PNNews

Conservation Group for the Prestwood Region including Great Missenden, the Hampdens, the Kingshills, North Dean and Speen.

Issue 45 **January 2018**

Chair's Chat

At the turn of the year this seems the right time to look back at what we have been doing, and forward to next year.

We have continued to maintain all our sites. We always welcome more people to our work parties so keep an eye on our website and regular emails with details of when and where we are planning to work.

Our usual pattern of field walks continued through the year. As well as the bird and flower walks in the spring, we visited the local churchyard in the autumn to see the large numbers of wax caps (Fungi) which are growing there, thanks to sensitive management of the area. Last year we pioneered a family-friendly walk, especially focused on children, around the autumn hedgerows of Prestwood. This was so successful that we have planned a further three walks in 2018 to see how the hedges change and develop.

Our talks included an evening by Tony Marshall on *Sex and the Single Flower,* Julia Lofthouse's talk *Rescuing Ratty* about water voles and at the AGM Roger Wilding spoke to us about *Fascinating Fungi.*

During August we took Prestwood Nature into Great Missenden library to try and interest the little ones in the wildlife that is all around them. Although it will be some time before they are old enough to wield a scythe at Boug's Meadow I hope we have awakened a love for nature that will stay with them all their lives.

Another initiative during the year was to run a pilot scheme for a Junior Photographic Competition which drew nearly a hundred pictures of wildlife from local school children. All the entries, including the award winners, can be seen on the picture gallery on our website. Have a look - some of the photos are mind-blowing.

As you can see, it was a busy and interesting year with several new ideas being promulgated. So what does 2018 have in store for us? Well, we shall continue to work on our sites and look forward to seeing the spring and summer flowers at Boug's Meadow; our programme of walks will include a stroll around Little Kingshill incorporating flowers, birds, geology and history and there will be three family-friendly walks to see seasonal development in the hedgerows - not forgetting the annual fungus foray in the autumn.

We have a very interesting talks programme – starting with a talk by Philip Horwood *How to Help Hedgehogs* in March, then in June Karen van Oostrum will talk about her experiences at *Cambridge Botanic Gardens* and Malcolm Brownsword will tell us about *Butterflies and Orchids* at the AGM.

2018's photographic competition is under consideration by the Council – we may let the adults have some fun too!

Hopefully there is something to suit all tastes. We welcome any ideas, features or articles that you may have and look forward to seeing you during the year.

Vanessa Rickett

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Great Crested Newt (Photo Geoff May)



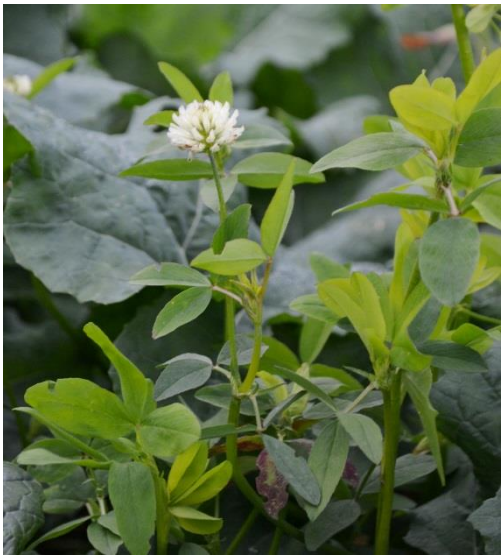
Citrine waxcap



Knotted cranesbill, Great Hampden churchyard



Orange-peel fungus



Egyptian clover, Hampden Bottom Farm

Members' News

The main news each autumn is naturally of fungi, although this year was not particularly good, especially for the woodland species. The interesting finds were all in grasslands and road verges. I conducted two walks of the churchyard at Holy Trinity in October and altogether we saw fourteen of the 23 waxcaps so far recorded there - a pretty good showing even if fewer than in 2016, and truly impressive for those people who attended. We also saw a few of the unusual club fungi and others, although these did not do so well this year. We even added a new species to the list, an attractive toadstool called Plums and Custard, so-called because it is purple on the cap and bright yellow underneath on the gills. On the first walk we also went on to Kingshill Common and saw eleven waxcaps around the cricket field there, plus some other interesting fungi like Green Brittlegill, Fly Agaric and Horse Mushroom.

Val and I had a couple of trips to Great Hampden churchyard, but the fungi were a bit disappointing this year (the management is far from ideal), although we did find the rare Citrine waxcap and a pinkgill *Entoloma lucidum*, which also grow at Holy Trinity. More interesting were two plants, both cranesbills. The pretty Shining Cranesbill, which has few sites around our area, was growing on John Hampden's grave, while Knotted Cranesbill was our first record for this garden escape, which was well established by newer graves at the southern end.

Other significant fungi were Oak Bolete (**Val Marshall**) and a brittlegill *Russula ionochlora* beside Nairdwood Lane (whose verges are very productive but are getting severely damaged by builders' vehicles - an increasing environmental threat locally); the brightly-coloured Orange-peel fungus in a garden lawn on Green Lane (**Frank Fermor**); a webcap *Cortinarius decipiens* in my own garden, growing with birch; Wrinkled shield and another pinkgill *Entoloma ortonii* at Prestwood Picnic Site; *Pholiota adiposa* growing at the base of a common lime tree in the avenue to Hampden House; and Potato Earthball in the section of Abbey Park east of the by-pass.

The highlight of this autumn was a large influx of Hawfinches in November, because of a poor crop of autumn seed in their East European homelands. A large flock settled around Great Hampden church (especially in the yews there), in a copse in a large arable field north of there where there was a good crop of hornbeam seeds, and briefly on hornbeam in Moat Lane, Prestwood (**Mike Collard**). They were seen by large numbers of twitchers from all around. While traipsing around fruitlessly (we never did see them!) Val and I did notice an unusual clover sown as an under-crop among oil-seed rape in the arable field. I checked with **Fiona** and **Ian Waller**, who farm this field, and they confirmed it was an experimental trial of Egyptian Clover, which is intended to fix nitrogen and maintain the fertility of the soil. I noticed it also in a field closer to their farm. In some ways this is a return to old practices - nitrogen-fixing plants like clovers, lucerne and sainfoin were sown over a hundred years ago in this area for just this purpose, although usually in a fallow period rather than with crops. It will be one to look out for in the coming years as an escape from cultivation, which might get established.

We saw Greenfinches around the church (a bird that has become rare in our garden) and a Kestrel perched in the largest hornbeam in the copse, which explains why the hawfinches were not there when we visited! The first report of Redwing was from **Tina Hillas** on 12 December (gardens on Wycombe Road).The other remarkable report this autumn was of an Otter just south of Great Missenden (**Mike Collard**). If only we could get a more regular flow back into the River Misbourne - we might be lucky enough then to see them more regularly, even as far as Boug's Meadow: how good that would be!

There were lots of Hornets around this autumn. It is important not to get too close to old hollow trees where they might be nesting. **Paul Heath** walked past one unknowingly in September and was stung (but fortunately survived). It may have been one in thick scrub in Lodge Wood that stung my ankle back in the summer and gave me considerable pain for the rest of the day. I noticed them feeding on ivy nectar on Denner Hill and tracked down a nest in an old oak by Newhouse Farm. With great care not to alarm them, I approached another nest in an old sycamore in Abbey Park, still active in November, to observe them at some length. Another visitor was less cautious. A hoverfly *Myathropa florea*, which lays its eggs in damp rot-holes in old trees, chose to investigate the same hole the hornets were using. They immediately converged on it and I have never seen a hoverfly fly so fast! It probably broke all previous records. It settled on the other side of the trunk, where it stayed shivering all over with the exertion. If it had got stung it would not have survived at all. (While examining these important old sycamores in the Park we found that sheltered clefts were packed with hibernating Garden and Brown-lipped Banded Snails, probably hundreds on each tree.)



Hornet nest in old sycamore

Mild temperatures encouraged other insects this autumn, too. **Shelley Mortimer** observed the caterpillar of a Pale Tussock Moth on Himalayan birch in Honorwood Close, Prestwood, on 17 September. **George Lewis** had a Speckled Bush-cricket in his garden on 24 October. The queen of the uncommon Large Garden Bumble-bee (the subject of a national Biodiversity Action Plan) was found hibernating at Boug's Meadow on 28 October. Red Admirals went on flying well into November (last record in Angling Spring Wood on the 6th). George Lewis again reported a remarkable occurrence on 14 December. A Peacock butterfly wintering on a west-facing wall of his house had been covered with snow for three days, but was still alive after it thawed, flicking the moisture off its wings.



Garden snails in cleft of sycamore

I examined a number of creeping-thistle seed-heads on 17 November for the presence of galls caused by the larvae of the picture-wing fly *Urophora stylata*. They have to be split open to find the gall. I found galls in 70% of the heads I inspected, a remarkable rate of attack, but the remaining 30% with mature seeds are quite enough to populate the whole countryside with creeping thistle! (These and other galls are covered by the latest chapter of our online Ecological Flora, which deals with the thistles.)

Geoff May reported Great Crested Newt (a protected species) in the garden at Idaho Cottage, Prestwood. We had recorded this species in an old pond in land beside the garden in 2011, when **Holly Bennett** was carrying out surveys for us. This was near enough to have possibly provided a recruiting ground for Sheepwash Pond when we restored it, but for some reason they have not so far colonised there. The Idaho Cottage pond is threatened by an imminent building application and we shall have to fight that one vigorously.

Tony Marshall



Pale tussock caterpillar (Photo Shelley Mortimer)

Council Member Portrait
Julie Hopton and Rose the Noctule Bat

Julie Hopton is a valued member of the PN Council where she is instrumental in sourcing speakers for our talks as well as leading children's events such as Creatures of the Night Safari at Boug's Meadow and Pond Dipping at Sheepwash Pond. She worked for many years as a Ranger for Wycombe District Council and has a great knowledge of the wildlife in our local area. She is also a Foster Mum for mammals (mainly bats) at St.Tiggywinkles and has looked after injured and orphaned bats for many years.

Julie has a Keepers Licence from Natural England and has cared for Rose, a noctule bat, who was found by the side of a busy road and had broken one of the fingers in her wing. Medical treatment to repair her wing did not work and she could not return to the wild, being unable to catch her prey or to get away from predators. Rose has a very gentle nature despite her injury, and has become an educational bat and an extremely valuable member of the Bat Group, teaching everyone from small children through to the elderly about these beautiful and amazing night-time flyers.

Over the years Rose has helped dispel a lot of myths and fears about bats and continues to visit schools, uniformed groups, WI's, gardening clubs and homes for the elderly, in fact anywhere people are interested in learning more about bats.

Julie and Rose were star attractions when Prestwood Nature visited the Great Missenden Library in the summer holidays.

Vanessa Rickett



Rose in Julie's safe hands Photo Alan Boutel

Microplastics? Let's start at home with Macroplastics in Prestwood.

We've all heard a lot about microplastics at sea and been appalled by the terrible conditions of birds and mammals being injured through ingesting plastic and the presence of plastic in their bodies. The scenes from BBC's Blue Planet struck a chord with us all. However, at a clean-up at Sheepwash pond in January we managed to collect about 40 plastic drink bottles from both the edges of the pond and the water, showing that this problem is just as much an issue locally as it is globally. It's not just bottles though, small plastic bags and sweet wrappers also littered the area and could easily have been eaten by ducks or the frogs and newts which inhabit one of the few areas of permanent water in Prestwood. There are lots of community-minded people in Prestwood who litter-pick, collecting rubbish that others have left or thrown down around our village. However, we need to make sure that we change the behaviours of our children and young people to discourage this antisocial activity. Whilst it's great to support international issues, there is a real need now right at home in the village.

Fiona Waller



Sheepwash pond 2013 after restoration

PN Butterfly Transect 2017

Weather conditions were suitable for butterflies in 22 of the 26 weeks available from 1 April to 30 September, with frequent periods of cool rainy weather through the late summer. Transect walkers were Virginia Deradour, Paul Heath, J Horwood, Howard Judge, Chris Lee, George Lewis, Tony Marshall, John Obee, David Page, Phillip Pratt, Sue Reynders, Kieran Sweeney, and MJ Webster. Thanks to all the walkers and the organiser Sylvia Bennett

Overall numbers

The total of individuals seen flying was 2004, slightly above average, and a marked improvement on last year. The number of different species was also slightly above average. **Brown argus** was low last year and did not recover - we did not see one this year; nor did we see any fritillaries. But other uncommon butterflies were still around - **small copper, small heath, dingy skipper** and **green hairstreak**. We even added a new species to the Transect - a **purple hairstreak** seen late in September when there were few other butterflies flying. It flew up from low vegetation in Meadsgarden Field into the top of an oak at the edge of Meadsgarden Wood (a new site for this species). 2017 was a good year for this butterfly nationally.

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Individuals	3191	730	1327	2020	2263	1679	1008	2353	2812	2858	1426	2004
Species	25	21	22	24	24	27	20	23	25	22	22	24

Numbers seen on any one walk varied from 9 (5 May) to 381 (1 July), but with only six weeks yielding over 100 (mid-June to early August), the main season was very truncated. Perfect conditions - high temperature, 100% sunshine, and low wind - never seemed to occur together.

Differences between sections of the transect

As usual Meadsgarden Field north of the Picnic Site had by far the highest total of individuals (779, 62% up on last year) and also the highest total per 100m (to allow for the different lengths of transect sections). The Picnic Site was used by more species than any other section (21 out of the total 24 seen altogether), although Meadsgarden Field came close with 18. The next highest species total was 14, at Stonygreen Bank (recovering chalk grassland like Meadsgarden) and Well Field (across the road from the Picnic Site). Stonygreen Bank is only a short section and it actually had the second highest total of individuals per 100m (more than the Picnic Site) and the second highest total of species per 100m (exceeded neither by Meadsgarden nor the Picnic Site, but a short section of old hedgerow and rough grassland on top of Denner Hill). Well Field is a long section and actually has low numbers of individuals and species per 100m - its numbers are also boosted by its vicinity to the Picnic Site and Meadsgarden Field. The poorest sections, as always, were the roads and woods, which also had low species numbers.

Species accounts

As always, the most numerous species was **Meadow Brown** with 1018, our fourth best year for it. It dominated the totals through June and August, getting off to a slightly earlier start than usual because of the high temperatures in June. It accounted for just over half of all sightings.

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Meadow brown % of total	54.5%	39.6%	50.1%	37.9%	30.9%	33.9%	57.6%	34.3%	39.1%	44.7%	33.1%	50.8%
Meadow brown nos.	1,739	289	665	766	700	570	581	808	1,099	1,277	472	1,018
Nos. other species	1,452	441	662	1,254	1,563	1,109	427	1,545	1,713	1,581	954	986

Most species numbers were below their long term averages, even though the overall total and the number of species seen were both very slightly above average. Most of the "browns" were slightly above average (**Meadow** and **Hedge Browns, Speckled Wood, Marbled White**) - but neither **Ringlet** nor **Small Heath**. **Red Admiral** had a decent year with substantial immigration in July and a surge in September which may have been a native brood from the July newcomers. **Small Copper** and **Orange-tip** also had slightly higher than average numbers. We are lucky to see any hairstreaks on transect, but we did see two this year, one **Green Hairstreak** and one **Purple** (as mentioned above).

The number of **Small** and **Essex Skippers** continues to plummet, although we did encounter 3 **Large Skippers**, which would normally be seen as poor but was at least better than last year's *nil points*. **Brimstone** failed to repeat the good results of the last few years, while the **Whites** have not had a good year since 2013. **Common Blue** recovered somewhat from two poor preceding years, but is still not near its average showing, while the **Holly Blue** looks like it may be in trouble. **Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Painted Lady** and **Comma** all did better than 2016 but are still not thriving.

Altogether, despite the slightly higher than usual overall numbers, most species are really not doing very well, this being disguised by the dominance of the Meadow Brown and its close relatives, which hanging on pretty well.

Butterfly of the Year

Each year we celebrate a butterfly that has done exceptionally well in the past year, with its best showing so far. In 2017 no species achieved exceptionally high totals, so I shall nominate for 2017 the species that was seen for the first time (even though we shall be lucky to see it again), **Purple Hairstreak**.



Butterfly of the Year – Purple Hairstreak

Tony Marshall

Flower Portrait 18

Lesser Celandine

This flower is one of our best harbingers of spring, usually to be found in flower at least by the beginning of March. Our earliest record so far is 12 January. This was along Green Lane, Prestwood, in the mild winter of 2015-16. There is a good chance of finding some in flower before the end of January, which is why it was chosen as the first species in our targeted flower-search project. By the time you get this newsletter someone will probably already have submitted a record, although fairly even low temperatures this year will probably mean the earliest record will go unbroken.

The lesser celandine is an appropriate spring flower because of its bright shiny golden petals and yellow central stamens looking like a sun's corona. Their splash of colour is unmissable at a time when everything else is brownly dank and dreary. The leaves, too, are somewhat glossy, dark green heart-shaped, often with pale green patches. You find them shining from hedgerows that have yet to get their leaves, or in woodland glades and edges, anywhere in the countryside or even in built-up areas.

The celandine was until recently classed with the buttercups, to which it is related, formerly sharing the same genus *Ranunculus* (as *Ranunculus ficaria*), but is distinct from other buttercups in many ways, so that it is worthy of its new separation. If botanists were unsure, our fungi have always been more sensitively aware of the differences, with rusts and moulds on *Ranunculus* and *Ficaria* being largely different species. Look on celandine leaves for the rusts *Uromyces trollii* - black patches and speckles on the stems and under the leaves, *Uromyces ficariae* - brownish bulges on top of the leaves, or *Uromyces dactylidis* - white patches underneath.

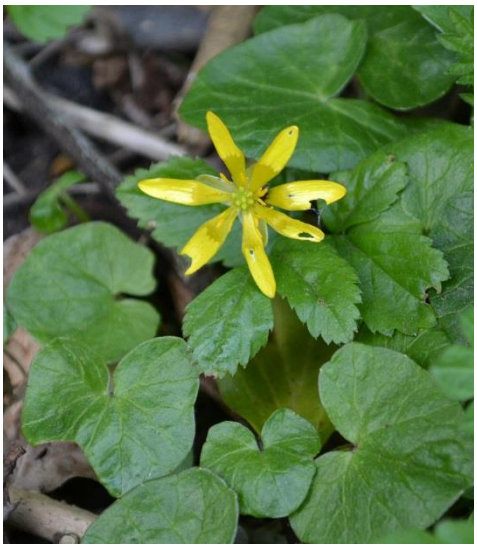
The first bright flowers will be our dominant subspecies *fertilis*, meaning fertile, because it is visited by early bees and flies, particularly queen bumble-bees just awake from their winter sleep, who gather nectar and pollen, the latter sticking to their hairy legs and being transferred to other flowers to fertilise them. There is another subspecies *verna*, which is common in the coldest darkest spots where insects are less likely to visit. These have shorter and fewer petals which are distinctly separated and fewer stamens, because they do not waste too much effort in attracting pollinators. They have another trick up their sleeves. In late spring they produce whitish "bulbils" (miniature bulbs) between the leaf-stalk and the stem. These drop off on to the soil and act as tubers to form new plants, so it matters little whether they get fertilised or not. There is also another foreign subspecies that is grown in gardens, *chrysocephala*, which has larger, even showier, flowers 5cm across (maximum 4cm for our native celandines). If you have this in your garden (or see it escaped), let us know, as we have no record of it in our area.

The Greater Celandine is a totally different yellow flower related to the poppies and growing on walls - the coincidence of name is unfortunate. "Celandine" comes from the Greek *khelidon* "swallow", from an ancient myth relating the bird and flower, but is appropriate anyway, as both are signs of returning sunnier seasons, although the celandine anticipates the spring, while the swallow waits until warmer weather has definitely arrived.

Tony Marshall



Subspecies *fertilis* with white-blotched leaves



Subspecies *verna*



Bulbil on ssp. *verna*

Long Serving Council Members Standing Down
John Obee and Fiona Waller

Both John and Fiona were elected to the PN Council in 2005, John as Chair and Fiona as Treasurer. Having served the maximum of six years in any one post as Council Members they decided to stand down at the end of 2017 after an admirable 12-year stretch.

Although John was a complete unknown to me, (Membership Secretary at the time), Tony Marshall (then Secretary) realised that John had the potential to be a good Chairman. He was right; John has been good natured, fun and actively involved throughout this time, spurring us on when necessary. He was Chair for 6 years and took on Boug's Meadow as project leader, a major role in itself, ably supported by his wife Valerie, as well as being involved in many other events. These include leading the yearly bird walks along the Misbourne to Shardeloes, and scrub clearance in Angling Spring Wood and at Prestwood Nature Reserve. A recent initiative at Boug's Meadow was the very successful Community Day held in conjunction with Chiltern Rangers following a grant from the Co-op (Great Missenden).



John and Fiona planting at Boug's Meadow

I had already met Fiona when she was elected Treasurer, a role she handled well, dealing with grant applications for Sheepwash in particular and The Living Tapestry projects. She was also Chair for 3 years. She took on the role of project leader for Sheepwash, which had been a completely neglected and very overgrown area - local residents had memories of a pond there somewhere! This area was transformed and the historic pond restored along with a dipping platform. The area is now used as an educational resource by local groups of children, and is a beautiful spot for rest and relaxation whilst watching nature. Like John, she has also been involved in many other events including the Big Lunch (Spirit of Prestwood) and shrub clearance at Angling Spring Wood. Fiona and Ian (her husband) have kindly held glow worm hunts/nature walks at Hampden Bottom Farm where their love and caring stewardship of the farm shines through.

During their time on the Council and whilst John was Chair, Prestwood Nature was honoured to be nominated and awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. This major recognition was only possible with the support of the members, various individual sponsors and local organisations.

Our grateful thanks go to John and Fiona for giving their time, energy, knowledge and using their skills over a considerable period in order to protect and enhance the quality of the natural environment in the area, and by encouraging the involvement of local people.

Jenny Smith

PN Council and Contacts 2018

Council members 2017	Phone	Email	**Project**
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Sylvia Bennett	866302	sylvia@mrbennett.co.uk	Butterfly Transect
Tina Hillas	NA	admin@prestwoodnature.org	Pollinator Friendly Garden
Tony Marshall	864251	records@prestwoodnature.org.	Surveys/Wildlife records
Angling Spring Wood		admin@prestwoodnature.org	Angling Spring Wood



Spring is y-comen in

Dates for your Diary

Date	Event	Contacts
March		
3 Saturday 2:30pm **Oldham Hall Great Missenden**	Talk - Bugs. Bluebells & Badgers: Natural History of Great Missenden Tony Marshall Friends of Great Missenden Parish Church	*Tickets £10* Jennifer Moss 01494 868667
25 Sunday 9:30pm **Crown, Little Missenden**	Annual Bird walk in Shardeloes area – prepare for all weathers. Look for and identify local and migrating birds.	John Obee
27 March 7:30pm **Great Missenden Memorial Hall**	Talk - How to help Hedgehogs – Philip Horwood People's Trust for Endangered Species	*Free admission to members* admin@prestwoodnature.org
April		
7 Saturday 10-12am	Pollinator friendly Garden Workparty General garden tidying	Tina Hillas
21 Saturday 2.00pm	Family-friendly walk –to find hedgerow spring flowers. Meet outside Prestwood Village Hall. Inform Karen if you intend to go	Karen van Oostrum
May		
6 Sunday 10am -1pm	In Search of the Gowk Walk in the Little Kingshill area, for flowers, birds, geology and history, listening for first cuckoo (the Gowk). Meet/park by entrance to Abbey Park GM SP898 006	Tony Marshall
12 Saturday 10-12am	Pollinator friendly Garden Workparty General garden tidying	Tina Hillas
June		
10 Sunday 10am-1pm	Boug's Meadow work party Link Road Great Missenden	John Obee
19 Tuesday 7:30-9:30	Talk Cambridge University Botanic Garden Karen van Oostrum Great Kingshill village Hall HP15 6DW	*Free admission to members* Vanessa Rickett
July		
7 Saturday 2:00pm	Family-friendly walk –to find hedgerow summer flowers. Meet outside Prestwood Village Hall. Inform Karen if you intend to go	Karen van Oostrum

