



THE MAGPIE

December 2016

The Newsletter of the Milton Keynes Natural History

Welcome to the December edition of the Magpie. If you don't feel like going out in the cold, dank days to come why not keep yourself busy by using your creative talents and entering the MKNHS logo competition or the photography competition, details of which are in this newsletter. Alternatively, you could use the travel advice offered by Colin Docketty and plan your birdwatching adventures for 2017! Don't forget to record your sightings around the area and submit them to Tony Wood for inclusion in the next issue of the Magpie.

Finally a couple of jokes from Paul....

Mountains aren't funny, they're hill-areas!

**Which horse runs the city?
The mare of course!**

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Birdwatching Abroad

Here is a selection of good birdwatching sites I have visited and seen good numbers of birds. A car is not necessary as public transport is adequate. All that is needed is a good map, field guide, timetables and any relevant local birdwatching pamphlets and off you go!

Spain Canfranc in the Pyrenees can be reached by TGV to Pau (France) then take a local bus or train into Spain. Here you can see rock thrush, red-backed shrike and mixed flocks of yellow-billed and red-billed chough. Being a ski resort, it is quiet and peaceful in the summer with magnificent scenery.

Sweden To reach Ann, take a flight to Trondheim in Norway and then a train to Storlien in Sweden. Here you can see close up views of red-necked phalarope from the hide, and breeding greenshank, wood sandpiper and crane. The whole area is a nature reserve with many hides and walking routes are well sign-posted.

Hornborgasjon-Take a flight to Goteborg and then a train to Falkoping, where you can easily see black-necked and Slavonian grebe as well as several pairs of cranes. Visitors in April can witness the European crane migration stop-over area with many birds present between Falkoping and Skara.

USA San Diego in California is excellent for birdwatching. Public transport is good value and excellent with timetables readily available. A leaflet giving details of places to see birds locally is available as well as a weekly what's on guide to local natural history events. Most notable birds seen at this location include the vermilion flycatcher, black skimmer, black oystercatcher and acorn woodpecker. Western grebe courtship display also observable on a large reservoir, January and February are the best time to visit.

Colin Docketty

Next year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of Milton Keynes, which is just one year older than our Society. As our contribution to the celebrations, the committee have proposed a number of activities which we hope you will support!

The first proposal is for an exhibition of wildlife photography by members of the Society based on the entries for our 2017 photographic competition. This competition always attracts such a lot of very high quality images it would be great to share them with a wider audience! The main focus of MK50 is on the cultural life of Milton Keynes and a photographic exhibition can be both a cultural and a wildlife event. We have approached the Central Library to see if there is space for such an exhibition there, preferably in July (see below), and the possibility of moving it to other libraries in the Milton Keynes area with display space.

The second proposal is for us to develop a number of self-guided nature walks which we would make available from our website. These may include a walk with 'treasure hunt' style instructions for families with younger children. The walks will be publicized on the '50 free things to do in MK' list which the Council has prepared.

Finally we have also met with the Parks Trust to talk about collaborating with them and the local Wildlife Trust in a week of activities showcasing the natural environment in Milton Keynes, beginning on July 1st. This is likely to include a nature day with a range of activities and organisations (similar to the days held at Howe Park Wood for the last couple of years), guided walks, bat and moth evenings etc.

We'll be circulating more details as and when the activities are firmed up. Do contact us if you'd be interested in producing a self-guided nature walk for a site in the city. Otherwise, make sure to get your photos into the competition and put July 1st in your diaries!

Linda Murphy and Julie Lane

I am writing this on the first truly miserable day of the winter. What a beautiful autumn we have had - how wonderful the colours have been! We had the first heavy frost of the year two mornings ago (7th November) and that was the first night of the year that my garden hedgehog didn't eat the mealworms I put out regularly for him/her. I assume that night he decided it was so cold that it was time to start hibernation. Funnily enough, the next night was milder and he must have woken up again as the mealworms disappeared. In case you are wondering, I know it is him eating the mealworms as I put them in a dish in a box with a small entrance and I have recorded him entering to eat regularly using my trusty trail camera.

The rowan tree in my garden has been shedding its berries onto my drive for several weeks now and the birds have not shown much interest in them. However, the day after the frost the starlings descended and stripped the whole tree - not a single berry left (much to my neighbour's delight - she hates the mess they make on her drive when squashed!!).

It's at this time of the year that you start to hear that characteristic piping call in Emberton Park that tells you that the kingfishers have moved off the river and onto the park lakes. This is one bird whose call it pays to learn by heart, as once you have heard it you can follow the sound and often see that beautiful iridescent flash of blue and orange. The cettis warbler is still singing his loud explosive song from the bank side bushes - will such a tiny bird get through the winter? If you are lucky you might flush a snipe or two from the wet flushes by the river. I have once heard the grunt of a water rail and a small group of goosander males take up residence on the river and fly off with a great fuss if you walk past.

Finally, moving away from the river it is at this time of the year that you often see the hares and Chinese water deer on the arable fields around the valley, the hedgerows become alive with the tsip tsip call of the redwings and the louder cackle of their fellow migrants the fieldfares and one can often spot a tawny or barn owl in the headlights when driving home in the dark.

Winter is here but it has its highlights and I feel privileged to be able to get out into our beautiful countryside.

Julie Lane

Autumn Wildlife Around the Area

Scientists are considering that 2016 could be the warmest worldwide since records began and certainly the beginning of autumn locally was mild and dry. It was not until the end of November that we experienced the first signs of winter with sharp frosts overnight. During that period our members were reporting a profusion of wildlife normally seen in summer, as late as November.

Mammals Otters were recorded at Linford Lakes Reserve in October and November. Also in October a resident in Stony Stratford reported to the Parks Trust that a harvest mouse had been caught by their cat. This was collected with the intention of having it mounted to add to the collection at the Linford Lakes Reserve HQ. The following month the nest of a harvest mouse was discovered during scrub clearance in front of the bird hide at Willen North Lake. Bats were still being recorded with long-eared at Manor Farm and Daubenton's at Pineham.

Dormice: I mentioned in the previous edition of The Magpie newsletter that following the first three monthly checks of this year no dormice were found in the boxes in Little Linford Wood. Sadly, this lack of dormice in the main wood continued for the remaining three surveys. This is the first year since the project commenced in 1998 that no dormice have been recorded in this wood. During each of the surveys from August to October, dormice and nests of young, were discovered in boxes installed in the adjacent Gayhurst Wood and along the hedgerows beside the M1 Motorway.

Birds During the latter part of August the Flood Meadows (Manor Farm), Old Wolverton, attracted a great white egret, a ruff, pintail, a redstart and two ravens, whilst records at Linford Lakes Reserve included a wood sandpiper and a juvenile Arctic tern. Apart from the great white egret still at Manor Farm, September records were noted for their absence. However, at that same site a shelduck and a scaup made an appearance during October and a short-eared owl was seen scanning the fields in the Tattenhoe area.

Fortunately, November was slightly more productive with a single ring-necked parakeet seen near Brickhill at the start of the month and again a week later at

Walton. Caldecotte Lake attracted a goosander, with two more at Tongwell, two ravens were recorded at Tattenhoe, two scaup and two whooper swans at Linford Lakes Reserve, and dunlin and a knot were observed at Manor Farm, Old Wolverton.

Records for the Willen Lakes included two red-crested pochards, a goldeneye and a short-eared owl on the island. But, the highlight of the month at Willen South Lake was not only a single common scoter, but two juvenile velvet scoters. Damage to the Anglian Water's flood control on Willen's North Lake caused low water levels, making conditions suitable for waders: on November 12th there were 5 redshank, 3 dunlin, 3 common snipe and approximately 150 lapwings. Could it be a waxwing winter? Two were recorded in the Gifford Park area and several have already been seen in Northants.

Amphibians and reptiles: During September, red-eared terrapins were reported on the bank of Furzton Lake and as late as October a slow worm was found at Elfield Park. This latter specimen was possibly one of those transferred from a Stony Stratford garden two years ago. Also in Elfield Park during November over 20 great crested newts and 6 smooth newts were discovered hibernating.

Fish: In the autumn, the Parks Trust introduced 1000 dace each to two sites, the River Ouzel near Walton Hall and the Great Ouse at Passenham. The Environmental Agency advised that "prior to release gravel deflectors were installed in sections of the rivers to offer different depth and flow and somewhere to hide."

Insects: There was a report nationally in October of houses being invaded by ladybirds, and at least two members locally reported that they had experienced the same occurrence. Members reported a great reduction in the numbers of moths attracted to their garden traps this year with regular species appearing in far smaller numbers. However, the number of species recorded was about average. Our youngest member, Ayla Webb, was successful in rearing a magnificent death's head hawkmoth this year from a pupa, and produced it at one of our indoor meetings for all to see. The mild weather at the start of November encouraged reports of white/buff-tailed

The Society Logo – an opportunity to get creative!

bumblebees feeding in the gardens and speckled wood, comma and red admirals at Tattenhoe. Common darter and Southern hawker dragonflies were recorded up to the beginning of November, but the highlight of the year was a discovery by our nature detective Harry Appleyard. In October he discovered what was first believed to be an emerald damselfly in the Tattenhoe area. However, he was confident it was different and photographed the specimen for further verification. It turned out to be a willow emerald damselfly, a first for the county - congratulations Harry.

We all dreaded it but sadly the Parks Trust have confirmed that chalara, a fungal disease, is causing dieback in some ash trees in Great Linford Wood, on the Shenley/Whaddon road area, and Swan's Way bridle route at Kingsmead. With the estimated 65% of the trees in Milton Keynes being ash there is some concern.

A joint walk between North Bucks Fungus Group and MKNHS was held at Linford Wood on 30th October. A total of 50 species was found including the interesting slime mould *Physarum nutans* and Black Bulgar *Bulgaria inquinans*. We hope to run a similar joint event with BFG in Autumn 2017.

Stop Press! All you gardeners out there - start digging! A gentleman from the Widnes area discovered an earthworm *Lumbricus terrestris* (nick-named 'Dave') in his garden which measured 40 centimetres long (15.7 inches) beating the British record by .1/8th of an inch. Sadly, it was "euthanised" and is now preserved in a jar at the Natural History Museum, London. We now need a live specimen to beat that record, photographed, then released to grow even longer. So - start turning over that soil.

Whilst you are in the garden take a closer look at the common garden snail *Helix aspersa*. The spiral to the shell is on the right-hand side, but, just occasionally, a specimen is found with it on the left-hand side (No, it's not April 1st). So, that could be your project for the winter. If you do find one, photograph it, or if it is an empty shell, preserve it for us all to see.

Happy hunting!

Tony Wood

The Society logo is a black and white outline of a Magpie in flight. You can see it on the front of this newsletter, our programmes and on the website. The actual logo consists of this outline, without a name. The name is added via the heading of the newsletters and programmes. Increasingly we are asked to supply a digital version of the logo to organisations who want to promote a link with MKNHS, or would like to show the Society's support for their aims or campaign (for example the recent 'Bucks Buzzing' campaign). We have been able to send the Magpie logo, but have had to ask the recipients to add our name so that it is obvious what the logo represents.

At the last committee meeting, it was agreed that we need to up-date the Magpie logo by adding our name to show what the logo actually represents. At the same time, the committee felt that it would be appropriate to add some colour to the logo, since we are no longer constrained to print in black and white. The Magpie was chosen as a representative of wildlife in the new city, since it is found throughout the area, in built up areas and in the many green spaces which Milton Keynes is fortunate to enjoy.

The committee has decided to run a competition for a revised logo with the Society's name, suitable for digital reproduction, but still retaining the simplicity and ease of reproduction which our current logo provides.

If you have an idea for a design, please let Jean Cooke have your entry by Tuesday 17 January 2017. The designs will be displayed on 24 January 2017 alongside the annual photographic competition. Members will be invited to express opinions about the designs before the committee makes a final decision.

Entries should be printed on a sheet of A4 paper. An electronic copy will also be required.

They should:

- 1) be approximately square and capable of being reproduced clearly at a size 3cm x 3cm as well as reproducing well at larger sizes such as A4 for use in displays and notices.
- 2) include the name of the Society in some form (but not just the initials MKNHS).
- 3) include some appropriate colour.

We look forward to seeing your creations!

Julie Lane and Linda Murphy

Long Horn Beetles- Milton Keynes

For now I have put aside my study of ants, harvestmen and caddis flies having reported on their distribution and life cycles over the past several years. I was inspired to study longhorn beetles following the Howe Park BioBlitz after finding two attractive species nestling in the shrubs.

There are sixty five native UK species plus another forty six accidental introductions. Larval food consists mainly of common tree species. Eggs are laid in spring and the larvae spend from two to ten years feeding in a tunnel. The adults emerge from spring onwards and will feed on pollen and nectar from a wide range of flowers of tree and shrubs.

Species recorded to date in Milton Keynes

Date recorded	Site	Species
17/5/11	Little Linford Wood	<i>Clytis arietus</i>
18/5/08	Little Linford Wood	<i>Rhagium bifasciatum</i>
22/05/07	MLK Garden	<i>Clytis arietus</i>
14/6/11	Little Linford Wood	<i>Stenocorus meridianus</i>
14/6/11	Little Linford Wood	<i>Rutpela maculata</i>
23/6/16	F.Higgs Garden	<i>Clytis arietus</i>
2/7/16	Howe Park Wood	<i>Rutpela maculata</i>
2/7/16	Howe Park Wood	<i>Stenocorus meridianus</i>
6/7/10	Little Linford Wood	<i>Agapapanthia villosoviridescens</i>
15/7/16	Oakhill Wood	<i>Rutpela maculata</i>
5/8/16	Linford Wood	<i>Rutpela maculata</i>
5/8/16	Little Linford Wood	<i>Rutpela maculata</i>
9/8/16	Salcey Forest	<i>Rutpela maculata</i>
19/8/16	Salcey Forest	<i>Strictoleptura rubra</i>

Should any member wish to contribute or assist with this project I would be pleased with an offer of help. The active period for these insects is spring to autumn.

Mike Killerby



Rutpela maculata

Annual Photographic Competition

Following the success of last year's competition with a large turnout and many high quality prints submitted I hope we can do as well this year. To remind you of the rules:-

Prints only can be entered.

Maximum size of prints A4 (210x297mm)

Each member may enter a maximum of 2 prints per category. (That's 8 prints in total). Prints must be unmounted.

The four categories are:-

1. Birds
2. All other animals, including mammals, fish, insects etc.
3. Plants and fungi.
4. Habitats, geological, astronomical.

Domestic animals and cultivated plants are not eligible.

People must not be a major subject of any photograph.

May the best photograph win!

Paul Lund