

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

SUMMER 2023

The Committee for 2023/24 is:

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Sheila Dickerson	749443
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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 2024

Individual: £10 Family: £15

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 £3.00 per person per session.

Common Dolphins in the River Great Ouse

Contributed by Simon Stirrup

Over the years watching cetaceans has provided me with many special moments: Humpbacks in Antarctica, California and Cape Verde, Orca in Shetland, Belugas in Norway and Svalbard and Hector's Dolphins in New Zealand, although none have been as surprising as an encounter on 31 August. That morning I was fortunate to be offered a lift on a narrowboat travelling along the River Great Ouse to look for two dolphins that had been reported from Bluntisham earlier. As we travelled up the river there was no sign and I wondered whether they had left or there had been a mistake. When we rounded a bend, I could see a cabin cruiser cautiously approaching with two people stood on the bow filming with mobile phones and ahead were two distinct dark curved fins – dolphins! Suddenly, they were around the bow of our boat and the clear water provided good views of two Short-beaked



© Simon
Stirrup

Common Dolphins and I could hear them taking breaths as they surfaced. Their cream-coloured flanks and flippers along with dark eye area and eye stripe allowed for easy identification. The animals were an adult and calf. The calf always remained in close attendance with the adult. The views were so good that fine scratches across the head of the adult and the duller colouration of the calf were visible. On several occasions one of the dolphins created splashes by jumping and landing on its side.

The exhilaration of seeing dolphins so close to home and 72km (45 miles) from the open sea was coupled with concern as to what would happen to them. Would they be able to find their way safely back to the coast? I feared that this story would not have a happy ending.

The following evening, I walked down to Brownhill Stauch and spent two hours watching the dolphins. Other people were there, respectfully watching from the bank and the Stauch. The dolphins were mainly swimming backwards and forwards along a channel of

deeper water. For much of the time the calf kept close to and alongside the adult, although to a lesser extent than the previous day. The dolphins were not disturbed by the occasional boat that passed along the river and through the lock. However, when a cabin cruiser parked at right angles to the river the dolphins became agitated and swam rapidly down river. Interestingly, the dolphins were seen near Earith Sluice and although they approached the New Bedford River seemed to be deterred by traffic crossing the bridge.

I posted news of the dolphins on the Haddenham Conservation Society Facebook page (which only has 200 members and restricted access) to allow other members the opportunity to see them as they could be easily viewed from public footpaths along the river. This was the only place where I posted, although details were then picked up by local media.

On Saturday, boat traffic on the River Great Ouse predictably increased and disappointingly some people in small boats harassed the dolphins which was irresponsible and illegal as they are protected by law from disturbance. By coincidence, I was away over the weekend on the Isles of Scilly and saw numerous pods of Common Dolphins there, including a mother and calf.



© Simon
Stirrup

Tragic end

Events then took a tragic turn. On the evening of Saturday, 2 September, the juvenile dolphin was found stranded in reeds on the edge of the New Bedford River, near Pymoor, and when extensive efforts by the British Divers Marine Life Rescue and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service to refloat it failed, and with no sign of the adult, it was euthanised on welfare grounds. On Monday, 4 September, the adult dolphin was found dead near Earith. The body showed no sign that it had stranded, and it was probable that the animal had died a day or so earlier. It is possible that the adult and calf were not related.

Why were they there?

Common Dolphins are very rare in Norfolk with the species only recorded for the first time in 1943. Records are increasing, perhaps due to global warming, but the species is not seen annually. This rarity, and a tendency to avoid estuaries and shallow water, makes this inland occurrence particularly notable.

What caused the dolphins to travel so far inland? Their appearance coincided with a period of high spring tides. These tides may have funnelled them into the mouth of the River Great Ouse north of King's Lynn and then pushed them past Denver and far inland. The calf may not have had the strength to swim against the resulting strong current.

Interestingly, a single Common Dolphin was seen in the Wash, near the Frampton Marsh RSPB reserve in Lincolnshire on 3 September and was the first record for that area. The dolphin was leaping high out of the water which may indicate that it was disorientated and was attempting to determine where it was.

Other records in Cambridgeshire and elsewhere

Inland records of dolphins are rare. Apparently, marine dolphins can survive in freshwater for a while, but the reduced buoyancy causes exhaustion, their skin begins to slough, and the lack of saltwater minerals is detrimental to the recovery of damage to the skin.

There appears to be only one other recent record of a Common Dolphin in Cambridgeshire – one in the River Nene in August 2020 which was found dead there on 29th. Elsewhere, there have been inland records of

Common Dolphins in the River Dee at Chester in August 2013 about 32km (20 miles) from the sea and in the Thames at Wandsworth, London, in November 2017 (this individual later being found dead). There are more inland records of Bottle-nosed Dolphins, perhaps because this species occurs more commonly in estuaries.

Finally

Despite the tragic end for the two Common Dolphins that arrived at Bluntisham these lost animals are generally treated with more compassion than in the past. During the First World War a Bottlenose Dolphin appeared in the Thames and the director of the Natural History Museum ordered it to be slaughtered. It was then served to members of the press in the museum's dining hall. Thankfully, our attitudes have changed since then.

Autumn in the Gallery Garden

Contributed by Ann Biggs

Summer leaves on a swallow's wing, having warned of his going for days, while martins serenade the blue, gossiping as they pass. Pigeons warm a thicket of green leaves, cooing seductively in the hope of a final mating before autumn's chill. Long-tailed Tit, who never travel alone, barge across the Garden, with small birds in their wake, feeding furiously before an abundance of berries is snatched by bigger, hungrier ones. A tumble of yellow heralds Goldfinches, fighting over my studio feeders, scaring doves from a peaceful lunch.

In the wooded shade, a berried lord takes his lady standing proud, a beacon of colour, while young dragons lurk deep in the pond waiting for lunch.

Meanwhile in the Arts Centre café, Gemma's divine cakes tempt us to stray, winter warmers reappear on the menu and a rash of new workshops designed to amuse in the darkest parts of the year are on offer.

Now autumn heads softly through remaining summer blooms breathing decay, trailing winter at his coat tails. Migrants gather, tiny on parade, catching insects in a frenzy of feeding before they depart our shores.



'Stay awhile' we call 'and summer will remain', but they chatter on the wires, as swallows do, and go, taking the summer with them.

The Big Butterfly Count 2023

Almost 95,000 citizen scientists took part, conducting 136,719 15-minute Counts in gardens, parks, school grounds and the countryside. In total, over 1.5 million butterflies and day-flying moths were recorded from 14 July to 6 August. After an all-time low in 2022 of just nine individual butterflies spotted per Count, this year saw an increase to 12 butterflies recorded on average per Count.

However, this good news is in contrast with what the long-term trends are revealing. Released for the first time this year, these show that since the Big Butterfly Count started 13 years ago, many species have significantly decreased.

The most seen species was Red Admiral, followed by Gatekeeper. Large Whites and Small Whites took third and fourth spots.

Species that saw a decline from last year include Ringlet, Common Blue and Speckled Wood, all of which also show long-term declines.

Butterfly Conservation has free resources and guidance on creating a Wild Space available, including accessible, tailored, simple advice for anyone to have a go. <https://wild-spaces.co.uk>



Moths by Lamplight

Contributed by John Burgess

Having developed an interest in the natural world from an early age, the bright and beautiful things that fluttered among the flowers have always attracted me. Invariably the butterfly had the pride of place, vibrant colours with such a haphazard flight it seemed impossible to comprehend any accuracy in their erratic fluttering.

Always it seemed playing second fiddle to the butterflies were the moths. These creatures of the night (well mostly) were a completely different matter – they ate your carpets and clothes, entangled themselves in ladies' long hair (allegedly) and were generally regarded with disdain.

Over the years my appreciation of Lepidoptera (to give the scientific name) has improved. I hasten to add that I am certainly no expert, anything other than the very common identifiable species results in trawling the Internet trying to identify what I had considered to be something easy to pin down. When you consider there are some 2,500 species of moth in the UK, I guess they do require a more protracted search.

My moth trapping in the past has been restricted to shining a warehouse light at a projector screen, then checking every half hour. This system was very good for attracting gnats and, for some reason, earwigs. Occasionally, a moth would put in an appearance. Having been captured and identified, they were released. The list was far from exhaustive, but it had fired my enthusiasm, as well as covering my exposed skin with gnat bites.



Delta-winged Moth.

My niece and her daughters had been gifted the holy grail of a bespoke moth trap. Fortunately, I am on very good terms with her, and her kind offer to loan the trap was eagerly accepted. Anyone who has visited our garden will know that neat and tidy is not our domain, space for everything is the mantra. That being said, a certain amount of intervention is always required. The trap consists of a large square box with a light above an open top. Visiting moths attracted to the light drop into the box and nestle along the corrugated egg trays awaiting below.

The trap was set, and the lamp switched on. There was nothing further to do other than to wait until morning. In the cold light of day inspection of the trap

was nothing short of a revelation. The egg trays were carefully removed to a very wide-eyed audience. There must have been 30 or more of these incredible night-flying insects nestled among the peaks and troughs. They ranged from the massive Privet Hawk Moth and the exotically



Various moths on egg tray.

patterned Elephant Hawk to Angle Shades and Footman Moths. The variety of shapes, colours and sizes was amazing, from almost prehistoric looking individuals to absolute masters of camouflage, a variety way beyond anything I had expected or could have imagined.

Trawling through the Internet and various books I felt sure the moths must be rare or infrequent visitors, but no, this enormous wonder of the natural world is in our gardens on a regular basis. They are equally as beautiful as the butterflies of my youth but more varied than anything I could have imagined. They have wonderfully evocative names too like Swallow Prominent, White Plume, Canary Shouldered Thorn, Vapourer... the list goes on and on.

Since this first occasion we have run the trap in different months and locations, including one in the heart of Haddenham. Never has it disappointed with its results. My daughter photographs the moths, and many have been posted on the Society's website, not least to confirm identification.

A fantastic experience, but alas the moth trap has been returned to my generous niece. However, my own trap is now under construction.

So the next time of an evening, when you see a night-time insect battering itself against your window, don't dismiss it as a carpet-munching hair tangler, it probably has a name far more evocative and romantic than you can imagine.



Elephant Hawk Moth

Moths and Other Miracles

Contributed by Barbara Grafton

It is invidious to judge anything by appearance, but some insects will never look attractive in my eyes. Bristletails, earwigs, cockroaches, and many flies fall into this category, while the beauty of other insects draws me to them like... well, a moth to a flame.

Fortunately, I am no longer mottephobic, or afraid of moths, an inconvenient condition my mother unintentionally gave me when I was a child. Neither do I have entomophobia, a more general phobia of insects. Instead, I find them fascinating both to observe and to research.

I have also learned that I am never going to see every species of insect, given that they account for over 90% of creatures on the planet, the most diverse group of living animals and the largest biomass among terrestrial animals. Entomologists estimate there are over 10 quintillion insects (10,000,000,000,000,000,000) or about 200 million insects per human at any given time on earth, all flying, crawling, and hopping about or in some stage of pre-adult metamorphosis (egg, larva, pupa).

So far over a million have been described or classified out of an estimated two to 30 million species (no-one seems quite sure), and in Britain alone, there are over 24,000 species of insects. As we do for all animals, we classify insects hierarchically, e.g. *Bombus lapidarius*, the Red-tailed Bumblebee:

Kingdom: Animalia (all animals)

Phylum: Arthropoda (all arthropods)

Class: Insecta (only the insects)

Order: Hymenoptera (sawflies, wasps, bees, and ants)

Family: Apidae (bumble bees, euglossine, euglossines, honeybees, stingless bees)

Genus: *Bombus* (bumblebees)

Species: *Bombus lapidarius* (Red-tailed Bumblebee)

The effort involved in insect classification is extraordinary and is probably best exemplified by the dedicated efforts of the German-British entomologist Karl Jordan (1861-1959). In 1893 he began work at the Natural History Museum at Tring (now a division of the Natural History Museum) established by Walter, 2nd Baron Rothschild, specialising in Coleoptera (beetles), Lepidoptera (butterflies), and Siphonaptera (fleas).

Between then and Walter's death in 1937, Karl published over 400 papers, some co-authored with the Rothschild brothers, the financiers Walter and Charles. He personally described 2,575 new insect species, with an additional 851 in collaboration with the Rothschilds. A lifetime of dedicated work and 'just' over 3,000 new insect species described. And that was with the unprecedented resources of the Rothschilds. Walter's private natural history collection included 2,250,000 butterflies and 30,000 beetles, and Charles had amassed a collection of 260,000 fleas. In addition, Charles personally described about 500 new flea species and – with Karl in Egypt – discovered and named the bubonic plague vector flea, *Xenopsylla cheopis*.

It is not much of a stretch to imagine Karl Jordan and Charles Rothschild energetically and contentedly collecting beetles, moths and butterflies together at Wicken Fen, two acres of which the 22-year old Charles had bought in 1899 in order to establish the UK's first nature reserve with the National Trust. He had drawn the significant conclusion from observation that while some creatures are generalists and can survive in many different environments, most have found their niche in specific habitats. Destroy these habitats and you destroy or displace the creatures. He had seen first-hand the consequences of habitat destruction, believed that nature had intrinsic value and, with his wealth and influence, was in a position to act. In 1910, Charles established another nature reserve, a wetland habitat at Woodwalton Fen near Huntingdon, and two years later set up the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves, the forerunner of The Wildlife Trusts partnership.

Tragically, this banker bored by banking, a man of immense intelligence and foresight, and the pioneer of organised nature conservation in Britain, was to commit suicide at the age of just 46 in 1923, suffering from the brain inflammation encephalitis.

I have promised myself that I will often go to Wicken Fen and Woodwalton Fen, enjoy the peaceful, protected landscapes and wildlife and thank Charles Rothschild for what he gifted this country.



Researching this article led me to think about choosing a single favourite insect from millions of the most beautiful, such as dragonflies, damselflies, mayflies, beetles, butterflies, and moths. I concluded it's an impossible task, but I recalled a late summer afternoon in 2020 in the garden when I encountered two of my favourites, a bee and a moth.

Summer Air Show

Almost hidden in the fuchsia and lavender, grown giant in our rich Jurassic clay,
Half dazed with sun and scent I drowse to the hum and drone of bees and hoverflies.
They take no notice, banded beauties, coal-black, copper, iron, fen mud, cinnabar-red,
Marmalade and honey, tangerine and yolk; gold leaf and lemon sparkles in their fur.

They lift, land, push and quiver, part the fuchsia's swaying scarlet petals, crawl inside.
Maybe two seconds, sometimes five, and then reverse, emerge, repeat the dance.
They are quicker on the lavender's top-heavy fragrant spikes, their weight bowing them
Briefly as they forage between whorled flower-heads, trailing citrus on their wings.

I love the pretty commoners, *Bombus lapidarius*, the Red-tailed Bumblebee, the females
In deepest velvet black highlighting sassy orange rumps, the males with vibrant yellow bands.
The bustle and buzz intensifies, the air vibrates as if a human VIP has entered through a door,
Whispers of recognition rippling in rising and falling rhythms into the corners of a room.

Talk about celebrity, a genuine star, *Macroglossum stellatarum*, Hummingbird Hawk Moth,
Startling mimic of its namesake bird, flies in and hovers, wings beating 80 times a second.
The bees and hoverflies make way, the moth commands the field ten inches from my face,
And just like a hummingbird's tongue its long proboscis probes the fuchsia's elongated bells.

It never settles, denies my eyes the sight of flashing orange in the midst of subtler colours,
Criss-crossed lines of black, its weighty chessboard-patterned body and bird-like stubby tail.
No silent stalker of the night but a daytime raider, a Harrier held aloft on Pegasus engines,
Its penetrating buzz is in my head long after it has lifted off, top gun of my private air show.

Fen Boating

Contributed by Jez Reeve

Should two novices be let out onto the River Nene with a 15-metre-long narrowboat in the middle of a storm? Probably not. However, we did not know any better, so chugged off through the fen market town of March, barely able to see it through the torrential rain, towards our goal – a trip through the tidal waters of the River Ouse at Denver and onto Brandon Creek, where there is a very nice pub. We had estimated that we could get to Brandon Creek with a day and a half's boating, but we were wrong!

The 45-mile-per-hour wind slewed the boat across the narrow waterways and meant that tiller-work and engine were extremely strenuous. The first night we got as far as Upwell. We had seen a heron in a field, rail, cormorant, swans and loads of mallards – nothing in the air, apart from flying vegetation ... and unexpectedly several Chinese Mitten crabs at the Marchmont Priory Lock. The wind continued to blow a hooley, as they say in Scotland, so not much sleep was had that first night. It was becoming clear that our nature-spotting trip along the quiet backwaters of the fens was not going to be realised. But not wishing to be totally defeatist we scanned the boat chart and headed for Gladys Dacks mooring, half a mile outside Nordelph. Gladys Dacks' tumbledown old cottage on



Wind in the willows.

the river where the eponymous old lady had lived most of her life gave the name to the mooring site.

A couple of mallards were hiding in the reeds and one water rail snuck past in a lull in the hurricane. We had a beautiful view of the fields to the south-west; green lines under the massive bulging grey sky, trimmed by the choppy river. Relaxing it was not. There was a wonderful sunset and we got to see a united family of two swans and eight cygnets on our way back down the Wellcreek towards March the next day. We think that the 25-minute car journey to the Ship Inn at Brandon Creek will be a much more convenient way to go to the pub on our next outing. Jez & Chris

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

I have hardly watched the pond this summer. At first it was cold and wet; then it was so hot I stayed inside, concentrating on indoor chores. Then the garden and allotment went mad. So, this report on what's been happening on Guppy's Pond will not be rich in details.

First of all, the reeds. They have loved what the weather has thrown at us and are looking very healthy, unfortunately. So, they will have to be sprayed to keep them to a manageable number. This will be done at some point to be decided between now and spring.

The swans now. We were hoping to see some cygnets, but this year has been no different to the last two – no little ones again. Was it that cold wet start to the season yet again? The moorhens and coots on our side of the pond managed to rear one chick each all the way to adulthood, so that's a positive.

Brian saw a kingfisher but only once, so at least we know they are here, even if our observation skills have been very much wanting. We have seen all the usual garden birds, but not a Green Woodpecker, whereas we usually see them quite often and the lawn ends up with lots of funnel holes where they have been digging for ants.

Plenty of butterflies, even now, as well as dragonflies and damselflies. Very few wasps, even on ripe plums, and the ones that were around were very small. I haven't seen a decent size wasp for over three years now. These seem to be a completely different species. Where are the ones we



used to have? We did have a couple of Ragwort plants in the garden and each one had a few Cinnabar Moth caterpillars chomping away, so their population should be boosted next year. You will learn a lot more about them if you attend the winter talk on 14 November.

I managed to catch a Pigmy Shrew one of our cats brought into the house and put it outside – while keeping the cat inside. It was very active so I'm reasonably confident it was able to survive. We seem to have plenty of those, as well as Water Shrews.

I must have been watching more than I thought I had!

HCS Facebook

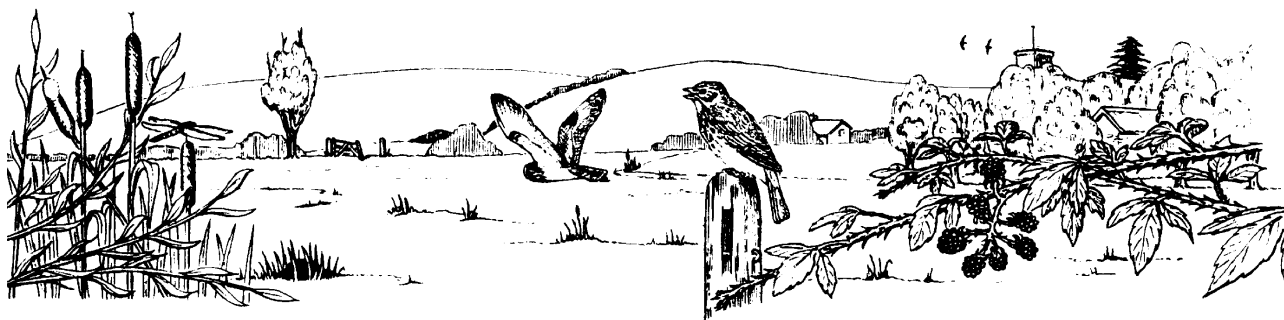
Contributed by Rachel Burgess

Wildlife sightings reported around Haddenham, Aldreth and Wilburton over the months of June, July and August from the HCS Facebook page.

Spined Loach & Stone Loach *10 June* Old West. SS
Cinnabar Moth *12 June* Haddenham. CB
Chinese Water Deer *18 June* Haddenham. CJ
Bee Orchid *18 June* Haddenham. SS
Crossbill, Grass Snake, 3 Red Kite, Lesser Whitethroat & Willow Warbler *June*. SS
Peacock Butterfly caterpillar *23 June* Wilburton. DG
Green Eyed Hawker, Hobby, Marsh Harrier, Red Kite, Grey Partridge, Yellow Wagtail & Corn Bunting *20 June* Clayton's Bridge. SS
Hummingbird Hawk Moth *23 June* Wilburton. DG
White Hairstreak Butterfly *29 June* Haddenham. SS
Harris Hawk *5 July* Haddenham. JS
Elephant Hawk Moth *30 July* Haddenham. HM
Common Pipistrelle Bat *2 August* Haddenham. Keith
Migrant Hawker Dragonfly *6 August* Haddenham. AG



Roesel's Bush Cricket (*above*), Field Grasshopper, Longhorn Beetle, Southern Hawker & Common Darter Dragonflies *10 August* Aldreth. LB
Leopard Moth *11 August* Haddenham. HM
Red Underwing Moths *11 August* Aldreth. LB
Brown Argus, Brimstone, Common Blue, Small Tortoiseshell, Holly Blue, Comma, Peacock, Red Admiral, Gatekeeper, Green Veined White, Skipper & Small White Butterflies *11 August* Aldreth. LB
Grey Dagger Moth caterpillar *15 August* Haddenham. TS
Poplar Hawk Moth *12 August* Haddenham. WC
Elephant Hawk Moth caterpillar *20 August* Haddenham. MA
Poplar Hawk, Pale Prominent, Canary Shouldered Thorn, Angle Shades & Swallow Prominent Moths *23 August* Aldreth. LB
Orange Swift Moth *27 August* Haddenham. AG
Privet Hawk Moth caterpillar *28 August* Haddenham. KL



WINTER TALKS

Indoor meetings are held at the Arkenstall Centre, Haddenham on the second Tuesday of each month at 8.00 pm. There will be no talk in January.

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

10 October

The Unique Life of a Ranger

Ajay Tegala will talk about his recent book, drawn from the diaries he kept as a ranger on Blakeney Point. Hopefully, he will have some copies for us to buy.

14 November

Day-flying Moths

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

12 December

Life on the Ouse Washes

Jonathan Taylor is the site manager at RSPB Ouse Washes.

13 February

Mammals in Your Garden

Peter Pilbeam from the Cambridgeshire Mammal Group tells us about the mammals we might find in our gardens.

Help Still Needed

We are still looking for a member/non-member keen to take on the task of arranging our Winter/Spring talks. No-one stepped forward after our plea in the May issue, so Sheila has kindly agreed to arrange talks for this coming season. However, after 10+ years, she would *really* like to hand this enjoyable task to someone else. She is willing to guide someone through the first year.

Please do consider it. Without our winter talks, the Society might well cease to exist in any meaningful way.

Sheila can be contacted on mobile 07917431912.

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