

HADDENHAM CONSERVATION SOCIETY

WINTER 2025

The Committee for 2025/26 is:

Barclay Arnott	740500
Ann Biggs	740810
John Burgess	749441
Sheila Dickerson	362258
Krisztina Lakatos, Treasurer	
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

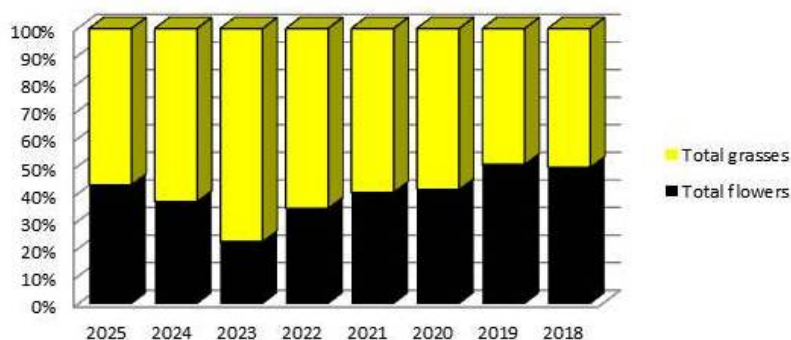
Membership information

Subscription rates
1 Jan to 31 Dec 2026
Individual: £10 Family: £15
If you wish to join the Society, please contact Krisztina Lakatos on krisztinalakatos@yahoo.com.
The membership will entitle you to receive our regular newsletter and will give you free entry to the seven winter talks, a saving of £3.00 per person per session.

Summer Flowers! Fairchild's Meadow Annual Count 2025

Contributed by Jez Reeve

2018-2025 % flowers and grasses by year



When we think of wildflowers our minds go to the open colourful petals of known species such as Oxeye Daisy, Cowslip and Buttercup. These are all found during the annual wildflower count in Fairchild's Meadow, along with at least 23 other species. When the count takes place on the second weekend in June those flowers that are in bloom within the randomly selected two-metre squares are recorded. For the most part these flowers are still in bloom, with their petals unfurled, but

they are easily recognisable after the petals drop off. As everybody knows, pollinators such as bees and hoverflies visit the open flowers for food and help propagating the species.

But the meadow is full of grasses as well, up to 23 different species. These plants also flower each year, but their flowers do not attract our attention in



the same way as wildflowers. However, grass flowers too provide pollen to bees and flies while the grass plants give shelter for breeding insects such as moths, grasshoppers and beetles. Some insects use the seed heads of grasses in order to develop their larvae, and birds will also feed off the seed heads.

Grasses in flower

Every year when we do the count we ponder on the impact the spring weather has had on the ratio of grasses to wildflowers in the meadow. 2025 was no exception. We all agreed that 2025 had been a very dry spring, which we thought had led to there being more grasses than wildflowers. However, when all the data was analysed (see *histogram on page 1*) it showed that the wildflowers had been increasing year on year since 2023. The annual count in June is a one-off event and will of course miss early flowering plants such as Ragged Robin, so it is just an indicator for assessing the health of the meadow. Every plant is doing something useful, whether it gets counted by us or not, as this moth knows!

P.S. For those who were interested in my article about wasps (see 'A Shed Story' Vol 40 No 3 October 2025), I can report that they were still in residence in the two nests in my shed in mid-November!



Is this a Lesser Yellow Underwing in the grass?

From the Gallery Garden

Contributed by Ann Biggs

- Winter** In the day a fieldfare calls,
from the sky as nighttime falls.
Redwing follows with carrying cries,
signals arrival as autumn dies.
- Spring** Caught by street light under velvet sky,
On village streets, a fox runs by.
Coat is rufus, heavy and bright,
I stayed in shadow, away from light.
- Summer** Evening cools, sky is light,
Swifts aloft until night.
Moon has risen, stars are bright,
Swifts are silent, comes the night.
- Autumn** Comes the fall with measured tread,
colours change from gold to red.
In the Garden through the trees
autumn walks with chilly breeze.
Dewy mornings, hedgehog sleeps
autumn laughs as summer weeps.

Looking forward to a New Year at Haddenham Arts Centre

2026 brings new plans to tempt you in. The café has homemade cake, scones, a splendid new coffee machine, sausage rolls and pies from our local butcher, homemade soups, jacket potatoes, paninis and much much more.

Our workshop programme grows every day with tutors teaching painting, drawing, pottery, printing,

sewing, knitting and life drawing to mention but a few. Three dates have been arranged for Artisan Markets (29 March, 31 May and 6 December). Studio Artists and invited others will be opening at the Cambridge Open Studio weekends in July.

Come and join us and bring your friends.

Our volunteer band is growing (many thanks to all) but we always welcome more. Please contact Ann on 07808628222 for a chat. All information is on our website but please call in the Gallery to chat with a member of staff or telephone the Arts Centre to speak to them.



Hedgehog. Artwork Ann Biggs

Ann Biggs

‘Blow-ins’ to The Pond

Contributed by Jo and Stuart Mills

We have quite recently moved to the Pond and have nervously agreed to take over writing ‘News from Guppy’s Pond’ from Wendy. As newbies and definitely not nature experts, we were reticent about contributing, but we are enthusiastic conservationists and do most definitely love the Pond. It has been wonderful to see the seasons progress from our waterside home and even in the winter the Pond is gloriously natural.

January is perhaps the coldest month and we haven’t seen the pair of Mute Swans for the last couple of weeks. But according to Wendy, we shouldn’t worry as they do occasionally go off to see their relatives who migrate in their thousands to the fens. Unlike the Hooper and Bewick Swans, Mute Swans are sedentary and rarely migrate significant distances, but they do move about a bit in the winter and don’t mind mixing with the itinerants. Thankfully, Mr & Mrs Swan have always returned in the past in time for the breeding season, although sadly to no avail as the pair are infertile. It would be fantastic if we could help them in some way to have cygnets and we have Googled to see how we could help. Apparently, The Swan Sanctuary (a national organisation) can help by substituting fertile eggs. If anyone has advice on how we could/should help we would love to get involved.



The Pond plant life during these winter months is subdued, but we suspect that now is the time to introduce some indigenous varieties to our shoreline. Other houses on the Pond have Flag Irises, Marsh Marigolds and, of course, reeds (not sure about the species). Given the difficulties associated with reed management, we don’t think it is a good idea to encourage them, but a little judicious planting might be warranted now, especially if it would attract frogs and toads to our end of the Pond. Advice on nature friendly planting would be most welcome.

The Pond is teeming with fish, and we never cease to be amazed how many there are. However, in the winter there is hardly a sign of them, until the Pike attacks; when there is a frenzied splash of Silvers (the collective name for small Roach, Rudd and Bream). The Pike is huge (at least a metre long) and often resides beneath our balcony. He is the king of the Pond Deeps, unless you count the occasional Cormorant, who definitely creates even more havoc than the Pike. It is a wonder just how many fish the Pond sustains, and we can’t help worry that it is to the detriment of the frogs!

The ash trees on the southern flank of the Pond are stark in the winter sun, which makes it easy to see the black squirrels playing in the top branches. Unlike the tiny black squirrels of Eastern Europe, these are melanistic grey squirrels and are relatively rare in the UK. Their black colouration is caused by the interbreeding of American Fox Squirrels that were introduced in the 1900s. The ash trees are, in part, bare throughout the year and we are concerned that this might be early evidence of ash dieback. If this is the case, they might be saved by removal of the worst-affected parts of the tree. This really must get checked out before spring, when the new growth makes access to this area very difficult. On a positive note, if the trees can be saved, they have the potential to become resistant stock that can be used to replace other areas of the country that have been devastated by this fungal disease.

Our final treat for today was spent idly watching a juvenile Cormorant fishing for his supper right in front of us. What a privilege, we are very lucky people indeed!

Many Thanks Wendy... Hello Jo and Stuart

For almost 30 years Wendy Lanman has reported the nature news from Guppy’s Pond for the HCS newsletter, keeping us non-pond dwellers in the picture and providing a wider view of Haddenham’s natural environment and its wild inhabitants. Very many thanks Wendy – your enjoyable and timely articles have been much appreciated, especially by the editor!

I would like to welcome Jo and Stuart Mills as our new contributors. I am looking forward to their articles.

Sally MacEachern, Editor

The Last Burbot in Britain

Contributed by Simon Stirrup

Recently, I was surprised to learn that the last confirmed British record of a fish called the Burbot, was from our parish. For anyone unaware of this dubious claim to fame I thought that I would share what I've discovered.

Our Burbot was caught in the Old West River, near Aldreth on 14 September 1969 by a fisherman called John Dean. The significance of this capture was recognised at the time and the fish was preserved in the Cambridge University Zoology Museum where it can still be seen today. Only a 100 years earlier the species was described by the renowned naturalist Leonard Jenyns as common in the River Cam and adjacent navigable water courses.



*Burbot. Credit: Stukel, Sam/
USFWS*

The Burbot is the only freshwater member of the cod family and not to be confused with the similarly named, but unrelated, Turbot which is a marine flat fish.

The Burbot is a long and rather eel-like fish that can grow to more than a metre in length. The eyes are small; the body is flabby and covered in slime and there is a single barbel beneath the chin. The species is a voracious predator and will eat almost anything it finds. These features make it well adapted for life in cold, dark waters.

The Burbot has a wide range in northern areas – across Europe, Asia and North America. Sadly, the species is declining in most European countries. The remnant British population was separated from the rest of Europe after the last ice age with the creation of the North Sea. Its range in the UK is considered to have comprised the catchments of the Thames and the rivers in Fenland and Yorkshire.

The exact cause for the extinction of the Burbot in Britain and in Belgium is unclear. No serious research has been undertaken so far. Possibly a combination of habitat destruction, habitat modification, pollution and global warming were contributory factors. The straightening, dredging and tidying up of rivers removed areas needed by Burbot to spawn and use as nurseries; agricultural run-off and industrial chemicals degraded water quality; and warming winter temperatures caused higher egg mortality and reduced reproductive success for this ice-age fish.

There are ongoing efforts to reintroduce the Burbot to the UK. Plans include rearing them in captivity from eggs brought from European hatcheries and releasing them into suitable river systems, such as the River Wissey in Norfolk. A similar project in Belgium has yet to create a self-sustaining population.

In the 19th century a man called Pennant described the Burbot as 'a very delicate fish for the table, though of disgusting appearance when alive'. Clearly, this fish lacks the appeal of recently reintroduced species such as the Beaver, White-tailed Eagle and Large Blue butterfly. Fortunately, despite the Burbot's lack of good looks, there is strong public support for a reintroduction.

Investigating the story of the last Burbot in Britain has been a fascinating and rather depressing exercise. When I'm next in Cambridge I must try to visit the Zoology Museum and see our Burbot.

Will a British reintroduction of the Burbot be successful? I do hope so. It would be wonderful to know that they are back in our rivers even if there is no chance of ever seeing one. The habitat requirements may be known and our rivers may be cleaner than they were, but I fear that the climate has warmed too much for this cold water fish.

Nature's Tonic

Contributed by John Burgess

It was one of those days when everything seemed grey. It had barely stopped drizzling, the sky hung heavy and oppressive, and I was struggling to find the incentive or energy to do anything. I decided that in order to beat the doldrums I would cycle to Nine Acre Wood, hopefully to reignite the fire in my soul.

Rachel's grandmother's trusty bicycle was wheeled out from the shadows and, notwithstanding its sixty years, was pressed back into service. It always amazes me how durable and reliable these vintage bicycles are; I can't imagine that if I was to stand outside in all weather that I would fare so well.

I struck off at an easy pace commensurate with the bicycle's age and my energy and was soon navigating the potholes of Church Fen Drove. Where Haddenham Engine Drain turns away from the drove side and heads towards Aldreth Causeway, a paddling of about 20 ducks was settled about three quarters of the way along the drain. Fortunately, they were far enough away for me not to disturb them but too far for me to identify. Binoculars confirmed that they were Mallard – one more week then any threat from shooting would expire (keep your heads down chaps).

Frequently when travelling this drove a buzzard is in attendance. Not so today. This time the large bird of prey set against the gloomy sky was a Red Kite. Twenty years ago you would have had to travel to Wales to see one, but successful reintroduction of this carrion feeder has made the prospect of seeing this magnificent creature far more common.

My soul marginally lifted, I continued to the wood, dismounted and entered its skeletal domain.

It really is down to its bare bones at this time of year, bark textures and colour in abundance, appealing in its own way and with the sense of energy about to burst forth with the first signs of balmy spring weather, alas not quite in attendance.

As I ambled through it struck me that birdsong had returned, not in a deafening way but a subtle quiet lament, solitary consistent voices looking for partners in the close prospect of spring. Who was singing was beyond my recognition, but their voices were a much appreciated tonic on this grey January day. I continued along the leaf-littered path and noticed that an abundance of moss had grown at the base of numerous trees, giving the trunk bases vivid green velvet socks (*see below left*).

Several mature trees within the wood have ultimately succumbed to a mixture of dense planting and weather; these are often suspended by their neighbours' entangled limbs. Posing no threat of falling, they are left to weather within this eerie embrace.

At the far end, I deviated from the path, crossed the dyke and crested the riverbank to catch a vista of the Old West river. A Little Egret stood by the water's edge, its pristine white plumage in sharp contrast to the river and its surrounding foliage.



The living chicken fence

Standing on the riverbank, looking back towards Haddenham, the expanse of the fen was laid before me. In the far corner of the neighbouring field a single row of very mature pollarded willows stand tall and defiant against the flat landscape (*see above right*). My father, who had previously owned the field, often recalled how this came to be.

The publican of The Swan in Aldreth (now a private home in the high street) had a sideline selling eggs. His chickens were housed in this field, retained by a reasonably high perimeter fence (a nod to fox security). The fence posts had been economically sourced from local willow staves, which were sharpened and then driven into the ground. As willow has a tendency to root very easily, these fence posts pushed their toes into the surrounding soil, consequently forming a living barrier to the outside world. Three sides of the enclosure were lost many years ago but as one edge formed the boundary of the original field, it created an imposing line of fabulous trees and a wonderful wildlife asset for everything from crows to micro-organisms.

Back to the woods

I descended the bank, crossed back to the outside path and continued my circumnavigation of the wood. The northern edge, just before Christmas, had suffered the loss of a couple of reasonably mature trees. Unfortunately, they had fallen across the path, making negotiation of this route particularly tricky. I had given these obstructions some swift attention with a bow saw, piling the removed debris into the edges to make new environments for a myriad of creatures.

My soul suitably restored, I exited the wood then headed homewards, fresh air filling my lungs, a renewed sense of expectation and enthusiasm driving the pedals. Immeasurable is the restorative quality of nature.



HCS in 2025

Here is a quick review of our activities this year. We have continued with monthly work parties on the first Sunday of each month at the Old Burial Ground (Closed Cemetery) and at Wayman's Pits. We have renewed the seat on Freda's bench in the Old Burial Ground. We have achieved the bronze award for the Old Burial Ground under the Caring for God's Acre scheme. We planted additional hedging at Wayman's Pits, in coordination with New Life on the Old West (and kept many of them alive during the very hot dry summer!). We have continued to encourage Turtle Doves to Wayman's Pits – though there have been no sightings yet. We have monitored and watered Paul Mason's hornbeam in the new recreation ground.

We responded to the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy Consultation, identifying additional areas in the Parish to be included, and have attended meetings of the Parish Council's Environmental Committee to help shape Parish Council policy.

April AGM

The Chairman, Chris Prescott, writes: After ten years as Chair, I am not standing for re-election this year, so there is an opportunity for someone new to help preserve and enhance Haddenham's green spaces and wildlife.

HCS Facebook

Contributed by Rachel Burgess

Wildlife sightings reported around Haddenham, Aldreth and Wilburton over the months of November, December and January from the Haddenham Conservation Society Facebook page. Please join the Facebook group and share sightings and photographs for us all to enjoy. If you are unsure of what you might have seen, ask on the page and it's likely another member will be able to assist with identification.

4 Egyptian Geese, 3 Little Egrets and 21 Roe Deer
2 November, Long Drove SS
Great Spotted Woodpecker 18 November, Aldreth SS
20 Whooper Swans, Snipe and a Green Sandpiper
18 November, Aldreth SS
Woodcock 21 November, Aldreth SS
Marsh Harrier, 14 Corn Bunting & 19 Roe Deer
1 January, Aldreth SS
118 Whooper Swan & 3 Redshank
2 January, Aldreth SS
Chinese Water Deer 3 & 4 January, Aldreth SS
2 Egyptian Geese, Great Spotted Woodpecker & Stonechat 5 January, Aldreth SS



Great Spotted Woodpecker (above); Whooper Swans (below)
© Simon Stirrup



© Simon Stirrup



Get Involved with Nature Recovery

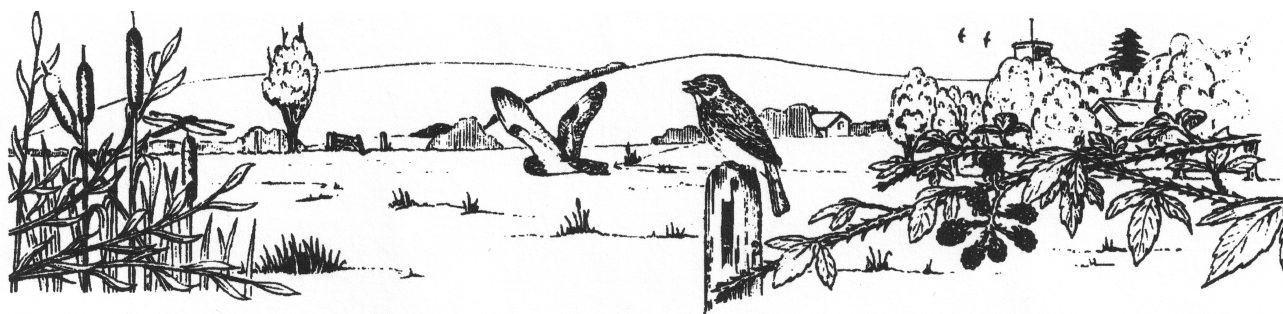
Contributed by Stephanie Barrett, Community Nature Engagement Officer

Are you interested in nature conservation in Haddenham? Do you have a community nature project in mind that you would like to find partners and funding for? Do you want to find out more about wildlife and nature in Haddenham and see how you can get involved? Please join us! The Nature Recovery – From the Ground Up project is a four-year Cambridgeshire County Council funded project that will support parishes to put together Community Nature Recovery Plans that are aligned with the

recently published Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

Our first working group meeting for the Histon–Impington–Cottenham–Haddenham parish cluster took place on 21 January at Cottenham Village Hall. We brought together local community group members, local councillors, residents, and other individuals interested in shaping how nature recovery progresses in their area. Together, we explored what's already happening locally for biodiversity and identified shared priorities; these insights will guide our future meetings within the parish cluster.

We'll be looking to host another meeting event in the spring, so if you would like to be notified of future events and receive updates on the project, sign up here to register interest and be added to the mailing list. [The full link for the form is <https://tinyurl.com/2s4c3n56>]



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 chat after each talk*

10 February

Haddenham Organic Market Garden Project

10 March

The Weird and Wonderful World of Parasites

Megan Shersby of the Wildlife Trust will tell us about the parasites we might find in our gardens and the wider countryside.

Parasites are everywhere. Not all are attractive, but they can be fascinating – and beautiful too – including many that we might overlook as parasites. This talk will provide examples of a few to look out for on your next nature walk.

14 April

A Photographic Journey to Three African Rivers

Graham and Martha How will take us on safari to the Zambezi, Chobe and Okavango.

Marvel at the birdlife on the Zambezi, Victoria Falls and surrounding area, including the stunning green Little Bee-eater. The Chobe River and National Park in Botswana are home to elephant, hippo, buffalo, numerous antelopes, crocodile and hundreds of birds, including the Malachite Kingfisher, Goliath Heron and African Fish Eagle. The Okavango Delta has no roads or permanent human settlements, but it has amazing wildlife, including leopard, lion, wild dog, elephant and, of course, a multitude of birds.

There will be a short AGM before the talk, starting at 8pm.