

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

WINTER 2019

The Committee for 2019/20 is:

Barclay Arnott	740500
Ann Biggs	740810
John Burgess	749441
Sheila Dickerson	749443
Susan Everitt, Treas.	740352
Elver Langley	740583
Wendy Lanman	741138
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

Send articles or photos for the newsletter to Sally on hadconsoc@gmail.com

HCS website:
www.hcs.tinaboneuk.co.uk

Our Own, Positively Helpful, Mr. Toad

Contributed by Barbara Grafton

Back in April last year, while watering the greenhouse, we were startled to see our strawberry plants moving quite vigorously. Cautious investigations revealed a common (aka European) toad staring up at us with protruding copper-coloured eyes. He or she was unambiguously a *Bufo bufo*, dark grey-brown with a squat, broad and warty body. Entirely unconcerned at being discovered (so no need to puff up or stand tall as a defence mechanism), it ambled off slowly into cover. We were thrilled to find it in residence, and thankful that it had an exit from the greenhouse around the sliding doors.



Common Toad. Photo © [patrick connolly](#) (cc-by-sa/2.0)

Membership information

Subscription rates

1 Jan to 31 Dec 2020

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.

On a couple of occasions during the spring we heard it making a pleasant chirping sound, meaning it was a male (as the females are silent). We were not successful at taming it to appear for food on demand at twilight (apparently, many toads will do this), but over the next few months we enjoyed several sightings of it in the greenhouse, usually dozing in a corner. On one memorable occasion, we gave it an accidental drenching from the hose and were greatly amused to watch it fastidiously wiping off the water with its hind legs. As the summer heat increased, we three-quarters-buried a terracotta pot in the greenhouse soil as a shady burrow, but never found any evidence that it had been used.

One considerable benefit of having a resident toad in the greenhouse was a much increased strawberry crop. In previous, toad-free years, we had far too much fruit damaged by woodlice, ants and

slugs. We have not spotted our helpful amphibian for many weeks now, but hope it is still in the greenhouse out of harm's way from its many predators (e.g. grass snakes, hedgehogs, foxes, cats, dogs, rats, herons, corvids, gulls, ducks and birds of prey). If it is, it will now be hibernating until late February or early March when it will emerge to find its ancestral breeding pond. With luck, it will return to our garden and delight us once more with its occasional appearances – and extra bowls of strawberries.

It is not difficult to distinguish the common toad from the common frog, but perhaps young readers would appreciate the guide below. And if they have not already read about the adventures of the rascal Mr. Toad in *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, or watched one of the films based on the book, they are in for a treat.

We can help toads to have a safe hibernation by making or buying a frog or toad abode: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/garden-activities/makeafrogandtoadabode/>

The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust (ARC) provides a free, downloadable, booklet called 'Dragons in your Garden' to encourage us to make our gardens friendly to frogs, toads, newts, snakes and lizards, many of which are disappearing from the wider countryside: <https://www.arc-trust.org/dragons-in-your-garden>.

	Common Toad: <i>Bufo bufo</i>	Common Frog: <i>Rana temporaria</i>
Status:	Not endangered, but listed as a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan because their numbers are declining due to habitat loss. Large numbers are killed on the roads, especially in spring en route to their breeding ponds.	Not classed as endangered. Their International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) status is 'Least Concern'.
Range:	In the UK (England, Scotland and Wales, but not Ireland); most of Europe, northwest Africa and Asia.	Most of Europe as far north as the Arctic Circle; England, Scotland, Wales and also Ireland (introduced, not native).
Description:	8-10 cm (3-4 in) in length; warty, leathery, dry dark grey-brown, olive or orangey skin all over; squat, broad body; short front legs with the toes turned inwards; short back legs and long unwebbed toes; no tail; no neck; rounded snout; wide mouth; long, sticky tongue; no teeth; protruding golden or copper eyes. Can change the colour of its skin to suit the surrounding soil.	Smaller and slimmer than a toad. 6-9 cm (2.4-3.5 in) in length; smooth, moist, shiny skin; very varied colours (olive green /brown, grey-brown, brown, grey and yellow); undersides are pale (white, yellow or orangey); sides, legs and back are blotchy; dark patches around the eyes; a V-shaped spot on the back of the neck; stripy legs; longer hind legs than the toad; webbed toes; teeth in the upper jaw. Can change the colour of its skin to suit the surrounding soil.
Movement:	They don't move much (sedentary). Slow crawl or walk, not hops (but they can jump short distances).	More active than toads. Short leaps or hops.
Habitat:	Dry, dryish, damp areas in gardens, woods and fields, but do not need ponds or other water sources except in the breeding season.	Wet or damp areas in gardens, woods and fields, but do not need ponds or other water sources except in the breeding season.
Diet:	Carnivorous. Mostly feed at night (nocturnal). Insects, beetles, earwigs, ants, woodlice, larvae, spiders, slugs, snails and worms. Also, more rarely, slow worms, small grass snakes and harvest mice.	The same as toads, except not the bigger prey. Young frogs feed in water and on land; older frogs feed only on land. They also eat their shed skin.
Eggs:	Laid in ponds in long, triple-stranded strings of jelly and hatch into black tadpoles.	Laid in ponds in clumps of jelly in March, and hatch into dark green/brown tadpoles that become speckled with gold as they mature.
Lifespan:	10-12 years in the wild; can live 20-40 years in the wild, and are known to live 50 years in captivity.	8 years in the wild.
Hibernation:	October to late March in burrows, log and stone piles, leaf litter, sheds, and greenhouses. Breathe through their skins so can hibernate underwater. Can emerge to forage in warmer weather.	October to February in muddy burrows, compost heaps, ponds and other water sources. Breathe through their skins so can hibernate underwater. Can emerge to forage in warmer weather.
Astonishing fact:	Have glands on the back of their head that produce an irritant toxin (bufagin). It can kill some species but is harmless to humans. (However, always wash your hands if you ever touch a toad!)	Frogs close their eyes to swallow. This is because they cannot swallow without pushing their food down their throats with their large eyes!

Remembering Paul Mason

On 17 December 2019 around 100 people gathered at the Arkenstall Centre to celebrate the life of Paul Mason.

Jake Allsop remembered meeting Paul for the first time in 1984 when they joined forces to save a derelict orchard near Nelson's Lane. Although they were not to be successful, their action group morphed into the Haddenham Conservation Society with Paul and Jake on the committee. Achievements included the Old Burial Ground, *Flora and Fauna of Haddenham*, *Birds of Haddenham*, *The Golden Oriole* and Nine Acre Wood.

Jeff Baker remembered Paul persuading him to climb a very tall tree, after Jeff said he didn't think it was possible. Paul suggested Jeff climb onto a higher branch that overhung the nest and then abseil down to ring the young Golden Orioles. He did, lived to tell the tale, and made Paul happy with mission accomplished!

David Hopkins met Paul at the age of 10 and was filled with admiration for his patience, persistence and powers of persuasion. Despite David's fear of heights Paul often persuaded him to climb trees in order to bring nests down for Paul to see!

Simon Stirrup moved to Aldreth in 2006 and soon made contact with Paul. Simon was immediately impressed by the depth of Paul's local knowledge and his many contacts. For instance, when unknown fungi appeared on Feast's Green recently Paul was instantly able to find an expert to identify them.

Mike Dilger regretted that he'd not met Paul, but he had discovered that they shared a particular affection for stuffed animals.

Mike was born in Stafford into a family that was not interested in wildlife. As a boy he went from being a train enthusiast to postage stamp collecting and found himself drawn to stamps with wildlife. On his ninth birthday he was given a bird book, which transformed his life. His next request was binoculars for Christmas. He began with the birds in the family garden and then the marshes by Stafford railway station. At university a thesis on moths in the cloud forest of Ecuador kindled a passion for travel, financed by life modelling for art students.

A film for Channel 5 led to more TV work, a job with Bill Oddie and finally the *One Show*. Mike has spent 12 years on the *One Show* and made 450 short films during that time. He enjoys the fact that it allows him to preach to the unconverted – *Springwatch* (for the converted) has 2-3 million viewers but the *One Show* has 5 million – and has enabled him to see amazing wildlife and meet celebrities such as Sir David Attenborough, Tony Curtis and Larry Hagman.

Very many thanks to Sheila Dickerson and Caroline Lee, in particular, and to all the other HCS committee members and helpers for organising a very enjoyable and memorable event.



Autumn Thoughts from the Gallery Garden

Contributed by Ann Biggs

From the northern night, on a favourable wind, come visitors. Redwings, a thin cry of 'seep' under a harvest moon. On their heels the harsh 'chack' of Fieldfare to feast on autumn fruit.

In the garden, trees drop a heavy coat of yellowing leaves in preparation for the long sleep. A young Robin sings, a tentative rendering of his spring challenge, racing to establish a territory before his siblings. October is wet, placing bracelets of fungi on dead wood while signs of digging betray a Badger's quest for rising worms. Squirrels bury walnuts, only to forget, allowing new saplings to be born next spring.



Artwork by Ann Biggs

Our café has a new manager, Gemma, and newly painted walls, with a display from Hazel's shop, give a cosy atmosphere to our seasonal soups and tasty bakes. Plans for the Gallery include an exhibition, 'Birds and Bees' in early spring, involving the local Wildlife Trusts (see <http://haddenhamartscentre.org.uk> for details).

Back in the garden, hopefully spring will see the renovation of our pond. Volunteers are needed. Come and talk to staff to see how you might be able to help.

Meanwhile, autumn softly walks the garden paths, trailing chilly fingers to wither late blooms and rot leaves, whispering to any that will listen, 'Winter is coming!'

September

Contributed by Sarah Shippey

It was a day in mid-September, a day to hold fast for the winter – warm, sunny, clear, calm, and full. It was best to walk slowly or sit and look. The honeybees, nesting in the old red-brick wall near the house, were gently busy, flying up over the wall, or away down the garden. A large, very hairy, red-brown caterpillar was sitting on a leaf of camellia next to the privet hedge – he had a Mohican haircut, and a bristling tuft of a tail. The photo, taken with my phone, was just a blur. Next time I looked for him he had gone.



Speckled Wood

Butterflies were everywhere – a Speckled Wood, Red Admirals on the flowering ivy, Large Whites, and a Hummingbird Hawk Moth on the white valerian, right next to where I was sitting. Lydia's pretty black bantams potted around, and there were birds everywhere. The squirrels, leaping about and digging, have arrived to raid the hazel and walnut trees. And the Muntjac has eaten the new courgettes, flowers and leaves as well.

As the sky turned a brilliant red in the evening at least two bats were silhouetted. And, oh joy, the first monster spider of the autumn arrived in the back hall!

Renew your subs!

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

A Wet Autumn and Winter

Well, after an excellent summer wildlife wise, we headed for a wet autumn, but still had the occasional butterfly and dragonfly about. By mid-November Goldcrests and Blackcaps were seen in gardens – the latter could well have come from the Continent, whilst ours headed south. Mid-December brought Whooper Swans over Station Road (the first sighting in quite a few years in this area). Into winter, and still very wet, bringing regular sightings of Common Gulls (*not* common) together with Roe Deer. Not many winter thrushes (Fieldfare and Redwing) reported this year.

5 October First report for the autumn: 1 Redwing and 1 Chiffchaff in the same tree in my garden. JA

18 October At 9.50am a Raven was circling over Enchanted Hill, Aldreth Road. It was calling repeatedly – a clipped ‘corp corp corp’. I had a good view in my binoculars, including the long neck and wedge-shaped tail. I’ve lived in Cambridgeshire for seven years now and it’s the first Raven I’ve ever seen in East Anglia (let alone Cambridgeshire). SB

31 October We noticed this spider (below) on the kitchen ceiling and thought that it might be a Noble False Widow. I managed to photograph it and confirm the identify. This is the species that the tabloids get very excited about as it has a very painful bite. SS



16 November A Raven seen in a tree in Haddenham Churchyard a couple of days ago, perhaps the same one seen in Aldreth Road on 18 October. ID

6 December Coal Tit on peanut feeder in our garden – only our second or third record here. SS

6 December Dambank and Long Drove this afternoon, after the fog cleared. Still very wet and muddy despite at least three dry days. Not much to report, but a few Fieldfare, 9 Mute Swan, 1 Heron, a total of 5 Kestrel, 20+ Stock

Dove, 9+ male Pheasant, 3 Green Sandpiper, 7 Grey Partridge, 2 Roe Deer and, looking over towards Chain Corner from Earith Road, approx. 50 Whooper Swan near the Sutton Road (from the Washes). S&ID

25 December To north of Dam Bank Drove: 98 Whooper Swan feeding on sugar beet leftovers and a further 20 on Ewell Fen. SS

30 December Ewell Fen: 13 Whooper Swan. Long Drove: 96 Whooper Swan, 29 Mute Swan, 1 male Hen Harrier, 5 Roe Deer. North Fen: approx. 100 swan sp., 4 Roe Deer SS

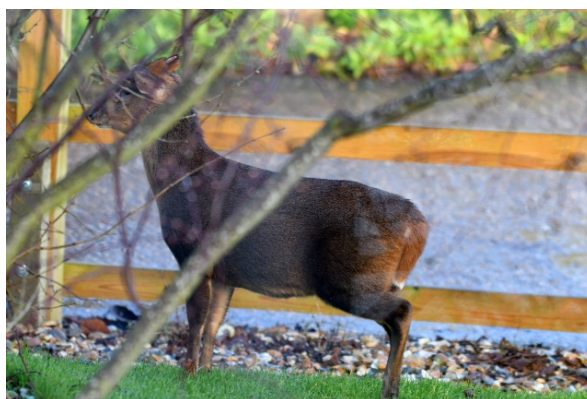
31 December Ewell Fen: 38 Whooper Swan. Long Drove: 69 Whooper Swan, 12 Mute Swan, 17 Roe Deer. Dam Bank Drove/Long Drove corner flooded field: 1 Peregrine, 1 Marsh Harrier, 1 Buzzard, 250 Lapwing, 250 Golden Plover.. SS

1 January A Kingfisher diving for fish at the Boot. SM

2 January Dambank and Long Drove: 100+ Starling, 11 Corn Bunting, 2 Kestrel, 100+ Goldfinch, 126 Whooper Swan and 17 nearer to road, and 3 Roe Deer. A family of 5 Whoopers on field by the Earith road. S&ID

3 January Put seed out on the lawn for ground feeders and had a total of 24 Stock Doves at one time. S&ID

At the time of writing, still no real winter weather and butterflies and bees seen on a still, sunny day. More wind and rain with the mildish weather (even the grass is growing!). Families of Long-tailed Tits doing very well, and two Robins in my garden (not trying to fight each other!). They obviously think spring is near. A bit optimistic I fear – we can only hope for a dry spell soon and look forward to seeing what spring brings us.



Muntjac visitor to a garden near Guppy's Pond. Photo Denis Calvert.



Sustainable Haddenham – Wildflower Verge Proposal

Contributed by Carly Juneau

With the loss of lowland meadows and pastures across the UK (over 97% of meadows destroyed in England since the 1930s, for example), grassy road verges offer vital refuges for plants and other wildlife of flower-rich grassland.

Restoration and regeneration of our increasingly threatened environment is an important part of Sustainable Haddenham's vision.

As a village and community, we have an opportunity to help 're-wild' crucial habitats and increase biodiversity by changing our approach to how roadside verges are managed.

With support from the Parish Council, the first stage of the project will be to engage and inform the community of the benefits restoring such habitats will have for local wildlife.

Three main areas have been suggested initially to 'showcase' a variety of wildflowers; starting small with a hope to eventually roll out the programme village wide.

We, as a group, would love members of the Conservation Society to get involved in the project. Help would be welcomed regarding advice, further ideas and, of course, muscle power – the more spades the merrier!

It is hoped that the initiative will benefit all members of the community, helping to make Haddenham a more beautiful and enriching place to live, not only for its human inhabitants, but also for its diverse wildlife.

Work starts next month, so please get in touch if you would like to be involved:
sustainablehaddenham@gmail.com

Leaving

We are having to say a fond 'farewell' to Caroline (Lee) who has served, without complaint, as our secretary for nearly five years, and even volunteered for the job!

Recently she (with help from Rachel and Tracy) brought us into the 21st century with Facebook, making us visible to a wider audience and encouraging others to tell us, with photos too, of the delights we have in and around the parish.

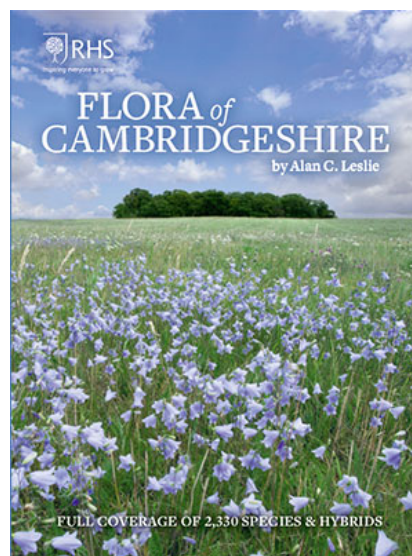
More recently, she contributed to our memorial evening to Paul Mason on the 17 December, both on the practical side, and by being the compere for the evening, helping to make it the success it was.

In addition, she and Max (her partner) provided the teas/coffees at the evening meetings during the Autumn/Winter talks. (We will need new volunteers!)

They are off to the North Norfolk coast, where we wish them all the best and 'Thank You for Everything' – we will miss you!

Slow or Fast Lane?

The Flora of Cambridgeshire by Alan Leslie is the first Flora of the area since 1964. At 912 pages it is the most comprehensive ever produced for the vice-county of Cambridgeshire (not the modern county and so excluding old Huntingdonshire). It covers 2,330 species and hybrids. Alan Leslie has been recording Cambridgeshire flora since arriving in the county as an undergraduate in 1972. Published by the Royal Horticultural Society it can be bought online for £70 or in RHS Garden bookshops.



In total contrast, *A Field Guide to Roadside Flowers at Full Speed*, available as a free download, allows the motorist to identify wildflowers without leaving their moving vehicle. Sadly, currently only for US motorists, but indicating a gap in the market for UK publishers! <https://prairieecologist.com/2020/01/13/finally-a-practical-guide-for-roadside-wildflower-viewing/>

News from Guppy's Pond

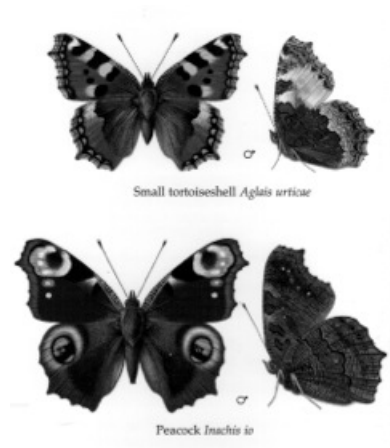
Contributed by Wendy Lanman

The reeds and bulrushes grew so much last summer that they almost choked the passage from the boating launch end into the main part of the pond, making it very difficult to row through, especially if, like me, it was the first time you had been in charge of oars in 30 odd years and steering backwards isn't your forte. This was in spite of the hard work John, Chris and Robert had put in just before the boating day. The reeds were sprayed shortly after, which did weaken them, but it was rather late in the season so they will need another dose when they start growing again in a couple of months' time. Not a pleasant exercise, but if it isn't done this shallow end of the pond will steadily become nothing more than a bog and no longer a safe place for the fish to come and spawn.

No fantastic Osprey sightings since the last one but the Kingfishers are seen regularly, as are the Coots, Moorhens and Mallards. The Moorhens are even regular visitors to the bird feeders and look amusingly ungainly sitting on one of the trays attached to the feeder pole so that they can reach the sunflower hearts.

Other regular birds on the feeders are a pair of Ring-neck Doves, many Blue Tits, Great Tits, Chaffinch, Long-tailed Tits, Goldfinch, and on the ground Wood Pigeons, Dunnocks, Blackbirds, Robins and I'm sure others I have missed as it's always very busy around the feeders.

I had a very useful piece of information from Barbara York while I was walking around Guppy's Pond a couple of weeks ago. It is relatively common to find Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies trying to overwinter in houses. Unfortunately, the conditions are far from ideal for them and they usually die. The best thing is to catch them gently and put them into a *deep* growth of ivy, where they will be protected from the wind and rain and will be free to fly away from to feed when they wake up. So, we all need to hunt for suitable places near our houses now in preparation for a butterfly rescue!



Yew at Kelburn Castle, Scotland.

© Lairich Rig / Thousand-year-old yew tree / [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

Ancient Yews

Ancient yews are not protected, despite some being over 5,000 years old. There are approximately 157 yew trees aged over 2,000 years across the UK. The vast majority are in churchyards, which puts the trees at great risk as church land is sold off.

Janis Fry has started a petition to Michael Gove to rectify this. Currently over 261,000 supporters have signed. To join them, sign at <https://www.change.org/p/save-britain-s-ancient-yew-trees-before-we-lose-any-more>

A list of ancient yew trees can be found at: http://www.janisfryart.co.uk/ancient_yew_tours.htm#yew

London Planes

Champion trees are individual trees that are exceptional examples of their species because of their enormous size, great age, rarity or historical significance. Did you know that the London Plane (*Planus x hispanica*) in the garden of the Bishop's Palace, Ely, is the National Champion Plane for girth? It is also one of the oldest Plane trees in the country, although the two Planes at Buckden Towers, Buckden, planted by Robert Sanderson, who was Bishop of Lincoln 1660-3, are believed to be older.



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 pm.
Members free. Non-members are very welcome for a nominal £2.50 fee.
All are welcome to stay for a free drink and a chat after each talk.

11 February

STANDING UP FOR TREES

Peter Vince from the Woodland Trust tells us all about our native trees and how they are faring.

10 March

PUFFINS IN SIMMERING SEAS

Euan Dunn discusses the threat to seabirds and their food supply.

14 April

THE BIODIVERSITY OF KINGS DYKE NATURE RESERVE

Philip Parker tells us how this area changed from a clay pit to a reserve benefitting nature and the local community at Whittlesey.

12 May

BIRD LIFE AND MANAGEMENT OF THE NENE WASHES

With **Charlie Kitchen**, the site manager.

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