

RNHS February 2021. Bulletin

Don't forget our upcoming virtual AGM March 2nd starting at 7.30pm. A Zoom invitation has been sent to all members and Peter will send another 'reminder' shortly.

Linda Biddle will present the Agenda on screen and the formalities will be kept to a minimum. Jack Perks will be talking about 'Birds of the Water' which promises to be entertaining and informative. We look forward to seeing you there. Any problems or worries about signing in please contact Linda Biddle, Peter Scott or Linda Clark.

The Heritage of Rutland Water.

Richard and Linda Brown gave the Society a copy of 'The Heritage of Rutland Water' and your committee felt that it would be a good idea to auction it for the benefit of a conservation charity. The book covers the history geology and natural environment around Rutland water, and is an **immaculate first edition, which at present sells for around £75**. All bids will be considered, and the highest received **before March 31st** will secure the book. The conservation charity will be chosen when we find out what has been raised. Any suggestions of suitable charities are welcome

A reminder to get your bids in before March 31st

Programme Secretary

Jayne Walker who has been our Programme Secretary has had to resign due to family commitments. We would like to express our grateful thanks for all the work she has put in over the past couple of years. Fortunately Jayne wishes to continue as a committee member and our insect recorder.

Jeffrey Wilcox Smith who has been a committee member for the past year has recently volunteered to be our new programme secretary. We would like to thank Jeffrey for volunteering and if anyone has any suggestions for both indoor meeting speakers or places where they would like to visit, please could they contact Jeffrey on wilcoxsmith@btinternet.com

To continue our 'member of the month series, John Rogers, who is not only on the committee but is also our Botany recorder has written his very unassuming 'profile'. I'm full of admiration for someone who is prepared to plunge into the botanical world without he says any prior knowledge although I can't believe that! A huge amount of work goes into recording the plants of Rutland. John also keeps a careful eye on verges and any developments that may threaten habitats.

Though I grew up on a farm, I was never keenly interested in natural history in those days. I knew about our type of mixed farming, and helped with milking and the harvest, but I only had a superficial idea of the variety of wildlife all around. I went out across the fields with my dog, encouraging her to chase rabbits or at threshing time to catch rats fleeing the corn stacks, but I didn't develop any particular natural history interest.

It wasn't until the children were small, and we were out and about on walks that I began to be a bit more in what was about us. We lived in a small village to the north of Bristol and we did lot of walks, exploring wild things though still at a fairly superficial level. It was when we moved to Woodstock that we began to be influenced by the boys' headmaster at primary school. Mr Brucker was an ornithologist, a real expert, and he got us all going in birdwatching. We joined OOS (Oxford Ornithology Society) and started to send in records. It's quite amusing now to look back at our early notebook to see when and where we first saw birds we now we hardly give a second glance. We were very early members of the telescope club - it was a great aid to helping the boys find and recognise birds. You could set up the scope and "Come and look at this". Looking back, it was a pity we didn't start sooner - Slimbridge had been on our doorstep. One of the benefits of living in Woodstock was access to Blenheim Park - not just the immediate park around the lake but all the woods and the rest of the estate. Our summer holidays were usually planned around a suitable area for birding not far from a beach so that everybody could be satisfied. We had a caravan which gave us a wide scope of different habitats, at home or in France or Spain.

My thing was birdwatching rather than flowers. What I learned in those years was largely from Jan, who was interested and very persistent in trying to identify whatever we'd found. The bird guides covered Britain and Europe. Our flower guides were more UK orientated which was quite frustrating at times.

We moved to Rutland 30 odd years ago, when I moved jobs from Oxford to Kettering, and lived in Barrowden. Jan and I had always lived in the country, so we weren't going to change our habits. Graham and Linda Worrall lived up the road, and they and others encouraged us to continue our interests - still mostly birds. We took part in a number of BTO surveys. We joined RNHS quite a long time ago, but for some years were sleeping or even lapsed members, but we eventually saw the light and began to take part. Graham and Linda, and Pat Garbutt were our role models as it were, enthusing us.



I volunteered to take on the Botany Recording role because it seemed wrong for nobody to continue the work that Graham had done over the years. I emphasised that I could do the administrative side but hadn't any expertise, so I couldn't advise others or identify things for them. I still can't but I've learnt a lot over the last five years or so, very much helped by Roy Lemmon and Martin Grimes to whom I'm very grateful.

That's me. I know a little about a few things but I enjoy being advised.

John Rogers

February 2021.

One of our newest members, Jacky Morrell has very kindly written about the birds her garden. Jacky originally wrote to thank the committee for keeping members connected during this time when we can't meet up and her comments are very much appreciated.

I only joined RNHS, this time last year, after John and I moved to live in the area in the summer of 2019. I only went on a couple of the outdoor visits last year, before restrictions prevented any more, so therefore don't know most of you very well but the regular bulletins have been a real tonic.

I originally started doing the BTO's Garden Birdwatch survey back in the 1980's when we lived over near Nottingham. Then had quite a gap in my records when work made it difficult and we moved around, with spells in Hampshire and Wales.

I started recording again in January last year and immediately enjoyed doing it and found that the discipline of recording does make you focus more closely.

Linda's total of 36 species for her garden, prompted me to look at my own total, which coincidentally also stands at 36 to date, (with an additional 8 seen flying over but not occurring in the garden.)

From reading other people's experience of their garden birds it seems that some behaviours are universal. Here too, we have a sizeable resident flock of house sparrows, that just as Linda describes, inhabit two bushes near to the bird table. They are forever tooting and froing between bush and table, either in groups or occasionally en masse.

Likewise our goldfinches completely ignore the nyger seed in favour of sunflower hearts. A friend over near Nottingham and another who feeds the birds down in Sussex, report exactly the same. I wonder what is behind that? More calories for the same effort maybe?

Something that has made a considerable difference to the number and possibly the variety of birds I see now, is the installation of a new and crucially, accessible pond that we put in last summer. (Not the ideal time but restrictions eased enough to permit it!)

Not just birds either, as by day 2 after filling, water beetles and water boatmen had arrived, wasps were drinking from the water's edge and on day 4 when the plants went in, we saw pond skater and a Southern Hawker dragonfly.

By day 5 I'd seen Willow Warbler and Goldfinches foraging around the edge of the pond and Starlings, Blackbirds and a Song Thrush all bathing in the shallow end.

Later in the month both Pied and Grey Wagtail and a female Blackcap paid a visit and were seen foraging around the edge.

I'd seen none of these species in the garden before. Although had heard blackcap and a pied wagtail when it flew over. In November, Redwing joined the list of bathers!



Finally the snow and freezing temperatures we've experienced so far this year, has seen a huge rise in the numbers of each species in the garden. Helped I think by the fact that during the time when the ground was frozen solid, I spread seed and some dried mealworms on a patch of ground just outside the front door, to help the ground feeders.

Numbers of blackbirds, chaffinches and starlings shot up, with a high count of 25 blackbirds at one point.

As soon as the snow melted I stopped the ground feeding as I didn't want them becoming reliant on my handouts, (quite apart from the fact that it was costing an arm and a leg!) after which, numbers went back to normal for the time of year.

It also brought in a Song Thrush, something I'd only seen once before in the garden. And one day, very briefly, I had one each of Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush and Fieldfare, all in view at the same time. A great opportunity to compare the different way they all moved and their respective distinguishing features.

The pond of course was frozen for many days and each morning, John set forth through the snow to break the ice and remove chunks of it so that the birds had open water. They made full use of this - even on the coldest days, the starlings in particular piled in and had a mass bathe - water flying everywhere. Once they'd departed, the rather more sedate Blackbirds came in but Goldfinches, House sparrows and Robins all made use of the free lido!

Much as I've enjoyed having the time to observe all that goes on in the garden, that perhaps in times past I've been too busy to fully appreciate, I also look forward to once again being able to get out a little further afield and hope that outdoor visits with RNHS will soon become possible again.

Jacky Morrell
February 2021.

[My Thanks to Stephen Smalley for the article and photograph on the 'Oakham' Peregrines.](#)

A pair of Peregrines have been roosting on the All Saints Oakham Church Tower for the last 3 months over the winter period. They have been spotted and documented by the Church members who are now trying to raise funds for a webcam similar to the one in use on Leicester Cathedral. The church members have welcomed the birds and have even gone so far as to ask Tim Mackrill and Paul Stammers to place a nesting tray on the intermediate walkway at the top of the Tower just below the base of the steeple. The female has an orange ring on its right leg with the letters "PJA" and came from a nest in Derbyshire. The smaller male is unringed. They are often seen resting on the ledges and walls of the NE "turret tower" of the church at the base of the steeple and seem very relaxed considering the numbers of people now visiting with binoculars and scopes and the regular chiming of the church bells. Given the height and location of the All Saints church steeple in the centre of Oakham and the plentiful prey in close vicinity both around the church and of course nearby Rutland Water, it was only a matter of time before Peregrines decided to stop off in Oakham and now a pair have arrived. Let's hope they stay and breed".



Coronavirus Lockdown Update 22nd February 2021

As you will no doubt all be aware there has been a recent major announcement from the Prime Minister as to how things might change over the coming weeks, this will obviously have an impact on what we as a Society can do.

The changes are small incremental steps and may be subject to change according to circumstances.

I am sure you will all have studied them from your own personal point of view but my understanding is as follows: -

8th March 2 people can meet socially outdoors and can actually stop and have a drink

29th March 6 people can meet outdoors for a walk

Stay at home ends although stay local still applies

12th April 6 people can meet socially in gardens

17th May 30 people can meet outdoors for a walk

6 people can meet indoors socially

21st June Hopefully all social contact limits to be lifted

All the above will be subject to some social distancing measures.

As a Society we will be reviewing these changes to the guidelines and issuing further information regarding meetings in due course.

Our first planned outdoor meeting is scheduled for the 10th April and if the reserve is open, we may be able to undertake a walk but limited to 6 people.

Also, our 30th April at Grafham Water and 8th May Dawn Chorus may also be restricted.

We will keep you updated.

Peter