

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

SPRING 2025

The Committee for 2025/26 is:

Barclay Arnott	740500
Ann Biggs	740810
John Burgess	749441
Sheila Dickerson	749443
Carly Juneau	
Krisztina Lakatos, Treasurer	
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

UK Bats Under Attack

Contributed by Babs York

Perhaps you saw the item on several news channels or in *The Guardian* last year about how poorly some of our bats were doing in 2024? One of the sources was an ecologist based here in Cambridgeshire who also helps with bat rescue by collecting bats and bringing them to our rehabilitators. If you didn't, one of the points being reported was about the exceptionally poor state many of the bats being brought into care were in.



Membership information

Subscription rates
1 Jan to 31 Dec 2025
Individual: £10 Family: £15
If you wish to join the Society, please contact Krisztina Lakatos on krisztinalakatos@yahoo.com.
The membership will entitle you to receive our regular newsletter and will give you free entry to the seven winter talks, a saving of £3.00 per person per session.

From approximately the end of July until early October, we are used to taking in juvenile bats in poor condition. These are bats that have been born in the same year, usually in June or July. Once they are fully grown, they have a few weeks in which to learn to forage well enough to stay alive and put on weight so that they can overwinter in hibernation safely. During this brief period, their mum will continue to feed them, although this will tail off fairly quickly. This is the steepest of learning curves – just two or three weeks in which to master so many skills. Many of them die; bats in poor condition are easy for cats to catch or become road traffic victims. But some are found by members of the public who are caring enough to get them to a bat rehabilitator. So, we in the bat care business are familiar with many juveniles coming in underweight, some with injuries. By underweight, I mean around 20-30 percent less than standard weight. If the bat has no other complications, it can be rehabilitated in a short period and released back where it was found.

But in 2024 many of the bats coming into care were around half the normal weight. Getting these bats back to health is another matter altogether. They require a prolonged period of rehydration, with

special fluids being administered every hour or two, sometimes for a few days. It's the human equivalent to being in the Intensive Care Unit. Instead of these bats being in care for a week or so, they can take over a month, some even longer. Some had to be euthanised as their organs had already shut down. I have been a bat rehabilitator for 13 years and have never seen this level of starvation before.

Why were these bats so underweight? Of course, we have no way of knowing definitely the reason or reasons, although the lack of insects, which has been reported in other places, has likely had the biggest impact. This may have affected the mothers when they were raising the pups, resulting in poor quality offspring. Or the juveniles not being able to catch enough insects once their mums had stopped feeding them.

All the UK's bats are insectivorous and rely on a plentiful supply of their food. Bats aren't the only creatures affected by the lack of insects – every single one of us will be affected sooner or later.

News from Guppy's Pond

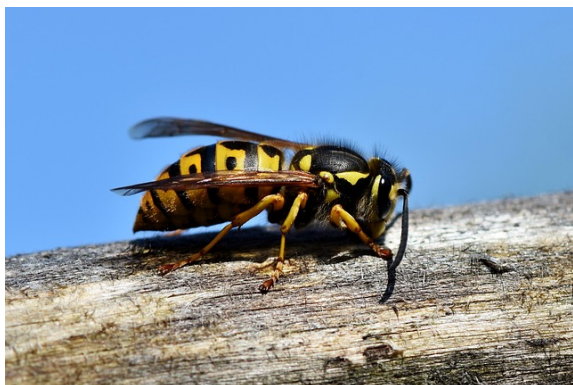
Contributed by Wendy Lanman

Bang on time, as May seems to be their month, hornets have been visiting our house. Three of them, just a few days apart. They seemed huge – at least 5cm (2in) of long, hard, vibrating body. Their wings are as long as their bodies and they make the most alarming noise as they throw themselves onto a windowpane.

It's just intimidation as they are nothing like as aggressive as wasps. They don't move as fast either which makes it quite easy to trap them under a glass, slide a card underneath and take them outside to freedom.

This is the most we have had in such a short time. One is the usual number, so their population might be growing or maybe we have a nest close by.

These are European hornets and are not a menace to honeybees which quite pleased me as I rather like them.



European Hornet. Image by Ralph from Pixabay

As if the lack of their food source wasn't enough, the current Government seem bent on scapegoating bats for the lack of progress in paving over our countryside. Their ignorance is staggering, and they should be ashamed of their approach and of betraying our wildlife.

Fortunately, most bats that come to me can be released back into the wild, and I hope that we won't see the same problems in 2025 that we experienced in 2024. I include a *photograph* (courtesy of Simon Stirrup) of one of the many bats recently released: a beautiful Barbastelle bat. These are rare bats and Cambridgeshire is one of their strongholds.

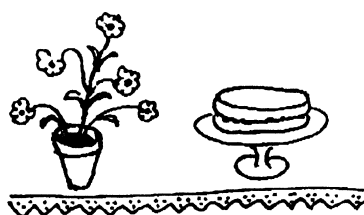
For more information on the UK's bats see the website of the Bat Conservation Trust <https://www.bats.org.uk/>

There's also a local group: Cambridgeshire Bat Group which has a website and Facebook page. <https://www.cambsbatgroup.org.uk/>

The swans have been sharing time on the nest so I'm guessing there are eggs, but this is still the same pair so they will probably not have young. It's really disappointing but life isn't perfect.

Coots and Moorhens are about, as well as a few Mallards; the carp are looking for spawning areas – and the sprayed reeds have not regrown!!

I'm sure a lot more has been happening – the garden is full of birdsong and the usual small birds visit – but I have been too occupied elsewhere to see it all. Hopefully, a future article will be fuller. In the meantime, vegetation has exploded and the sun is out. Enjoy it everyone!



Plant and Cake Sale

The plant and cake sale on 26 April was held on a windy but sunny morning and raised £213.50. This year sales were pretty evenly matched with the plants making £108.50 and the cakes £105.00.

Many thanks to all those involved.

Chair's Report 2025

In the Closed Cemetery on Church Lane we hosted Caring for God's Acre, the conservation charity for burial grounds, who put on a day of talks relevant to ecology, wildlife and management of churchyards. This has stimulated us to go for the Churchyard Conservation award, in recognition of the Closed Cemetery's rich wildlife diversity. More news of this in later newsletters.

Meanwhile we have installed two new bug hotels (thanks to John Burgess), and a new information board (thanks to Ann Biggs for the painting, and Simon Stirrup for converting it to digital format). All these make a visit to the Closed Cemetery even more worthwhile. We have also been planting/sowing Cowslips and Yellow Rattle to bring on the wildflowers.

The noticeboard was paid for by New Life on the Old West (NLOW), who have also been helping with our long-term Turtle Dove project in Wayman's Pits, where we have planted additional hedge saplings to upgrade and further develop the hedgerow, and are beginning to develop wildflowers.

We have also been represented on the Parish Council's new environmental committee, which enables us to help shape council policy and activities in the area of conservation. In particular, we had input to the new grass-cutting contract, to specify appropriate seasonal cutting (with cuttings removed) in the Closed Cemetery, and also to ensure the trees and new hedge around the new recreation ground are kept well-watered and mulched. Meanwhile, Paul Mason's memorial hornbeam, which was planted last January, is doing well.

Finally, we continue to help manage Nine Acre Wood in conjunction with the Woodland Trust.

We now have regular work sessions – *Conservation Action* – on the mornings of the first Sunday of every month at 10.30. Just turn up if you feel like it – to be on the mailing list for information about upcoming sessions, please email me at chris@cprescott.net

You can read more about *Caring for God's Acre* here <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/> and more about NLOW here <https://www.newlifeoldwest.org.uk/>

Chris Prescott
8 April 2025



Bug Hotel in the Closed Cemetery.



Information board with artwork by Ann Biggs in the Closed Cemetery.



Turtle Dove. Image by Marcel Langthim from Pixabay

Restorative Evening

Contributed by John Burgess

Since my early days of sitting beside the river fishing, an anomaly with the weather has always left me somewhat perplexed. As dusk falls a certain calm descends over the proceedings. A balmy stillness occurs, the wind drops and for half an hour or so a halcyon serenity persists.



It was during such a time that I cycled to Nine Acre Wood. The local birdlife was the only soundtrack, a Green Woodpecker yaffling in the distant line of trees proved my point. I have a friend whose knowledge of birdsong leaves me in awe. Walking with her is an amazing experience – from her vast knowledge, she identifies a plethora of birdlife, some of which I've rarely seen, others more common but no less valued.

Nine Acre Wood has some new residents. It was obvious from the outset as I walked along the inside path, the incessant arguing of the newly established rookery dominated the soundtrack. If you look to the top of the trees at the river/drove corner, their position is punctuated by a multitude of nests within the canopy. Why Nine Acre Wood has suddenly become their new residence of choice is anybody's guess. It will be interesting to see if anything changes due to their presence. Having passed below the rookery and briefly silenced their noisy banter, a Chiffchaff (one of the few birds I can identify) sang its distinctive notes, adding to the soundtrack. For those without a knowledgeable friend, a smartphone app called Merlin is available free online and has proved an entertaining revelation to the variety of birdsong around our garden (some scrutiny is required).

There has been an explosion of growth within the wood over the last few months; it has transformed from its skeletal form to an abundance of lush green foliage. During the summer there has always been a fair amount of cow parsley; this year it is growing with possessed passion. The gentle flowers caressed my shoulders as I continued along the interior path and my work boots were given an unexpected polish by the lush grassy fronds at my feet.

As I progressed through this serene landscape, a sense of calm descended upon my soul – a contrast from the chaos and incessant bustle of modern life. It was a good place to take a breath, relax and reflect.

The outer path was equally entertaining, black poplars at the far end are now magnificent specimens, their deeply fissured bark showing every day of their character.

A buzzard called as I walked towards the gate, not an uncommon bird of prey but extremely impressive, its mediaeval cries identifying its whereabouts. Having left the wood, while cycling along the drove, two Mallard arose from the drain beside me. Flying in perfect formation they complained noisily at having their slumber disturbed by my presence.

It was an outing (Rooks arguing aside) of calm, serenity and solitude – a perfect antidote to the maelstrom of everyday life. Long may it continue.



Tracey Mentions the Ravens on the Mound

Contributed by Jez Reeve

In conversation with Tracey Scott, smallholder at Enchanted Hill Farm, she explains how she shares everything with the wildlife around her.



'This is my earth mound, which will be moved back around the house eventually to embed it into the hillside. But I have been using it for some time, maybe a year now, to leave offerings for the birds and night mammals. When I have any bones or carcasses left over for different reasons from meat processing, I put them on this mound and feed the birds. I've had jackdaws, magpies, crows, ravens, kites and buzzards.'

So how long does it take from putting the remains, the animal remains, up there to the birds arriving?

'Same day usually. I put a lot up there one day and came back the next day after putting a wildlife camera there because I wanted to capture some footage. And everything had gone, the lot, but obviously the foxes had come overnight as well. Yeah, and unfortunately, the wildlife camera had been on test, not on run, so I did not get any footage! All of it went. Once, when I left a deer carcass, an entire rib cage and spine, on the mound, the next day Matt found it up on the roof of the house. So it had been dragged or carried in flight 50 metres from where I left it. Amazing! But we regularly see kites and buzzards and recently I've seen a pair of buzzards. The buzzards have always been here. The kites came over in the last eight years of us being here. The ravens have only been here, perhaps the last four years. That's great.'

I think people might be interested in why you have these carcasses to dispose of. I think you breed dogs. Do you have the carcasses to make dog food?



'So, I make my own raw dog food by buying in carcasses. Sometimes, if my freezer is full and my fridge is full, I leave some outside on the mound. Or, if it is too warm, the carcass will start to turn, and cannot be given to the dogs, so I would put it on the mound because the scavengers like rotten stuff. So, it's a treat for them and it doesn't waste the product. Nothing is wasted. So if any deer stalkers give me any deer, I'll put the entire carcasses, after taking the meat off, right on the mound as well. Everything gets offered up to the mound when I don't require it, or I have too much of it. And so what happens to the bones that are left, as obviously the animals are generally just after the meat on the bones, is that I collect them, especially the skulls, and then use them for odd pieces of taxidermy. It's a sellable product afterwards and then you can actually advertise it as bird-cleaned. Sometimes the fox will carry things away so there is nothing left.'

Image from FreePrintableStencils.com

Local Talent

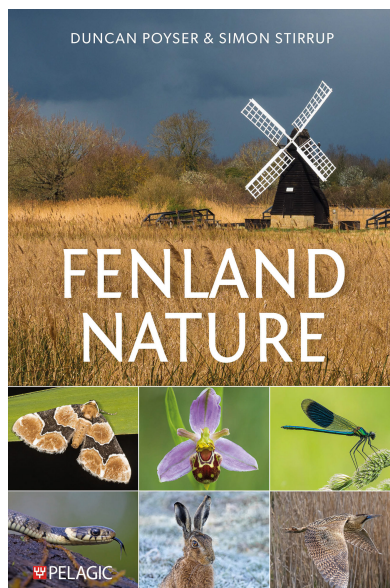
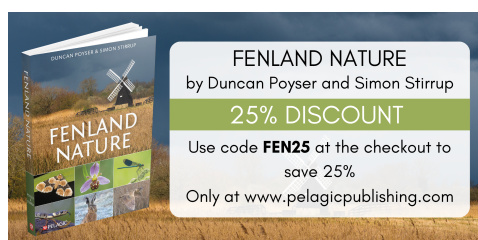
Two longstanding HCS members have been hard at work behind cameras and on desktops over the last few years and we are delighted to report on their achievements.

Fenland Nature

Fenland Nature was published on 6 May by Pelagic Publishing. It is a collaboration between Duncan Poyser, who provided the text, and Simon Stirrup, who provided the stunning images – nearly 300 of them. The 376-page-book focuses on the natural history and ecology of the Fens, past and present.

For a flavour of the book treat yourself to this u-tube video, which also features the work of fellow Cambirders Ben Green (music) and Tony Fulford (who provided the field recordings used to make the bird soundscape). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxZxbPldfil> If you want to set yourself a mini challenge, why not try to identify all 28 of the species (2 are non-avian) that feature in the recordings.

If you order the book direct from Pelagic Publishing, you can make a considerable saving. <https://pelagicpublishing.com/products/fenland-nature>



Duncan Poyser and Simon Stirrup

Book events

Toppings Ely on Thursday 19 June
7.00pm at the Methodist Church, Chapel Street, Ely CB6 1AD.

Early bookers will get a discount of £8.00

<https://www.toppingbooks.co.uk/events/ely/duncanpoyser/>

Wicken Fen 3 July

WWT Welney – date to be decided

Some addictive webcams

Ely Cathedral Peregrines
<https://www.elycathedral.org/plan-your-visit/things-to-see-and-do/peregrine-falcons>

Storks in Sussex
<https://www.youtube.com/live/s0liN8AzykQ>

Ospreys at Loch Archaig
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/osprey-cam/>



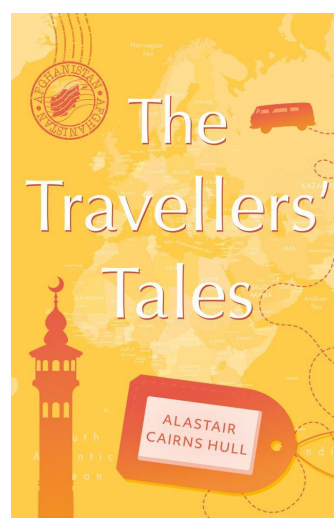
Two of Simon Stirrup's stunning images – Hare and Bittern.



The Travellers' Tales

Alastair Cairns Hull has spent five decades travelling to remote bazaars in unfrequented corners of places such as Afghanistan and Iran and he has now written a novel inspired by his travel experiences. It is set in the 1970s when the overland trail to India and the Far East was open and followed by adventurous young people from Europe and North America.

The Traveller's Tales is due to be published by Troubador Publishing on 28 May. It will be available through Alastair's website thetravellerstales-book.co.uk, from the publishers <https://troubador.co.uk/bookshop> and to order from local bookshops. The paperback will be £10.99 or download as an e-Book for £4.99.



HCS Facebook

Contributed by Rachel Burgess

Wildlife sightings reported around Haddenham and local villages over the months of January, February, March and April from the Haddenham Conservation Society Facebook page. Please join the FB group and share sightings and photographs for us all to enjoy. If you are unsure of what you have seen, please ask on the page and it's likely another member will be able to assist with identification.

8 Bewick's Swans 12 January, Aldreth SS
 Nuthatch 15 January, Nine Acre Wood SS
 Green Sandpiper 15 January, Church Fen Drove SS
 Young Kestrel 24 January, Haddenham HJ
 Stonechat 17 February, Aldreth DG
 Grass Snake 25 February, Sutton ACS
 6 Roe Deer, Fox, bats, Tawny Owl 28 February, Aldreth SS
 Treecreeper, rookery with 6 nests 2 March, Nine Acre Wood SS
 Pair of Reed Buntings 4 March, Aldreth SS
 Green Sandpiper 7 April, Dam Bank Drove SS
 Cuckoo & Swallows 22 April, Aldreth JB
 2 Male Wheatear 25 April, Dam Bank Drove SS
 Ashy Mining Bee 26 April, Haddenham BY
 Grey Partridge, Yellow Wagtails & Roe Deer 27 April,



Ashy Mining Bee Babs York (above); young Kestrel Helen Jagger (bottom left); Grass Snake Alison Campbell-Smith (bottom right).



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