

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

SUMMER 2021

The Committee for 2020/21 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 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 2021

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.

40 Million! So Where Are They?

Contributed by Barbara Grafton

How many of you have seen a Wood Mouse, also called Long-tailed Field Mouse or just Field Mouse? You'd think they'd be visible all over the place, given that they're the most common of Britain's four mouse species (our two species of dormice aren't mice) with a population of about 40 million. You can tell them apart easily enough from the grey-all-over House Mouse. Adults have a sandy reddish-brown upper body, often darker along the spine, an off-white underside, and a yellow-orange streak across the chest. They have large prominent eyes, very large ears and a slender, smooth tail rather than the scaly, rat-like tail of the house mouse. On average, their bodies are 8 to 11 cm long, with the tail adding a further 7 to 11 cm.



<https://eunis.eea.europa.eu/species/11233>

Unlike House Mice, which of course prefer life indoors, they inhabit woodlands, fields, gardens, parks, and agricultural or domestic buildings. Until 1834, they were believed to be the same species as the Yellow-necked Mouse from which they differ slightly in appearance and distribution. The Yellow-necked are found only in mature woodlands in south-east England, parts of the Midlands and southern and central Wales, while the Wood Mouse has spread throughout the British Isles. As they have moved closer to our homes, domestic cats and dogs have become predators alongside owls, raptors, foxes, badgers, moles, snakes, stoats and weasels.

They are mostly nocturnal, although females (does) with young will often emerge in daylight for short periods of time to feed as the males (bucks) play no part in pup-rearing. You might spot one at a burrow entrance under a tree or shrub, or raiding your bird feeders.

They hop and jump well, aided by long back feet, and are excellent climbers so often use abandoned bird nests to cache food.

Wood Mice spend almost all night foraging up to a quarter of a mile from their burrow. Throughout the summer and at this time of year, they enjoy a varied diet, including carrion, caterpillars, worms, snails, spiders, centipedes, small frogs, fungi, bark, roots, seeds, grain kernels, berries, nuts, and fruits such as blackberries and apples.



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/127787488@N03/32862706885/>

Communal burrows are generally used for overwintering, although some solitary mice will dig their own deep nest lined with grass, moss and leaves, and some will find their way into our warm homes. Be warned: if a hole, crack, or gap is large enough for a pencil, a Wood Mouse can find its way in. Like most mouse species, they do not hibernate, but will spend most of winter asleep, only waking to seek out acorns, tree seeds, crops, berries, maybe a hibernating bat, plus whatever they have cached when food was plentiful.

Burrows can be extensive, containing complex tunnel runs, food stores and nest chambers. Breeding starts in late February or early March and continues until October. The females leave the winter burrows to form their own nearby territories, building nests in bird boxes, in holes in tree trunks or in buildings. Adult males range over wider areas occupied by several females. Wood Mice are

polygynous, so a single male will mate with several females and a single female can mate with several males during the four-hour period in which she is fertile. DNA analysis has shown a single litter of Wood Mice (typically 4 to 7 pups, pinkies, or kits) can have up to four different fathers. Each female can produce up to six litters a year, with litter size decreasing in the autumn as food becomes scarcer.

Life happens extremely fast for a Wood Mouse. Gestation lasts 21 to 26 days and the pups are born naked and blind. After six days they open their eyes, by which time their fur, darker all over than the adult coat, has grown. At 18 to 22 days old, weighing between 6 to 8 grams, they are weaned, and their mother turfs them out of the nest to fend for themselves. Within two months, assuming they have reached a weight of 12 grams (that of an AAA size battery), the young females will be ready to start their own families. Full adult weight for males can be as high as 27 grams and for females 17 grams, although this is after a summer and autumn spent fattening up for winter. Although a wood mouse may live up to three years in captivity, most will succumb to the cold or predation and survive less than a year in the wild.

Let's be honest, no rodent is anything but a pest and the Wood Mouse is no exception. If found in our homes, they are just as unhygienic as the House Mouse, although they lack their greasy coats and strong unpleasant smell. They could also potentially carry the rare bacteria *Leptospira* which causes the blood infection *Leptospirosis*, or Weil's disease. However, they are garden friendly in that they prey on many harmful insects and other pests, and they certainly aid the regeneration of many areas of woodland and shrub land by dispersing and burying seeds. They are also a vital prey animal for owls, particularly the Tawny.

To give them a helping hand in the garden, and to discourage them from venturing indoors, leave as many berries, seeds, nuts and wild fruits as possible on your trees and shrubs. Piles of logs, small stones, and heaps of leaves are also helpful. You could also attach a nest box with an opening of about 4 cm diameter facing the trunk of a tree; place it quite low down and leave a small gap so a female mouse can gain access. Then keep a watch for her taking a break from her pups during the day in the spring and summer. That may be the best chance any of us (without a cat or dog to catch one) ever have of seeing these photogenic mice.

Scottish Soldiers History Trail

In tribute to the Scottish soldiers who were forced to work on the New Bedford River, known as the Hundred Foot Drain, following the Battle of Dunbar in 1650, Welney Wetland Centre has opened a history trail with seven marker posts holding rainbow-coloured glass panels. Set beneath are information panels describing how the Hundred Foot Bank, running some 34 km (21 miles) from Earith to Denver, was cut through waterlogged peat bog, using only shovels and spades. For more details: <https://www.thewordgarden.org.uk/projects/>

Trapping Garden Visitors

Contributed by Simon Stirrup

Muntjac Deer started my interest in camera trapping. These deer were becoming regular visitors to our garden, and I wanted to discover where they were getting in. Setting up a remote camera to capture deer activity at night and when we were not around during the day seemed a good approach. A wildlife supplies company recommended a Bushnell model. It captured wonderful footage of deer, including a cute stripey fawn, dashing around our garden at night. Despite improving the quality of our garden fencing, efforts to exclude deer from the garden were a complete failure. The camera trap was then relegated to a cupboard and forgotten about.

At the start of lockdown, I thought that it would be interesting to set up the camera trap in the garden again. Frustratingly, the menu system on the Bushnell camera trap no longer worked and was not repairable. I replaced it with a Browning Strike Force HD Pro X which, if nothing else, sounded impressive. Browning has become a popular brand, and this was a mid-range model in their range. Camera traps are quite similar to a standard digital camera, but are weather-proof, take images silently and automatically on detecting movement and can capture images during the day and at night. They can take still images or video footage. Images are written to a SD card and can be viewed on a small screen on the camera or on a computer. Image quality is good but is not sufficient to produce a quality print.

These cameras do require a lot of AA batteries. The Browning camera trap requires six batteries and the previous one required eight. Initially, I used standard batteries, but this quickly became expensive. Rechargeable batteries do not last as long but are much cheaper to use.



Photos © Simon Stirrup

I set up the new camera by our garden pond, hoping that this might be a focus for mammals to come and drink during late spring and summer. My expectations were low, and I anticipated that the camera would capture images of the local cat population and little else. The first results were a complete surprise: on the first night the camera captured a Hedgehog, on the second a Fox and the third night a Hedgehog and a Fox. I had not seen a Hedgehog in the garden for over 12 years and I have never seen a Fox in the garden. This run of successful nights has not been repeated since. The sightings were a revelation and showed just what was happening in our garden at night. I have always envied people who had Foxes and other mammals visiting their gardens at night and so it was more than a little embarrassing that it took 15 years for me to realise that we had a garden like that.

Over the past year, the list of mammal species captured by the camera trap has grown. It now comprises Muntjac, Fox, Badger, Hedgehog, Grey Squirrel, Long-tailed Field Mouse and Bank Vole. Apart from local cats, by far the most frequent mammal recorded has been Fox (with at least three individuals involved) and the least frequent has been Badger which has been recorded only five times. I have yet to see either a Fox or Badger in the garden, other than on the camera.

The camera has captured a range of bird species too, including Heron, Pheasant, Green Woodpecker, Jay, Fieldfare and Redwing.

If you have not tried camera trapping then I can thoroughly recommend it. You should be aware that it is addictive. Each morning, there is a sense of anticipation as you review the images to discover what the camera has captured during the night.

The images that accompany this article were not taken with a camera trap. They were taken with a digital SLR, two wireless flashes and a wireless passive infrared sensor trigger. It is a complex set-up, but that is a story for another time.

Autumn Thoughts from the Gallery Garden

Contributed by Ann Biggs

Today autumn sends a feather light touch across the orchards of my morning walk, a thought plays the poplars, of Robin song, subdued and wistful for summer gone. The sun, a silver orb, tries to warm the air but misty tendrils caress and warn of change to come. Two Stock Doves mourn, their voices damped by low cloud which, heavy with scent from ripening fruit, hangs above the barely moving trees.

I reach my studio, depressed by summer's loss but high-feeding martins mock my sadness as they fly south for a Saharan adventure. Friends call by, a regular visit to the Arts Centre Café where we sniff the coffee and try, not too hard, to resist delicious cakes, finally settling for lively conversation instead. Haddenham Arts Centre Café opens Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 4pm. Don't take my word for it – Gemma's cakes are to die for.

Later, I wander in our Garden, viewing the pond when my eye catches an alien glow amid deep shade, where a small stand of Lords and Ladies (see artwork right) in full mature glory, spread orange light, fluorescent against bottle



green ivy. I sketch to catch the scene until a drop of rain, soft from sheltering leaves, puddles on the page, mixing with watercolour, adding improvement to my work.

A retreat to watch from my window delays the inevitable start of my next commissioned work.

News from Guppy's Pond

Contributed by Wendy Lanman

Nothing as exciting to report as the Otter last time (see Volume 36 No 2 Spring 2021). However, we have seen the Kingfishers so often – even poised to dive from our balcony railing – that there must be more of them than a few years back. Maybe the last two quite mild winters have been kind to them.

The reeds have grown together again, almost cutting off our end of the Pond from where the boats take off on boating day. So, even if the present pandemic hadn't made us cancel the event, we wouldn't have been able to hold it, as a boat couldn't be rowed through into the open water. The reeds are due to be sprayed to weaken them before being uprooted next spring. Hopefully, we shall be able to have a Boating Day next year. It really is quite a treat and an opportunity for villagers to experience the loveliness of Guppy's Pond from the water.

Other than that, the Swans are still around, and we hope to see them bring up a family next year. We have seen a few more ducks this year and the Coots and Moorhens are still faithful residents.

We have seen Water Shrews, Pigmy Shrews and Bank Voles, as well as mice, and the population of bats is thriving.

In spite of the poor weather in the spring there have been plenty of dragonflies and damselflies, although not quite as many as usual.

All in all, Guppy's Pond seems well, healthy and balanced with very little interference by us humans, apart from the need for reed control – for the first time in the 28 years we have been here.



Water Shrew

Whose Fluttering Wings Are Those?

Contributed by John Burgess

If an exercise regime was to be part of my daily schedule, then I would try to combine as many of my interests as possible.

It was a bright blustery day when I cycled down to Nine Acre Wood. Three Swallows flitting about the neighbouring farmland provided a wonderful distraction, no doubt preparing for their epic journey to the African continent. At an altogether higher level, three Buzzards emitted their primeval cries whilst effortlessly soaring the azure blue skies.

I arrived at the gate, dismounted and proceeded along the path to a variety of birdsong. I have a friend who can pick out and identify these calls with spectacular accuracy; I am in complete awe of her knowledge. Alas, I am restricted to a few of the common varieties. To top it up, there was a very noisy unidentified individual ahead, managing to keep just out of sight, which added to my frustration.

The last Red Admirals of the summer danced along the edges of the pathway, while autumn's bounty, with the likes of blackberries and hawthorn berries, hung from their relative stems. Several Hawker Dragonflies patrolled the open rides, again specifically unidentified but always entertaining to admire.

It's always calm within the shelter of the trees, the figure of eight path is completed far quicker than expected but exercise of this nature is hardly an arduous task.

With the shortening of the evening light, my weekly cycle ride with friends has metamorphasised into an evening amble down to the Old West River,



albeit in very fading light. It was a wonderfully calm and serene evening. By the time we had arrived at the corner of Nine Acre Wood, starlight was our only illumination.

One of our number was particularly unconvinced that walking the wood's path would be to his benefit. Undeterred I strode confidently through the unofficial path in the corner, negotiating the numerous branches and stumps in near darkness, to emerge on the inner path (luck was definitely on my side). Progress was now far more straightforward. If you want to really fill up your senses, this is the way to do it. Limited sight certainly sharpens the hearing, the Jackdaws were unimpressed by our presence and were extremely vocal in their disapproval. The smell of the woodland floor, the grass carpet under our feet and the occasional caress of a passing leafy stem made for a memorable diversion. Had we met someone else experiencing the Wood at night, it may well of elevated our senses to an altogether different level.

The Wood also has some residents of a far more mythical nature. In the summer, a beautifully painted and adorned door appeared halfway up a tree in the south-west corner. A chimney flue was recently added, so it looks like they will be here during the winter months. We would welcome any sightings of these residents, flying through the glades or sitting on toadstools. Please send any reports to the Conservation Society.



A Case of Chocolates, Hay and the Investigative Lab

Contributed by Jez Reeve

September, early morning sun; such a treat, after an indifferent August. The Old Burial Ground, a haven for wildlife all year round, needs to be cleared of hay. Various guardians have already cut back the grass and wildflowers between the stones on the West side. The mini stooks of grass have turned to hay and are already starting to rot down.

We took a wheelbarrow and two pitchforks and off we went to finish the job before breakfast. It being Saturday morning I nipped to the shop to get my newspapers before I started. (If I'm not quick on my feet I can miss buying one of the three *Morning Stars* that are ordered). By the time I got to the graveyard C. was already filling the wheelbarrow, so I dumped my newspapers and the small bag of Maltesers I had bought as a post-job-reward, and got stuck in.

Several barrow-loads later we heard the sound of an irate dog-owner disciplining her dog. I looked over to where I had left my newspapers and chocolate on a convenient, flat gravestone and saw an investigative lab munching away on the chocolates and wiping his feet on my *Morning Star*. "We can't all be lefties" I thought! Apologies accepted from the owner, we returned to our labours. As the stack increased so did the chocolates! Our dog-owner friend had returned



with replacement chocolates – this time a whole box of them. All in all, a successful morning's work.

Thanks to all who have helped with the haymaking this year – Mike, Barclay, John, Elver, Chris and, of course, Celia and her Labrador.

Endangered Beetle

The Tansy Beetle (*Chrysolina graminis*) is critically endangered in the UK. In recent times it was discovered along a stretch of the river Ouse. It was believed to be extinct in East Anglia but then one was spotted in 2014 at Woodwalton Fen. In 2017 a few Tansy Beetles were sighted at Welney Wetland Centre. Its population has increased since then and the Centre is hoping that they are making a home in the Fens.

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Spotted an Old Tree?

Ancient trees are important to our heritage and wildlife, and yet they don't get the protection they need. Knowing where they are is the first step to preserving them. The Woodland Trust is asking us to add trees to their Ancient Tree Inventory so they can monitor threats and plan how to conserve the trees. To find the inventory go to: <https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk>. Plot the location of the tree. Enter basic information such as species, girth size and access. The tree record will automatically be sent for checking and approval by a Woodland Trust verifier.

HCS Facebook

Contributed by Rachel Burgess

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

Hornet Moth *5 July* Aldreth. DI
Privet Hawk Moth *6 July* Haddenham. AC
3 Hares *9 July* Haddenham. JR
Cinnabar Moth *10 July* Haddenham. SW
Lesser Stag Beetle, 15 Buff-tip Moth caterpillars, female Marsh Harrier & a pair of Hobby *30 July* Aldreth. SS
Silver Washed Fritillary *5 August* Haddenham. SD
Common Blue butterfly & Dead Man's Fingers fungus *11 August* Haddenham. CA
Badger *6 September* Haddenham. JS
Little Egret *10 September* Aldreth. SS
Female Peregrine, Wheatear & c. 100 Lapwing *12 September* Aldreth. SS
c. 30 Corn Bunting, 3 Roe Deer & c. 40 House Martins *12 September* Aldreth. SS
4 Buzzard & a ringtail Hen Harrier *16 September* Aldreth. SD
Hornet Mimic Hoverfly *20 September* Haddenham. SY
Toadflax Brocade Moth caterpillars *21 September* Haddenham. AC



Hornet Moth © Dee Ireland



Toadflax Brocade caterpillar © Andrea Chambers



© Simon Stirrup

Roe Deer © Simon Stirrup



WINTER TALKS

Indoor meetings are held at the Arkenstall Centre, Haddenham on the second Tuesday of each month at 8.00 pm. There will be no talk in January.

Members free. Non-members welcome for a nominal fee. All are welcome to stay for a (free) drink and a chat after each talk

12 October

THE MARINE WORLD

Marine biologist **Dr Frances Dipper** gives us another glimpse into life under the waves.

9 November

THE NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK

Geof Lee returns with another of his fascinating talks on this National Park.

14 December

MY TRIP TO KENYA

Simon Stirrup, our local wildlife photographer, gives us a glimpse of the wildlife there.

8 February

PROJECT OWL

Dr Hugh Hanmer will talk about the research being done on our nation's owls.

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