chiffchaffs on August 4<sup>th</sup> - a very unusual host species. Harry Appleyard was fortunate to photograph this young cuckoo.

**Butterflies** – Martin Kincaid reports that although numbers have been down this summer a few exciting species have been seen locally. Last year several members observed purple emperors in the local woods, a first for Milton Keynes. Well, they have returned – with specimens seen in both Shenley and Oakhill Woods and on 16<sup>th</sup> July five male purple emperors were observed sparring among the oaks

along the North Bucks Way. A single female was seen in Shenley Wood on 28<sup>th</sup> July. Also at Shenley Wood, Martin discovered the rare silver/green colour form *Valezina*, of the female silver washed fritillary (see picture opposite).

**Moths** – There was an early report on 23<sup>rd</sup> May of a hummingbird hawkmoth in one member's garden in Newport Pagnell with a suspicion that it may have bred in this country rather than being a migrant. A report in the local newspaper in June of two bushes in Stony Stratford being attacked by "hordes of caterpillars" that stripped them entirely of leaves in 12 hours turned out to be of a micro moth, the bird cherry ermine *Yponomeuta evonymella*. It would appear that the larvae form communal webs over the bushes first to provide protection from predators.

**Damselflies** – Alan Nelson, our county recorder for these species, informs us that the beautiful demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo* is spreading locally and the white-legged damselfly *Platycnemis pennipes* has reappeared locally again. Members have reported this damselfly at Tattenhoe, Pineham and Great Linford Reserve this year after an absence.

**Plants** – It is hard to believe but our President, Roy Maycock, who has studied plants all his life, and been our county recorder for them for many years, discovered a plant locally that he has never seen before. It was during the members' evening walk at Milton Keynes Village at the end of July that a bindweed was pointed out to him. It turned out to be a field bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis* var. *stonestreetsii*, a national rarity. These records are submitted mid-August for the autumn edition of the "Magpie" so there is still plenty of good weather and wildlife locally to enjoy out there. So take advantage, enjoy, record, and share those experiences with the rest of us.

**Tony Wood**



**Female Silver Washed Fritillary var. *Valezina* spotted by Martin Kincaid in Shenley Wood on 5<sup>th</sup> August. He finally fulfilled his ambition to see this butterfly after many years of searching.**

### A-List Mini-Beasts

Over the past few centuries many species of wildlife have been named after Emperors, members of royalty, scientists, and eminent persons, so I was surprised to discover a rare species of Huntsman Spider named after the recently deceased pop star David Bowie – *Heteropoda davidbowie*. It would appear the frontal view of the spider resembles the singer's face in his earlier career.

So – can you identify which celebrities and entertainers the following species were named after from their scientific names: -

A marsh rabbit from USA – *Sylvilagus palustis hefneri*

A whirligig beetle from India – *Orectochilus orbisonorum*

A species of horsefly with a golden rear – *Scaptia beyonceae*

A species of Tarantula spider from USA – *Aphonopelma johnnycashi*

- and two famous leaders:-

A species of blind cave beetle found in Slovenia – *Anophthalmus hitleri*

A trapdoor spider found in California – *Aptostichus barackobamai*

**Tony Wood**