

# HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Vol. 33 No. 2  
May 2018

SPRING 2018

## Paul Mason – An Appreciation

*Contributed by Jake Allsop*

The Committee for 2018/19 is:

|                       |        |
|-----------------------|--------|
| Barclay Arnott        | 740500 |
| Ann Biggs             | 740810 |
| John Burgess          | 749441 |
| Sheila Dickerson      | 749443 |
| Susan Everitt, Treas. | 740352 |
| Elver Langley         | 740583 |
| Wendy Lanman          | 741138 |
| Caroline Lee          | 361678 |
| Robert Norman         | 740473 |
| Chris Prescott        | 749038 |

All numbers are 01353.

Please feel free to get in touch with any committee member with questions or information you might have. If you have any specific records of flora and fauna, send them to Sheila Dickerson on

hadconsoc@gmail.com

HCS Website:

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

*An account of my personal involvement with Paul over more than thirty years.*



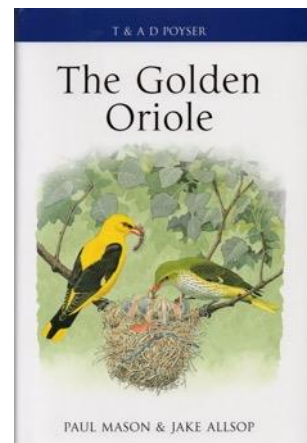
*Paul Mason with Mark Nokkert, Cambs ACRE, at New Cut Drain in 2014. Photo © Simon Stirrup*

There is no monumental sculpture over Christopher Wren's grave in Westminster Abbey, just a simple plaque on the wall that says SI MOMUMENTUM REQUIRIS, CIRCUMSPICE: 'If you need a monument, just look around you'. The monuments are, of course, his architectural masterpieces like St Paul's Cathedral and many other buildings. I would like to tell you about some of the monuments to Paul that you can encounter if you look around you.

### The Golden Oriole

Paul and a small dedicated group had been studying the Golden Oriole in the Fenland Basin. This iconic bird was mainly confined to the poplar plantations at Lakenheath, but had started to spread out into Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. Paul, very persuasive, got me to join and we spent many vigorous summer seasons investigating likely poplar plantations. Then Paul asked me if I would help him to write a book about the bird, since we had accumulated 25 years' worth of information about it, much of it not previously known. Poyser, a prestigious publisher of natural history monographs, gave us a contract. Paul took on the task of finding out about the extent of the Oriole's distribution throughout Europe and Asia. He loved the internet, and he loved networking with people, so in no time he had correspondents everywhere. The most exotic was Kazakhstan where he persuaded some senior person to send us all their ringing data, page after page of figures – and all the commentaries and headings in Russian. He dropped it on my desk and asked me to analyse it! It turned out to be a very important piece of work as it proved that two different subspecies of oriole bred in Kazakhstan, one of which later became a separate species, known as the Indian Golden Oriole.

The book was published in 2009 and was well received by the ornithological community. Truly a monument to Paul's passion for the bird and his tenacity in getting the information he needed.



### Haddenham Conservation Society

My first encounter with Paul was in 1984 when I had just arrived in Haddenham. A small group of people had bruited the idea of a Conservation Society, and Paul soon roped me in. We worked on a number of different projects together, including the following:

#### Nine Acre Wood

When Paul heard from James Cater that his father-in-law, Sid Burgess, was giving up farming on nine acres of land in Aldreth up against the Old West, the idea of planting a wood there was immediately accepted. We needed to raise money to buy the land, and find an organisation to own it, as HCS is not constituted to own property. Paul said we should compete for an award from the Anglian Water Conservation scheme. It worked and we got several thousand pounds. As to ownership, the Woodland Trust agreed to take responsibility for the wood. That was fine, but Paul wanted something more. Given that Orioles at that time bred near Stretham to the north and Waterbeach to the south, Paul pointed out that Orioles could very easily fly over Nine Acre Wood and, who knows, stay to breed. However, there was a snag: they bred more or less exclusively in poplar cultivars, but the Woodland Trust has a strict policy of planting only native species. As many of you know, there is a huge tranche of poplars in the heart of Nine Acre Wood, including derivatives of the North American *P. balsamifera* species. Who on earth could have talked them into planting such alien trees? As I say, Paul could be very persuasive!

#### The Birds of Haddenham, 1995

At about the same time, Paul and James Cater put their heads together to collate all the records that had been collected over the years about the birds of our parish. This was to become an HCS publication, *The Birds of Haddenham*, which received much praise from local wildlife organisations. My role was a minor one, namely, to edit the manuscript and prepare it for publication. It is a shame that Paul did not live to realise his dream to publish a revised and expanded version of *The Birds of Haddenham*.



#### Fairchild's Meadows

When David Fairchild gave up farming the 17 acres in the centre of the village, it provided a golden opportunity to create a recreational area. The long field, generally known as the Wildflower Meadow, was Paul's pride and joy. For years we had had no one in the Conservation Society who was really knowledgeable about wild flowers, so Paul decided that he would learn about flowers. Within the space of a year he had become amazingly proficient in finding and recognising wild flowers, and what is more, in recalling their names and details. A prodigious memory and a voracious appetite for knowledge were his hallmarks. He immediately started his search for help, which arrived in the form of Martin Baker, a senior member of the county Wildlife Trust. He and Paul worked closely together for several seasons slowly converting the field from 'improved grassland' to sweet grass and a remarkable range of wildflowers. Go and visit it now as the flowers come into bloom: each one is a monument to Paul's determination to save and enhance the wildlife of our parish.

#### New Cut Bank

Paul ranged far and wide over his beloved Haddenham fens, noting its wildlife and writing about it to share his knowledge and enthusiasm with others. On one occasion he noticed that a stretch of the Cut Bank along from Two Pot Corner rich in wild flowers had been cut much too early, i.e., before seed fall. He had already advised the Environment Agency of this valuable stretch of land. Unfortunately, the local LDB, which had been subcontracted to manage the bank, had not received the instruction not to cut until September. Paul went back into battle, and the Cut Bank wild flowers were saved. Go and enjoy them this summer and say thank you for another monument to Paul's efforts.

#### Lakes Drove

Drove encroachment is a sensitive subject in the fens and seemed impossible to stop despite the fact that it was illegal. I was away when Paul went into battle against the encroachment of Lakes Drove in Haddenham fen, so when I got back he had already instigated the legal tussle that resulted in a reversal of the encroachment. Today there are markers to show the boundary between the original drove verge and the adjacent farmland. When you see those markers, remember Paul and be thankful.

These are just a few of my memories of Paul and of the legacy he has left us. No doubt others could add to this list.

One thing is for sure: Paul was a big man and he has left a huge gap. Rest in Peace, my friend.



## A Late Spring

The spring was a long time coming to us this year, with cold wet weather not too keen to let go. The snow brought winter thrushes (Fieldfare and Redwing) with Mistle Thrush into the gardens from the fields in early March, and Buzzard and Kestrel into Fairchild's Meadow. Wildlife picked up from then, with Swallows and Butterflies arriving in early April, all set for the spring and summer.

**1 March** 4 Fieldfare and 2 Redwing (our own mini flock!) in the garden, warding off all Blackbirds from the apples. I&SD

**4 March** Plenty of Badger tracks in the snow along almost the entire length of Aldreth Causeway. The Old West River was almost entirely frozen apart from small 'holes' near the High Bridge, which were occupied by a Little Grebe. SS

**16 March** A Brimstone in our Aldreth garden and an unusual standoff between 2 female Great Spotted Woodpeckers on a feeder. SS

**13 April** Something to cheer us all up! Our first 2 Swallows have arrived over the garden this morning! Hooray!! S&ID

**14 April** Because of sunshine and warmer conditions, in our garden this afternoon: 2 Siskins (male and female), 1 Red Kite flew over, with 1 Peregrine harassing it. Butterflies: 2 Peacock, 1 Tortoiseshell, 1 Comma and 1 Brimstone. So spring at last! S&ID

**6 May** One Swift over Aldreth. SS

**7 May** Dambank, Long Drove, Claytons and Back Drove: 2 Kestrel, Skylarks (singing), 12 plus Corn Buntings, many Reed Buntings (in the rape), many Whitethroats, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, 2 plus Yellow Wagtails, 1 Reed Warbler, 3 Gadwell, 2 plus Mallard, 1 Sparrowhawk, 1 Marsh Harrier, 1 Buzzard, 2 Mute Swans flying over. Butterflies: Orange Tip, Tortoiseshell, Speckled Wood, Peacock, and many unidentified whites. Also 2 Swallows on the wires down West End. S&ID

**10 May** A Hobby flying low over Dam Bank Drove which then soared and finally headed off in the direction of Aldreth High Bridge. SS



© Simon Stirrup

Short-eared Owl. Photo © Simon Stirrup

**22 May** Common Tern and Short-eared Owl photographed near Aldreth in the past week. Other recent sightings include a pair of Gadwall, 2 pairs of Shoveler and an Oystercatcher over Aldreth. SS

Although things are fairly quiet on the local droves, all of nature seems to be busy. Young fledglings of Blackbirds, Robins, Starlings and any day now, Sparrows are all doing well. The Swifts are back! All regular butterfly species are about. The hedgerows are full of Blackthorn blossom, and Cow Parsley has been a delight. So, we look forward to a promising summer.

## Chair's Report

My report consists mainly of thanks to the various people who contributed to the ongoing success and vitality of the Conservation Society during the year. So, in no particular order, thanks to:

- Sheila Dickerson, for researching and signing up speakers for the winter talks such as this evening's, and of course to the speakers themselves, who often travel a significant distance to give their talks.
- Sally MacEachern, for editing the Society Newsletter, and to all contributors.
- Tina Bone for hosting the Society's website, and all contributors to the website. The website is well worth a regular visit as it is updated with photographs of recent wildlife sightings, and news and stories that supplement those in the Newsletter.
- All contributors and helpers at the annual Plant and Cake Stall which raised £361 last year. This year the Stall will be on the Green on Saturday morning 5 May at 9.30 am. As always, all contributions of cakes and plants will be welcome.
- Haddenham Galleries for selling surplus produce from the Plant Stall.
- Helpers at various workparties during the year in the Old Burial Ground, and in Nine Acre Wood. As always, volunteers for workdays are very welcome.
- To Steve Hawes for the Conservation Society posters.
- And to Christine Lowrey for checking the accounts. Before I hand over to Susan for her Treasurer's Report, a quick word about Nine Acre Wood.

Issues and work this year:

- Leaching of pollutants into a ditch that feeds into the New Cut Drain at Aldreth was reported to the Environment Agency, and we are continuing to liaise with the Agency regarding regeneration, and possible prosecution of the offender.

Chris Prescott  
10 April 2018



# A First for Our Parish

*Contributed by Alan James & Barbara Grafton*

If, like us, you have a log pile to keep the home fires burning you will be very familiar with moving a log or two to reveal spiders, woodlice, flies, lacewings, moths and butterflies, both dead and alive. It's considerably rarer to find a bat, but that's exactly what we did on a snowy 4 March during the 'Beast from the East'. Given that all UK bats are covered by the legislation of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, we knew that disturbing it meant we had an obligation to protect it – so we called an ecologist friend who put us in touch with Barbara York, Haddenham's resident bat carer from the Cambridgeshire Bat Group (See Newsletter Vol 31 no 3 Summer 2016 for Barbara's account of her work).

Barbara paid us a visit within a couple of hours, and gave us a great deal of fascinating information about bats. Shockingly, even today humans kill bats because they fear them or do not want them on or in their properties, and 40-50% of rescued bats in Cambridgeshire have been injured by domestic cat attacks. We later discovered from the Bat Conservation Trust that cats kill well over 250,000 bats a year in the UK.



*Image of a Nathusius' Pipistrelle by Mnolf, reproduced under terms of the GNU Free Documentation Licence.*

Barbara – who is a Bat Conservation Trust registered bat carer trained to rescue, rehabilitate and release bats – held our log pile bat with great care in her gloved hands, identifying him as a male pipistrelle, dehydrated and underweight, with some bruising to his wings, and took him away for some dedicated TLC. She rang a couple of hours later, in great excitement, to say that the newly named bat (Alfie) was not a Common Pipistrelle but a great rarity: a Nathusius' Pipistrelle. She had been able to distinguish him from his cousins by his longer upper fur – which gives him a shaggy look – and by the fluffy fur extending further down his tail membrane than is seen on Common or Soprano Pipistrelles. He also has broader wings and is slightly larger than either of the other pipistrelles. To put his size in perspective, he is between 45-55mm (about the size of a human thumb), with a wingspan of 220-250mm, and could fit inside a matchbox!

Nathusius' Pipistrelles are widespread in Western and Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, and in Asia Minor, but are rare in the UK. The first recorded sighting of a Nathusius' Pipistrelle in the UK was in the Shetland Isles in 1940. Then there were sightings in Londonderry in 1966 and, in 1997, the discovery of a breeding colony in Lincolnshire which changed its status from a vagrant or occasional visitor to a resident British bat. Bat detector surveys indicate that there may be between 6,000 and 18,000 in Northern Ireland, and just 1,600 in England. They favour woodland, farmland, and proximity to bodies of water such as rivers and lakes which provide them with midges, mosquitoes, mayflies, lacewings and small moths.

## Bat care

We had no idea of the commitment required to care for a downed bat until we met Barbara. Bats in her care are housed in individual boxes and some require hand-feeding every couple of hours with mealworms specially fed with a nutrient-rich diet to provide the bats with maximum nutrition. Alfie proved to be a willing recipient of the generous free meals, delivered on the end of tweezers.



*Barbara's flight tent for the recuperating bats in her care prior to release.*

Weighing in on arrival in Barbara's bat hospital at a scant 6.4gm, he left her care to return to us on 10 March after six days of dedicated nursing for a 'soft release' weighing a very healthy 8.6gm, giving him ample fat stores in reserve. The 'soft release' entailed sealing Alfie into a special bat box, used specifically for releases, for 24 hours with water and mealworms. The following day, Barbara returned to check on Alfie and found him hanging in the corner of the box having eaten all the mealworms. On this occasion Barbara replenished the food and water but removed the tea towel sealing the box entrance. A further visit the following day revealed that Alfie had flown the box (we assume he hadn't just returned to our log pile!). Over the following few days, food continued to be placed in the box just in case Alfie returned and was hungry.

A couple of days later, we received confirmation that Alfie is the first ever recorded Nathusius' Pipistrelle for our parish (Haddenham, Aldreth South and Hill Row West).

We feel immensely privileged to have discovered Alfie and had a brief acquaintance with him thanks to Barbara's dedicated care. It's extremely rare to observe a bat up close and to see how tiny and beautiful they are. We now have a bat box above our log pile and are hoping that, one day, we will have a resident bat or colony.

If you discover a grounded or injured bat, call the Bat Helpline 0845 1300 228. Do not handle the bat unless absolutely necessary to protect it, and then only whilst wearing thick gloves. For more information on these wonderful, intelligent and beneficial creatures which are so threatened by multiple factors, including habitat loss, pesticides, wood treatment chemicals, inappropriate land management, domestic cats, and wind farms, see: [www.cambsbatgroup.org.uk/](http://www.cambsbatgroup.org.uk/), [www.bats.org.uk/](http://www.bats.org.uk/), (<http://batconservationtrust.blogspot.co.uk/2016/04/researching-impacts-of-cats-on-bats.html>, and – specifically on Nathusius' Pipistrelles – [www.nathusius.org.uk/](http://www.nathusius.org.uk/).)

## News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

In addition to the usual garden birds we have seen several Reed Bunting and Redpoll, a Treecreeper and, on 28 April, a Bullfinch. The Great Spotted Woodpeckers were later than usual drumming on the trees, but the Green Woodpeckers were often heard yaffling so there must be a fair number around. We regularly see the Kingfishers, and the Great Crested Grebes were also often seen until a couple of weeks ago. Greylag Geese have made some attempts to settle on the pond, but, so far, haven't stayed. We're hoping that the Grebes haven't been chased away.

The Reed Warblers are back, but fewer than before, probably because there are not as many reeds to nest in due to the deep water this year and I do miss the loud chatter of the larger flocks.

Ian and Sheila Dickerson spent an afternoon watching for Spotted Flycatchers, which we have seen here in the past and are now an endangered species, but left not having seen any.

Eight orchids – I believe them to be Bee Orchids – have



appeared on our lawn. They are still in bud and we are following their growth with great interest. Eight years ago Mike and Gill Smith had some on their lawn when they were still neighbours of ours, but the orchids disappeared after appearing for four or five years. That is apparently what they tend to do – and then reappear some 30 years later or so when they consider the conditions to be just right. I have read that each flower takes five to eight years to grow, but this must be underground as I hadn't noticed the leaves on our lawn before this year when they appeared as the weather started to warm up.

Talking of bees – I have also noticed more Bee Flies (*Bombylius major*), this year. It looks very much like a bee, but is actually a bee mimic. It flies from flower to flower with a very noticeable proboscis which seems permanently extended. It is totally harmless and fun to watch. Oh – and the Hornets are around again. I caught one under a glass and carefully freed it outside. They are huge and make a very loud noise as they fly against a windowpane. What is extraordinary is the tiny waist holding the tail end to their abdomen – it looks ready to snap at any moment.

### 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.



*Hornet on a branch.*

You will have noticed my 'probably' and 'I believe' – I can no longer pick up the phone and ask Paul for more information or even pop in with a sample to identify. I hadn't realised just how much I would miss him.



## Garden Thoughts

Contributed by Haddenham Galleries

Sitting in the Sculpture Garden at Haddenham Galleries on an early spring morning. What a way to start the day!

A Song Thrush sings in welcome, repeating phrases of song from the branches of a young oak. An overwintering Chiffchaff answers him from the beech hedge that still holds onto its coppery autumn leaves. Newts rise to the surface of the pond, basking in a shaft of sunlight, and all the surrounding trees show buds of new life. A daisy peeps out from the new grass while an early ladybird spreads its wings and flies to the next flower.

Our garden is always open to visitors, please come and enjoy a moment of peace and perhaps a slice of cake from our teasop.

Opening hours Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 5pm,  
Sunday 12pm to 5pm.

Haddenham Galleries 20 High Street.



## New Life on the Old West: Development Phase

*Contributed by Will Birkin, project manager for New Life on the Old West*



*An example of a habitat enhancement that could be funded through the project: a pond that has been re-profiled to allow access for Turtle Doves and to encourage a greater diversity of aquatic plants and invertebrates. Photo © Andrew Holland, RSPB.*

New Life on the Old West is a Heritage Lottery funded project to create a series of natural stepping stones in Cambridgeshire, between RSPB Ouse Washes and Ouse Fen to the West and the National Trust's Wicken Fen to the East, and to connect the communities in the nine parishes around the Old West River to their local natural heritage through citizen science, educational and other activities.

The money has recently been granted for the development stage, so plans can be made for the habitat enhancements that will be made in the IDB (Internal Drainage Board) ditch network (e.g. berms, ponds, and coir rolls), on farmland (e.g. wildflower mixes and wetland creation) and community space (e.g. flowers on village greens, hedgerows, and ponds). To help guide and monitor these small-scale interventions Cambridgeshire ACRE are tendering for two pieces of consultancy work: one to create a biodiversity monitoring framework for the project area; and one to conduct an audit of community green spaces, propose enhancements and devise a management programme.

If you are interested, or know of someone interested in the project, or you are a landowner and would be interested in a free farm visit to discuss the kind of small scale habitat creation the New Life on the Old West project could fund, please contact [william.birkin@cambsacre.org.uk](mailto:william.birkin@cambsacre.org.uk). And please see the website for further information: <https://newlifeontheoldwest.wordpress.com/>.

**Funding raised by  
The National Lottery**

and awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund



## Spring in a Small Garden

*Contributed by Caroline Lee & Max Lyzba*

Having enjoyed a variety of wildlife in the winter, we were looking forward to spring and fresh delights – what we got was a week of snow and freezing temperatures! We worried about the daffodils, which had bravely put their leaves above the ground before getting buried and flattened, but they proved hardy enough to bounce back to give a pretty display. The cherry has blossomed, lots of wild flowers have filled the tiny space under the shrub that isn't an acer but looks like one and last year's violas have reappeared in the cracks of the patio. Bees, type unknown, and butterflies, including a small blue one – I hope it's a Small Blue but it's probably got a fancy name that I'll never remember – are attracted by the new growth and pollen.

So, which birds have we welcomed back? The first



*House Martin*

Swallow on 14 April, followed by a few House Martins and finally Swifts in mid-May; the Goldfinches have returned, ignoring the niger seed but gorging on the mixed seeds; Blue Tits and Great Tits (enjoying the nut feeder); Pied Wagtails nesting in next door's gable end while an intrepid Starling prefers its own front door, using another neighbour's extractor fan to reach its nest; and best of all, the return of 'wonky wing'. Last summer we were visited by a Dunnock with a

damaged wing, who kept coming into the garden, pecking around below the feeders, before managing to fly off. Concerned for its survival, we were pleased every time it flew in. But surely, it wouldn't survive the winter? How wrong we were, as it's back, as cheeky as ever.

Common garden birds in our ordinary garden, but a pleasure to watch. We're eagerly awaiting the next season!



*Paul Mason inspecting a recently unearthed bog oak on Long Drove in 2009. Photo © Simon Stirrup*

## Your Newsletter Needs You!

When I took over from Wendy Lanman as editor in October 2014 (Can it really be over three years ago!), I would have struggled to fill the pages without the steady support of Paul Mason, who always provided at least three pieces an issue, plus suggestions, contacts and photographs.

Without him my role will be much more challenging. I would much appreciate input from HCS members. If something interesting happens in your garden, or you spot something locally, or you have a particular interest, do write a piece (long or short, with or without a photo) and send it to Sally at [hadconsoc@gmail.com](mailto:hadconsoc@gmail.com). The newsletter deadlines are usually some time in February, May and September, depending on my commitments, but you can send me the material any time of year.

How about some family related activities/articles? I know a lot of our members have children or grandchildren. Is there a nature activity or project that your children enjoy – and that might inspire other families? *Ed.*



## Cake and Plant Sale

We thought that sales would be down this year due, partly to possible competition from the Ely Eel Festival, but mostly to the fact that Maxine had to make nearly all the cakes as Jane was laid low with a broken ankle. In addition to that, the cold weather had stalled the growth of many young plants specially sown for the event. *But* we did very well all the same: a total of £269.25, made up of £101 from cakes and £168.25 from plants. Alastair and Hazel Hull are again kindly selling the leftover plants at the Galleries so we shall be able to add their takings to that total. Many thanks to all who toiled in the kitchen and the garden and helped on the day. Thanks to you we shall be able to afford more good speakers this winter.



## 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.*

9 October

### **FASCINATING FUNGI**

An introduction to Mycology by **Peter Walker**

13 November

### **TITLE TO BE CONFIRMED**

An illustrated talk on the Great Ouse by **Jeff Hide**

11 December

### **THE WILDLIFE OF MAY FARM, LITTLEPORT**

By **Steve Mumford** and friends

## OTHER EVENTS

July, a Sunday tba, Church Lane

### **OLD BURIAL GROUND**

Our annual haycut. Helpers much appreciated. Look out for an announcement on the HCS website and for posters nearer the date.

Early September, a Sunday tba, 2:00 to 4:00 pm

### **BOATING DAY ON GUPPY'S POND**

Our yearly chauffeured boating day. Look out for the yellow posters nearer the date.

*Every effort has been made to obtain copyright permission for the illustrations, but has not always been successful.  
We shall act on any information provided by readers to rectify the situation.*