

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

SUMMER 2024

The Committee for 2023/24 is:

Barclay Arnott	740500
Ann Biggs	740810
John Burgess	749441
Sheila Dickerson	749443
Susan Everitt	740352
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

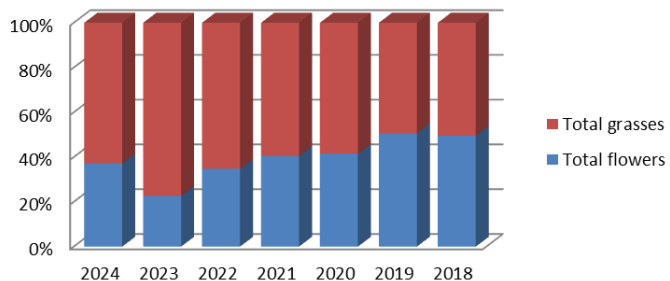
HCS website:
www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk

A Good Year for Yorkshire Fog!

Contributed by Jez Reeve

Not sure if Yorkshire had much fog this Spring, but Haddenham had an abundance of Yorkshire Fog grass in the Wildflower field at Fairchild's Meadow, when the annual count was undertaken on 23 June this year. Twenty square metres of the field were closely surveyed in five disparate 2 x 2m squares. The results may well suggest that, despite, or because of, the increased rainfall this year, the ratio of flowers identified to grasses has increased. Last year flower species were less than 21% of the sample and this year 37%.

**2018-2024 flowers and grasses total
%ages**



Membership information

Subscription rates
1 Jan to 31 Dec 2024
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.

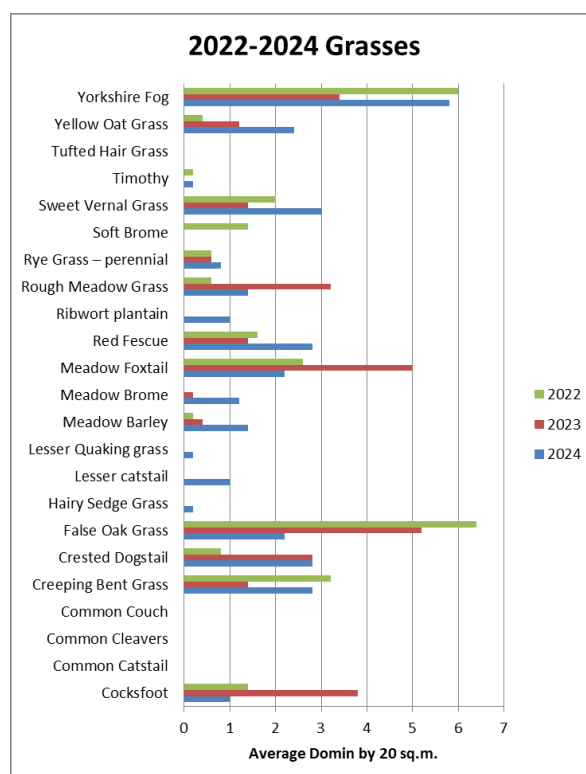
Yorkshire Fog, or *Holcus lanatus* in Latin, has a lovely purplish hue, with the seeds growing in dense tufts. It can grow about one metre high. When seen in abundance across a field the purple haze was once likened to the lingering smoky fog from the industrial chimneys of Yorkshire of the industrial revolution, hence 'Yorkshire Fog'.



This year the incidence of previously observed flower species within plots was 16 of a total of 26. However, a further 8 species were identified in the field, but not in the selected survey plots. Similarly, 18 of the total previously observed grass species were recorded within the designated plots, with a further two identified elsewhere in the field. The continuation of this long-term survey helps to monitor the health of the field, which is a natural haven for invertebrates, particularly butterflies. The presence of Yellow Rattle, which is doing well, is a good sign for the development of the field as a wildflower meadow, as it helps reduce the balance of grass in favour of flower species. Last year and this year cows will graze the field in summer, trampling in the seed of the Yellow Rattle and encouraging it to spread.

Thanks as ever are due to the trusty volunteers who turned up to the two-hour recording session: Ann, Andrea, Chris, Heather, Jez, Lydia and Tim.

Jez@jrworks.co.uk



Autumn Thoughts from the Gallery Garden

Contributed by Ann Biggs

Autumn brings a sadness to the Garden; death thrives amongst blooms of summer as flowers wilt and wither to winter brown and rebirth must wait for Spring. Summer visitors are leaving; Swifts in early August after a rise in numbers screaming down the High Street in evening frenzy. Our warblers stuff themselves with juicy berries, blood red in morning chill, before long flights across unfriendly seas, while young Red Kites stalk the heavens, searching for territories of their own. Hedgehogs snuffle in heaps of dead leaves, searching for a winter nest, plucking earthworms from soft earth before winter freezes the ground to ice.

A message to those who read my words.

Your Arts Centre needs you!

We want to recruit new volunteers to help out in the centre, especially in the run up to Christmas. We are now opening three days a week, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, which will increase to four days for December, with Sunday opening until Christmas. Volunteers will be welcome in all areas: helping in the Gallery and Café or outdoor jobs such as gardening, DIY and painting. We would also welcome help advertising events and workshops, spreading the word through social media, putting posters out, etc.

Please come and chat to our friendly staff or ring Ann on 07808628222 for information on how you can join our team. Our Christmas event,

Handmade at Haddenham, is on Saturday 26 October. Please come and support us, either by helping on the day or visiting the café for coffee and cake, and the gallery for presents.

We now look forward to the joy of a new year, with the return of all our friends and an exciting new year in every sense of the word.

Wood Warbler. Ann Biggs



Ann Biggs

Conservation Action

Contributed by Chris Prescott

HCS has a rich history of conservation action, from its origins planting the now established and thriving Nine Acre Wood. In addition, the Closed Cemetery has been encouraged to develop as a wildlife habitat, which was much praised by various local wildlife experts who gathered as we hosted *New Life on the Old West* for their *Well-kept but Wild* workshop in May this year.

This workshop triggered (among other things) engagement with *Caring for God's Acre*, an Ely Diocese initiative to encourage wildlife and diversity in churchyards, both closed and open. This programme offers awards for churchyards (bronze, silver and gold). The Closed Cemetery already scores well, and it is hoped to achieve the bronze award next year.

In the meantime, we have, many thanks to John Burgess, installed two bug hotels to encourage insect life (see page 4). Do visit and admire John's amazing work! We have also continued the practice of cutting (thanks to Mike Overall) and removing the growth on the left-hand (wildflower) side. The cuttings have

been piled into heaps that will provide good over-wintering habitat.

It is intended this autumn to plant spring bulbs on the left-hand side, near to Freda's seat, and sow some wildflower seed.

Another ongoing scheme involves Wayman's Pits, which we are promoting as a habitat for Turtle Doves, in association with the RSPB Operation Turtle Dove. (You may remember Bethany Kiamil – now Tomlinson – giving a talk in 2023 about Turtle Doves.) This is a long-term project that will involve work on the hedge on the northern side (planted in about 2012), in order for it to thicken and become a Turtle Dove friendly habitat. We look forward to working on this with *New Life on the Old West* in the New Year. It will also involve creating a foraging plot to give Turtle Doves something to feed on.

Alongside this, it is intended to develop the Pits as a wildflower area, again a long-term project. We have made a start by having this year's growth removed (many thanks to the Steam Rally for this).

Finally, it is intended to create a wildflower area on the approach to Ovin's Rise.

There will be workparties, beginning in October and continuing through the winter, to develop all these projects, so please keep an eye out for notices, especially on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/909424869414105/>.

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

It's getting cold and wet again after a short, dry summer. It rained and remained so cold in spring that our heating went on automatically in June. Plants were very late to flower, so we have seen very few bees or other insects. There were a few Brimstone, Comma, Holly (or was that Common?) Blue, Red Admiral and Peacock butterflies, but mostly both large and small Cabbage White butterflies. Nothing like the usual numbers, so very worrying for what is to come next year. However, the Potter Wasps have again constructed their pots in the outside casing of our water softener and the exit holes in them mean that their eggs hatched, and the young have reached adulthood. They will be welcome again next year.

The Swans remained here for most of the 'summer', disappearing from time to time. They have a second residence in the steam engine field across the road. As preparations started for the rally and humans invaded the field with their noisy cars and equipment, the Swans decided to come back to Guppy's Pond, creating quite a traffic jam as they waddled down the road. Luckily, Andy King saw them and shepherded them expertly across to safety. A few years ago, he had been a volunteer with a charity helping wild

Swans so he knew what he was doing. When everything went quiet a couple of weeks after the rally, the Swans waddled back to the field pond, creating havoc on the road again as they did so. They got back safely thanks to some very careful drivers. No doubt they will be crossing again at some point. (Note to self: maybe we should put up a couple of 'Swans crossing' signs there.)

A clattering of ten or twelve young Jackdaws flew above



the pond a week ago, chasing each other in large swoops, calling as they went, obviously having a great time. Their antics made me think of young dolphins in wildlife documentaries. Where the Jackdaws suddenly appeared from, I have no idea; we usually only see them singly or very few at a time.

The Moorhens had a second brood, with one chick reaching 'teenage' status, but it disappeared suddenly, so now only the adults are present, living on friendly terms with a pair of Coots now that the breeding season is over. The Kingfishers are here, as are the usual Great-, Blue-

and Long-tailed Tits, Blackbirds, Robins and Dunnocks. We didn't hear the loud chatter of Reed Warblers this summer as the reeds are so much thinner.

The straggling reeds in the middle have been sprayed so, hopefully, we shall be able to have a boating day next year. We need to monitor their growth carefully throughout next spring and summer before being able to know for sure that rowing through the channel will be safe.

Oh – we did have three Bee Orchids in the lawn after all! In a couple of months I should be able to find next year's orchids' leaves if I look very carefully.

Cake and Plant Sale

Now is the time, as you put your gardens to bed and remove the unwanted self-sets, to pot up those little plants in readiness for the plant sale at the end of April. The money raised will go towards the speakers we book for the winter talks. We shall all be very grateful.



Extreme Joy!

Jez Reeve

Extreme joy is what I felt
In homage to the queen, I knelt
She had stayed the night
Robbed of her flight
Because of my folly
A bee hotel, on a washing pulley.

The rain had come
Our towels were rescued
And she had clung
In folds had nested
Until the card and jar
Had trapped her
Swift procession to release
At last, at joy, at ease.

17/3/24



Bug Hotels

Contributed by John Burgess

The old cemetery in Church Lane has been overseen by the Conservation Society for a considerable number of years. There have been various projects to improve the ecosystem within this environment, many of which remain in place. One such improvement was made in 2020 when the children from the primary school created an insect sanctuary. This consisted of a stack of four pallets with the gaps and edges filled with various materials within which insects could make their home/overwinter.

Unfortunately, it was subject to some unwanted attention, which resulted in the aforementioned structure being pulled apart and split to the four winds.

Having had the subject of the missing microsystem raised at a meeting, as well as being an obvious oversight for the area, a plan was hatched to redress this issue.

I charged myself with overseeing construction. Various wooden elements of the new bug hotels were sourced from a skip at my work. And a wide range of fillings were kindly donated by various members of HCS.

Construction ensued, primarily within the constraints of the material sourced. Fortunately, this was very forthcoming, so two hotels were made, along with numerous rooms for the different media. The sections were covered with a close wire mesh, small enough to hold the material in the hotel but large enough to let in the residents. A roof was added, and the untreated wood was covered with insect friendly preservative.

They now weighed a considerable amount, requiring the collective efforts of Chris Prescott and myself to transport them to the cemetery. We placed one at the very far end, securing it to the cemetery wall, in the hope that this would help to keep it in place. The other was similarly attached halfway down the right-hand side wall.

Having built some smaller versions in my own garden a few years ago I was surprised by how quickly residence was taken up. Generally, this manifested itself by holes in the bamboo canes and pieces of wood being sealed up. It will be interesting to see how the new accommodation is received. Fingers crossed.

Bill Murrells

Contributed by Dick Newell

Bill Murrells was an extraordinary man: quiet, unassuming, and I got to know him through his work trying to help nesting Swifts. I first met Bill about 20 years ago, since when we have had many adventures together, usually involving a ladder. The last time was on 10 August when we both climbed two 30-foot vertical ladders into the belfry of St George's in Chesterton.

Amongst other things, Bill repaired church roofs, when he became aware that Swifts that may have been nesting under the eaves for decades, if not centuries, were being denied access to their homes.

Bill found ways to preserve these nest sites. Following on from this, he was one of the first (the first?) persons to pioneer Swift nest boxes in church belfries, with early projects here in Haddenham and St Mary's Ely.

The spectacle around St Mary's, with over 50 pairs of Swifts, in June and July is now, thanks to Bill's foresight, something to behold. Since then, nest boxes in belfries have been installed in many other churches around the country.

The Maltings in Ely once had a thriving Swift colony until the roof was repaired. Single-handedly Bill installed nest boxes under the eaves. This project has grown to 14 pairs of Swifts – more than were there before the reroofing.

It wasn't until 2021 that Swifts were officially recognised as being in trouble when they were put on the red list for birds. However, 25 years earlier in the 1990s, together with Chris Mead, Jake Allsop and others, Bill was a founding member of Concern for Swifts, a pioneer group who realised early on that Swifts were declining and that something needed to be done – Swifts have since declined by a further 70%.

Concern for Swifts raised awareness of the problem. In 2006, Cfs was renamed Action for Swifts. AfS is an organisation that generates ideas, does projects, gives advice and documents these experiences on its website. Much of this came from Bill.

In 2016 Action for Swifts was given a BTO Marsh Award for 'Innovative Ornithology' for innovations inspired by Bill.

Bill did a lot more than just Swifts. In 2020 he was awarded the Etheldreda Medal for persons



Bill Murrells in action.

whose service to the wider community is both 'generous' and 'outstanding'.

Every year, Action for Swifts has a stand at the Birdfair in Rutland. This is where many people in the Swift community would have met Bill.

When I put out the news to the Swift community about Bill's passing, I was overwhelmed by the number of warm responses that I received.

John Day, RSPB, wrote: "... Bill has done so much in collaboration with you over the years to further Swift conservation. His knowledge of architecture and vision of the possible whatever the situation was incredible."

Harriett Mead, sculptor and daughter of Chris Mead said: "... what an amazing legacy. I only met Bill a few times but of course dad would have known him very well. People like Bill are so important to conservation-proper: hands on skills and determination with a big splash of obsession thrown into the mix! I am so happy that Bill and Action for Swifts has done so much to help these beautiful birds. Dad would be proud of you and so glad that Bill dedicated his time and talents to Swift conservation."

Clare Darlestone, Concern for Swifts (Scotland), wrote: "Yes what was REALLY important about Bill was that he was not a 'birder' or a counter or a twitcher but a very down-to-earth practical lover of Swifts. He was in at the beginning of awareness of the decline and the need to conserve nest sites; before Swifts were a fashionable add-on to planners' lists, which made him also visionary.

I hope there are Swifts in his heaven."

Swift Brick Petition

Wildlife Trust Wales are asking for new laws to ensure that 'swift bricks' can be built into all new developments in Wales. It doesn't matter where you are, you can sign this petition and support work to protect these amazing birds. <https://shorturl.at/ZJFIO>



'Mists And Mellow Fruitfulness' for All

Contributed by Barbara Grafton

Autumn spans September until the end of November, and the opening line to John Keats' 'To Autumn' (1819) on 'mists and mellow fruitfulness' is for me the definitive description of the season. It is a perfect time to get out into the changing colours and sensations of the landscape, so here's a brief taster of the joys of autumn:

Breathtaking Birds

Autumn is an exciting time for birdwatchers. Vast numbers of summer visitors depart, from Chiffchaffs to warblers. But in their place will arrive spectacular swans, geese, ducks, and other water-birds, Waxwings (*right*), Fieldfares, Goldcrests, Redwing... and so many more exquisite species. There will also be increased numbers of the commoner birds such as Blackbirds, Chaffinches and Starlings as migrants from Scandinavia, Europe and Russia join our resident birds.

To see new arrivals, you can't beat Welney Wetland Centre (OS ref. TL527941 / Ouse Washes: OS ref. TL471860), which starts its Swan feeding by floodlight in November (they fly in around 4pm, and are fed at 6.30pm every Wednesday to Sunday). Welney has fantastic

activities for October half-term: <https://rb.gy/d20tg9>, plus an exhibition by own super-talented Ann Biggs until 31 October.

Do try and catch a Starling murmuration in November. Good locations are Maxey Pits near Peterborough (OS ref. TF12827); the RSPB Fen Drayton Reserve (OS ref. TL3469) where you can also spot rarities such as Glossy Ibis and Black-winged Stilt; and Paxton Pits Nature Reserve (OS ref. TL196629), which also offers low cost guided walks and free wetland bird surveys: <https://rb.gy/8u9m8a>.



Fabulous Fungi

One of the many joys of autumn is the sudden appearance of mushrooms and toadstools. Gloriously varied in appearance and habitat, they are ideal subjects for spotting on an autumn day out. Identifying, admiring, photographing or drawing, and leaving well alone are ideal approaches unless you are an expert, as a few are toxic, even deadly, and about 200 are hallucinogenic. As part of its 'Monthly Meander' series at Trumpington Meadows, our local Wildlife Trust is running a guided fungi walk of 2-3 miles on Monday 14 October from 9.30am to 12pm (OS ref. TL438549): <https://rb.gy/yvdklm>.

Fair Foraging

There is plenty of autumn wild produce to be collected in modest amounts to use in recipes and crafts but identification guides are recommended.

- **Nuts:** Beech/Mast, and Hazel/Cobnuts/Filberts can be eaten raw when ripe or toasted and used in salads and risottos; Sweet Chestnuts can be baked, roasted, boiled or microwaved, then used in stuffings, desserts, candies, and syrups; Walnuts can be eaten raw ('wet'), dried, pickled and added to numerous sweet and savoury dishes.

- **Fruits:** Blackberries, sadly now gone over, but wonderful raw, or cooked with apples, in fools, summer puddings, flapjacks, sweet sauces, wine and liqueurs; Bullace/Wild Plum, and Damsons, used in crumbles, preserves, fruit wine, liqueurs; Crab Apples for jellies (try in combination with rowan berries), liqueurs, mini toffee apples; Elderberries for wine, syrups, desserts; Rosehips, for wine, jellies, jams, teas, cordials/syrups; Sloes, for gin, whisky, preserves, vinegars.

- **Plants:** There are masses of tasty edible wild plants to try, but remember it is illegal to uproot any plant in the wild. Try nettles and dandelions, common sorrels, wild chervil, wild garlics, Hairy Bittercress, Rosebay Willowherb, Fat Hen, and Fool's Watercress.

▪ **Foliage:** Natural Christmas decorations look stunning, and foraging in gardens, field margins, verges, cemeteries, railway embankments, and woods (with the landowners' permission) or on common land will yield material for wreaths and swags, e.g. <https://rb.gy/uybh21>. Be careful with potentially toxic plants such as ivy, holly, laurel, spindle, mistletoe, acorns, rowan, and horse chestnuts.

Woodland Wonders

We don't need to jet off to New England for spectacular autumn colour. Although the least-wooded of all English counties, Cambridgeshire has some beautiful mixed woodlands. With or without accompanying children, there we can collect conkers, kick through crisp leaves, admire (and hug) trees, detect wildlife, or simply pause to immerse ourselves in the sights, sounds and smells of nature. Woods to visit include:

- Our own Nine Acre Wood, Aldreth, planted in 1995 with a mix of broadleaved species which provide a beautiful show of autumn colour (OS ref. TL444722)
 - Beechwoods Reserve, Wort's Causeway, near Great Shelford, fabulous beechwoods planted in the 1840s (OS ref. TL485547) <https://rb.gy/ze8drl>
 - Brampton Wood, Brampton/Grafham, 900+ years old (OS ref. TL 184 698)
 - Gamlingay Wood, (OS ref. TL 240 537), 1000+ years old, no parking
 - Hayley Wood, Little Gransden, excellent for fungi (OS ref. TL 294 537)

Wildlife Watch has free 'spotter sheets' for children, covering fungi, woodland wildlife, and trees, plus making a hedgehog house, care of nest boxes, and decorating trees: <https://rb.gy/s76p5q>. For a more organised event, there's a guided family activity in Trumpington Meadows' orchard, Cambridge (OS ref. TL438549), including making apple juice, on Saturday 26 October from 2-4pm – booking required: <https://rb.gy/uyyn1p>



Shaggy Parasol.

Other walks

Created by local residents, there are so far three circular historical walks through Haddenham. Pick up the leaflets at the Library and the Social Hub. For excellent bike and hike routes (for all ages and levels of fitness) around the village and further afield see: <https://rb.gy/gbv64e> and <https://rb.gy/a5n469>.

Phew! I've not even touched on wildlife-rich habitats such as rivers, lakes and seas (think otters, water voles, and Grey Seals at Blakeney Point), or fascinating species such as reptiles, moths, dragonflies, spiders, and beautiful bugs. But I've taken up enough space already.

Wishing you wonderful autumn nature and wildlife-spotting, wherever you go!

Images: Waxwing: Wikiwand
Shaggy Parasol: <https://flic.kr/p/2nRMPBx>

HCS Facebook

Contributed by Rachel Burgess

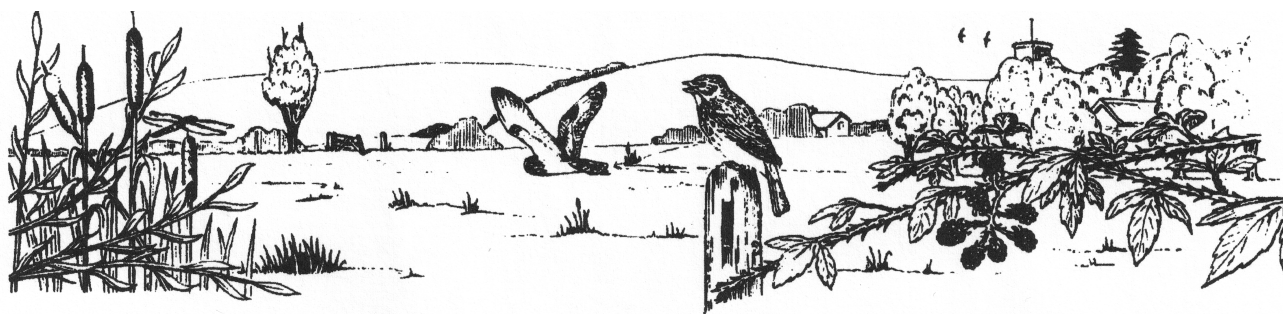
Wildlife sightings reported around Haddenham, Aldreth and Wilburton over the months of June, July and August from the HCS Facebook page. Please join the Facebook group and share sightings and photographs for us all to enjoy. If you are unsure of what you might have seen, ask on the page and it's likely another member will be able to assist with identification.

Marsh Harrier & Cranes, 1 June, Hillrow RN
Montagu's Harrier, 8 August, Aldreth SB
Green Sandpiper, 13 August, Aldreth SS
Yellow Wagtails & Wheatear, 16 August, Dam Bank Drove SS
Buzzard, 20 August, Dam Bank Drove SS
Merlin, 25 August, Dam Bank Drove SS
Swallow, 26 August, Aldreth JB



Merlin (top) and
Buzzard (bottom).
© 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

8 October

Kingfishers Bridge

James Moss, Manager of this local nature reserve, will take you through 30 years of 'Wildlife First' conservation there.

12 November

Farming and Biodiversity

Charles Shropshire, Managing Director of G's Farm Growers, will explain how they farm intensively in harmony with conservation and biodiversity.

12 December

Spitzbergen and Polar Bears

Richard Bashford, Tour Leader with Naturetrek, will take you to this island in Svalbard, northern Norway, and describe what is to be seen there.

October exhibition

Catch Haddenham artist Ann Biggs' awe-inspiring WWT Welney exhibition – on until 31 October.

You can meet Ann and find out how she creates her beautiful artwork on

Saturday 12 October 10.00-2.00pm.

<https://www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/welney/whats-on/events/ann-biggs-art-in-our-gallery>