

# HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Vol. 32 No. 1  
February 2017

WINTER 2016

The Committee for 2016/17 is:

|                       |        |
|-----------------------|--------|
| Barclay Arnott        | 740500 |
| Ann Biggs             | 740810 |
| John Burgess          | 749441 |
| Sheila Dickerson      | 749443 |
| Susan Everitt, Treas. | 740352 |
| Elver Langley         |        |
| Wendy Lanman          | 741138 |
| Caroline Lee          | 361678 |
| Paul Mason            | 740219 |
| 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, please send them to Paul Mason, 13 Aldreth Road, Haddenham (740219).

HCS Website:  
[www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk](http://www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk)

## Membership information

Subscription rates  
1 Jan to 31 Dec 2017:

Individual: £7

Family: £12

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 7 winter talks, a saving of £2.50 per person per session.

## Unique Learning Card Game Delivered

Haddenham and Wilburton Primary Schools Years 1 and 2 will now be able to make use of a wildlife card game in their lessons to help them recognise species of birds, mammals, insects and plant life. The 'Happy Families' educational activity was carefully selected and produced by Haddenham Conservation Society. It has been grant aided by the Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership (OWLP) in conjunction with the Heritage Lottery Fund.



Ann Biggs presents Happy Wildlife Family sets to Head Teacher Kate Bonney.



Susan Everitt and Wendy Lanman of HCS with children of Wilburton Primary School.

Members Ann Biggs, who designed the cards, and Wendy Lanman, who collated and packed the sets, spent many hours finishing the 100 packs before having the pleasure of delivering them to the schools. Robert Arkenstall Head Teacher Kate Bonney said "that the cards were very exciting and would also be used when they take the children outside". She commented on the fact that the frog and toad illustrations really showed up the differences, which are otherwise difficult to get across to the children, and that they would certainly be able to see a hare during an outing – and possibly even a fox within the school grounds. Wilburton Primary enjoyed being shown the illustrations by Wendy Lanman and were much looking forward to playing the games during their lessons.

Mark Nakkert of OWLP said this was an unusual project and had OWLP's full support. In order to produce and finance similar ideas for other higher grade pupils in the future some original art work from this set is on sale at a considerably lower price than would normally be charged. Why not pop along to Ann Bigg's studio and buy one of these already rare artworks.

Supported by  
**The National Lottery**  
through the Heritage Lottery Fund

heritage  
lottery fund

  
**Ouse Washes**  
The Heart of the Fens

## Nine Acre Wood Update

*Contributed by John Burgess*

It would be impossible not to notice the recent transformation in Nine Acre Wood. Left to Nature the trees would grow to maturity and, for whatever reason, eventually fall, creating a diverse environment in their wake. However, safety responsibilities prevent this. (The Woodland Trust's management plan is available from their website.) The upside is that the wood matures faster as a result of intervention.

The ongoing management has seen a contractor employed to remove the larger Poplars. This particular species grows rapidly, as is clearly evident from the size of the removed trees' stumps (right).

Unfortunately, Poplars also have a nasty habit of snapping their trunks in a high wind, often half way up. Until recently, some of the part trunks were still suspended in the canopy. Traditionally poplar wood was used for matchsticks, but now has little commercial value. Poplars are still used for furniture on the Continent but they have never really found favour at home.

Having spoken to the Woodland Trust's Ian Froggatt he confirmed that our wood is particularly small in commercial terms, so the felling had been at considerable cost to the Trust. The value of the wood had amounted to only about one third of the cost of felling.

It would be mistaken to suggest the removal of the trees had not dramatically altered the visual aspect of the wood, particularly in some of the sections near the entrance. Like most pruning, when first cut, it is quite an assault on the senses, but given time the results are well worth it. The light now flooding into these areas will



have a dramatic effect. A new level of regeneration is about to ensue. It will be interesting to see which species colonises first.

The contractor has been very proficient in keeping pathway damage minimal. Considering the size of the timbers removed and the equipment used for the job, it was quite remarkable (see Paul Mason's article in the Dec/Jan *Village Voice*).

On a less positive note, an individual on a quad bike has been far less conscientious; his pleasure has reduced the lower circular path to mud, devoid of grass. The resulting damage will take months to recover. Access to the Wood is very easy; it would be a shame to compromise this because of one individual.

If anyone has any questions or queries I am happy to oblige. Please contact me via the Conservation Society.



## Hedge Laying Completed

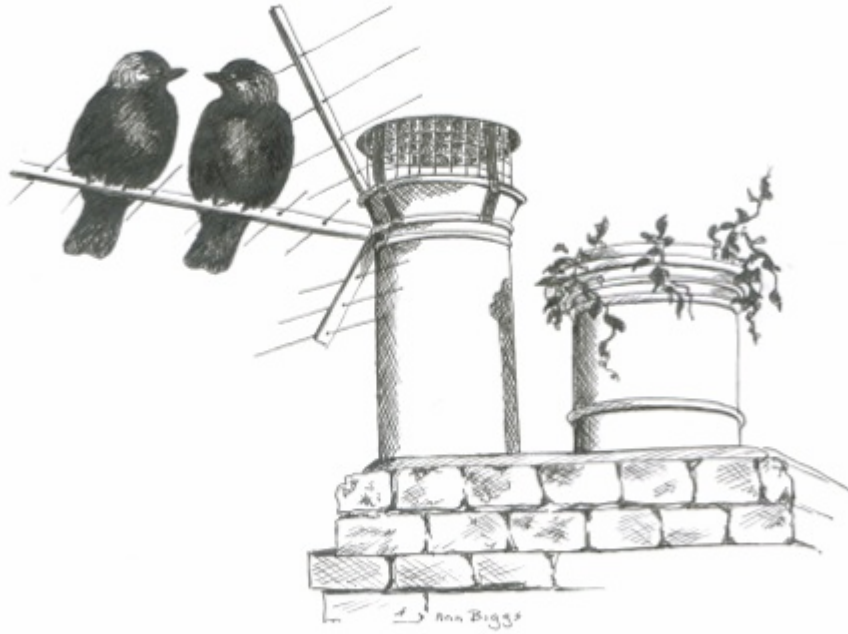
On Sunday 29 January the Fairchild's Meadow Hedge Laying team gathered together, intent on completing the work that had to be left undone at the end of last year's successful event. It was just a few metres at the bottom of the field by the kissing gate.

In addition, last year's work had to be inspected and judged a success or not, depending on how well the new growth had 'bushed out'. That required a little tidying here and there and pulling out some aggressive bramble plants. Not an easy job, as it grows so strongly, but we must not let brambles take over and smother all the Hawthorn, Hazel and other berry-bearing plants.

A great big thanks to Alastair, Ann, Chris, Chris, Gareth, Hazel, Jez, Kate, Robert, Stuart, Tim and, of course, Buster the dog! To HCS for lending us the gazebo. And to Barclay and Loz for sourcing the binders for the top of the new-laid hedge. They could not come on the day, but they still played their parts. And not least to Hazel for providing some super tomato soup with added zest herb wise!



Binding the hedge. Photo Paul Mason



Artwork by  
Ann Biggs

## That Noise in the Chimney

*Contributed by Paul Mason*

Now it's time to search out a place to build a nest! Well, February is the time that most Corvids get busy and some get themselves a High Street address. If you hear 'Squee-aw' replied to by an ecstatic 'Squee-gees' coming from on high, look up to the now little-used old Victorian chimney pots and our modern Elizabeth the Second unused ones, and you'll find a Jackdaw pair has decided, 'This one, this year, my dear.' It's not going to be full of smoke and the excitement rises in the air with a little cavorted flight dance in celebration. 'Got to fill it with sticks now and a bit of hay or straw', as three or four more little Jacks appear, having climbed out of a sometimes quite deep chimney. Clever beasts these birds! Nineteenth-century belief in the Fens held that seeing a Jackdaw on the way to a wedding was a good omen for a bride.

All their Corvid cousins are equally occupied with nest building and in Haddenham parish there are four more species to look for (except they don't take a lot of looking for as they are bloomin' obvious). Anywhere there is a tree, even a lonesome tree out on the fen, then the largest and most fearsome, if you are a small edible item, is the Carrion Crow. A wicked-looking, black, overbearing Corvid that you don't mess with. They will chase off anything up to a Marsh Harrier, Red Kite or Buzzard whatever the time of year. They particularly don't like Short-eared Owls for some reason and chase them high in the air before desisting.

Then there are the black and white Magpies, everyone's favourite to-hate bird, traditionally used to estimate how many children you will have: 'One for sorrow, two for joy, three for a girl and four for a boy...' Certainly Magpies are not good to have around when other smaller birds are nesting because they will seek out nests in hedges and bushes for anything to feed their own young on. An ominous death rattle call from a long tail means it could have an egg in its beak. A large, thick, obvious bundle of sticks in a tall hedge is the Magpie's nest home. This nest is used for many years and even generations.

I sometimes get a telephone call and an excited caller on the other end who says, "I've got this ever so pretty bird on my lawn. I've never seen anything like it, what is it?" "Well, what does it look like?" "Oooh it's pink nearly all over, white on the top of its head and it has a blue patch on the wings. It must be a rare foreign bird, as we don't have pretty birds in this country, do we?" "Well, yes we do have many colourful birds in the UK, and what you are seeing is a Jay." The Jay is a member of the Crow family. There are only a very few in Haddenham and they mostly nest in places like orchards in ones and twos; they prefer deep conifer forests normally. Again it is a nest-hunting bird, and also famous for gathering acorns in autumn, several at a time in a throat pouch, before burying them in a place they often forget. When they do, a great oak may grow from one of those little acorns.

Raucous-nesting Rooks used not to nest in our parish but in the last three or four years a rookery has been set up in some trees by the Old West River. Noisy white-beaked birds, they usually go around in quite sizable flocks, eating mainly worms and invertebrates found in the soil. There is a folklore rhyme assigned to them too, but I am not sure if it's really true: 'Four seeds in a hole. One for the Rook, one for the Crow, one to rot and one to grow'.

Will it be long before we see the large Raven around Haddenham? Well maybe not, because they are spreading eastward again and have reached the west of the county already. It will be very exciting if we do see them cavorting in our skies, tumbling with extended diamond-shaped tail spread and uttering that deep-throated 'cronk-cronk'. Can't wait!

## News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

There is nothing unusual for me to report this time around, except maybe a dead carp, which must have weighed about 1kg and was probably injured when two cormorants came together and spent a couple of days gorging themselves. This fish was probably just a little too big for them to handle because we have seen one nearly its size eaten by a lone cormorant, so completely that we couldn't find even a single scale after the feast.

One thing was slightly out of the ordinary and that was a very noisy day with six Coot couples battling for territory right in front of us – even the more timid Moorhens entered the fray. All is quiet again now, so boundaries must be settled for the time being.

We do have a very grand and flamboyant cock Pheasant patrolling the gardens around the pond, picking up food scattered under the bird feeders. Again, the Moorhens come there too and even perch high on the bird table so as to get even more food.

The usual Chaffinch, Blue and Great Tits, and Long-tailed Tits visit regularly, as do Goldfinches, Dunnocks, Blackbirds and Robins. Little Wrens work thoroughly around the plant pots, picking out all the insects and grubs they can find – to Brian's delight. We have had the odd visit of a Magpie and Green Woodpeckers, and at least one Thrush has left broken snail shells near the house. However, we have not yet heard the Great Spotted Woodpeckers drumming. That sometimes starts just after Christmas, but nothing yet this year. Strange, because we have been having flowering – and highly scented – violets since October!



Pheasants.



*Mallota cimbiciformis* hoverfly. Photo © Rob Mills.

## *Mallota cimbiciformis*

Rob Mills, a local entomologist, was asked to survey invertebrates on behalf of the Fairchild's Meadow management committee. His first full year of research using linear transects and analysing his findings came up trumps in 2015 when he found the *Mallota cimbiciformis* hoverfly. (It does not have a common name.) The Latin word *cimex* means bug. Rob found the adult fly imbibing nectar on the flowers of hogweed not far from the iconic line of Elm trees known as Hinton Hedges. Only three other records have been found in Cambridgeshire. It is regarded as 'Nationally Scarce (Notable)'.

The insect is a large rather furry hoverfly with strongly swollen hind legs and can closely resemble a honeybee when it flies. It is a widespread but localised species associated with water-filled rot holes of mature trees, and has turned up in some surprisingly urbanised locations. The adults visit the flowers of brambles, thistles and hogweed. The larvae develop in water-filled rot holes and females have sometimes been observed investigating such holes high up in a trunk.

What are tree rot holes you may well ask? Well, abandoned woodpecker holes for example. Often these are used by Starlings for a year or two. Faeces accumulates and rain pouring down the trunk of the tree flows into the hole and soaks into rotting materials, which presumably start to smell. This attracts our hoverfly friend to lay an egg or two. Larvae hatch out and enjoy the decomposing material before emerging in June as adult or imago hoverflies. They fly off to feed on the nectar of brambles, thistles and hogweed.

Whilst there are other invertebrates that use rot holes our hoverfly rarity likes Elm rot holes. Well each to their own. Congratulations to Rob for his discovery, which will now be recorded in scientific registers for all time. This brings to three the rare species dependant on the habitat to be found in the Hinton Hedges-Fairchild's Meadow complex. The others being, of course, White-letter Hairstreak butterfly and White-spotted Pinion Moth.

### Renew your subs!

Subscriptions were due on  
1<sup>st</sup> January.

If you haven't done so already,  
please pay promptly as  
it really does help.

## A Slow Early Winter

Our contributors' reports direct from the HCS website  
[www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk](http://www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk)

**7 November** Aldreth and Haddenham fens: A pretty wild windy trip round the fens found countless Lapwings spreading to nearly all fields in varying numbers. A rough estimate would be 2500–3000. A Grey Heron insisted on landing on the road despite us moving forward slowly in the car. Large numbers of Starlings practising the communal flights usually seen at roost sites. Many Corvids and just one Common Buzzard showing itself. It was the brown colour of a male Kestrel and not seen by us before. Several diverse flocks of Linnets amounting to perhaps 300 and Goldfinches about 100. Pair of Mistle Thrushes at Aldreth Ponds and small numbers of Fieldfares feeding on the field inside The Boot. *PM&ID*

**28 November** Last Friday morning, before work, I had a look along Dambank Drove and was impressed by the numbers of Lapwings and Golden Plover. There were also 4 Buzzard, 1 Little Egret and a male Stonechat. *SS*

**1 December** Lakes Drove: Flock of 60–100 Linnets plus a dozen or so Goldfinches. A pair of Reed Buntings, 7 Redlegged Partridges, 18 Grey Partridges. Dambank: A flock of 20+ Skylarks, 2000–2500 Lapwings spread thinly over several fields. Female Marsh Harrier and 2–3 Buzzards, 1 Little Egret. Long Drove: approx. 150 Linnets. Claytons Bridge: 2 Kingfishers, 1 Green Sandpiper. The Boot: 3 Kestrels, 50+ Fieldfare, 6–8 Redwings, plus various finches. *PM&ID*

**10 December** I heard you were always interested in bird sightings. Just to place us, we are at the bottom of Lode Way and along the lane, opposite the potato sheds, leading to the sewage works; we have a 20-acre field. Last Sunday about 1pm, a few hundred yards to the south of us, we saw a Red Kite circling quite low above us before it turned towards Wilburton. Also, several times this week I have heard a Little Owl over the field. Two or three years ago, we had a resident Little Owl that used one of our stables, and I was able to get some good pictures (see Vol. 30. No. 1 Winter 2015 newsletter). We did not see it last year, so I'm pleased to hear one again. *PD*

**28 December** We walked down to the Old West River along the Aldreth Causeway and saw a Buzzard perched on a tree on the far side of the river and a Barn Owl being pursued by what we thought might be a Crow but passing horse riders said was a Buzzard. They had seen two Barn Owls, both being pursued/buzzed. *SM*

**29 December** The Bullfinches arrived this morning (Aldreth), at least three males and one female, in the cherry trees as per usual. *JB* Long Drove: 2 Common Buzzard, 1 pair Stonechat, 30 Corn Bunting and a Green Sandpiper. *SS*

*Into the New Year* and approx. 250 Wigeons and 2 male Pochards among other water birds using Hinton Farm reservoir. Plus 2500 Fieldfares, 6 Mistle Thrushes and a Common Buzzard. *PM&ID*

**13 January** There was a Tree Sparrow on our feeders this morning – despite the horrendous conditions. Only the second I have seen in Aldreth (the previous one was also in the garden). *SS*

**14 January** Then maybe we have a visitation as there were 2 Tree Sparrows on feeders at Lode Way reported by Ann Biggs. *PM*



© Simon Stirrup

Tree sparrow on nut feeder. Photo © Simon Stirrup.

**16 January** Aldreth: Bullfinches still are coming to the cherry tree in the garden and feeding on buds. *JB*

**19 January** Many Fieldfares coming to fallen fruit in Aldreth Road Orchard. *RN&PM*

**20 January** Dambank/Long Drove: approx. 250 Lapwing, 3 Grey Partridge, 1 male Stonechat, 3 Common Buzzard, 50+ Fieldfare, 4 Corn Bunting, 2 pairs Reed Bunting, 12+ Linnets, 3 Kestrel and 12+ Goldfinch. *PM&ID*

**26 January** We've just spotted a Tree Sparrow in our front garden (Orchard Way). *SM*

**29 January** Blackcap in garden. *SM* Just a Common Buzzard but one of 7–8 we have in the parish this winter. Chocolate ginger colour. Others vary from speckled near all cream to nearly black. *PM*

**31 January** Regular visits now to my garden include Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting. Stock Dove and a Muntjac played havoc with my garden foliage. *JA*

The weather towards the end of January was so miserable that wildlife seemed to go to sleep. Let's hope February picks up. Keep checking the HCS website and see it in glorious colour!

## Swifts in Haddenham 2016

Contributed by Jake Allsop

The usual pattern is that last year's breeding Swifts arrive first, check out their nest site from the previous year and then go off for a few days to feed up after their long journey back from Africa. I always get questions from people who have Swifts on their property, along the lines: "My Swifts arrived but they've disappeared. What happened?" Now you know.

A couple of weeks later, when the breeders have taken up residence, the non-breeders arrive and spend their time looking for a suitable nest site. If they find one, they will occupy it but generally don't breed until the following year. This is the time when vicious fights can break out as freewheeling birds blunder into already occupied nest sites.

Once all the Swifts have arrived, the timing of breeding, from egg laying to fledging, is much influenced by the weather and the consequent availability of food. In 2016, a period of bad weather at the start of the season had serious consequences for breeding Swifts. Some didn't even attempt to breed, others laid eggs but then pushed them from the nest. Sensible really. The adult birds would then often push off to find good feeding. But the weather did improve, and breeding was generally resumed. Sometimes a burst of bad weather would again slow down the breeding process. Fortunately, from a couple of weeks after hatching, chicks can go for 2–3 days without food. So, 2016 had its own pattern: late start, interrupted breeding, and in some cases late fledging.

Given the loss of suitable nesting cavities on modern or renovated buildings, the provision of artificial nest boxes, external or internal, has become much more important. In addition to the pre-existing sites in the High Street – in and around the butcher's shop, 2016 saw the provision of new sites: nine on buildings in or near the High Street. They are all internal boxes, but if you are



Internal nest box at Northumbria Close.

sharp-eyed, you can see the small entrance holes in the brickwork through which the birds access the box accommodation behind. A dozen or so internal nest cavities were also installed on the new housing development at Northumbria Close. We think there is a good chance of occupancy of some of the boxes in 2017, particularly where property owners play the calls that can lure non-breeders to investigate. A number of external boxes were also installed, including four on the Old Vicarage and three on the buildings adjacent.

There are also breeding Swifts in the parish away from the High Street, including in Aldreth and Hill Row. It all adds up and gives hope that Swifts will continue to grace our skies with their shrill calls and their amazing acrobatic flights.

Visit [www.actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk) for more information about Swifts and how you might help them.



## Unwelcome Migrants

In 2004 the Asian Hornet (*Vespa velutina*) hitched a ride to France in a pottery container. They spread quickly and reports of sightings from Gloucester and Somerset in the autumn of 2016 confirmed that they had reached the UK.

An aggressive predator of native insects, the Asian Hornet poses a significant threat to honeybees and other native pollinators. A hive was found and successfully destroyed. However, the queens survive the winter to create new colonies in the spring, so it's possible that mated queens are still in hibernation.

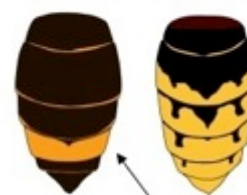
It is still possible to prevent Asian Hornets from establishing in the UK, and a key part of this will be detecting any queens as they emerge from hibernation. With queens emerging as early as February, now is the time to be vigilant.

The Asian Hornet is smaller than the European Hornet (*Vespa crabro*). It has an almost entirely dark abdomen except for the fourth segment, which is yellow. European Hornets, on the other hand, have a brown and yellow striped abdomen. The legs of European Hornets are dark, whereas Asian Hornets have bright yellow tips to their legs.

If you think you may have spotted an Asian Hornet please email: [alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk) or fill out an online form on: [http://www.brc.ac.uk/risc/alert.php?species=asian\\_hornet](http://www.brc.ac.uk/risc/alert.php?species=asian_hornet)

Do not disturb an active hornet's nest or provoke these insects.

Asian hornet European hornet



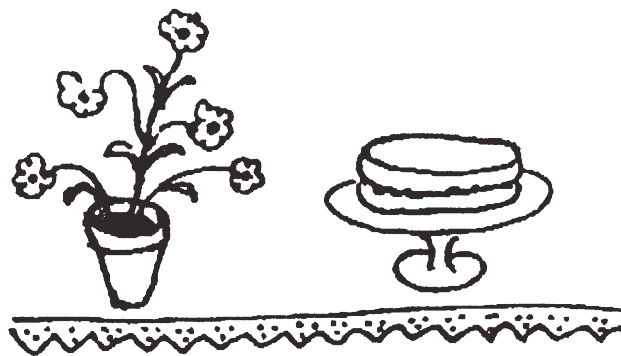
Asian hornet abdomen is almost entirely dark except for 4<sup>th</sup> abdominal segment

Artwork ©  
RSPB  
Images



# CAKE & PLANT SALE

Saturday 6 May 9:30 - 11:30 am Haddenham Green



The annual Haddenham Conservation Society fundraising "bring and buy" stall - just in time for you to stock up with plants for house and garden, vegetables included. Don't throw away any surplus offshoots from your own gardens: bring them to the stall instead; they are sure to make someone happy. If you prefer to bring cake or other produce, this will also be gratefully received. Then reward yourselves with the fruit of someone else's efforts. All proceeds will go towards speakers' fees at the winter talks. Further information from Wendy Lanman on 741138.



## WINTER TALKS

Indoor meetings are held at the Arkenstall Centre, Haddenham, on the second Tuesday of each month from October to May, but NOT in January, at 8:00 pm.

*Members free. Non-members welcome for a nominal fee.*

*All welcome to stay for a (free) drink and a chat after each talk.*

14 March

### GIVING WILDLIFE THE EDGE

Managing Fenland Waterways for Water Voles, Kingfishers and other wildlife. **Cliff Carson** from Middle Level Commission has been working hard to make sure they have a home here.

11 April

### DOVE STEP – A JOURNEY FOR TURTLE DOVES

**Johnny Rankin**, writer and follower of the beautiful birds, has put rings on some of his Suffolk birds. Where do they go and will they come back? Do they pass through the Maltese killing fields?

9 May

### THE WILDLIFE OF TEES VALLEY

**Geof Lee** comes from this terrific place with unique flora that is well worth a visit. Visit early and you'll find many unique and very local flowers, birds and animals. From the moors to the sea it's a golden place.

## OTHER EVENTS

Saturday 6 May, 9:30-11:30am

### PLANT AND CAKE BRING AND BUY SALE

Our yearly fundraiser towards the winter talks. The perfect opportunity to find new homes for your excess plants after dividing up the clumps in your garden – and also to buy – at very reasonable prices – new plants, some quite unusual ones, to fill any gaps. There will be vegetables, too, as well as trees, shrubs and even a few house plants.

There will be cakes, biscuits and other produce to keep you well fuelled while you put your new plants in their new homes.

Any contributions will be very gratefully received.