

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

WINTER 2024

The Committee for 2024/25 is:

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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

A Peach of a Find

Contributed by Simon Stirrup

On 10 November, Susan and I walked from Aldreth taking in Nine Acre Wood, the Old West River and the Causeway. Wildlife expectations were low, but I had a pleasant surprise as we walked along Church Fen Drove. There were a few fungi growing on a dead branch lying on the verge and I navigated some deep muddy tractor ruts for a closer look. On examination, I could see that the bun-shaped caps of the fungi were a pinkish/orange colour overlaid with a distinctive reticulated pattern. I was confident that this was a species that I had wanted to see for a



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.

long time. To confirm the identification, I used the Obsidentify app on my mobile phone. The app stated, with 90% confidence, that they were, as I had suspected, *Rhodotus palmatus* – the Wrinkled Peach. Many of the caps had 'gone over' but there were several in perfect condition. I was not able to identify what type of hard wood they were growing on or where it had come from.

Wrinkled Peach has been described as "a strong contender for the title 'Most Beautiful British Mushroom'" and it is certainly a striking and attractive fungus. The cap is a peach colour with a network of interconnected pale ridges across the surface. The gills on the underside of the cap are pale pink and the paler stem has no ring. Apparently, the stems can weep a bright red liquid, rather like blood.

The fungus prefers to grow on dead and rotten Elm wood, but will grow on a variety of other hardwoods including Ash and Horse Chestnut. It tends to grow on dead wood where the bark has been lost. The fruiting body is produced from autumn to winter. When I checked on 25 November all the caps had 'gone over'.

The common name for *Rhodotus palmatus* is Wrinkled Peach, but it is also known as the Apricot Fungus, Rosy Vein-cap or Netted Rhodotus. The unusual features of *Rhodotus palmatus* made it difficult for taxonomists to decide on its classification, which has led to an interesting taxonomic history. It was assigned to the *Rhodotus* genus in 1926, although this taxon has been transferred between various families since.

The Wrinkled Peach is not poisonous, but neither is it edible.

This fungus is scarce in the UK. However, it probably occurs in most woodlands in Cambridgeshire, because of the abundance of Elm trees. It is rare in Fenland due to the lack of woodland, with few records shown on the NBN Atlas. The species benefited in the UK from the impact of Dutch Elm disease from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, but it is now less common than it was 100 years ago.

The NBN Atlas includes 817 records. These records form a broad band across central England extending east to Suffolk and Kent. There are a few records from Wales and none from Scotland. Most are from the month of October, the decade of 1990-1999, with a peak in 1997 and a steady decline since.

The species has a circumboreal distribution including parts of Europe, northern Africa, eastern North America and Asia. It is included on over half the fungal Red Lists in Europe, is protected by law in Hungary and is believed to be extinct in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The 'IUCN Red List of Threatened Species in 2019' lists the Wrinkled Peach as globally 'Near Threatened'.

Finding this attractive fungus on the edge of Aldreth has been one of my natural history highlights of the year. This may represent the first record of this species for our parish. It demonstrates yet again just what there is to see and discover close to home.

January Thoughts from the Gallery Garden

Contributed by Ann Biggs

Early January, after a mild Christmas, Britain is hammered by storms, bringing heavy snow, flooding and tempestuous winds. The Garden, in contrast, experiences an icy calm with still cold air bringing warning 'cronks' from Ravens, new to the parish, overhead.

Overnight hoar frost cloaks the trees. Below, every blade of grass and winter stem wears a white shroud. A rising sun sparkles in the clear, clean light and all is silence.

No bird sings, no rustle of tiny feet, my feeders attract the only life as starving creatures large and small, fight for crumbs. Ground is deep frozen and yields no food. I, warm and fed, bewitched by a winter wonderland, note the suffering of others.

By noon the fairyland is gone, humans sigh for a lost beauty but outside the birds make up for lost time, and a Robin sings.

The Gallery is now open again, after a Christmas break, from Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 4pm. 'START', our new café is up and running, starting each morning (Tuesday to Saturday) at 9am for the early risers, with Friday PIZZA night, 4pm to 7pm, for eating in or take out (pre order 07539745103).

Our volunteer band is growing with help needed – looking after customers in the café and Gallery, cleaning, gardening, administration etc. To find out more ring Ann on 07808628222, see the staff in the Gallery or come to our free volunteers coffee

mornings, on the first Wednesday of each month from 10.30 to 11.30am.

Events this year see four Artisan Markets, the first one on 23 March (10am to 3pm) with a variety of produce, makers, crafters, artists and lots more.

In the new Community Gallery we have work on sale from local makers, while the Main Gallery has work from established artists all over East Anglia as usual. Our second-hand hardback book shop is open daily (Gallery hours).

An exciting programme of workshops for 2025 is already accepting bookings. Call in for details at the Gallery, ring on 01353-749188 or visit the website on haddenhamartscentre.org.uk.

Meanwhile the Garden waits for Spring and new life, with an overwintering Blackcap on my feeders bringing hope.

Robin. Ann Biggs



Wind and Ice

Contributed by John Burgess

The changing weather patterns are a daunting aspect that we are all having to contend with. More and more we hear of records being broken in the extreme, heavy rain, low sunshine, dreary days and, to top it all up, stronger winds. Whenever we have experienced one of the named storms, (which we seem compelled to give a particular identity), it is with some trepidation that I cycle down to Nine Acre Wood.

When planted by caring volunteers, the strike rate for the saplings was extremely high. A consequence of this care is that when these young trees are growing in a densely competitive arena, the quest for light is paramount. This resulted in an abundance of tall slim trees, which unfortunately are prone to lateral forces. The weaker individuals regularly succumb to these persistent aggressive winds, falling to earth. Fortunately this is a positive thing; the gap in the canopy will allow light to penetrate deeper into the woodland floor, stimulating growth and promoting diversity on many levels. The downside is that anyone trying to walk around the path can be met by a barricade of branches which only the very stout of heart would attempt to cross.

Dedicated Work Party

As a consequence of these winds, braving the recent snow, and with the prospect of impending rain, a willing band of volunteers armed with a plethora of hand tools were determined that access should not be denied. After a couple of hours of concentrated effort, the pathways were restored, along with a most enjoyable morning experienced by these like-minded individuals. It was amazing how quickly even some of the larger recumbent specimens were dealt with.

Trimmed branches were piled together to create micro-environments for other woodland fauna; previous woodpiles already show a variety of life.

Many thanks go to the willing individuals who gave their time and energy.



Birch Polypore on dead trunk.



Fenland Skating

A recent snap of cold weather had my daughter and myself eagerly anticipating the prospect of some Fenland ice skating. Beyond the wood beside the river was an area of flooded washland shallow enough to freeze quickly and large enough to provide some fun. Whilst I was cycling along Church Fen Drove to check the freezing progress a little Egret floated silently aloft from the drain beside me. This bird, never seen in my youth, is now reasonably common, a majestic sight in all of its pure white finery, perplexing as to how it can possibly maintain its clean exterior in its damp muddy environment.

A screeching call to my left signalled the presence of a lofty buzzard, an amazing sight set against an azure blue sky, another fantastic success story absent in my early years.

Fortunately the mercury was in our favour; Sunday morning saw the skates retrieved from the attic and the winter weather gear in attendance. We entered the wood in what felt like a scene from Narnia. A hoar frost the previous evening had transformed the interior to a magical place, icing frost had coated every exposed branch leaf and extremity. As we walked along the frozen path, the skeletal branches were woven above us in a white lace corridor and the frost-nailed leaves barely made a sound beneath our feet.

Once on the frozen washland, a deft stillness hung in the air and the silence was all enveloping. There is a particular sound when a skate runs across the ice – a low drumming which reverberates through the ice, vibrating your feet and legs and subsequently stirring your soul. Neither of us is Torvill or Dean but it was a magical experience and a wonderful place to be. Memories were definitely made that day.

I can't pretend that it wasn't an effort on a cold frosty morning to drag myself from a warm and comfortable house to the frozen riverside. I didn't see any rare birds or very many birds at all, but it was just a case of being there.

Enchanting (and Enchanted?) Hares

Contributed by Barbara Grafton

I have always loved hares and first knew of them from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and Aesop's *Fables*. But I waited over fifty years to see a real one, on a mid-morning in Aldreth. Larger than I imagined, with a prominent nose, black-tipped long ears and bright, watchful amber eyes, it was delightful.



Symbolism and Superstition

If you look at any art form, hares are there: on ancient mosaics, carvings, jewellery, medieval manuscripts, Albrecht Dürer's life-like drawings, and today the universal graphics showing them staring dreamily at the moon. For thousands of years and across cultures, hares have been symbols of femininity, fertility, renewal, the cycle of life, magic and the Underworld. The Ancient Egyptians had a hare-headed goddess, Wenet. When the Romans invaded Britain, Julius Caesar observed that the Celts refused to eat hares as they led the souls of the dead to the afterlife. Both Celts and Vikings attributed hares with shapeshifting and other magical powers. Witches were believed to do evil deeds while in the form of a hare, including causing hare lips in babies and drying up the udders of cows. In 1662, the accused Scottish witch Isobel Gowdie admitted shapeshifting: *I shall go into a hare, With sorrow and sych and meickle care; And I shall go in the Devil's name, Ay while I come home again.*

Cornish superstitions say a white hare presages storms, or is a young woman seeking revenge on

her faithless lover. For centuries in Central, Southern and Eastern England a hare seen in a town meant an outbreak of fire. An 1866 news item from Ely described a 'foolish hare' entering the city and being 'hotly pursued by dogs, cats, boys, and men . . . many persons being certain that Ely was to be visited by a fire'.

Not a Rabbit

Sometimes mistaken for each other, hares and wild rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) are separate species and differ in aspects of biology, behaviour and ecology. There are two species of hare on the UK mainland (and one in Ireland). The only native (here for c.120,000 years) is the mountain, or blue, hare (*Lepus timidus*). Found at altitudes above 500 m in Scotland, the Isle of Man and the Derbyshire Peak District, it turns white in winter for camouflage. The second species is the European brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*), the subject of this article. Radiocarbon dating of bones indicates they arrived (along with chickens) about 3,000 years ago in the Iron Age. Most common in rural parts of the Midlands and Southern England, the arable farms of Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, and Norfolk are particular strongholds. Their fur is reddish-brown or greyish-brown with yellow flecks, becoming darker and denser in winter to retain heat.

Vital Statistics

The body of an adult hare measures 50-70 cm (20-28 in), with the tail adding 8-13 cm (3-5 in). Bucks (males) weigh 3.5-5 kg (7.7-11 lb), and does (females) a little more at 4-6 kg (8.8-13.2 lb). Their hind legs are about 1.5 times the length of the front legs. When differentiating hares from wild rabbits, the most obvious signs are that hares are noticeably larger, and have much longer ears: 12-15 cm (4.7-6 in) on hares and 7-10 cm (2.8-4 in) on rabbits.

Life in the Fast Lane

The hare is extraordinarily athletic. The UK's fastest wild land mammal, it can sprint up to 70 kph (45 mph). To put this in perspective, Usain Bolt's record for fastest human is 43.5 kph (27 mph). The hunting lurchers set on them illegally by poachers and hare coursers can attain the same top speed, depending which dog breeds have been cross-bred. Hares also have sharp claws that enable fast turns and swerves, and can rapidly slow to a stop to evade and confuse predators. They can cover up to 3 m (10 ft) in a single bound, and 'pronk' (jump high while kicking out their legs).



There's a good chance of spotting 'boxing' hares any time over the next few months, ideally pre-dawn and just after dusk. The expression 'Mad as a March Hare' refers to this boxing behaviour (see *left*), which is part of their courtship: bucks demonstrating their fitness and does fending off their unwanted advances. But hares are not just mad in March. The breeding season is long; leverets (*below*) can be born any time between March and October to does only six months old. Depending on weather conditions, does can have three or four litters of 2-4 (or up to 6) leverets each year by different bucks, after a gestation period of 6 weeks. Unlike burrow-dwelling rabbits, hares dig out several temporary nests ('forms') in fields, long grass, or under hedgerows. The forms are shallow but will conceal most of the adult hare's body below ground level. To reduce predation, leverets are born

with fur, good eyesight, and can hop within hours of birth when they weigh just 80-100 g (2.8-3.5 oz). At 2-3 months they will be fully independent. Hares typically live 3-5 years in the wild if they survive predation as leverets.

Contradictory Status

Hares are a species of conservation concern and have priority status under the UK Biodiversity Plan. Despite this, they are the only game species in England and Wales not protected by a closed hunting season and so can be shot all year round (except Sundays and Christmas Day). That includes during the breeding season, so orphaned leverets can be left to starve (a clear animal welfare issue). However, we should be wary of thinking a leveret has been abandoned; the doe is usually nearby, returning to feed her young at sunset. Transferring your scent to a leveret by touching it could potentially lead to rejection by the doe.

Usefulness to Humans

Hares have long been hunted for sport and for food and fur. Their meat is lean and flavourful, ideal for stews, casseroles, sausages, pies, and 'jugged' (the entire hare slow-cooked with vegetables, red wine, juniper berries and blood). The fine, soft fur was once highly valued for gloves, hats and coats. It is still used in fly-tying.



Destructive Tendencies

Hares are undeniably destructive and, in large numbers, can cause huge damage. In spring and summer, they tuck into grasses, clover, weeds, herbs, carrots, lettuce, cabbage and peas. In autumn and winter, they turn to grain crops such as wheat, barley, and oats, plus pasture, and twigs, buds and bark of shrubs, and saplings of fruit and hardwood trees. The cost to agricultural businesses can be substantial, not just in crop damage but also in preventative measures such as fencing, netting, tree guards and repellents.

Threats

It is estimated there are 500,000 to 800,000 brown hares in the UK. The population has dramatically declined by c.75% since World War Two. Humans are, by far, the main cause, but hares have many natural predators. Mainly foxes, but also stoats, weasels, badgers and domestic dogs catch injured adults or young leverets. Similarly, common buzzards, peregrine falcons, and barn owls will all take vulnerable hares. Severe weather conditions cause food and shelter scarcity, and make hares vulnerable to diseases and parasites. Distressingly, the viral disease Myxomatosis has now jumped from rabbits to hares, although it has not to date caused mass population collapse.

Human-related pressures include habitat loss and fragmentation from intensive farming and development; land drainage; loss of grassland, mixed farmland, wildflower meadows, field margins, and hedgerows; grass-cutting and ploughing; and use of pesticides and herbicides. Hares are often killed on the roads, while poaching, illegal game hunting and hare coursing – all increasing – also contribute to mortality rates.

Conservation

East Anglia may have sufficient populations of hares, but elsewhere they are increasingly scarce. Conservation groups like the Hare Preservation Trust raise awareness and advocate for stronger protections. The Countryside Stewardship Scheme and other agri-environment schemes have helped farmers adopt practices that benefit hares, including wildlife corridors, hedgerows, copses, field corners and boundaries, wildflowers and tall grasses, reducing pesticide and insecticide use, and controlling fox populations.

Nothing compares to seeing these beautiful mammals in the wild. Aldreth, Wimpole, Wicken Fen, and the Ouse Washes are all good locations, and Welney Wetland Centre run guided Hare Walks from November to February. Just watch out for a white one! If getting out and about is impossible, two brilliant best-selling books on hares will provide lots of information and enjoyment:

- *The Private Life of the Hare* by John Lewis-Stempel explores the natural history, poetry, folklore and conservation of hares (2019)
- *Raising Hare* by Chloe Dalton recounts how a political adviser and foreign policy expert in the UK Parliament and Foreign and Commonwealth Office reared a leveret during lockdown, transforming her life (2024)

Hares feature in excellent works of fiction, mostly for children:

- *The Great Adventure of Hare* - Alison Uttley (1931)
- *The Little White Horse* - Elizabeth Goudge (1946)
- *Masquerade* - Kit Williams (1979)
- *Guess How Much I Love You* - Sam McBratney (1994)
- *Hare* - Zoe Greave (2016)
- The 'Spellchasers' trilogy - Lari Don (2017)
- *The Hare and the Moon* - Sophie Shaw (2019)
- *Hare House* - Sally Hinchcliffe (2022)
- *The Magnificent Moon Hare and the Foul Treasure* - Sue Monroe (2022)
- *The Hare-Shaped Hole* - John Dougherty (2023)
- *Hesper the Hare* - Laura Timberley (2024)
- *The Golden Hare* - Paddy Donnelly (2024)
- *Hare's New Dress* - Julia Donaldson (April 2025)

Let us hope hares are allowed to thrive, because – as John Lewis Stempel wrote:

'To see a hare sit still as stone, to watch a hare boxing on a frosty March morning, to witness a hare bolt... these are great things. Every field should have a hare.'

Images: Alert hare Péter Kövesi <https://shorturl.at/0bzM3>
Boxing hares Steffi Wacker <https://shorturl.at/a3d54>
Leverets Autumnalis <https://shorturl.at/DGBu9>



Old Burial Ground

For some time now an information board for the old cemetery in Church Lane has been under construction.

The Conservation Society has had a long association with this parcel of land. Founding member Freda Croft spent many an hour pruning, cutting grass and planting seeds to improve the diversity of the area. A memorial bench and seat in her name within the boundary walls are a welcome addition. Many members and volunteers have been involved over the years to make it the wildlife sanctuary that it is today.

Funding from New Life on the Old West, Heritage Lottery Fund and Cambridgeshire Acre was made available for the sign, local artist Ann Biggs came up

with a wonderful design with an impressive level of detail for the picture. The information board was subsequently produced, then recently installed by a group of volunteers, within the bounds of the cemetery just inside on the left.

Many thanks to those involved with its production and installation. It is a brilliant asset to an enchanting area.

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

For a multitude of reasons I have not been watching the pond as intently as I could have. It has frozen over lightly during our few days of sub-zero temperatures, so the waterfowl have not needed to keep an opening of free water by sitting around the edge and taking turns to swim and keep the surface free.

Instead, we have seen a large number (30?) of Mallard ducks alight one day and stay for a few hours before going on elsewhere. We have a resident number of approximately a dozen ducks visiting our end of the pond quite regularly, the pair of Swans, Moorhens, Coots and Kingfishers are all still here as well.

I didn't do the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch but just looking out of the window I have seen Long-tailed Tits, Blue and Great Tits, Goldfinch, Ring-necked Doves and three different types of pigeon, as well as a Pied Wagtail.

I found hedgehog poo during a mild spell about a month ago and, judging by the size of it, the producer must have been of a good size too. Squirrels regularly test the bird feeders.

Bank Voles, Pigmy and Water Shrews are about, in addition to mice and – dare I say it – rats. Being close to water these are creatures we know are about and they keep themselves safely distant from us and do no real harm, as long as their numbers are low.

The reeds haven't started growing yet and we hope that the last treatment has been effective in controlling their spread. As the days get longer and warmer, we shall have more flowers to feed the emerging bees, although they already have a decent buffet offering. I'm really looking forward to

seeing the big fat bumblebee queens out and about again at last. They have plenty of nesting sites in vacated Bank Vole holes. So, just an ordinary normal time here at Guppy's Pond for a so far mild but wet winter.



heartofenglandforest.org

HCS Facebook

Contributed by Rachel Burgess

Wildlife sightings reported around Haddenham, Aldreth and Wilburton over the months of October, November and December from the HCS Facebook page. Please join the Facebook group 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.

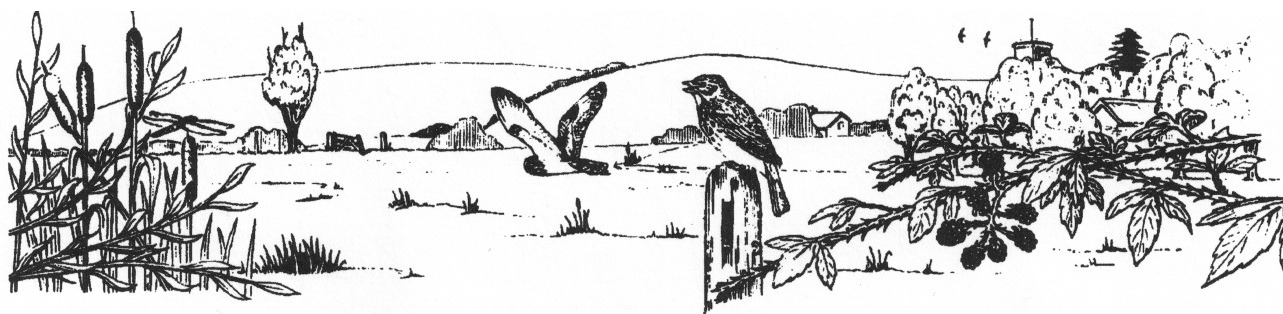
100+ Redwings 15 October, Haddenham BY
 2 Great White Egrets, Little Egret & Golden Plover 25 October, Haddenham SS
 Wrinkled Peach Fungus, 47 Yellowhammers, Little Egret, Cormorant, 6 Mallards, 3 Moorhen, Buzzard, 2 Kestrel, Green Woodpecker, Kingfisher, Skylark, 6 Fieldfare, 3 Redwing, 5 Reed Bunting & 25 Long-tailed Tits 10 November, Aldreth SS
 Comma Butterfly 11 November, Aldreth RB
 50+ Pink-footed Geese 12 November, Aldreth SS
 Great White Egret, 12 Roe Deer & 1 deceased Chinese Water Deer 25 November, Haddenham SS
 Redwings, Blackbirds, Goldfinches, Great Tits, Blue Tits, Doves, Jackdaws & Robins 27 November, Aldreth RB
 118 Whooper Swans 12 December, Haddenham SS
 450+ Whooper Swans, 30+ Roe Deer, Great White Egret, Red Kite, Corn Bunting & 2 Chinese Water Deer 30 December, Aldreth SS



Chinese Water Deer (top) and Whooper Swans (bottom).
 © Simon Stirrup



© Simon Stirrup



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

11 February

Cetacean Conservation: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Greg Donovan will be telling all.

11 March

Antarctica

Dr Keith Makinson, oceanographer and drilling engineer at British Antarctic Survey: How exploring Antarctica's hidden depths will help us understand how it will affect us all.

8 April

Welney through the Seasons

Tony Winchester, Welney Wildlife Trust, will talk on how global warming is affecting the area.

13 May

Think Global – Act Local

Peter Bates, chair of the East Cambs Climate Action Network, will talk about what ECCAN has achieved over the past four years.

Plant and Cake Sale

Just a reminder that this will most likely take place on the last Saturday morning in April on The Green. Look out for the posters. Bring as many plants as you can and any produce you wish to contribute. And/or buy what others have to offer. All proceeds will go towards paying for the winter talks.