

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

WINTER 2022

The Committee for 2023/24 is:

Barclay Arnott	740500
Ann Biggs	740810
John Burgess	749441
Sheila Dickerson	749443
Susan Everitt, Treas.	740352
Elver Langley	740583
Wendy Lanman	741138
Robert Norman	740473
Chris Prescott	749038

All numbers are 01353

Please feel free to get in touch with any committee member with questions or information you might have. If you have any specific records of flora and fauna send them to Sheila Dickerson on hadconsoc@gmail.com

Send articles or photos for the newsletter to Sally on hadconsoc@gmail.com

HCS website:
www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk

Membership information

Subscription rates

1 Jan to 31 Dec 2023

Individual: £8 Family: £12

If you wish to join the Society, send your cheque, made out to Haddenham Conservation Society, with your name, address and telephone number, to: Susan Everitt, 21 Twenty Pence Road, Wilburton, Ely CB6 3RM

This will entitle you to receive our regular newsletter and will give you free entry to the 7 winter talks, a saving of £2.50 per person per session.

Jack Frost Pays a Visit

Contributed by John Burgess

There are few weather scenarios which have dramatic effects on the entire landscape. Snow is an obvious one – one of the rare occasions when my garden looks as neat as everyone else's. The other is hoar frost. This we have had aplenty, and the transformation was both spectacular and beautiful. The prolonged frost and fog somehow encapsulate the scenery, holding it in an icy grip, subduing any noise with an overbearing stillness.



It was with some expectation that I cycled down to Nine Acre Wood in what felt like Christmas card scenery. I was hoping the sun would break through the mist to illuminate this dramatic landscape. Nothing moved, a solitary gull stood upon the ice-locked drain as stationary as if were also frozen. I continued to the riverbank, keen to see if the river was equally affected. Surprisingly, a central third of the river was still unfrozen. I would guess because the water had been moving. A few miles to the west people were skating at Bury Fen. Fortunately for them, they were skating over flooded fields only a few inches deep, allowing the water more exposure to the elements.

I wandered back to the Wood and entered via the small path in the south-west corner. It looked amazing. No words or photographs can possibly describe the sight before me. If the ice queen herself had been riding through on her horse-drawn sleigh, she couldn't have had a more perfect setting.

Walking through this ice-locked world it is hard to imagine how insects can possibly survive the conditions. Fortunately for them, millennia of evolution have provided the solution. Some live among the leaf litter's crannies entering a state of torpor until warmer days arrive. A bizarre aspect of some of the overwintering insects, namely the likes of Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and some caterpillars, is an ability, at the onset of cold weather, prior to torpor, to change some of the glucose in their system to glycol, effectively running anti-freeze through their bodies. No trip to Halfords necessary.

I wandered through the crystalline wonderland, meeting up with my considerably better half Rachel and our friend Tracy. It was a wondrous journey, full of spectacular views in an invigorating atmosphere.

A few days later the weather changed, the ice went, and the world was unlocked again, no less interesting but not with the visual shock.



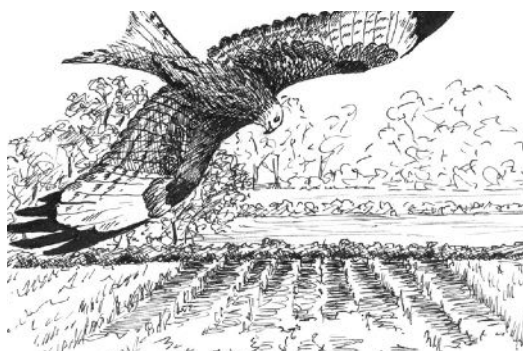
Thoughts from the Gallery Garden

Contributed by Ann Biggs

Naked winter, skeletal trees against leaden skies which promise snow.

Alder key clusters, clothed in rime, call Goldfinch to feed on a seasonal meagre fare and, high above, Fieldfare forsake frozen fields for orchards' rotten fruit.

No breeze stirs the air but in a still silent world, Robins practise singing, Jackdaws inspect a chimney nest site and a Red Kite spirals lazily pursued by Crows which he outflies with ease.



Red Kite. Artwork by
Ann Biggs.

In our garden, January holds sway, our pond winter gripped, vegetation reduced to apparent death. But beneath thick ice, creatures pursue an alien existence unconcerned for the world above, and at the water's edge green shoots push through decay ready for a breath of spring.

In Haddenham Arts Centre, volunteers play a key part in our success and we are pleased to have partnered up with Tempo Time Credits for our volunteers as a reward for a range of services and activities both locally and nationally through Recognition partners such as cinemas, leisure centres and much more. If you would like to find out more about volunteer opportunities at our community art centre, pop in or call us on 01353 749188.

Meanwhile winter should be celebrated, cold skies of brilliant blue, incredible light, slow awakening of new life, birds pairing, amphibians emerging from a muddy bed, footprints of nocturnal visitors in early frosts, a promise of things to come.

In a few short weeks, spring will arrive.

Membership Subscription Rates

As you may have heard, the rental rates at the Arkenstall Centre have increased, which obviously affects the cost of staging the monthly talks. The Committee is therefore proposing an increase in membership (and the one-off charge for non-members attending talks). This will be put before members at the AGM in April. The proposal is to increase the annual membership to £15 for joint members, and £10 for single members, and the one-off charge to non-members for attending a talk to £3.

The change is proposed to be effective from January 2024. It is the first increase in many years, and there have of course been recent increases in other costs. Any feedback on this proposal would be welcome. Please email chris@cprescott.net or write to Susan Everitt at 21 Twenty Pence Road, Wilburton, CB6 3RM.



Giant Willow Aphid. Images Nicholas A. Martin © Plant & Food Research

Calling All Gardeners

Private gardens may be an untapped source of scientific discovery, so the RHS is asking gardeners to record the 'weeds' that pop up in your garden in case the weed is a rare plant, or growing in an unusual place where it has not been recorded before. Submit any find to the iNaturalist app for scientists to analyse.

The RHS is also asking gardeners to help find a mysterious bug which disappears in spring and reappears at the end of summer. The Giant Willow Aphid (*Tuberolachnus salignus*) is one of the UK's largest aphid species. They are regularly seen from July to February with a peak in autumn. The aphids are usually found on willow, but the RHS wants to know if they are found on other plants, and especially if they are seen between February and the end of May.

Giant Willow Aphids are usually seen on stems and branches of trees. They do not cause unsightly damage to host plants.

Sightings of the Giant Willow Aphid, which must include a picture, can be submitted to <https://www.rhs.org.uk/biodiversity/large-willow-bark-aphid>

Renew Your Subs

Subscriptions were due on 1 January. If you haven't done so already, please pay promptly. It really does help. Thank you!

A Plea from the Editor

Filling this newsletter was a struggle and I leaned heavily on our wonderful regular contributors. Please do send me articles or interesting local snippets. You can send something to me any time of year and I will keep it until the next newsletter – usually produced in February, May and October. Email hadconsoc@gmail.com.

Hedge Trimming Haddenham-style

Contributed by Jez Reeve

Nature does not always play fair. The last two workdays we had organised in Fairchild's Meadow were a washout. A few old faithfuls turned up only to give up after getting nearly soaked through. Needless to say, on those occasions, when we were trying to cut back the elm suckers along the line of the fences in the Wildflower Field, the job did not get done.

Undaunted, and despite being a couple of years later than originally planned, we organised another workday in the Bonfire Field to help give the hedge that was laid in 2016 its first serious trimming. The trees that had been laid in 2016 had reached the same height as the field maples that had been deliberately left in as uncut trees. There was no way all the cutting back could have been done by hand, so it was arranged to flail the hedge mechanically before Christmas. Of course, this did not happen, the weather toyed with us again! However the week before our workday the flailing finally took place between the tall field maples. The hedge looked ripped and tangled.



Top left: Flailed and tangled hedge. Bottom left: Serious pruning.
Above right: Tea break.

At 9:00am on Sunday 15 January, despite the temperature being just 3 degrees, a handful of volunteers turned up, then more and more as the morning progressed. People soon took to the task, which was a mighty pruning session. Some people had a personal interest in the hedge as they had been the ones who had planted it 19 years previously! The flailed branches would have recovered eventually, but the tender treatment by each person with loppers and secateurs means that the hedge will flourish sooner and thicker than before.

Two friends with vans volunteered their stoves to boil water for morning tea and cakes, whilst the Haddenham Sports and Social Club lent us crockery and special help from Bernie. The Conservation Society gazebo gave us a place to gather and chat whilst we had our break. Although we had asked people to volunteer until 3:00pm, the 22 people and dog, George, had both the hedge fully trimmed *and* the elm suckers around the Wildflower Field dealt with by lunchtime. Spicy pumpkin and beautiful borscht soup were served to complete the experience of volunteering in Fairchild's Meadow. Everyone agreed that it had been an enjoyable and productive morning and they would come back to the next workday.

Thanks to everyone – many hands make light work. Jez@jrwork.co.uk

Drought, Drought, Go Away!

Contributed by Barbara Grafton

Following the feature on drought and how we can help to minimise its effects on wildlife in our Summer 2022 newsletter (*Volume 37 No 3*), it is disappointing that the 10 February meeting of The Environment Agency (EA) and National Drought Group (NDG) reported that East Anglia remains in official drought status. Our own catchment, The Cam and Ely Ouse, is in drought alongside the Upper and Bedford Ouse, North West Norfolk, North Norfolk Rivers, Broadland Rivers, East Suffolk Combined Essex and South Essex catchments. Only Old Bedford and Middle Level catchment has been moved into a 'recovering drought' status.

The EA and NDG members (comprising experts from the Met Office, Defra, water companies, angling, farming and environmental groups) are preparing for the 'worst case scenario' of another hot, dry summer. Possibly even hotter than the record-breaking one we had last year. Between then and now, steady rainfall at average levels or above is needed to refill the reservoirs and aquifers, but so far February rainfall has been only 7% of the long term average.

Drought means severe impacts on farmers, water-reliant businesses, beautiful water bodies used for abstraction, and on our precious and increasingly threatened wildlife. <https://www.waterwise.org.uk/save-water/> has many easy ideas we can implement to use water more thoughtfully and economically. For instance, they recommend not watering your lawn at all, and



Image by Gino Crescoli.

definitely not using artificial grass, one square metre of which uses 3,744 litres of water to manufacture (the equivalent of watering a real lawn for 18 years).

Few of us enjoy wet days, but in the hope of moving more of East Anglia into 'recovering drought' status, wearing macs and wellies more often seems a small price to pay this Spring!

Full and summary reports on the water situation in East Anglia can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-situation-local-area-reports>

Ravens are Here!

On 26 December 2022 the *Cambridge Independent* excitedly declared that 'Ravens are getting nearer and nearer! They have been seen and heard flying over the city and breed nearby in west Cambridgeshire.'

As you will see from the Facebook sightings on page 7, Simon Stirrup spotted two noisy Ravens flying past his garden in Aldreth at lunch time on 31 January this year.

So, keep your eyes open and please report any sightings to Sheila Dickerson or to me and perhaps we'll have an update for you in the October newsletter.

Crows, Rooks and Ravens are all part of the crow family, known as corvids. The Raven is the largest member of the corvids with a wingspan of 120-150cm – much larger than the Crow. It is black all over, but with a metallic sheen in



Images © RSPB.



sunlight, a huge black bill and a shaggy throat. In flight the Raven has a distinctive diamond-shaped tail, whereas the Crow's tail is rounded. Ravens are not as solitary as Crows and can be found in pairs and small family groups. In the winter they can come together to form huge roosts.

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

Living here is such a privilege and I'm very much hoping that, once the reeds have been removed between our little backwater and the open 'pond', we shall be able to share it again during the Boating Day in early September.

The other morning, when I was upstairs, I heard a watery whooshing sound outside. It wasn't the rhythmic whoosh-whoosh-whoosh an angry male swan makes when chasing out an intruder, but something more sinuous so I quickly went to the window to investigate. And then I saw it again: a little head coming up to breathe for a second or two before disappearing under water. The Otter! So this is, if I remember correctly, the third year in a row that we have seen it. Is it the same one? Is it the only one? Is it resident here or just pops in as and when it feels like it? There must be some way to find out, or someone to contact who knows how to find out.



OTTER
Lutra lutra
L 110cm. Local and rare nowadays. The largest native mammal likely to be seen in British waters. Swims and dives well.

Taken from Rivers and Ponds by Paul Sterry.

Another unusual happening, after many years of seeing few ducks here, was to witness 30 or more Mallard ducks land onto the water in front of the house. They stayed for about 10 minutes before swimming through the reeds into the open water.

A pair of Swans have returned, and I think they are the same pair seen in previous years as they think my shaking sheets out over the balcony is my way of calling them to feed. If it is the same pair, we probably won't see any ducklings again.

The Coots and Moorhens came out into the garden for food during the cold spells and now the garden birds are costing us a fortune in bird seed as there are so many of them. Robins, Blackbirds, Chaffinch, Great and Blue tits, Long-tailed Tits, a couple of Wagtails and no doubt a lot more I have forgotten or not seen. We haven't noticed any Kingfishers yet but that doesn't mean they are not around.

Eurasian Otter – Five Fun Facts

- Otters first inhabited the British Isles in the Cromerian Interglacial period (500,000 years ago), long before humans.
- Over 100 different scent components of otter droppings have been identified. About 17 of these are thought to contain information on sex, age and even individual recognition, which can be used by other Otters.
- Otters can dive as deep as 14m under the surface and spend 4-6 hours a day in water foraging.
- The Otter can only hold its breath for 20 seconds as it dives for its prey.
- Otters can close their small ears and nose when under water.

With thanks to One Kind Planet: <https://onekindplanet.org/animal/otter-eurasian-european-or-common/>

HCS Facebook

Contributed by Rachel Burgess

Wildlife sightings around Haddenham and Aldreth over the months of October, November, December and January from the Haddenham Conservation Society Facebook page. Please join the Facebook page and share sightings and photographs for us all to enjoy. If you are unsure of what you might have seen, ask on the page and it's likely another member will be able to assist with identification.

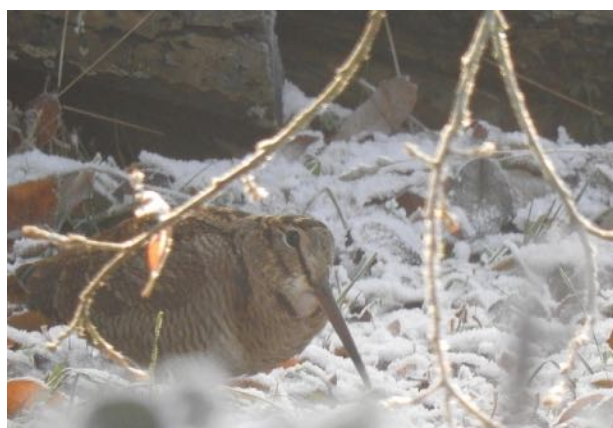
Six Cattle Egrets & 1 Siskin. *11 October* Aldreth. SS
 Wheatear. *13 October* Haddenham. DD
 Two Egyptian Geese, 49 Whooper Swans & 1 Corn
 Bunting *23 November* Ewell Fen. SS
 300 Whooper Swans. *23 November* North Fen. SS
 Wren *1 December* Aldreth. LB
 25 Fieldfare, 5+ Redwing & 450+ Whooper Swans
12 December Long Drove/Dam Bank. SS
 1000+ Whooper Swans *12 December* North of
 North Hill. SS
 Common Snipe *15 December* Witcham. SD
 Woodcock *17 December* Haddenham. BY
 Woodcock *18 December* Haddenham. BY
 Blackcap & Small Tortoiseshell *24 December*
 Aldreth. SS
 Startling Murmuration *29 January* Haddenham. RG
 Startling Murmuration *30 January* Haddenham. RG
 Two Ravens & 1 Blackcap *31 January* Aldreth. SS



Cattle Egret. © Simon Stirrup.



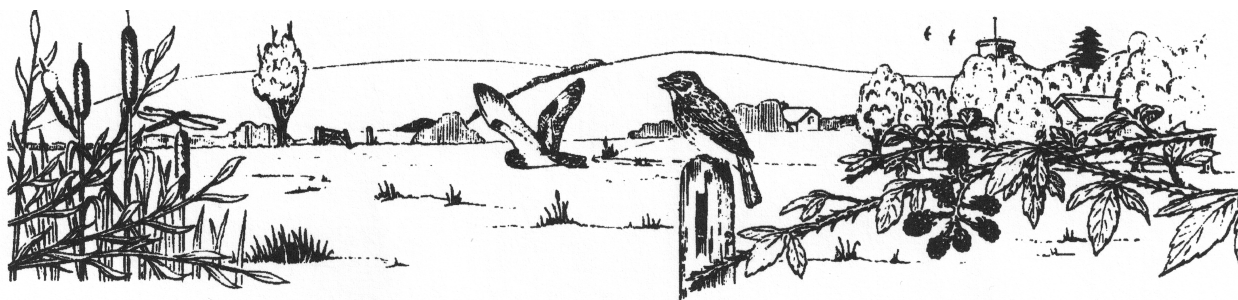
Wren. Laura Burgess.



Woodcock. Barbara York.



Redwing. © Simon Stirrup.



WINTER TALKS

Indoor meetings are held at the Arkenstall Centre, Haddenham on the second Tuesday of each month at 8.00 pm.

Members free. Non-members welcome for a nominal fee. All are welcome to stay for a (free) drink and a chat after each talk

14 March

New Life on the Old West

Howard Jones, Project Manager, tells us how to improve community green spaces in the Fenland Countryside.

11 April

Day-flying Moths

Bill Mansfield, Cambs County Moth Recorder, gives a general overview of these wonderful creatures.

9 May

Ponds and Associated Wildlife

Laura Osborne, of Beds, Cambs & Northants Wildlife Trust on how the wildlife is doing and what we can do to help.

Bring and Buy Plant Sale

The Green. Saturday 29 April 9:30-11:30am

We will be holding our usual yearly plant sale. We also hope to have a selection of cakes and other produce but that will depend on what people bring.

Our plants are often unusual perennials and some vegetables from well-stocked local gardens. The money raised goes towards paying for the winter talks.

So, bring what you can, plants, produce or cake, and head back home with new plants and something to go with that cup of tea.