

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

SPRING 2022

The Committee for 2022/23 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

Membership information

Subscription rates

1 Jan to 31 Dec 2022

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.

The 'Winning' Grey Invader

Contributed by Barbara Grafton



Love or loathe them? Few of us can sit on the fence when it comes to the grey squirrel. They are undeniably endearing and entertaining, leaping impossible-seeming distances, making acrobatic tumbles and jumps, running head-first down tree trunks (which they do by rotating their back feet 180 degrees so

they can dig in their claws), or practising deceptive tactics to mislead other squirrels into thinking food is being cached when it isn't.

But the fact remains that they are rodents (alongside rats, mice, dormice, and voles). Furthermore, they are listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as one of the 100 worst global invasive species. A silk manufacturer called Thomas Unett Brocklehurst imported a pair from America in 1876 for release on his estate, Henbury Hall in Cheshire. Other landowners loved these appealing novelty mammals and sent for more. So, it was here: the grey invader that has caused the UK population of our much more beautiful native red squirrel to crash by 90% to about 120,000-140,000, with 75% of those in Scotland. In addition to outcompeting the smaller and less adaptable reds for food, the greys can infect them with the Parapoxvirus that ulcerates their eyes and noses and can kill them within days.

When a grey isn't grey

Grey squirrels are most grey in winter, quite silvery, with brown banding on the back, tail and around the face. Their summer coat is more yellowish brown, and in all seasons the underparts are white. Colour variants are increasingly common but, and it is extremely important to clarify this, they and the greys are all the same species even though they look very different.

Black squirrels were first recorded in the UK in Hitchin in 1912, yet another American import escaped from a private zoo, and have been sighted quite often in Haddenham. These have genetic mutations producing much higher than normal levels of the pigment melanin. These jet-black variants are the result of interbreeding between two



black squirrels. Interbreeding between a normal grey and a jet-black squirrel will produce a dark brown kitten, because the black gene is not fully dominant.

There is a 50:50 chance of black kittens being born to a black and a brown pair; and the same odds for two brown parents. So, in either case, a litter of four could have combinations of black and brown kittens. If a grey and a brown are paired, they will produce only grey or brown kittens, with a 50% chance of each.

Prior to 2012, black squirrels were found only in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, but they have now spread into south-west England, Wales and southern Scotland. They are known to be dominant in Girton, making up at least three-quarters of the squirrel population there.

There are also two types of the much rarer genetic variant white squirrels. Leucistic greys, which have a genetic mutation inhibiting melanin, have white fur, often with patches of grey, and dark eyes, whereas true albino greys, which entirely lack melanin, have pure white fur and pink or pale blue irises to their eyes and a deep red pupil.

The dominant feature of the grey squirrel is the bushy grey tail, fringed with white, which is an important means of communication for the animal (and a cosy blanket for it in winter) and at 20-25cm is as long as the head and body combined in an adult. Typical adult weight is between 400 and 600 grams. However, urban adults living close to humans, with plentiful food and few predators, can reach 34cm in height, with 30cm tails, and weigh 1kg.

Predator and prey

Greys are not picky eaters, devouring nuts, seeds, bulbs, flowers, shoots, berries, fungi, small rodents, frogs, insects, caterpillars, and whatever we put out on bird tables and in feeders. They also take eggs and fledglings, particularly Great Tits, Nuthatches, Chaffinches and Blackbirds; and they compete for nest sites with birds as diverse as Tawny Owls, Kestrels, Jackdaws, Stock Doves and Starlings. The females can live for 5-7 years, the males for just 2-3, and the healthy adults have few predators capable of catching them (occasionally stoats, foxes, cats and birds of prey such as Goshawks).

Only pine martens, native members of the otter, badger and weasel family (mustelids), and formidable predators at home in trees and on the ground, are equal to the challenge. In parts of Ireland, pine martens have almost eradicated the greys; partly by predation but also by forcing them to move territory. The smaller and lighter reds escape by retreating to the ends of branches that will not take the weight of the pine martens.

Given the resilience and adaptability of the greys, it is unsurprising that their UK population has boomed to about 5 million in the last century and a half, despite active attempts at control. Their sheer numbers and geographical range mean that they cause an estimated £50 million in damage annually to commercial forestry alone, and do immense harm to mature and ancient deciduous woodland by seed-eating and stripping bark from trees such as beech, sweet chestnut, oak, sycamore and cherry laurel (*see left*) to access the sapwood.

In their defence, they are highly effective at dispersing tree seeds by spreading hundreds, if not thousands, of nut caches around in the autumn; those that remain undiscovered will often germinate into new trees. There is also increasing evidence that in some UK cities they have decimated local rat populations by out-competing them for food, taking their young, and by killing the adults.

Nests and breeding

There is a misconception that squirrels hibernate, but they are unable to build sufficient fat stores to sustain them through the winter and so remain active all year, although less so in winter to conserve energy. For protection, they construct several dome-shaped, football-sized nests (dreys) in trees (*see left*), usually six

metres or more off the ground. The summer dreys are fairly scrappy, but in winter they are stronger structures, woven of leafy twigs lined with soft materials such as moss, grass, feathers, wool and shredded bark; alternatively, a hollow tree, a woodpecker's nest, a large nest box, or a magpie's or rook's nest, which they roof over, is used – or they may enter a house loft-space or a barn. Usually solitary animals, during the worst weather several squirrels will share a winter drey for mutual warmth, where they might sleep for several days at a time. Breeding takes place in late winter, with several males (bucks) mating with a single female (doe) for the one day that she is receptive. Only females rear the young, which are born hairless and blind in March and April after a six-week gestation period. Females may give birth once again in June and July, depending on their fat stores. Litters are typically of one to four kittens. The mother suckles them every three or four hours for seven weeks by which time they will have grown fur and opened their eyes. By ten weeks they will have grown teeth, be able to eat solid food and live independently, although they don't reach adult size until they are eight months old. They start breeding at 10-12 months.

Population control

Culling has proved necessary in some parts of the country, including by use of poisoned bait (Warfarin), to limit damage to woodland. The Forestry Commission and National Trust shoot and trap them, the latter necessitating humane killing of the captured animals as under the 'Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981' and '[The Invasive Alien Species \(Enforcement and Permitting\) Order 2019](#)' it is illegal to release grey squirrels in Britain without a special licence from the Ministry of Agriculture or Secretary of State for Scotland.



Successful captive breeding programmes for the reds, clearance of the greys from designated areas and then translocation of the reds into the safe enclaves has taken place in Anglesey and Scotland. But these programmes are hugely expensive and extremely slow. Pine martens may offer a glimmer of hope that the greys can be controlled by more natural means in some areas. There are reds as close to us as Thetford Forest – and it would be wonderful to see them spreading into Cambridgeshire. I have never been fortunate enough to see one.

A trend which seems to be taking off is human consumption of grey squirrel, once a hugely popular game meat that declined in popularity when chicken became more available and affordable after World War II. Maybe its time has come again, as it is free range, with a low carbon footprint, low in fat, high in protein, and can be a substitute for rabbit in any recipe. Paul Wedgwood of Wedgwood the Restaurant on Edinburgh's Royal Mile, one of Scotland's leading chefs, has found them a very successful addition to his menu since 2008, and the Wild Meat Company in Woodbridge, Suffolk, sells well over 10,000 of them every year. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings in *Cross Creek Cookery* (1942) mentions that grey squirrel was a favourite of Queen Victoria, so in this Platinum Jubilee year we would be in prestigious company should we fancy giving it a try.

In the absence of any desire to enjoy them on a plate, I think the best approach is just to appreciate the grey squirrel for their wild beauty, wily intelligence, acrobatic abilities, and personality. Just please don't actively encourage them with the special food and feeders that are on the market. The last thing we need is 1kg King Kong squirrels causing havoc amongst our precious local flora and fauna!

Images:

Grey descending tree: <https://pixabay.com/de/photos/graues-eichh%c3%b6mchen-eichh%c3%b6mchen-4518667/>

Black squirrel: <https://pixabay.com/de/photos/eichh%c3%b6mchen-schwarz-tier-natur-4473525/>

White descending tree: Andrea Schaffer CC BY-SA 2.0 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/aschaf/2847447825/in/photostream/>

Grey on feeder: Tim Felce (Airwolfhound) [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Squirrel_\(5503730146\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Squirrel_(5503730146).jpg)

Damage: Rosser1954, CC BY-SA 4.0 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grey_squirrel_damage_to_Cherry_Laurel_Spiers_Old_School_Grounds_Beith_Ayrshire.jpg

[File:Grey_squirrel_damage_to_Cherry_Laurel_Spiers_Old_School_Grounds_Beith_Ayrshire.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Grey_squirrel_damage_to_Cherry_Laurel_Spiers_Old_School_Grounds_Beith_Ayrshire.jpg)

Drey: Rosser1954, CC BY-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/> via Wikimedia Commons

Pine marten <https://faunafocus.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/cropped-zweer-de-bruin-2-1.jpg>

Spring Thoughts from the Gallery Garden

Contributed by Ann Biggs

In a first flush of Spring, mating fever overtakes our Garden. With all to play for, a pair of Blue Tits meet, throwing caution to the wind in a flurry of feathers and consummated love. Spring calls three rampant drakes to attack a sleeping lady, resulting in an attempted drowning from an excess of passion. Meanwhile, in a secret tryst, Starlings creep beneath the roof tiles of my studio and, unbeknown to me, lay eggs, soon to hatch and provide a noisy chorus while I work.

Our shaded glades bring Speckled Wood to spiral in lusty fervour. Honeybees caress early blossom while swarms of St Mark's Flies drift in leggy profusion on hot afternoons and Brimstone flush the shade with sulphurous colour.

Sun invites our human visitors to the Garden, where they consume scones and delicious cakes provided by the Tea Room, and conversation ranges from weather to war, politics to passion and a lot more in between.



*Juvenile Blue Tits.
Artwork Ann Biggs.*

Our Blue Tits hatch eleven young, Starlings start their second brood and the three drakes, spent from love, sleep the day around the pond, waiting for the subject of their adoration to bring fluffy ducklings for a swim.

As I write, Swifts have arrived, high above the Garden in a never-ending scream of joy.

Summer has come!

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

Another sighting of the Otter! Brian was able to watch it for several minutes as it swam around the shallow area in front of our balcony. He did call me, but by the time I arrived it had disappeared. Everyone seems to have seen it except me, so I'm keeping my fingers crossed for my luck to change.

Although the pen has been on the nest since 30 March, the Swans still have no young, so it does seem that the pair are infertile, which is very disappointing. We did have a 'crisis' morning last week when it seemed as if the Swan on the nest hadn't moved for days and so was probably dead. Haddenham Parish Council and Defra were informed, and arrangements were made for a specialist to come and remove the body in case it was bird flu. But the Swan woke up and started preening itself, so everything was called off and we all breathed a big sigh of relief.

We have heard the Moorhens and Coots but have only seen them rarely for some reason. They are usually swimming around with their young at this time of year. However, one very good mother duck has managed to keep four ducklings which are now almost fully grown. So, we have at least seen some new life.



Moorhen.

A couple of weeks ago a two-foot-long Grass Snake swam across from where we launch the boats on Boating Day to the opposite side of the water. It's always great to see how well these snakes can swim and a real privilege to watch. Otherwise, everything is pretty much as usual with plenty of songbirds flitting around. The Reed Warblers haven't arrived yet. I'm so looking forward to hearing their chatter again.



New Life ON THE OLD WEST

Join New Life on the Old West on Saturday 18 June in Fairchild's Meadow. The event will run from 11 am to 2 pm and is free. Everyone welcome! Talk to wildlife organisations and local groups, such as the RSPB, the Cambridgeshire Mammal Group and local Conservation Societies about their work in Cambridgeshire.

Enjoy tabletop displays and hands-on activities (including planting wildflowers to take home and grow). Meet 'Fenland Natural Heroes' at 1.00 pm. They may include well-known figures such as Charles Darwin or Charles Rothschild! Our historians will ask members of the audience to vote for their favourite. They are also keen to hear from members of the public about their own memories and stories of local individuals who have played a key role within the fenland landscape throughout history.



New Life
ON THE OLD WEST

OPEN FOR NATURE DAY

Let's help wildlife thrive!




Saturday 18th June 2022
Fairchild's Meadow, Haddenham

A day to discover local wildlife and find out how you can support our much loved species

Free event!

Get in touch with us WWW.NEWLIFEOLDWEST.ORG.UK

Made possible with  **Heritage Fund**



*Common Lizard (above) and
Brimstone Moth (right).*

Reptile Survey in Fairchild's Meadow

Contributed by Laura Allen

On the 14 and 15 May New Life on the Old West held a BioBlitz weekend to monitor and record species in the Fens. Attendees were excited to record two Grass Snakes (although it's possible that the same individual was seen on both days) and two Common Lizards. They hope to run the survey again on the Open for Nature Day or later in the summer. The Cambridgeshire County Moth Recorder was also at the site and caught a variety of moths, including an Eyed Hawk-moth and a Brimstone Moth.



Chair's Report

As everyone knows, this is the first AGM since 2019.

There are three matters mentioned in the last minutes on which I can report good outcomes. First, we had a very successful Paul Mason memorial talk in 2019, with about 100 people attending to hear Mike Dilger and others. Well done to Sheila, Caroline, and others for organising. Secondly, the Environment Agency successfully prosecuted Pretoria Energy for the pollution incident at Aldreth (and another incident in Norfolk), and the company was fined £40,000. I don't know whether the Conservation Society's persistence in pursuing the matter with the Environment Agency made a difference, but I would like to think so. Thirdly, we had good discussions with Haddenham Drainage Board about the timing of bank cutting. Thanks for that are due to John Burgess and Michael Church.

Since then activities have been fairly quiet, but there was a wildflower planting in the Old Burial Ground in November, in conjunction with New Life on the Old West, and we hope to see some positive results this year.

As always, thanks are due to many people who have contributed to the ongoing success and vitality of the Conservation Society. So, in no particular order, thanks to:

- Sheila Dickerson, for researching and signing up speakers for the winter talks such as this evening's.
- 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, and to Rachel Burgess for the Facebook page.
- Helpers at various work parties 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.

Finally, turning to upcoming events, this year's Plant and Cake Stall will be on the Green on Saturday morning, 30 April at 9.30 am. As always, all contributions of cakes and plants will be welcome.

And the New Life on the Old West project is coming to Fairchild's Meadows on Saturday 18 June, with various events and demonstrations. Please watch out for more information.

Finally, thanks to John Burgess for standing in for me this evening.

Chris Prescott
12 April 2022



Deer stolen from March earlier this year – still missing.

Cambridgeshire Wildlife Crime

Contributed by PC Alun Bradshaw

I am PC Alun Bradshaw, the force Wildlife Crime Officer for Cambridgeshire Constabulary. I cover the whole county and am part of the RCAT (Rural Crime Action Team). I am based at FHQ at Huntingdon. I deal with all types of wildlife crime.

This time of year it is mostly nesting bird disturbance jobs but it can be anything.

I have recently dealt with a gentleman for the destruction of a bat roost. The roost was very small, only one bat, but it is protected by law. The gentleman admitted that he had had the works completed prior to obtaining any mitigation licence and was dealt with by means of a Community Remedy. Which basically meant he made a donation to the Bat Conservation Trust.

Where wildlife crime is of a low level and if previous convictions of the offender allow, I like to use Community Remedies as a tool, as they allow the money to go back to local groups. The South East Cambs Badger group has benefitted from these in the past.

My contact details are as follows:
alun.bradshaw@cambs.police.uk

Follow RCAT on [@CambsRuralCops](#)
Follow CambsCops
on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#)

Small Stuff

Contributed by John Burgess

As I wandered around Nine Acre Wood the other day, I was struck by how easy it was to be taken in by the grandeur of it all and miss out on the equally important smaller things of life.

The Wood has an enormous complement of invertebrates, very few of which I am able to identify. Usually, I resort to taking very blurry photos on my phone, followed by trawling the internet for formal identification. The sun shone as I wandered around, a few Red Admirals charged around in their seemingly haphazard flight, then a similarly sized brown butterfly put in an appearance. Having eventually alighted on some Cow Parsley, it turned out to be a Speckled Wood. Very appropriate for the location and a wonderfully marked butterfly, less common 20 years ago, but now more frequently seen.

As summer develops, the figure-of-eight path becomes a corridor for various hawking dragonflies, but today the outer circuit was the preferred route. Various small hawkers were patrolling the margins, entertaining to watch, but unidentifiable as far as I was concerned, too busy to sit still long enough for me to photograph.

Eventually a Delta-winged Moth was far more accommodating. Its camouflaged wings stood out boldly against the nettle leaf; had it been sitting on a tree trunk it would have been a very different matter. The triangular fellow was unfamiliar to me, so it was photographed and later identified as a Snout Moth. Apparently they are a common species, but rare or common, this has no bearing on the satisfaction of identifying something new.

I will never make an entomologist; identifying the vast array of species and individuals is way beyond my capabilities. However, I can appreciate the small things and the essential part they play in the greater scheme.

So, take a walk to Nine Acre Wood and have a go at sweating the small stuff.



Speckled Wood



Snout Moth

Plant and Cake Sale

We were blessed with a bright sunny morning on Saturday 30 April. The gardeners had excelled themselves and we made £129.60 on vegetable plants, £131.10 on garden plants and £70.50 on cakes – a grand total of £331.20. Thank you to everyone who helped or brought things to sell. See you next year – and please will more cake makers step forward.

HCS Facebook

Contributed by Rachel Burgess

Wildlife sightings reported around Haddenham and Aldreth over the months of March, April and May on the Haddenham Conservation Society Facebook page. Please join the page and share sightings and photographs for us all to enjoy.

Great White Egret, Little Egret, Skylarks & 155 Whooper Swans *6 March* Aldreth. SS
 Hedgehog & Reed Bunting *8 March* Aldreth. SS
 Mute Swans & Kestrel *11 March* Aldreth. LB
 Tree Creeper & Little Egret *13 March* Aldreth. SS
 Young Grass Snake *19 March* Aldreth. SS
 Yellow Wagtails & Male Wheatear *20 April* Haddenham Fen. SS
 Bee Fly & Orange Tip butterfly *24 April* Nine Acre Wood. DI
 Swift & Willow Warbler *9 May* Haddenham. BY
 Female Wheatear, Cuckoo, Score Chaser Dragonfly, Hairy Dragonfly & Red Eyed Damselfly *22 May* Haddenham Fen. SS
 40+ Seven Spot Ladybird larvae & pupae *26 May* Haddenham. JS
 Ladybirds emerging from pupae *4 June* Haddenham. JS



© Simon Stirrup

Grass Snake (above) and Yellow Wagtail (below) © Simon Stirrup.

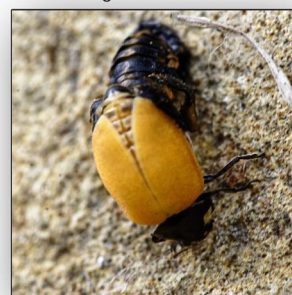


© Simon Stirrup

The life cycle of the Ladybird posted by Jim Sawyer.



time 0 emergence



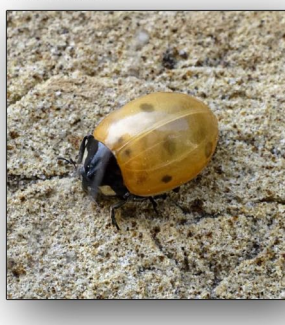
time 9min



time 35min



time 1h 13min



time 4h 10min



Every effort has been made to obtain copyright permission for illustrations. Any errors will be rectified on notifying the editor.
