

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

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May 2015

SPRING 2015

The Committee for 2015/16 is as follows:

Barclay Arnott	740500
Ann Biggs	740810
John Burgess	749441
Sheila Dickerson	749443
Susan Everitt, Treas.	740352
Elver Langley	
Wendy Lanman	741138
Caroline Lee	
Paul Mason	740219
Robert Norman	740473
Chris Prescott, Chair	749038

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, please send them to Paul Mason, 13 Aldreth Road, Haddenham (740219).

HCS Website:

www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk

Membership information

Subscription rates

1 Jan to 31 Dec 2015:

Individual: £6

Family: £10

If you wish to join the Society, send your cheque, made out to

Haddenham

Conservation Society,
with your name, address
and telephone number,
to:

Susan Everitt

21 Twenty Pence Road
Wilburton, Ely CB6 3RM

This will entitle you to receive our regular newsletter and will give you free entry to the winter talks, a saving of £2.50 per person per session.

Ouse Washes Landscape: Home away from Home

Contributed by Mark Nokkert



The beautiful Ouse Washes Landscape. Image © Bill Blake Heritage Documentation

The Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership scheme (OWLP), funded with a substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, is delivered by a partnership of 28 organisations. We have been delivering a range of exciting projects since April 2014, and will continue to do so until early 2017.

The OWLP scheme focuses on the promotion of the Ouse Washes Landscape, a 48-km long area in the heart of the Cambridgeshire and Norfolk Fens, and on encouraging community engagement with the area's diverse heritage. This is a distinctive landscape that also happens to be immensely beautiful. Huge open skies, expansive views, strongly linear features and isolated settlements only add to the sense of mystery and tranquility.

The Ouse Washes and surrounding Fenland are spectacularly important, much of the area would be flooded if it wasn't for some magnificent drainage engineering back in the 17th century; this involved the digging of two diversion channels of the Great River Ouse, the Old and New Bedford Rivers. The Ouse Washes is the rich washland area between the two, which allows floodwater to be stored safely in winter and protects the prime agricultural soil of the area. The area has been home to Oliver Cromwell, the Hovertrain trials of the 1970s and Fen Skating champions.

The diverse wetland habitats of the Ouse Washes Landscape are of international significance and crucial for the survival of a large number of rare species, including booming Bitterns, Bewick's Swans and Barn Owls. You can have incredible wildlife encounters throughout the year by visiting WWT Welney Wetland Centre or the RSPB Ouse Washes, Ouse Fen and Fen Drayton Lakes nature reserves. Watch an animated history of the Ouse Washes on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dzga2xt3jOk>), a lovely film created by the Fens Museum Partnership as part of the OWLP scheme's delivery.

Home away from home?

I have been involved in the exciting Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership scheme since December 2012, employed by the lead partner organisation Cambridgeshire ACRE as the OWLP Programme Manager. With a background in heritage management, obtained in the UK and elsewhere, my job is to coordinate the vast range and immense diversity of our partners' work across the Ouse Washes Landscape.

Growing up in the 'other flatlands', the polders of The Netherlands, and now living 'high and dry' in Ely I get why people call the Fens beautiful but can also understand that newcomers need time to appreciate this area, which may seem 'flat and boring' at first – just get people to notice one of the most spectacular sunrises, or the endlessness of the vast horizons. I also understand what it does to the collective psyche of people living on or below sea level: this brings with it a culture displaying an interesting mixture of self-reliance and community spirit.

This is, without doubt, the most exciting and varied project I have had the pleasure to be involved with. It is a great privilege to help promote the fascinating heritage and biodiversity of the Ouse Washes Landscape, meeting so many people who help sustain this beautiful area.

OWLP's legacy

The partnership is keen to leave a lasting legacy for the landscape, its heritage, its communities and visitors. Films like the 'Ouse Washes' and a range of other resources to be created through the OWLP scheme are only part of this. We hope to sustain the benefits of the projects through a scheme-wide focus on tourism promotion, community empowerment, volunteering and skills training opportunities, and the creation of a range of educational resources. We do all of this in partnership with all relevant organisations, be they local authorities, statutory agencies or community interest groups. The partnership will also be applying for further funding sources to enable the continuation of successful projects and events such as OuseFest.

How can you get involved?

- Coming to your area is OuseFest, a fortnight of events happening every day from 20 July to 2 August 2015, across the whole Ouse Washes area. Be sure to put the dates in your diary!
- In the lead up to our fantastic summer OuseFest celebrations, we have launched the exciting Snap the Ouse Photography Competition. Whether your photographs include landscapes, wildlife, people, buildings or water, you are encouraged to enter. Shortlisted photographs will be posted on our website for public voting and will also be exhibited at events throughout OuseFest. Three winners will each receive a fantastic basket of prizes worth £50.
- Do you have an idea for an interesting community project in your local area? Why not apply for a grant through the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership's Community Heritage Fund? Grants are available for up to £2,000 for groups or individuals and the next deadline is 31 October 2015.
- Why not visit our website www.ousewashes.org.uk, which includes our What's On Events Calendar, our Interactive Map and Volunteer Hub for more exciting events and ideas for things to do across the Ouse Washes Landscape, plus a page for the HCS (<http://ousewashes.org.uk/partners/partner/haddenham-conservation-society/>)
- To follow us, sign up to our Ouse News, or find us on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.
- Or contact me at mark.nokkert@camsacre.org.uk or tel 01353 865030.



The Turtle Sang Early

Contributed by Paul Mason

Despite the fact that Turtle Doves are said to be declining fast, whether due to those terrible Maltese hunters (and elsewhere to be fair) or natural climate changes, there has been a pair or two breeding around and in Aldreth for as long as can be recorded – quite a feather in our cap. (Terrible pun!) Anyway a male was singing there this year on 10 March, which is very early indeed.



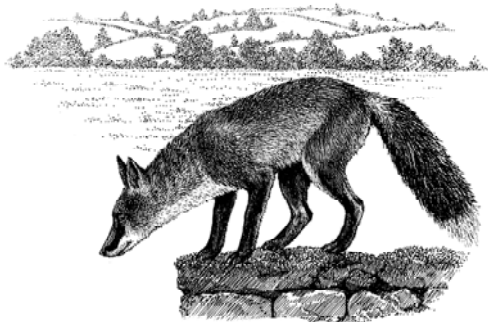
Before this, the earliest record for Cambridgeshire was 20 April on the Fleam Dyke, south-east of Cambridge. Over one month earlier is incredible, so one has to ask why. Has it fooled those Mediterranean guns and sneaked by, or has it not gone south in the first place? This is not the first time this question has been raised, as recently some have been thought to winter in the milder parts of Britain.

As to the parish as a whole, probably up to about eight pairs nest if each of the recorded singing birds had a mate and nested. That number has been fairly consistent in the last few years, but 10 years ago 10–12 males singing was not unknown. Also in past years, post-breeding congregations of up to 30 birds were not unknown. No such numbers have been seen in the last three to four years but that does not mean they have not been there. Usually such flocks are thinking about migration, but if our climate is warming then maybe these beautiful doves, with their magical song (best heard on a hot summer day, and not to be confused with the woo-woo of the Collared Dove), will overwinter safe from guns and their numbers will increase again. We can only dream.

Hunters in Malta celebrated on 12 April as proposals to ban spring hunting were defeated by just 2,200 votes. The margin of victory was tiny – 50.44% to 49.56%. Voter turnout was 74.8%. Ed.

January–April Wildlife Round-up

The New Year came in with the Kingfishers still fishing in Guppy's Pond, despite the cold weather threatening to ice up the water, and a report of a Peregrine Falcon at the west end of the parish. It's a sign of a bleak winter on the fens when two Reed Buntings were noted in a Bury Lane garden actually taking food from feeders, together with up to six Yellowhammers visiting as extra food was spread on the ground. There was also an unusual record of a Little Egret flying near to houses in Bury Lane. A Barn Owl flew over a Station Road garden and melanistic Blackbirds continued to be seen around Duck Lane. Reports of Bullfinches came from the old railway line to Wilburton, Bury Lane, and a cherry tree in Aldreth.



Two Foxes were seen by Robert Norman in his orchard actually pouncing on Bank Voles in the ground. A Barn Owl was flying around, trying to get in on the act no doubt! On 9 February it was good to get out on a fine morning and see 4000+/- Lapwings, with a few Golden Plovers mixed in, on Ewell Fen, plus about 50 Mute Swans. Three Kestrels were back on sites that were once thought traditional but then came a spell when some were absent in some years. Three Common Buzzards, one of which was on a post close to the Lapwing flock; the plovers were unconcerned, even when it moved. Plenty of gulls of various species. On a field at the top end of Long Drove where tractors were working were 10–12 Pied Wagtails, many Starlings and a juvenile/female Stonechat – always a great bird to see. Some 30 Wigeon spent two days around Hinton Hall reservoirs, which was a very nice turn up for this private site. Kingfishers were also seen with Great Crested Grebes, Little Grebes, Pochards, Tufted Ducks and Greylag Geese.

Moving now to March and the sighting of an early Turtle Dove (see page 2). On the evening of 16 March about 20 Pied Wagtails were reported on the Recreation Ground. The next day a trip down Dambank and Long Drove in late afternoon brought good results – four Mallard, one Merlin, eight to ten Corn Buntings, 30+ Reed Buntings (one singing), one Pied Wagtail, four Red Legged Partridge (in pairs), nine Grey Partridge (eight paired up), one Buzzard, one distant displaying Lapwing, and many male and a few female Pheasants. On 25 March, after a heavy hail storm the previous afternoon and a freeze overnight, the fens were very dull with only six Pied Wagtails and sundry Reed Buntings and Goldfinches

spotted on a drive round, plus the inevitable Common Buzzards on Long Drove and two Kestrels. A resident of The Ramparts found a dead Goldcrest by his back door. And a Red Kite was seen in Wilburton, flying around to the south of School Lane out beyond the houses in Mitchell's Yard.

By 6 April there was still not much birdlife; although the weather was fine the cold north wind persisted. A pair of Common Buzzards circling around a probable nesting area, one Corn Bunting singing, three to four Reed Bunting pairs on site and a male Kestrel hopping about on the ground. Lesser Celandine flowering by track. On 10 April the first good sign of spring – two brilliant Yellow Wagtails at Clayton's Bridge and one Wheatear, although the latter didn't stop. Otherwise Corn Buntings were arriving on their breeding sites as were Reed Bunting pairs. Other than circling Common Buzzards and a Yellowhammer near Two Pot farm nothing else of significance.



Chair's Report

A busy year as usual, with a successful programme of indoor talks, with thanks to Sheila; including talks on Dragonflies, Marine Life and tonight's talk on Iceland. May saw a successful Plant and Cake stall to raise money for the group, with more money raised by Haddenham Galleries who sold the leftover plants for us.

Throughout the year, work parties were arranged regularly at the Old Burial Ground to cut the meadow areas and generally cut and tidy, while others worked at the Nine Acre Wood in Aldreth.

We had involvement at the new housing development at Northumbria Close with talks on the possible siting of Swift nest boxes on site. We also made strong observations on disturbances to wildlife at the proposed Berry Wind Farm site.

We are in the process of applying to the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership Community Heritage Fund to:

- revamp the footpaths maps of the Parish and
- create the second stage to our laminated flower card sets. The first stage was a set of 12 laminated flower cards for the preschool children in the village, free to each child. Our new proposal is to design and print a new set for the reception class age of a Happy Family Wildlife Card Game.

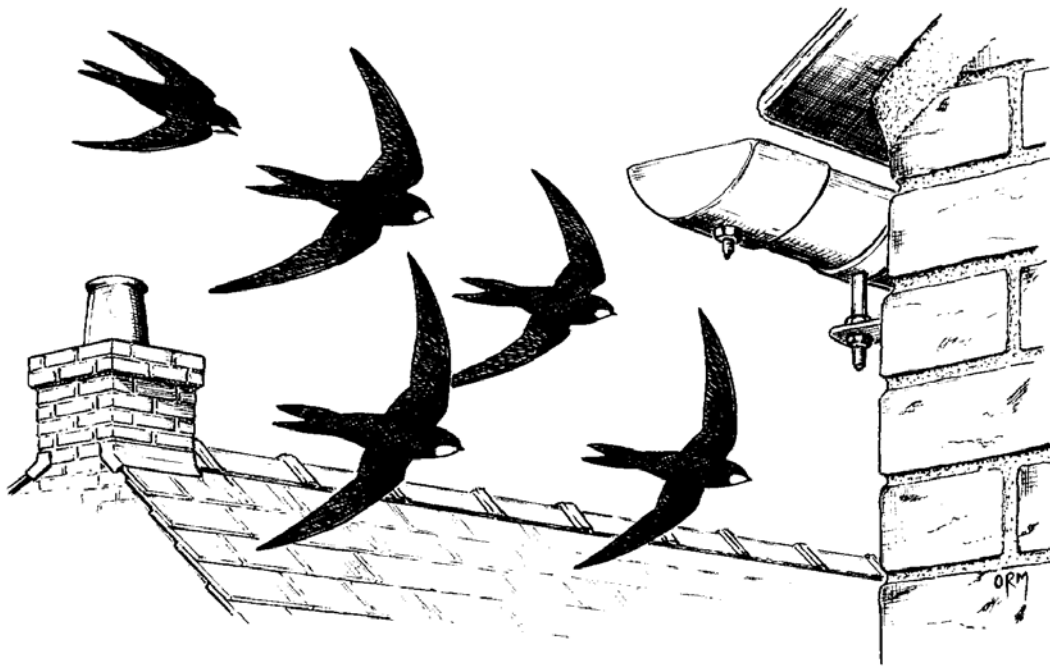
I have an apology to make. At the AGM last year, we passed a resolution to raise the group's subscription in January 2015. We forgot! So the rise will take place in January 2016.

I would like to thank all Committee members for their work during the year, particularly Mike and Gill Smith, who will be moving away from Haddenham in the near future, so will be leaving the committee. I will also be standing down as Chair at this AGM, though I will be willing to stay on the Committee if I am wanted!

Ann Biggs
14 April 2015

What Can We Do to Help Swifts?

Contributed by Jake Allsop



Most people probably now know that Swifts are declining at a rate of about 3% a year, but we are not sure why. Possibly changes in their wintering quarters, possibly a reduction in the quantity of food available during their breeding time, possibly because of the massive loss of nest sites in the UK as old buildings are pulled down or renovated. Whatever the cause or mix of causes for the decline, we can at least do something to save existing nest sites and to provide new accommodation.

We first became aware of the problem in the mid-nineties, when public buildings were being renovated for the millennium, with the inevitable sealing of entrance points for Swifts. Add to that the increasingly strict legislation regarding insulation of properties and it was clear something had to be done. We started a campaign, initially called Concern for Swifts and later Action for Swifts, to raise awareness among all the stakeholders. We canvassed for Swifts to be added to the red or amber list of conservation concern, but only achieved that about three years ago. In the

meantime, we tried to save colonies, but in most cases we only found out after the event that renovation work had been done and that it was too late. Even now, when the situation has improved somewhat, we depend heavily on members of the public to alert us to proposed developments where Swifts are present. So, the first thing any of you reading this can do is to let us know of any threat to a colony, wherever it might be in the country.

Somewhat reluctantly, we shifted the focus of our campaign to nestboxing, i.e. providing new accommodation for Swifts, on private dwellings, on commercial and industrial properties, in church belfries and in schools. There is a variety of solutions, from standard 'shoebox' nestboxes to multiple occupancy cabinets to incorporated nest bricks. You can read about many of these projects on the AfS website [<http://actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk>].

In Haddenham, we have breeding Swifts in the High Street, where, fortunately, the property owners are aware and indeed proud of their Swifts. There are small colonies in one or two other places. Our latest success has been to have Swift accommodation built into some of the new properties in Northumbria Close, although we are not sure of the uptake. One of the difficulties with Swifts is their reluctance to try new places (and where other houses are still being built), which is why we play 'lures' to persuade prospecting birds that a pair is already in residence. And it usually works if you are persistent enough!

If you want to get involved, you are welcome to join us on one of our summer survey evenings. Events of this kind are being held this year at St Neots, Worlington, Fulbourn and St Mary's Church in Ely, where the spectacle is breathtaking. For details, visit the website.

An important PS: if you find a grounded adult Swift or a fallen nestling, don't try to rehabilitate it yourself; it's a highly specialised task. Get in touch with one of our experienced rehabbers listed on the website, or with me (tel 01353 740540).



Woodland Work Party

Contributed by John Burgess

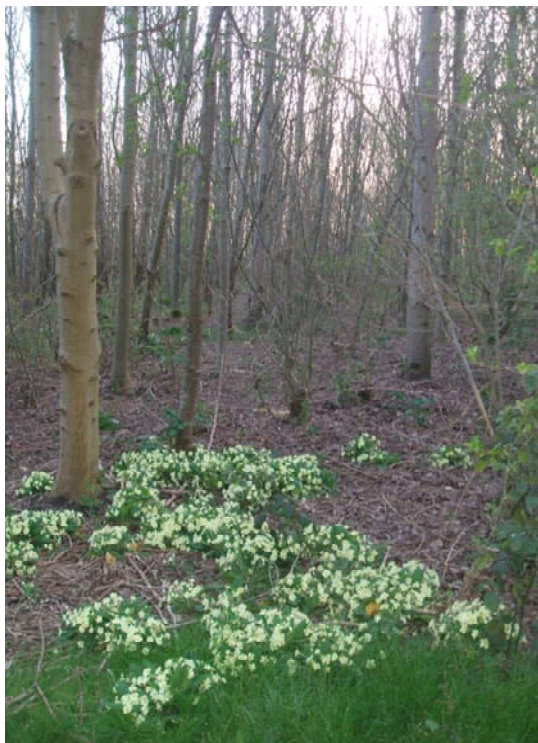
A bright clear winter's morning in early February saw a keen assembly of would-be tree-fellers in Nine Acre Wood. A Haddenham Conservation Society work party had been arranged in conjunction with the Woodland Trust.

The aim was to improve the diversity within the wood. It is clear to anyone who has walked around the interior path that the wood has grown extremely well. Once inside, and when the trees are in leaf, it is impossible to see out. The trees were planted by volunteers and the strike rate has been exceptionally high; consequently they are growing far denser than expected.

Natural processes, i.e. the trees growing to maturity and falling over when dead, would eventually rectify the situation, but we would be looking at a process way beyond my years.

The far end of the figure of eight path is particularly dark, so a collective decision was made to intervene here to improve matters. The plan was to scallop/trim back the path edge trees; this will let the light in through the canopy to the woodland floor allowing lower vegetation to grow.

The Woodland Trust's Ian Froggatt kindly supported us with consultation and provided the tools for the job, along with the mandatory and necessary protective equipment.



A lovely patch of primroses in Nine Acre Wood.



A scalloped path edge.

We went to work on an area approximately 12 metres long and 4 metres wide, cutting an arc into the dense area of the wood. Avoiding the larger trees, we felled, trimmed and then stacked the wood into piles. The decomposing timber will provide shelter for insects, food for birds and medium for fungi. Species felled include Silver Birch, Poplar and Ash. We do have Ash dieback within the wood; it remains to be seen how this will affect the wood over the years. (Note signs on the entrance gatepost.)

The tree stumps have been coppiced close to the ground, so with any luck the remaining stools will sprout to add to the lower growth.

This work is an on-going process; we will monitor the progress and see how it develops, intervening again if we feel it is necessary. When we finished there were views of cloudless skies through the canopy; only time will tell how effective we have been.

In a final exercise we walked around the perimeter path, trimming the overhanging branches as we went. This will make life easier for the tractor topping the grass.

I would like to thank the happy band of brothers who freely gave their time, sweat and tears to assist with this task. Without you none of this would happen. I had a great time; community spirit is still alive and kicking, or should that be sawing and chopping?



Renew your subs!

Subscriptions were due on
1 January.
If you haven't done so already,
please pay promptly as
it really does help.
Thank you.

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

The mystery of the disappearing ducks has been solved! A generous person with a large garden and several ponds not so far from Guppy's Pond had been feeding the ducks and geese to such an extent that they flocked to her from far and wide. (They don't get fed here, except when young visitors come, or during hard winters when the pond freezes over, as there is plenty of food for the wild birds to feed on and they are, after all, wild.) This person's ponds became so overpopulated and polluted that nothing now grows in or around them and a decision had to be made to stop feeding them, which is why they are returning to where they came from originally. However, we do seem to have acquired two pairs of Greylag Geese, both determined to take over last year's swans' nest with a lot of loud honking and beating of wings. We shall see whether one pair stays and raises young, which would be lovely to watch, but also slightly worrying as they can become invasive.

Several times we have seen two Kingfishers together so we are hopeful that they will be able to raise young and thrive this year. The usual garden birds come regularly: Long-tailed, Great and Blue Tits, Chaffinch, Greenfinch and Goldfinch, Robins, Blackbirds, Green Woodpeckers, Collared Doves, Wood Pigeons and many Wrens. On the water the Moorhens and Coots are busy keeping each other at bay while they build their nests, but – no swans yet. I suppose it is possible that they will avoid Guppy's Pond this year now that the geese have moved in...I shall report all in the next newsletter.

We have seen so many Bumblebees in the garden this spring – huge queens visiting the winter flowers and very first spring ones, followed by drones and workers and now honey and other bees as well. They



Greylag Goose

have all greatly benefited from the mild winter with only short cold spells.

Brian and I were sitting by the edge of the pond on a warm sunny day in late April and were lucky enough to see two grass snakes swimming through the water. The first was about 60 cm (2ft) long and a good inch (2.5 cm) in diameter and the second, which swam by a couple of hours later, was about the same length but only half as thick. Both swam close to the bank until they were a couple of feet from us. Then they swam across the water to the opposite bank and disappeared in the vegetation.



Thank you Gill and Mike

Gill and Mike Smith are standing down from the Committee at the AGM. They have worked tirelessly for close to twenty years. Gill has taken minutes and made sure that we are adequately insured for work parties and other events, and provided plants and advice at our annual plant sale. Mike has worked hard for HCS and the Pond Management Committee, checking that all is well with the footpath and banks of Guppy's Pond, organising any necessary work parties and doing much of the work himself, as well as planting the hedges around Weyman's Pits with the help of volunteers. Both have worked hard at maintaining the Old Burial Ground in Church Lane and establishing and maintaining the Wildflower Meadow in Fairchilds' Meadows.

We can't list everything they have worked on here – it would be far too long – but their input and enthusiasm is very much appreciated and they thoroughly deserve our thanks.

Jays...such Colourful Corvids

Contributed by Paul Mason



Simon Stirrup © 2015

Laying up stores. Image © Simon Stirrup

The phone rang one day. I won't say who was on the other end, but the voice said: "I've just seen the most colourful bird I have ever seen in this country. I didn't know we had such pretty birds...what is it? It's pink nearly all over with a bright blue patch on the wings, which are black at the tips, and it has a white bum. The tail is black and the pink head has a sort of black moustache and is slightly black on the crown and forehead. What is it?"

Well, much as I would like to have said that it was some rarity or other, I had to let the caller down lightly and say that it was really quite common, mostly in woodlands like Thetford Forest. It was actually a Jay, a member of the corvid family, which includes Crows, Rooks, and the bird many people have a strong love/hate relationship with...the Magpie. We don't get Jays that often in Haddenham despite there being at least one pair nesting often in Robert Norman's Aldreth Road orchard.

Jays are very cheeky birds and clever in that they store food away for bad times. They have a pouch

just behind their beaks so that they can carry several items of food, mainly acorns and other large tree fruit such as 'conkers', and then bury them. Some individuals will notice where another Jay has buried his food and then dig it up and transfer it to her cache. (Got to be gender correct nowadays!) They can even find a Grey Squirrel's store and rob that (no worries there though). Yes, we do have a small number around the parish but it's mostly winter when they become noticeable in our gardens.

Mind you there are a lot of pretty birds in this country, but they are much smaller than Jays...think Goldfinch, Kingfisher and Redstart, Yellowhammer, Greenfinch...and the list goes on.

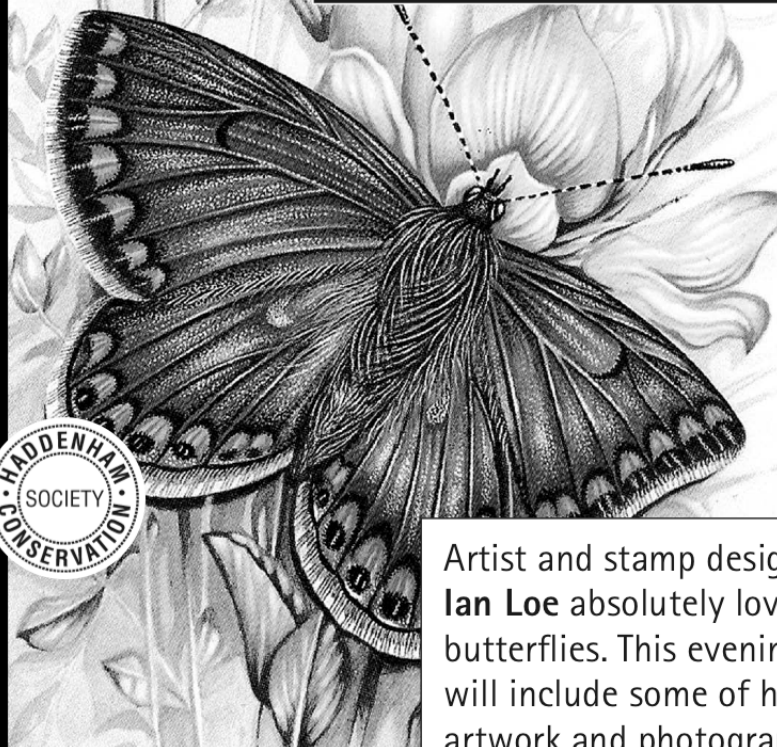
Three Jays came regularly to Simon Stirrup's Aldreth garden and he managed to take a series of fantastic study photographs which can be found on our HCS website (www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk). Do go and look. I particularly like the one with its crest raised, giving it one of those 'aaah' looks.





ÉIRE

For the love of butterflies



8PM TUESDAY 12TH MAY 2015

AT THE ARKENSTALL CENTRE

MEMBERS FREE NON-MEMBERS £2.50

ALL WELCOME TO STAY FOR A
DRINK AND A CHAT AFTER THE TALK

Artist and stamp designer
Ian Loe absolutely loves
butterflies. This evening
will include some of his
artwork and photographs
from around the world.
Really not one to be
missed, especially if you
are a budding artist.

SH 11.14

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We shall act on any information provided by readers to rectify the situation.*