

## Magpie Digest December 2023

Welcome to this winter edition of the Magpie Digest which contains a selection of articles that have appeared on the Society website over the last six months. They include tributes to Society member Colin Docketty who died suddenly in September 2023; information about the Society annual photo competition to be held in January 2024; a report from a trip by members to Spurn National Nature Reserve and reports from a selection of Society late summer walks. If you have any comments, or would like to contribute, please get in touch.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of the Magpie Digest and wish you all the very best for a wildlife-rich New Year!

Linda Murphy

## MKNHS Photo Competition 2024 – Entries by 16 January please

The Society's annual Photo Competition takes place in January.

As last year, the format will be a print competition. That is, entrants need to submit prints rather than digital photos online.

There are five categories:

1. Birds
2. Plants & Fungi
3. Insects
4. Other Animals
5. Astronomy, Landscapes, Minerals etc.

A maximum of two prints can be entered into each category. (10 prints in total per entrant)

Maximum print size is A4 (210 x 297mm)

The deadline for submission of prints is 16th January, with the entrants judged by members at the Tuesday evening meeting on 23rd January.

Prints may be submitted at the Tuesday meetings on 9th and 16th, or by post to:

MK Natural History Society  
c/o City Discovery Centre  
Bradwell Abbey  
Milton Keynes  
MK13 9AP

No prints will be accepted after the deadline of 16th January.

The winner receives a small shield to keep and the large shield to hold for a year.

May the best photograph win – it's up to you!

## COLIN DOCKETTY

Society members were shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Colin Docketty on 19 September. Colin had been taken to hospital from the gym he attended and died after arrival at hospital.



### Tributes to Colin Docketty

#### Three tributes to Colin follow from his friends in the Society

*(Photos courtesy of Colin's sister Marion)*

Colin Docketty was born in north-west London on 28 January 1943. Leaving school at the age of 15, Colin went to Pitman's College and after that began work at Euston House for British Rail. He would remain with the railways for his entire working life and his passion for trains and trainspotting was infectious. Colin's sister Marion tells how his love of trainspotting and 'collecting trains' evolved into a similar interest in watching and listing birds, and thereafter wildlife in general, although he had had some interest in nature from an early age.

Marion remembers how Colin was close to death in the early 1970s. He had been suffering from cancer and had been treated with chemotherapy – then very much a new treatment. Colin was on life support and the doctors gently explained that it might be time to switch off as he was unlikely to recover. But Marion felt Colin squeeze her hand and persuaded them to give him more time. Soon after, Colin made a full recovery and was determined to live life to the full.

Colin lived with his parents in Watford and by the mid-1980s was working in administration at Melton House near Watford Junction. Colin was introduced to John Blundell by a mutual friend and he and John would go on to become good buddies and would make regular railway journeys in later years. John remembers how he would usually bump into Colin in the canteen – his love of good food legendary even then! Colin took voluntary redundancy in 1990 and moved to Milton Keynes in 1993. The house in the Lakes Estate was bought primarily to house Colin's vast collection of books (his mother had had enough by then!) One of the advantages of living here



*Colin, sister Marion and other family members*

was that Colin was close to Blue Lagoon Local Nature Reserve and ‘the bluey’ as he called it became his local patch, giving him countless hours of pleasure looking for birds, wildflowers, butterflies and dragonflies among other delights. He led a number of society visits to Blue Lagoon in the years to come.

Colin made many friends at MKNHS and in his own quite way made a vast contribution, particularly in the last five years or so. He has been our chief refreshments person – ensuring that tea and coffee is provided at indoor meetings and has planned the Christmas party for some years. He has also served on the committee and helped to plan and lead several society trips further afield. Perhaps his most valuable contribution was organising and running a series of Sunday walks, beginning in the aftermath of the 2020 COVID lockdown. When meeting indoors was still impossible for our society, these local walks were a vital way for us to keep connected and indeed helped us to recruit a number of new members. His almost encyclopedic knowledge of the Milton Keynes (and indeed UK) transport system came in handy to many of us!

Sadly, the last trip that Colin planned, he did not live to attend. Harry Appleyard welcomed 13 members to Spurn in Humberside last weekend (27-29 October) and we assembled a list of birds and wildlife that would have delighted Colin, not least the woodcocks we saw coming off the sea – a favourite bird of his. We drank a toast to him on the first evening. He would have loved the food.

Colin passed away suddenly on 19 September 2023. He is survived by his sister Marion, his niece Yolanda and two nephews, Adrian and Sidney. The family were incredibly welcoming when Matt Andrews and Martin Kincaid attended his funeral and wished to acknowledge their thanks to all his friends in MKNHS. Wherever he is now, let’s hope the buses are running on time.

### **Martin Kincaid**

I was very sad to hear that Colin had died. Once you met Colin, you didn’t forget him and I certainly won’t. My wife, Mairi, only met him once but on the day I heard he had died we were able to have a long conversation about him! He was undeniably different! So here are just a couple of my reminiscences.

Most of you will remember Colin from the MKNHS meetings at Cruick Barn or summer field meetings. I also saw him at Cruick Barn where our conversations usually started by him asking me about my latest trip abroad as a tour leader. He wanted as much information as possible to assess whether that trip was one he should take in future years. In all, he accompanied me on three trips abroad, but I had not previously met Colin when I led a trip to Florida around the turn of the century. Before we left London airport I had found all, bar one of my fellow travellers. I sat

in a packed Jumbo Jet as we waited for the last embarkee. At first sight, as he appeared down a gangway, dressed exactly as you would expect, I just knew it was Colin! There were 15 other people on the trip, as I had to remind Colin occasionally, since he asked more questions than the rest of the group put together. His appetite for information and answers was almost insatiable. I just wish I could have answered all of them with complete confidence, since Colin seemed to have seriously misplaced trust in my infallibility. So, we had many conversations during the trip, not least at several dinners, since the seating arrangements of most of the motels we used did not promote communal dining, but retro booths. Colin's appetite for information was not entirely based on me. Some of the reserves we visited had gift shops – and more importantly book shops – attached. I'm not sure how much spare luggage space Colin had planned, but he bought a lot of books!

On one of the first occasions, he turned up at a birdwatching walk which I was leading, I asked who had given him a lift. No-one. Two buses and a walk had done the trick. What about getting home? Well, a lift to a specific bus stop was welcome but he never asked for a lift home. The one situation which did allow him to accept a lift home was the prospect of a tortuous, very late-night journey from Heathrow Airport.

Over the years I was always curious as to how on earth he had reached various often remote nature reserves in the UK, or the USA, by public transport. In describing precisely every stage of the journey, the answer became obvious – by meticulous planning, of course. Public transport operators sometimes let him down, or made mistakes, which Colin never did!



However, there was one form of transport, of which Colin was not at all fond.... ski lifts. During a trip to Bulgaria, on which there were several other MKNHS members, this was an essential part of the itinerary. The birds and butterflies at 2000m near Bansko, on Mt Pirin, could only be sought with the aid of two ski lifts. Eventually, with the quite accurate assurance that I had never been on a ski lift either, we took the plunge, metaphorically speaking, together, holding hands! To the great amusement of more hardened ski-lifters!

Happy days! I shall miss you, Colin.

### **Andy Harding**

The many members of Milton Keynes Natural History Society remember Colin with fondness. Not just as a smiling face above the coffee cups, as he managed the provision of refreshments with commitment and kindness.

He was much more than that. Colin was an excellent naturalist over many branches of natural history. But even more important was his knowledge of when and where to find natural history, and his enterprise in searching them out via the local and not so local bus routes.

The real benefit we all gained from him was his enthusiasm for organising and sharing trips to encounter nature. For the past years he organised and lead Sunday walks round local places full of nature. The Society gained many members who started with one of Colins walks.

On top of this he liked to organise short trips away or take part in ones organised by others. I went on a trip he organised on the Isle of Wight. It was a bit too windy for the butterflies and birds we hoped to see. We saw a hedge covered in the gossamer of Ermine moth caterpillars and saw Nightjar and Woodcock on our last evening.

The other trip of his that I went on, had much more problem with the weather. The week after the queen's jubilee was very wet in the Chilterns. It was good fun hiding in left-over marquees and watching the success of the Red Kites introduced to the area.

Thank you, Colin, for being part of our society, we owe you our gratitude for all you have done for the society, and for being a great character.

**Di Parsons**

## **MKNHS Group Visit to Spurn National Nature Reserve – Report by Harry Appleyard**



This residential trip saw a small descent of MK Natural History Society members on Spurn, a 3.5-mile-long peninsula sat at the mouth of the Humber on the East Yorkshire coast from 27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> October. It is an SSSI and a National Nature Reserve, owned by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust since



1960. The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust closely monitor and manage the meadows, wetlands and intertidal habitats across the reserve alongside Spurn Bird Observatory (established in 1946).

The Spurn area is widely considered one of the UK's best birding destinations, boasting a huge variety of migrants common, scarce and rare annually. There are several watch points and hides which are manned daily in varying capacities but usually for hours on end during the peaks of migration when there can be near non-stop "vismig" of passerines flying overhead and the possibility of rare seabirds passing the shoreline. Its neighbouring reserve Kilnsea Wetlands also holds the only breeding colony of Little Terns in Yorkshire, breeding alongside other shorebirds including Ringed Plovers, Oystercatchers and Black-headed Gulls.



*Waders over the Humber, 29th October 2023 © Harry Appleyard*

To date just over 400 species have been recorded here and over 250 this year alone. With persistent westerly winds earlier in the autumn, local birders and visitors were treated to several American vagrants including a Pectoral Sandpiper, American Wigeon, a Red-eyed Vireo which was ringed at The Warren near the north end of the reserve and a flypast from Yorkshire's 1<sup>st</sup> Upland Sandpiper. More recently the winds have turned more easterly, bringing deluges of wintering thrushes, finches, Goldcrests, Woodcocks and other annual migrants from mainland Europe, plus a handful of passerines from the far east including Red-flanked Bluetails, Siberian Chiffchaff, Yellow-browed Warblers and a Dusky Warbler.

This trip was originally suggested by Colin Docketty, who very sadly passed away just a few weeks ago. He was very much looking forward to it when I had last spoken to him over the phone just over a month ago and I know he would have thoroughly enjoyed this weekend here, as we were incredibly lucky with both birds and the weather.

Naturally with a few of us split up across the area on arrival and some coming from further afield, the species seen were not shared by everybody but in the end, it was a great first visit for newcomers to the area with some of Spurn's scarcer species gracing the skies, hedgerows and wetlands throughout the weekend. The species list wasted no time in getting off to an exciting start with a **Dusky Warbler** ringed at The Warren on Friday morning, which was subsequently heard calling by a few of us in the same area on Sunday. These "little brown jobs" are more likely

to be found wintering in southeast Asia but are one of the more regularly occurring vagrants in the UK at this time of year.



*Dusky Warbler ringed at The Warren, 27th October 2023 © Harry Appleyard*

Early risers were treated to a **Rough-legged Buzzard** on both Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 29<sup>th</sup>. On Saturday morning it was mobbed by Crows before landing near Spurn Bird Observatory and on Sunday it flew south across the reserve in superb morning light, showing off its striking white rump, very pale underwings and a distinctive solid brown patch on the belly, separating it nicely from the more familiar but still quite variable Common Buzzards of North Bucks. A ringtail **Hen Harrier** also flew south past the Warren a little while earlier on Sunday, offering a short view as it flew low along the Humber. **Common Crossbills** also put in a few appearances. On Saturday a pair fed on a small conifer near Kilnsea Church before heading south with a flock of 4 and on Sunday a pair were seen flying over the Spurn Discovery Centre.



*Rough-legged Buzzard, Spurn, 29th October 2023 © Harry Appleyard*

We spent much of Saturday walking across the Spurn peninsula, scanning the dunes, the Humber and the North Sea. We didn't quite make it to the very tip of the reserve but still managed to cover a very good amount of ground with plenty of species found along the way, not limited to birds. A single **Red Admiral** flew south under a gloomy sky and **Dog Vomit Slime Mould** was spotted next to our path. As we made our way to the peninsula a flock of **4 Whooper Swans** flew low to the south along the shoreline, accompanied by a single **Cormorant**. A flock of **30 Mealy Redpolls** showed very well as they fed close to ground level around the Chalk Bank/Potato Field areas and a trio of new-in **Siskins** near the lighthouse also provided excellent views. Sadly, the

bird of the day, a **Hoopoe** was only seen by one of us as it flew over the dunes near the southern tip of the reserve but later showed very well for other birders in the area. A couple of newly-arrived **Woodcocks** made brief appearances and an adult **Grey Seal** passed by the shoreline as we headed back north later on in the afternoon. The edge of the Humber estuary provided a few common Spurn species which would otherwise be a rare treat in Milton Keynes including a flock of dark-bellied **Brent Geese** from Siberia, 6 **Turnstones** and a **Grey Plover**.



*Cormorant and Whooper Swans, 28th October 2023 © Harry Appleyard*

*Mealy Redpoll at Potato Field, Spurn, 28th October 2023 © Harry Appleyard*

Sunday was a very productive day from start to finish. Movement on the sea was very minimal but there was lots to see in the sky above with plenty of migrants trickling through to the south. Between 8.10 and 9.30 over 160 **Siskins** flew south past the Warren Watch Point, followed by small numbers of **Bramblings**, **Reed Buntings**, **Mistle Thrushes** and a few **Redwings** and **Fieldfares** in-off" the North Sea. A **Lapland Bunting** also gave itself away with calls as it flew north past The Warren. During some continued exploration of the shoreline, a **Merlin** gave an incredible display of its aerodynamics as it pursued a **Skylark** which narrowly escaped its talons, minus a few feathers! A vibrant **Greenland-type Wheatear** showed very well around the small cliffs and another new-in Woodcock came straight in from the sea, flying very low over the shoreline before ascending above the cliffs at the last second right in front of us.



*Woodcock, 28th October 2023 © Julian Lambley*

After lunch we made a quick dash to Beacon Lane at the northern edge of the reserve to see a small flock of **Waxwings**. 8 had been reported a little while earlier but we only saw 4, which eventually flew south. A single individual flew north from Canal Scrape by the Spurn Discovery Centre around sunset also. For the rest of the afternoon we headed to Kilnsea Wetlands and Beacon Ponds, also owned by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and part of the Spurn Bird Observatory's recording area. On the way we passed by a Sound Mirror, built to detect zeppelins during WW1.



This is one of the many wartime structures still standing across the Spurn area, with more being excavated and maintained by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Military History volunteers further south on the Spurn peninsula.

There was no shortage of wintering waterfowl to see with large numbers of **Wigeon**, **Shoveler** and **Teal** across the lagoons. A **Long-tailed Duck** which had arrived on the wetlands earlier in the week had also kindly stuck around, though being very mobile and frequently diving under the surface as it fed adjacent to the Kilnsea Wetlands hide. 4 **Avocets**, including a colour-ringed individual and a single **Mediterranean Gull** were also present. Perhaps the highlight of the afternoon for most of us was an incredible murmuration of waders spotted in the distance over the Humber, caused by an unidentified raptor. A couple of Red Admirals and 10 **Common Darters** were also still on the wing across the area.

For those that ventured out onto Monday morning, there were a few last-minute additions to the species list. The sea was once again surprisingly quiet but a flock of **14 Common Scoter**, a regular species for Spurn sea watching, flew south past the Warren. There was also another flyby from a ringtail Hen Harrier. A little while later a **Purple Sandpiper** called as it flew in from the beach and went north and a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, a much less frequent find here than in Milton Keynes was calling near the Kew Villa area by the northern edge of the reserve.

In the end, over 80 species of bird were observed through the duration of the trip. I think it was safe to say we were spoilt with good weather and good birds all through the weekend, which is exactly what Colin would have wanted. I'd personally like to thank Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Spurn team and Spurn Bird Observatory for their assistance and hospitality over the course of this weekend and of course all the attendees that managed to make the journey up here.

**Harry Appleyard, Visit Leader**  
**November 2023**

## Reports from a selection of Society late summer field meetings

### Flitwick Moor- 4th July

Flitwick Moor in heavy rain is not the place to be for a site visit; alas, the Society's first since 2019 was on such a day and this was reflected in the very low turnout for the occasion. It is an unusual and special location. Its SSSI status is based on the very uncommon habitat for southern England of an alkaline peat mire of the flood plain of the River Flit (a tributary of the Ivel which in turn flows into the Great Ouse) being acidified by Greensand springs. It is managed by the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust. The peat was extracted commercially until 1960 resulting in large areas below the level of the water table and some just above the former being dominated by Alder and the latter by Silver Birch and Pedunculate Oak with open areas of sphagnum moss, reeds, sedges, and ferns. The Reserve also includes a rough grass meadow area on slightly higher ground.

This report describes the various habitats visited and some of the species observed and the annex provides a cumulative checklist of the Society's sightings at this location, including additions from the recce and visit this year.

#### **Wet woodland**

The recently replaced board walk takes the visitor along the dividing line of the two woodland habitats. We accessed one of the boggy clearings which had been recently cleared of the

dominant Common Reed (a grass) and experienced the squashy feel of sphagnum moss under our feet. We had hoped to find Cotton Grass (a sedge) an important indicator species of acid peat here but to no avail; the Marsh Thistles stood high and erect here being excluded from the clearing work.

The next stop was to look at the ferns. Bracken grows mainly on the slightly higher ground whereas the elegant Broad Buckler Ferns were mainly at the edge of the lower ground. Wood Dock was a new sighting for this area. A rusty coloured stream is crossed, one of several that are fed by the iron rich acid springs (called Chalybeate which was bottled and sold as cure-all in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Honeysuckle fights for light where the canopy is thinner and Raspberry has established itself in this unlikely habitat.



*(Wood Dock © Phil Sarre)*

### **Rough Grass Meadow**

Trees line this large area on all sides. It is a mix of coarse and soft grasses, and flowering plants with a few scattered bushes. Some parts are well-drained, others not. Meadow Vetchling, Tufted Vetch, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil, Hedge Bedstraw, and Lesser Stitchwort were identified here along with patches of Yarrow, Common Knapweed, a Hawks-beard (probably Smooth Hawks-beard), Lady's Bedstraw, and Hogweed. Nest mounds of the Common Yellow Ant – a metre or more in diameter with an underground chamber of at least the same size – are scattered across the area.



*A Hawks-beard, probably Smooth Hawks-beard © Phil Sarre*

The wetter areas along the boundary of the wet woodland included Meadowsweet, Water Pepper, Scented Mayweed, Yellow Iris (no longer in flower), Purple Loosestrife, and Field Horsetail. Insects which normally thrive here were not to be seen but we did disturb a Common Frog in two different locations. A small detour at the far end of the meadow took us to the banks of the alkaline River Flit. Hemlock so dominant in 2019 has been cleared and a species new to our list, the Himalayan (Indian) Balsam, may be next for removal. Russian Comfrey continues to thrive here.

### **Overview**

Flitwick Moor has a special 'primaeval' charm of its own and to walk through the wet woodland is to observe a different natural world so I hope that members will be encouraged to visit over the coming years. Its habitats are reflected in the diversity of wildlife that can be seen. But do try to pick a dry day for it!

### **Thanks**

My thanks to Phil Sarre for accompanying me on the recce, and to him and to Charles Kessler for taking part in the species identification. My first Society visit to the site was on a recce in 2016 with Roy Maycock as my mentor and he did the same for me again in 2019. Most of the plant species identified on the checklist date back to these visits so a special thanks to him also.

**Joe Clinch, Visit Leader**

**July 2023**

### [Willen Lake North walk – 22nd August](#)



*The moon © Peter Barnes*

Willen Lake North was the focus for this MKNHS walk and we started at the Willen Pavilion car park. Walking anti-clockwise, in the direction of the Peace Pagoda, we stayed close to the lake to look out for Dragonflies and Water Rail. A Common Gull was spotted on the water as we approached. We were then lucky to spot a juvenile and adult Common Tern perched on the poles by the water's edge, along with some Black Headed Gulls. A young frog was spotted further on, in the grass.



*Black-headed Gull and Common Tern (Photo © Martine Harvey)*

Walking towards the bird hide, we heard the call of a Water Rail as a Jay flew above into a tree. From the bird hide, several Migrant Hawkers were seen, and a roost of Cormorants were up high in trees across on the island. We then spent some time by the small bridge looking for Dragonflies but unfortunately did not see any. As the sun dropped low in the sky, we saw a Great Crested Grebe in silhouette and further in the distance a family of Tufted Duck.

Near the weir, an unidentified Dragonfly was seen and noted in case it could have been a Lesser Emperor, but unfortunately no ID was made. House Martins and Swallows were seen in the distance, up high as the light levels dropped. On returning to the car park a Noctule Bat was seen and heard with a bat detector.

Many plants were noted on the walk including grassy tall phragmites which grows profusely at the water's edge. There were good flower heads on the tall stalks; they are large, ranging from near black to a glorious deep purple-red at this time of year, and becoming beige to a creamy bleached white by the spring.

Many people enjoyed the walk, and the evening sun was especially beautiful as the crescent Moon started to appear.

**Martine Harvey**  
**August 2023**

Olney Riverside – 15th August



*Olney Church across the meadow (Photo © Derek Taylor)*



In previous years, this walk along the Ouse has been very popular when undertaken in May or June, usually co-led by Julie Lane and Martin Kincaid. A late summer visit still proved rewarding though.

A short walk from Olney market square brought us to Church Street. At one of the mill-side houses, Martin pointed out a large quantity of bat droppings on the white window ledges of the house. Some of these were the pellets of pipistrelle bats but there were also the larger, twisted pellets of brown long-eared bats. Little did we know the grand finale these bats had planned for us!

At the river, we soon saw Banded Demoiselles and Common Emerald damselflies and also spotted Minnows and Rudd in the clear water. One of our newest members, Rob Andrews, spotted some Yellow Wagtails flying over and a single juvenile Goosander was fishing in the river. In previous years we have seen family groups of this species, which has nested at Olney Mill for the past decade. Rob later found a male Redstart in one of the hedgerows crossing the fields. Although distant, most of the birders managed a glimpse of this lovely bird.



*Juvenile Goosander (Photo © Julie Cuthbert)*

Our attention soon turned to riparian plants. We found some nice stands of Flowering Rush in the ditches and along the river. Further along, we found the naturalised Orange Balsam, Marsh Woundwort and the bright deep flowers of Skullcap. Mid-stream, the white flowers of a Water Crowfoot could be observed, although we were unable to identify this to species from such a distance. Kingfishers were active, calling regularly, and eventually two appeared and gave brief views to the group.

We walked back towards the church across the fields, picking up Speckled Bush-cricket and Roesel's Bush-cricket with bat detectors. Jenny Mercer identified Musk Thistle in the fading light.



*Musk Thistle (Photo © Jenny Mercer)*



On reaching Olney Mill at dusk, the bat detectors were overwhelmed with the sounds of echo-locating bats. We all stood and watched in amazement as dozens of bats emerged from the house and began their evening flights. These were mostly common pipistrelles although a few larger bats seen may have been brown long-eareds. We returned to the market place at around 9pm having enjoyed a memorable walk – in August sunshine!

**Martin Kincaid, Visit Leader**  
**August 2023**

### Elfield Nature Park – 8th August



*All photos © Sue Lafferty Hayward*

Elfield Nature Park is around 4 hectares of mixed woodland, mature scrub, open grassland and a series of ponds. The site is rich in wildlife, with its range of habitats supporting dragonflies, bees, butterflies, birds, amphibians and bats. It is a secure nature reserve which is not open to the general public.

Thank you and well done for those of us that braved the weather; it was drizzling somewhat as we navigated through the Bowl access roads, whilst the Event organisers were packing up the Reggae Festival from the previous weekend.

A hardy bunch of 10 of us met up, including members of the Elfield Bushcraft Group to assist with gate access, for a good hour's walk round the site. Wellies felt essential but it soon stopped raining and the skies cleared. As we were leaving the sun was setting and the bird song re-appeared. Since it was a bit damp, we thought it would be a perfect opportunity to check the artificial covers objects (ACOs) for amphibians and newts rather than focusing on Plant ID, as we were missing many of our botanists.

With Great Crested Newts being a protected species, licence holder Carla Boswell was able to check the ACOs, which are a combination of metal, carpet and bitumen squares, and record our findings. Sadly, there were no reptiles due to the wet and low temperature. Nevertheless,

although we are just outside the survey season, through checking 13 ACOs we uncovered a total of 10 Great Crested Newts. 5 adults and 5 juveniles.



*Great Crested Newts (Photo © Sue Lafferty Hayward)*

We also uncovered some Great Crested Newts in other locations: one of the tree stumps in the car park and a big stone along the track. Elfield Nature Park has recently been a receptor site for amphibians trapped from the development site opposite. Let's hope they don't move back!

Elfield Park looks completely different to last year's dry parched visit and is looking very lush and green, with lots of interesting fungi too. The main walking track, up the middle hill, is a carpet of bird's foot trefoil, a sight to behold! We discovered some Red Bartsia on site, something we're not sure if we have seen before in Milton Keynes (*identification confirmed subsequently*). We were too late in the year for the orchids but perhaps we can revisit earlier in the 2024 programme.



*Unidentified fungus, left; Red bartsia, right (Photo © Sue Lafferty Hayward)*

The finale for the visit was a peek into the honeybee hives, hosted by James Chew and Colin Bowker from the Elfield Bushcraft group. James and Colin took on the initial couple of hives at the site and have since grown their broods and collected swarms from across MK to have 12 active hives this year. They also sell their honey and perhaps there's a potential winter talk on

their beekeeping activities for the society? This year's honey is darker and fruity from bramble flowers, and James has sent his honey off for pollen DNA analysis!



*Honeybees (Photo © Sue Lafferty Hayward)*

Elfield Bushcraft group of friendly independent volunteers is open to new members, to help maintain and improve the site. The main activities include sharing bushcraft skills; such as fire-building, shelter-making, knot practice and wood-whittling. They use basic tools to improve the natural environment and carry out tasks for The Parks Trust, such as mending fences, observing wildlife and tending plants. They meet every Tuesday from 11am to 2pm finding time for a chat over food and hot drinks too. They hold taster sessions before joining and group members pay a small fee each month into the kitty to finance supplies.

**Carla Boswell, Visit Leader**  
**August 2023**