

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

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WINTER 2017

Meet the Melilots – Our Amazing, Changing Parish Wildlife

Contributed by Paul Mason

The Committee for 2017/18 is:

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Please feel free to get in touch with any committee member with questions or information you might have. If you have any specific records of flora and fauna, 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 2018:

Individual: £8

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.

We have only a six-square mile parish but the wildlife still manages, after 50 years watching it, to amaze me. It's the plantlife that does it mostly, and over the years that has been very changeable. For years this or that species has been pretty constantly on view, then it becomes scarce or non-existent. Well, that might be explained by 'climate change' but I am sceptical because, suddenly, it's back again after ten or 20 years or even more, for apparently no rhyme or reason. I will give you an instance.

Have you ever heard of the Melilots? No. Well, they are a group of species in the pea and vetch family, although you wouldn't think so if you've never seen them before.

There are three or four species depending on which field guide you use. There's Ribbed Melilot, Golden Melilot, Tall Melilot, Small Melilot and White Melilot. According to some field guides the Golden and the Ribbed (*Melilotus officianalis*) are the same species. Ribbed, Golden and White are all 3-4 feet (0.9-1.2m) plus high. These last are the ones we have recorded in Haddenham parish. They may have been introduced nationally in the 14-15th centuries as crops.

They are not recorded every year though, and that is the point. In fact there are more years when they don't appear than when they do. In spite of hunting hither and thither, as Shakespeare would say, we cannot find any and then 'woe and betide' suddenly they can turn up where

you have never seen them before. This happened on 9 July 2017 alongside the road as you go round The Boot leaving Aldreth west along towards Dambank and Long Drove. (Don't ask me to explain why The Boot. I don't know everything!). There, suddenly, were about 8-10 specimens of White Melilot (*Melilotus alba*) looking like a double row of thin bushes (see photo above). It certainly caught the eye.

How and why had they turned up 'out of the blue'? It's obvious the seeds were there to be germinated. Had earlier farmers grown Bokhara Clover (another name for it) nearby in the dim and distant past as a crop? It has a well-deserved reputation as an excellent honey plant but was also used for cattle forage and, being a member of the pea family, would put nitrogen into the soil. So a bit less of a mystery as to why there but why now? We shall never know. However, weather conditions must have been right and so the seeds germinated, and there they were in all their glory, resplendent with bees, bumble and otherwise, gathering the delicious nectar...mmmm.



The Woods in Winter

Contributed by John Burgess

If you walk through Nine Acre Wood during the next few weeks, you could be forgiven for feeling it is a somewhat desolate place. Apart from a few conifers at the far end of the wood, most of the greenery is restricted to the grass around the understory. Do not despair, everything is about to explode, buds are forming on the trees, bulbs are pushing through the soil, even the birds are showing renewed vigour, all be it in a wispy, thin canopy.

The consistently wet weather has left the ground somewhat sodden. Fortunately the off road motorcycle fraternity has found somewhere else to visit, consequently no further damage has occurred. The grass removed by their tyres will need an undisturbed spring to recover, so let's hope this continues. One of our members questioned a very civil rider. He replied that, as there were no signs precluding riding within the wood, therefore he presumed it was okay. This situation has now been resolved – prevention notices are affixed to the gateposts.

Some trimming around the perimeter and the figure of eight path will be completed by the end of February. A work party has been organised for the middle of the month. This will amount to cutting back the overhanging branches to allow the tractor-mounted mower free access for maintaining the path. Owing to the considerable amount of work completed by the tree removal contractor, very little work is being done within the wood itself, as the rides are very wide and accessible.



A wintery Nine Acre Wood.

My father-in-law and I walked around the wood at the weekend. He had attended the original planting day in 1995 and it had been several years since he had returned. He was astonished by the progress the wood had made. He commented that, considering the size of the whips he and many others had planted into what was a fairly barren landscape, the transformation was nothing short of miraculous.

An endearing and atmospheric place to visit, long may Nine Acre Wood continue to thrive.

Calling All Members

We would welcome more contributions from our members for the newsletter. If you have seen interesting or unusual wildlife or plants, have a favourite local walk or nature reserve you'd like to share, want to write a quarterly diary of sightings in your garden, fancy yourself as a nature poet or have any other ideas, we'd love to receive them! Please send your contributions to Sally at hadconsoc@gmail.com. The deadline for the next newsletter is 25 May.



Morning visitors to a Haddenham garden on 6 February.
Photo Ian Dickerson



Cake & Plant Sale

Saturday 5 May, The Green, 9:30-11:30am

We will be holding our annual bring & buy sale on the Green to raise funds for the winter talks – just the incentive you gardeners need to divide up those congested plants in your garden – and nothing will go to waste.

If you turn up with cakes or other produce instead, you will be just as warmly welcome. There will be plenty of varied and interesting things to buy and we very much look forward to seeing you.

Mixed Winter

Our contributors' reports direct from the HCS website www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk

There were a variety of birds about the parish during January, with plenty of Fieldfare, a few Redwing and flocks of Lapwing and Golden Plover, much as is usual. A high number of Wigeon on Hinton Reservoir – about 500 – with other ducks. More Roe Deer have been reported on the fen this winter, but not many hares (perhaps just not reported?).

9 November Back Drove: 8 Yellowhammers, 6 Corn Buntings, 2 Pied Wagtails, 1 Brambling. Long Drove: 400+ Lapwings, 50+/- Pied Wagtails, 150+ Common Gulls, 12 Skylarks in flock. Dambank: 4 Corn Buntings on wires probably means more on ground but hard to see. Aldreth, near ponds: 6 Fieldfare, 2 Redwings. PM&ID

13 November I've been doing some migration watching when time has allowed over the past 10 days in the garden (Aldreth) and near Nine Acre Wood. I've seen a few Redpoll, Brambling, Siskin and Grey Wagtails going over, as well as the usual pipits and thrushes. Yesterday morning there were 2 Hawfinch over the garden. (The last record for a Hawfinch was pre-1985. PM) I also had a large flock of 50+ Greenfinch in Robert Norman's orchard. SS

16 November Nice ringtail Hen Harrier hunting at the Aldreth end of Long Drove late this afternoon. ME

20 November Two Mute Swans killed by flying into power lines near the Old West River. This has been reported and we hope that prevention measures will be installed. SS

24 November Hillrow North Fen and Back Drove: 3 Redwing, 8 Yellowhammer, 60-70 Goldfinch, 6 Reed Buntings, 2 Meadow Pipits, 1 Marsh Harrier, 1 Merlin, 2 Kestrel. Aldreth Fen: 2000 Startling. PM&ID

26 November A large flock of 500-600 Fieldfare behind us on College Farm. ID

4 December A little surprised to see a new bird for my Duck Lane garden this morning – a Kingfisher. He successfully caught something in the pond, so hopefully he might return. BY

10 December 2 Red Kites were circling over Doghouse Grove, Wilburton. SB

16 December A Chiffchaff by the bridge at the start of The Boot. It was calling constantly but also quite flighty. However I did eventually get a good view as it fed low in the nettles in one of the ditches. SB

30 December Male Blackcap spotted feeding on honeysuckle berries – a first for my tiny garden in Haddenham High Street. DC

8 January Well, I couldn't believe it but have just spotted a male Bullfinch feeding on honeysuckle berries. I can't ever recall having seen one in my garden before so a



A jay visiting an Aldreth feeder in February.
Photo © Simon Stirrup

real first for me! I have such a tiny garden so could see it just a few feet away through my kitchen/conservatory window. What a joy! DC

17 January Aldreth to Earith road: (estimates only as spread along the road) 50 Mute Swans, 125-150 Lapwing, 20+ Goldfinch, 50 Stock Dove, 2 Gadwell, 200+ Starling, 300 Fieldfare, 3 Pied Wagtail, 100+ Golden Plover, 2 Kestrel, 1 Buzzard, 3 Roe Deer. Sunny, but cold and windy day. S&ID

18 January 50+ Fieldfare on the Recreation Ground yesterday. Some out again this morning but not as many. VF

26 January Female Great Spotted Woodpecker in our garden. A far less frequent visitor to feeders than in previous winters. SS

4 February A quick trip along Dam Bank and Long Drove had mixed results. Dam Bank only 25 Mute Swans but Long Drove 500+ Lapwing (flying), 50 Fieldfare, 3 Redwing, 1 Buzzard, 2 Kestrel, small flock of Goldfinch, 1 Brambling and 9 Roe Deer. ID

6 February On the garden feeders this morning: Longtailed Tits, male and female Reed Buntings and a Redpoll – a good start for the day. ID

So, as we head towards spring, we look forward to birds singing (some have already started), spring flowers and the first butterflies – Brimstone, Comma, or a Red Admiral on a sunny day. Please let us have your sightings.

Stop press: A dead animal by the side of the road between Haddenham and Wilburton has been identified as an otter.

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

We found a spectacular, rare fungus alongside the drove beside Guppy's Pond. It was nestled on an ivy-clad log and was such a bright orange colour that it seemed to glow from within. Paul Mason had to do some quite extensive research before being able to identify it as *Pluteus aurantiorugosus*. I have since looked it up on MushroomExpert.com, where the author, an expert, admits having encountered it only once in 20 years! We can add a lovely big tick to our Haddenham list.

We also found a much more common fungus on a very rotten piece of Pin Oak wood: *Cudoniella acicularis*. This had Paul searching through his books again until he found the correct name. The website mentioned above has a good description of this one as well.

Now for the more usual sightings. As I write, a Cormorant is fishing in the pond, Kingfishers and a couple of Great Crested Grebes too. Could this be the same pair as last year? Maybe we shall be lucky enough to see them breed again. Coots and Moorhens are very visibly starting to mark out territories and a few Mallards have moved back in.

Every morning, as the sun rises, hundreds of gulls fly over – north to south – and every evening they fly back in the opposite direction just before dusk. It takes a good half hour for them all to pass by. Lit from below by the sun low on the horizon, they look like bird-shaped lamps in the sky.

This cold weather, added to the need to be fit for the breeding season, has made all the garden birds



Pluteus aurantiorugosus. To see it in glorious colour go to 1 August entry on the HCS website.

very hungry and I'm forever filling the feeders. No regrets, as it's lovely to watch them all: Long-tailed Tits in large family groups, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Robins, Chaffinch, Blackbirds, Pied Wagtails, Collared Doves, Wood Pigeons, Dunnocks and probably more that I don't see. Strangely, although we have seen Green Woodpeckers on the lawn, we haven't heard the Great Spotted ones drum yet. They sometimes do so just after Christmas. Maybe that has something to do with the relatively cold weather we are having.

Wild primroses and violets are flowering and buds are swelling – spring is coming.



Male Blackcap in Haddenham West End. Photo Ian Dickerson

Winter Stray or Permanent Resident?

When I spotted a Blackcap in our garden in January 2016 I was quite surprised, as I had thought that all warblers sensibly migrated to Europe or North Africa in about September to spend their winter in the sunshine.

A bit of research on the RSPB website indicated that winter Blackcaps probably hatch or breed in southern Germany. The scientists who have been studying Blackcaps in two areas of Germany, some 500 miles (800km) apart, have discovered that birds which spend winter in Spain have more in common genetically with Spanish wintering groups than they do with UK-wintering groups. In fact, they may be on their way to becoming two different species.

So why are Blackcaps staying in the UK? Because we are putting out plenty of bird food! And sure enough I spotted a female Blackcap on our garden feeder this January while taking part in the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch.

If you see a Blackcap during winter, please add details of your sighting to Birdtrack, a BTO, RSPB and Birdwatch Ireland project. <https://www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/birdtrack/about> By collecting information about where birds are when, they can learn more about the birds' changing behaviour and populations. *Ed.*

Renew your subs!

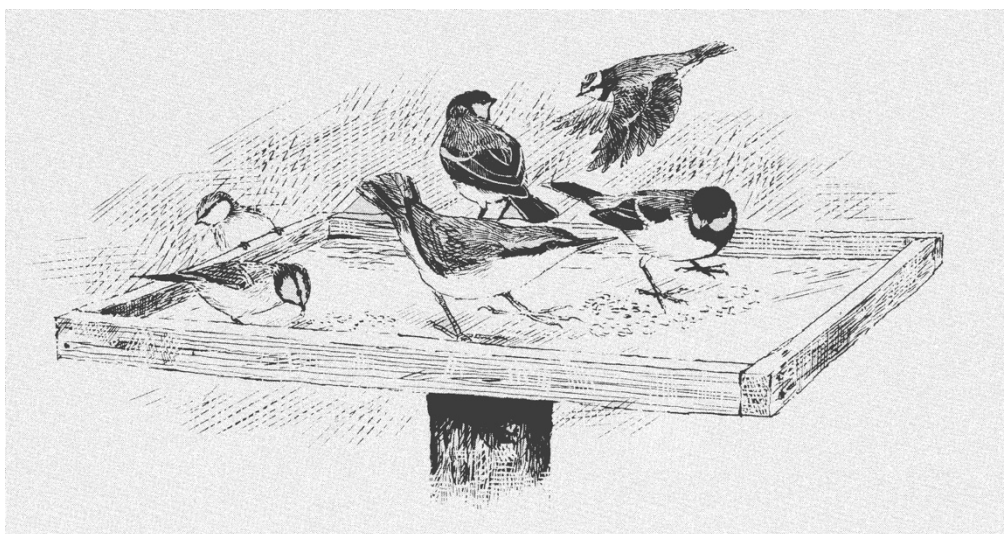
Subscriptions were due on
1st January.

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

Winter in a Small Garden

Contributed by Caroline Lee & Max Lyzba

When we moved to Haddenham, we knew we didn't want a large garden; although we love the outdoors, neither of us are gardeners, and the large garden at our old house, lovingly nurtured by its previous owner, had become sadly unkempt and unmanageable. What came with our new house was certainly small, about 15 feet square with a tiny lawn and a few shrubs in the border, in the shadow of the water tower and radio mast – not very inspiring for birds or other wildlife. We put up some feeders, filled with various nuts and seeds, and some suet balls, and hoped for some action. Two



years on, what have we spotted, without leaving the comfort of the living room?

Since Christmas, we've seen a group of 8-9 Long-tailed Tits, which come in almost every morning, hordes of House Sparrows, and at least a couple of Tree Sparrows with them, Blue Tits, Great Tits and Coal Tits, male & female Blackbirds, Starlings, Robins and Dunnocks. Of course, Woodpigeons and Collared Doves come and try to muscle all the small ones off the feeders (and make a terrible mess on the patio!). Jackdaws roost on the water tower, Crows & Starlings love the radio mast, Pied Wagtails hop along next door's roof, and in the sky above, we regularly see Kestrels and Buzzards.

Ordinary birds maybe, but pleasing nevertheless. Let's see what the next three months bring!



Some Reasons to be Cheerful

Chile set aside 11 million acres of land for national parks in Patagonia, following the largest ever private land donation from a private entity to a country. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/chile-adding-11-million-acres-national-parks-180962592/>

The United States, Russia, China and the European Union reached a deal to make the Arctic off-limits to commercial fishers for the next 16 years. <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/12/nations-agree-ban-fishing-arctic-ocean-least-16-years>

In September, one of the world's largest marine parks was created off the coast of Easter Island, and will protect 142 species, including 27 threatened with extinction. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/sep/09/easter-island-marine-park-save-endemic-species-indigenous-lives>

Eleven countries continued their plan to build a wall of trees from east to west across Africa in order to push back the desert. In Senegal, it's already working. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05h6qsd>

In November, Mexico's government created a new 148,000 square kilometre ocean reserve, 'the Galapagos of North America' for the conservation of hundreds of species, including rays, humpback whales, sea turtles, lizards and migratory birds. <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-mexico-environment/mexico-creates-marine-reserve-around-islands-called-galapagos-of-north-america-idUKKBN1DO2MQ>

The EU imposed new, stricter limits on pollutants such as nitrogen, sulphur, mercury and particulates that will apply to all 2,900 of Europe's large power plants. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-coal-pollutants/eu-states-approve-plans-for-stricter-limits-on-pollutants-from-power-plants-idUSKBN17U1ZO>



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.

13 March

BLAKENEY POINT

Ajay Tegala is the Coastal Ranger on this unique headland. Come and find out why it's his dream job and possibly the best.

10 April

POLLINATORS

Hilary Conlan is studying the insects using grass verges and ditch banks and will tell us what she has discovered.

8 May

WICKEN FEN – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Dr Peter Green is voluntary co-ordinator for this famous local nature reserve. It has a great history, a vivid present and a promising future. Let's learn about it tonight.

OTHER EVENTS

Saturday 5 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.