



SPELTHORNE NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



www.snhs.org.uk

Hon Sec Gordon Freeman. 45, Lansdowne Road, Staines, TW18 1HH Tel: 01784 453402

Newsletter: Liz and Roger Whitaker, The Hollies, Middle Hill, Egham, Surrey, TW20 0JG

Spring 2023

Dear Member

Welcome to the Spring newsletter. Thanks to Phil Cribb and Peter Clifford for their contributions to the newsletter

Previous Events

Wednesday 8th February, Thames Landscape Strategy.

Rebecca Kendrick, Rewilding Arcadia Project Officer, gave a talk about her work with The Thames Landscape Strategy, a not-for-profit partnership. She has been the Project Officer since 2008. The area of the Thames covered is Weybridge, Hampton and Kew, called "the Arcadian Thames". Since 1994 the TLS has raised £21 million for restoration, environmental management and educational projects and undertaken some 350,000 hours of conservation volunteer work. Sir David Attenborough, is a founding Patron.

This is a hundred-year plan for the Thames which has now been extended to the Wey Navigation. Chiswick House has been included in the "Arcadian Thames" scheme. The plan covers 30 miles of riverbank, 15 each side and just 3 people are involved excluding volunteers. Arcadian Thames, Weybridge to Kew is a paradise in the city. An example being the view of the Thames from Richmond Hill which is protected by 3 Acts of Parliament. The aim is historic and wildlife conservation. There are many Palaces and Mansions here including the remains of Richmond Palace where Queen Elizabeth I died. Hampton Court, a royal palace, Ham House, Marble Hill House and Kew. The area has lots of character including Isleworth, Brentford and Kingston as well as fantastic parks.

The reign of George III was important in the development of Arcadia. The poet Alexander Pope, (1688-1744) lived at Twickenham and had an involvement in initiating the conservation movement. The area is a landscape of inspiration seen by Turner's paintings. Pictures were shown of the old Orleans Ferry, Regattas on the Thames and ice skating at Hampton Court.

Area Action Plans

Local Authority Planning Departments are involved and many areas have been designated Conservation Areas. In 1994 the document for 100 years ahead - the Thames Strategy and 30 years on the document is still relevant and is constantly reviewed. However, Kingston has become more high-rise, taller and taller and closer to the Thames so there is an element of failure here. Every time a Local Authority writes their Local Plan, they have to take account of the Thames Strategy. Areas of water leads to rubbish and litter and it is aimed to track and reduce this. The large Palaces and Mansions used to have many servants and

gardeners but is now just a few people but maintenance still needs to be done including tree works. It is not always best to plant trees on wetlands. Managing and reducing willow trees can lead to abuse from the public when they see them being cut back. Some trees, for example, Oaks can drown in water around their roots. So, Reed beds are being planted which are more efficient at capturing carbon dioxide than trees. At Richmond can be seen Reed banks growing out of the vertical concrete river wall as well as Flag Iris and Purple Loosestrife.

Survey and Maintenance are carried out once a year on the foreshore at Richmond and Teddington where water is drained away. An invasive breed of mussel that kills native wildlife and causes flooding has been found in the river at Richmond. Non-native invaders are increasing including Chinese Mitten Crabs. The Eel population is also in decline. In some ways the Thames is getting too clean, so tyres, rocks etc are being left for Eels to live in. A document produced by the Zoological Society; "State of the Thames 2021" report examines the health of the Tidal Thames environment. Using various indicators selected by scientific and technical experts and available data, long- and short-term trends were calculated to evaluate the current state of the estuary as a healthy, thriving ecosystem that not only sustains wildlife populations, but also provides mental and physical benefits to people. Where there are insufficient data to draw conclusions, the information provided sets a baseline from which to measure progress.

State of the Environment

The water quality of the Tidal Thames has exhibited some promising improvements. Dissolved oxygen concentrations, critical for fish survival, show long-term increases. Further, phosphorus concentrations, have reduced in both the long and short term, showing the effectiveness of improved sewage treatment works to reduce harmful levels of nutrients entering waterbodies. Despite these favourable trends, there has been a long-term increase in nitrate concentrations, which can negatively affect water quality through enrichment. In addition, the influences of climate change are clearly impacting the Tidal Thames, as both water temperature and sea levels continue to rise above historic baselines. This will undoubtedly affect the estuary's wildlife, leading to changes in life-history patterns and species ranges. A benchmark for plastic levels in the Tidal Thames has been set, and will need to be monitored closely.

State of Nature

The picture is brighter for the state of nature, with improving short-term trends identified for natural habitats, birds and marine mammals. However, the historic decline in habitat extent in the Tidal Thames is captured by the long-term analysis of the habitat conservation indicator. The number of fish species found in the Tidal Thames also showed a slight decline, however further research is needed to determine the cause. While there have been significant historic losses of the natural habitat to urban development, there are positive indicators of change such as the creation of new 'estuary-edges' and saltmarsh habitat, and plans for the re-wetting of floodplains in the Upper Tidal Thames. Reopening migratory paths for fish has set a baseline for habitat connectivity.

State of play

Important baselines were set for future analysis of the recreation by the river and recreation on the river indicators. While no trends were identified for these indicators, the baseline data show that the Tidal Thames provides a valuable outdoor space where millions of people can improve their physical and mental health and enjoy the water and fostering a sense of community stewardship. There are many organisations, opportunities and activities that allow people to learn about nature and history, and in doing so to access the cognitive benefits.

Banks are being created for Sand Martins and Owl Boxes erected. Syon Park is the only stretch of natural riverbank, being there unchanged for the past 400 years. There is also the Barnes Wetland Centre, Hampton Court and Pen Ponds in Richmond Park as important wildlife areas. Nine of the Bat species can be found along the Thames and the river is a Bat highway and they act as indicator species. Investigation

is also made into light pollution. The late Queen Elizabeth took an interest in the project and met the staff several times.

Adapting to Climate Change

With the risk of the Thames flooding there has to be plans for the future emergencies. The area is all flood plains apart from Hampton Court Palace and All Saints Church, Kingston, which were built on high ground, the latter, where seven Saxon kings of England, including Athelstan and Ethelred the Unready were crowned on the King's Stone in the 10th century. The traditional approach to protect London and its suburbs from the Thames has been to construct higher and higher flood defences usually in response to a flood event. As climate change accelerates this option is no longer sustainable. A new approach to flood risk management has been launched by the Environment Agency in line with Making Space for Water known as TE2100 for the Tidal Thames and the Lower Thames Management Plan for the freshwater reaches between Datchet and Teddington. Set within this strategic framework are a series of more locally based policies and partnerships such as Local Flood Forums, Regional Growth Boards, Regional Economic Partners, The London Plan, Borough development plans and Biodiversity Action Plans. These flood risk management plans look to the next 100 years. The Teddington Lock Lifeboat is busier on this part of the Thames due to flooding the Thames path but can be a lack of water as well as with the drought last summer affecting Teddington Lock. There is an aim for a set of interconnected habitats with a diverse range of wildlife. Cows could be used to keep grass down rather than lawnmowers. Wet areas can be kept with access by boardwalks.

Rewilding Arcadia

This part of the Thames is tidal and freshwater and enables a lot of opportunities including habitat for Eels, tidal wet woodland, grazed wet meadows, creation of refuges for fish, White Willow planting that can withstand flooding but needs management, riverbanks can be naturalised by plants, a fish route to bypass the lock is a possibility. Horse drawn mowing machines could be used, (Shire Horses were bred at Hampton Court for Henry VIII as a war horse). Now the largest herd of Shire Horses is found at Hampton Court. Rebecca concluded that this should be the approach rather than building more riverbank high walls.

A very interesting talk. For more information visit www.thames-landscape-strategy.org.uk

Questions

Where did the £21 million come from?

Local Boroughs including Hounslow and Richmond. Also, the National Trust, English Heritage, Kew Gardens, Defra, National Lottery, Landfill Tax Credits, Biffa etc gave money. Can also get free equipment that has been donated.

Has a Baseline Survey been done?

Yes, many have been done, work is currently being done on the Old Deer Park on hydrology by volunteers. It has been found that wells are empty when the fields are flooded as it takes time for water to percolate down when it rains. The, rare German Hairy Snail is found in the ditches at the tidal Thames frontage of Syon Park, so these ditches need to be maintained.

Does the area include Spelthorne?

Yes, willow pollarding in Shepperton and ditch clearance has taken place.

Does it include Penton Hook Island?

They will be looking into this

With Eels they are looking to the Zoological Society, giving advice on putting in sluices and culverts for the Eels to pass through. There has been a huge reduction in the number of Eels but are inclined to find them where it is not expected to see them. More cormorants are being found on the Thames. East Europeans are fishing on the Thames and are inclined to take all the fish and a sign in various languages needs to be put up to advise against fishing. Wetlands can have nesting birds so need to control access by the public.

Do you go into side rivers?

We go only into this part of the Thames generally but we do get request to go further.

Extra water is expected to come from the melting ice caps, the climate is changing, sea level rise, tides getting higher. Sunbury Lock may become part of the tidal range and also effect water temperature, so the river is reclaiming land. After 2035 the Thames Barrier will no longer be used to protect floods coming down and from the sea at the same time, so will concentrate on the tide from the sea to protect the capital, rather than the Arcadian Thames. Fighting the water flow only moves the water further down to flood elsewhere, so we have to live with it and adapt to it.

Saturday 4th March Social Evening Lucy T Smith, Artist, on Illustrating the Giant Amazonian Waterlily

Lucy began by saying she is a freelance artist at Kew and shares an office with several others including the plant illustrator Christabel King.

Lucy began by showing a picture of the Kew Herbarium. At Kew there are specimens spanning 250 years, and 200,000 examples of botanical art. In drawing plants there is a close cooperation with Kew scientists. It is like bringing pressed herbarium specimens back to life with the pen and ink drawings. Colour work is also carried out. Observations are also made from living specimens.

The “Curtis's Botanical Magazine” is the world's longest running published botanical periodical featuring original colour illustrations of plants in which Lucy was involved as well as for the journal “Kew Bulletin” and the Palms of New Guinea project, 1999-2023 which involved 250 species illustrated by pen and ink.

Her new personal challenge is to illustrate the Giant Victoria Waterlily. No one has done this for 150 years. Walter Hood Fitch (28 February 1817 – 1892) was a botanical illustrator, born in Glasgow, made some 10,000 drawings for various publications and is an inspiration with his artwork. She will draw the *Victoria amazonica* and *Victoria cruziana* Giant Waterlilies to show the difference between the two, focussing on the flowers. *Victoria boliviana*, or the Bolivian Waterlily is a new species of Waterlily within the genus *Victoria* in the family *Nymphaeaceae* was to be included. It is the newest described species and is in the Princess of Wales Conservatory. As they flower at night it was necessary to sleep on site overnight but not alongside the waterlily due to Cockroaches so Lucy used the nearby first aid room. The work involved drawing and dissecting flowers at their stages of development, drawing from life and from photographs. Painting was by use of a size 00 watercolour brush, using paper Fabriano 5 300gsm hp, 70cm by 100cm sheets. Winsor and Newton paints including Permanent Red, Permanent Magenta and Quinacridone Magenta were applied building up layers of watercolour. Painting the Waterlily included the leaf which is an incredible structure when viewed from underneath. The *Victoria amazonica* was used and was first pressed to make an Herbarium specimen which is a difficult job. A life-size painting of the leaf was done and then published. So now the Giant Waterlilies attract many people to see them. The paintings should now enable you to identify the three types of Waterlilies. Two of the paintings have been purchased by the Shirley Sherwood Gallery at Kew where they can be seen from April 2023.

This was a well-illustrated and interesting talk, followed by an enjoyable buffet with a quiz and raffle. Thanks to those who took part in the evening preparations.

Questions

What are the challenges of being a botanical artist?

There is a need to understand botany and to work with botanists and also to make a living out of it.

Photography shows one thing but drawing a plant helps understand it.

Artists are now getting credit for in publications, so recognising the artist as well as the author.

Lucy said she uses watercolours but you can get incredible results from coloured pencils.

Botanical art has to be accurate unlike other forms of art. Using watercolours is a traditional method for botanical art, the paint dries quickly and mimics the translucent quality of flowers. Use a good quality watercolour pigment that does not fade and keep in a drawer in low light.

Wednesday 15th March Andy Tucker from Naturetrek gave a talk on Ecuador, Columbia and Venezuela.

Naturetrek holidays are increasingly wildlife orientated and try to offer sustainable tourism. Many countries visited, are dependant on tourism and if this was taken away there would be logging and other environmental problems. Andy studied Zoology at Aberystwyth University, then went to Peru, then Ecuador. In 1998 he stayed in Ecuador in the travel business in an area he is passionate about.

Ecuador is on the west side of the South American Continent. There are massive volcanoes here in the Andes. There have been environmental problems with logging in the Amazon rainforests in the east. As you go up higher in the mountains the air gets thinner and the sun can be very fierce. The capital is at Quito and the trips include a city tour. About 50 km south of Quito is the Cotopaxi Mountain, an active volcano with a glacier. Many slides were shown including Humming birds including the Violet-Tailed Sylph and Velvet-purple Coronet. The Flame-faced Tanager is Andy's favourite bird. Then onto the Choco Region which is an important area for biodiversity. It is also an area for oil extraction. The river here can rise 9m in the wet season. Accommodation is in a thatched building in a forest and nearby is a roped walkway, 150 ft off the ground. Slides included a Squirrel Monkey, Raptors including the Hawk Eagle, Chestnut-crowned Woodpecker, White-necked Puffbird, Pygmy Marmosets, Owl Monkeys and Macaws. A night walk would show a different kind of wildlife including frogs. Photos then of the lowland Andes and then higher ground with various lodges. More slides including the Sword-billed Hummingbird, the Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Toucan and Andean Bears, (where Paddington Bear comes from). When about 3,700m up there are thermal springs in fresh mountain air with the distinctive Red Bark Tree. Slides included the Scarlet-bellied Mountain Tanager and the Condor.

Then onto Columbia which has more varieties of birds than anywhere in the world. In the west, east and central area there are a variety of habitats but some areas are too dangerous for tourists to go into. There is a direct flight from Heathrow which is rare, (Ecuador involves a change enroute). Here in Columbia can be found unbroken, pristine rainforests. A visit is made to the Tamá National Park going up high and walking down. Here it is encouraging to see local school children being taught about nature, conservation and their heritage. Then onto Los Nevados National Park in the coffee-growing region of the central Colombian Andes. It has snow-capped volcanoes, glaciers, lakes and forests. The park has Hummingbirds, Eagles, Parrots and Condors. It has Wax Palms, Bromeliads and Espeletia plants. Slides included the Bearded Hummingbird, the Green Beard Hummingbird and Bearded Hornbill. Over the border in Maracaibo Venezuela. Some of the land here has been desecrated and there is a major oil industry. On the Columbian border can be found salt flats. There are lots of endemic species here.

Questions

Is there an age limit for these trips and are they strenuous?

People come from across the board, the average age is 55, even some up to 90, there is no age limit but need to be fit.

What camera was used?

Nothing special about the camera, digital photography has revolutionised this. People are inclined to use their cameras more than binoculars.

Climate change. Not a great deal of resources is spent on biodiversity in South America but will see this change in years to come.

Condors?

They can be seen in Columbia and Ecuador on the cliffs.

Saturday 25th March Ash Link Nature Reserve A meeting took place from 10am to enjoy the signs of spring at the Local Nature Reserve, Ash Link and see the valuable conservation work being carried out by our volunteers.

Wednesday 12th April Biodiversity in Spelthorne- the Council's Work, a talk by Andi Roy, Spelthorne's Biodiversity Officer. Andi studied Zoology at Reading University, then an MSc at Silwood Park. His work has included the Thames Basin Heaths and then for Natural England. He recently met Sir David Attenborough with the involvement in the Thames Strategy.

Spelthorne has a population of 103,000 with 3 km² of open space. His role involves looking after the common land, the three open spaces Staines Moor, Kempton Park Nature Reserve and Dumsey Meadow, giving ecological advice and strategy action. He does not deal with planning applications, parks, flooding or road verges. (Road verges are now under the control of Surrey County Council). The aim is to encourage wildlife including leaving dead trees standing, fallen wood left on the ground, wildflower planting and meadow creation projects with a local school. Long grass is beneficial for wildlife but people are inclined to prefer short grass football pitches. He was not keen on bird boxes as it can encourage the common species like Blue Tits at the expense of rare birds. It is aimed to re naturalise rivers and carry out tree planting. With tree planting climate change will have to be taken account in choosing tree species. Rivers, ponds and wetland are being looked after including the RiverAsh and the Colne and numerous streams and ditches. Eels are now endangered. Marsh Frogs are an alien species, not native to the UK, but a small number were released at a site in Kent and they have now spread throughout southeast England.

On Staines Moor a variety of birds can be seen such as Kingfishers, Osprey and Egrets and plants like the Southern Marsh Orchid. Common land in the Borough consists of 360 acres which is mainly Staines Moor, Shortwood Common and parts of Shepperton. Common Land does not imply we own it, it is owned by private bodies. Grazing rights are restricted to the Commoners. No fires or camping is allowed but there is the right to roam. Cattle and Horses are useful for conservation grazing, sheep are no good as they graze grass to the ground and is important not to overgraze. May also be useful to use pigs.

Other Projects

Biodiversity net gain as part of the Environment Act 2021, developers will have to assess the biodiversity of a site and add at least 10% biodiversity net gain. Local Nature Recovery Survey aims to link up open spaces for habitat creation. The Nature Recovery Network will be a national network of wildlife-rich places. The aim is to expand, improve and connect these places across towns, countryside and the coast combined with flood management.

How you can help

This is being done by the SNHS working locally at Ash Link, with Civic Pride at Laleham Pond and the Egham and Staines Conservation Volunteers. Look at the Spelthorne website for information. The Blue Heart Scheme involves adopting a grass verge and planting flowers and encourage others to join in. Look at the Surrey County Council website for information.

This interesting talk ended with photos of an Otter on Staines Moor, Wrinkled Peach Mushroom growing on Elm, Barn Owl, the Oak Processionary Moth now found in the Borough and a Little Owl at Greenfield Recreation Ground.

Questions

What is the logistics of getting cows for conservation work?

The Commoners provide the cows. The Wildlife Trust paid to provide Galloways on Staines Moor. The aim is to work with farmers. The drought last summer caused problems providing food for the animals,

The ditch by the allotments on Moor Lane is clogged up and flooding the allotments. This will be reported.

It was suggested that there is a need for bramble clearance on the edge of the wayside at Staines Moor so wildflowers could grow again as it used to be.

Wednesday April 19th 2023 8:30 a.m. Hounslow Heath Adders. A group of 12 members was taken round the Hounslow Heath Local Nature Reserve by Countryside Ranger Andy with the primary aim of seeing adders. The group met at the Rangers' Hut by the (free) car park on Frampton Road. Hounslow Heath LNR is an 80-hectare acre area of lowland heath, dry acid grassland, woodland, scrub, neutral grasslands, wetlands and wildflower meadows. It is owned by the London Borough of Hounslow and is designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance.

The visit was successful in finding adders. Altogether 6 individuals were seen. Andy knew exactly where to look for adders basking in a number of (relatively) sunny sites close to cover, and there were also a few tin sheets. 2 individuals were seen basking alone, then a group of 3, including 2 melanistic individuals. Finally, a female adder was found under a tin sheet. The basking adders were seen by only a few people before sliding into the undergrowth. However, the female under the tin sheet remained in place when the tin was lifted and gave excellent viewing to everyone. Given the rather chilly weather (~10 C), with only glimpses of sunshine, Andy had not been entirely confident. However, sufficient animals did turn up. Surveys had indicated a population of 400 – 700 adders early in 2022, though probably reduced by the fires that summer. Some individuals had been seen as early as February this year in the dry weather.

Two slow worms were also found beneath tin sheets, one of them sharing with the female adder. Solitary bees, black rabbits and muntjac tracks were sighted. Plant species seen included the dwarf gorse, alkanet and Russian comfrey, with also the morel *Verpa conica* and the hare's foot ink cap fungus. Andy also talked about the work done by volunteers to remove some scrub and gorse in order to expand the area of heather, which had initially had to be planted, due to its disappearance from most of the Heath.

Thank you to Andy for his great local knowledge and enthusiasm.

Peter Clifford

Phil Cribb Sunbury Park 3rd May

23 people turned up for a walk in Sunbury Park to identify trees. Phil explained that the UK climate suits many trees from around the world. Native trees are far outnumbered by aliens, with trees from as far away as North America, China, Australia and Chile all found in Lower Sunbury. In the carpark, we examined Chinese Sweet Gum, American False Acacia, Mediterranean Holm Oak and English Yew. We then saw the champion Californian Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) near the walled garden which is over 18 m tall. All the three species of Cedar, Lebanon, Atlantic and Deodar could be seen from a point on the lawn above the ha-ha. The oldest trees in the park are probably Sweet Chestnuts, of which there are several. Their spirally bark is characteristic.

Six types of oak grow in the park, including the native Pedunculate, and the introduced Holm, Turkey, Hungarian and Red Oaks, plus the hybrid Lombardy oak. The maples include Sycamore, Norway and Field Maple.

Some trees suffer from diseases, notably Common Elm, which has been devastated by Dutch Elm disease, and Ash, which is suffering from Ash dieback. Both are present in the park. Elm is now present only as suckers that reach 20 ft tall before dying. Young ash is particularly susceptible to Ash dieback. As we left the park, we noticed the Australian Wattle that grows in a garden in the Avenue.

Phil Cribb

Wednesday May 10th Before the start the AGM, **Tabatha Boniface** gave a talk on **“The River Thames Scheme.”**

Tabatha, who is an ecologist working on the Scheme, described the objectives, habitats and work performed so far relating to biodiversity.

The River Thames Scheme is a flood-alleviation measure involving the creation of a new river channel in two sections (Runnymede and Spelthorne), linking several existing gravel-pit lakes. In addition to its engineering objectives, Tabatha said it has the ambition of achieving a 25% net gain in biodiversity, which compares with the mandatory 10%. The ecological work so far consists of a large number of surveys and is moving towards mitigation plans.

Tabatha described the 8 Habitats of Principal Importance (HPIs), which tend to be dominated by the history of gravel extraction. These habitats are:

- Open mosaic of vegetation on disturbed ground
- Wet woodland
- River
- Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
- Hedgerow
- Eutrophic standing water
- Pond
- Reedbed

There are 6 protected sites in the area covered by the scheme. These are:

- Dumsey Meadow SSSI
- Thorpe Hay Meadow SSSI
- Wraysbury Reservoir SSSI
- Thorpe Park No. 1 Gravel Pit SSSI
- South West London Waterbodies SPA/Ramsar
- Ham Lands Local Nature Reserve

There are also 82 non-statutory protected sites within 2 km of the project boundary.

The gadwall and the shoveler ducks are the 2 key species of the SW London SPA/Ramsar, since they account for >1% of the global population.

Tabatha then discussed the many wildlife surveys which have been undertaken. These include:

- Baseline habitat surveys.
- River condition assessment.
- Bats, with 8 species identified.
- Badgers. There are no setts currently within the project area, but badgers are very mobile.
- Botany, national vegetation classification.
- Dormice. There are apparently none present.
- Otters. Common, but without holts in the project area.
- Ware voles. Not present.
- Great crested newt.

- Reptiles. The grass snake was found at 8 sites in 2021. 22 sites will be surveyed in 2023.
- Breeding and wintering birds, notably the gadwall and shoveler.
- Terrestrial invertebrates. 71000 species have been identified in the project area. 86 species are of nature conservation status. 4 species contribute to the Species Protection Index. These are the money spider, the picture-winged fly, the digger wasp and the small heath butterfly. A highlight was to find a very rare mayfly near Walton Bridge, after a gap in recording of 49 years. Surveys of hairstreak butterflies have detected the brown hairstreak but not the white-letter hairstreak.
- A stag beetle survey will take place in 2023.
- Fish. There is a surprisingly low population density. The species identified include bleak, roach, ruffe, tench, silver bream and perch.
- Phytoplankton and zooplankton.
- Macrophytes.
- Phytobenthos (diatoms).
- Aquatic invertebrates.
- Terrestrial and aquatic Invasive Non-Native species (INNs). Dozens have been identified. The project will attempt to eradicate species that are currently located in one area, but which would otherwise be enabled to spread due to the Scheme.

Tabatha proceeded to discuss briefly the approach that will be taken to mitigation. This will divide into three categories:

- Species-specific.
- Landscape-scale, such as the construction of corridors to give connectivity.
- Mitigations feeding into the wider project assessment, such as the Water Framework Directive and the Habitats Regulations Assessment.

Up to now, the design of mitigations is just beginning.

Questions

It was asked why Daubenton's bat had not been named as one of the species located. Tabatha agreed that it must be present and said it should be found in additional surveys planned for 2023. Slow worms are known from Kempton Park but were not mentioned. Tabatha said that a large reptile survey would also take place in 2023. A comment was made that the barbell is a common fish in the area that was missed. Again, there will be more work in 2023, partly to understand better why fish numbers appear low.

She clarified that fish surveys are now done in ways that minimise catching of fish. Environmental DNA is used by preference. There was surprise that eutrophic standing water was considered a habitat of importance. Tabatha said that it is very extensive, but highly polluted water is not included.

Tabatha reported that the Environment Agency is responsible for delivery of the target of 25% biodiversity net gain. She also agreed that the SNHS database and other local databases should be used, in addition to the new surveys.

Peter clifford

Members' photos. Following the AGM, a few photos were shown by Marion Rider and Mike Parsons. Marion showed fungi, including some seen on the Hounslow Heath outing, along with adders seen on Hounslow Heath. Mike showed some photos from the Chertsey Meads outing.

Chertsey Meads 26th April. An evening walk led by Phil Cribb

13 members took part on a chilly but dry evening walk around Chertsey Meads. Chertsey Meads is Local Nature Reserve owned by and managed by Runnymede Borough Council for recreational purposes. It is a flood meadow, the chalky water from the river gives the Mead its interesting flora associated with ancient meadow. Dumsey Meadow which is on the opposite side of the river is contiguous with Chertsey Meads

is a biological Site of Scientific Interest (SSSI) being an unimproved meadow whereas Chertsey has been improved in the past does not have SSSI status. Chertsey Meads consisting of 41 hectares is neither the less home to an extensive range of plants of importance and of birds. It is possible to walk to Weybridge from the Mead and worth looking out for birds such as Sky Larks and Hobbies.

The Meads were quite wet which is expected for this time of year. Buttercups were in flower, the Bulbous Buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*) was seen which has sepals that are down-turned (reflexed) as opposed to the Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) where the sepals grasp the petals. Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*) was coming into flower with delicate white flowers and also Salad Burnet (*Sanguisorba minor*) was here which when in flower has rounded reddish flowers. When both are fully out together the meadow is lovely to see along with the fine grasses which is typical of this part of the meadow. Also found here and in flower was quite a lot of Field Wood-rush (*Luzula campestris*) with its brown tassel like flowerheads which is an early flowering wood-rush. Roe deer, Lady's Smock (*Cardamine pratensis*) and Queen Anne's Lace Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*) were also seen here.

Many species of plants can be found here one of which is Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) which is small and hard to spot but should be showing now. Despite much time given to looking for its oval shaped leaves we did not succeed in finding any. But one treat remained before completing our walk was finding a small metallic blue beetle on the leaves of an Acer, identified as the Alder Leaf Beetle which feeds on Alder and is also found on other deciduous trees.

Phil's tour of the Mead was a good introduction to what can be seen on Chertsey Meads and an invitation to further visits. Other plants seen here later in Spring and Summer is the Clustered Bellflower (*Campanula glomerata*) found on the higher and drier land areas of the Mead. The Mead is worth a visit during the summer to see the display of orchids such as the Spotted (*Dactylorhiza fuchsia*), Southern Marsh (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*), Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) as well as Pyramidal Orchids (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) when they are in full flower. Many thanks to Phil for an enjoyable evening's walk.

What to look out for during the Spring and Summer Months

With a mild May and a profusion of Spring flowers, we are approaching the early Summer. June is the month when bird song continues including the Cuckoo and Swallows may be seen coming in over the southern coasts. Resident birds like the Blackbird and Robin should be in the middle of their brood, while House Martins, Sand Martins and Willow Warblers create their territories. Adders and Grass Snakes will be out of hibernation. More flowers now come into their own including Orchids. Where there are flowers, you find insects in search of nectar including Bumble Bees and Queen Wasps. On sunny days Butterflies come out including the Orange Tip, Peacock, Brimstone and Holly Blue. Dragonflies and Damselflies should start to be seen. Badgers and Moles can be seen and may be able to spot a Hedgehog which is becoming more of a rarity as well as Frogs and Newts. Broad leaved woodlands are worth a visit as they burst out and also to see the variety of wild flowers, the blossom of the Hawthorn, Cherry and Apple trees combined with the birdsong. Grey Squirrels may be seen in the branches building their drey with twigs. As we approach midsummer with long hours of daylight a visit to the coast can be rewarding to see the bird colonies. June is probably the best month of the year to enjoy the wide range of wildlife and flowers. It is also the time of year when Bat species are active near old buildings and rivers on warm summer evenings at dusk.

WILDLIFE RECORDING IN SPELTHORNE

Martin would like to receive any records that our members have of the wildlife they see or find within the Borough to add to the Societies database. Also any records that are made on Society visits to other areas and particularly on the annual Members Weekend, these records are passed to the local Natural History Society or to the Local County Recorders as appropriate.

All records are wanted, but they need to have a minimum of information for them to be valuable.
WHO - Who made the original observation and the name of the person who made the identification if different from the original observer.

WHAT - An unambiguous name for the specimen, preferably the scientific binomial if possible.

WHERE - A reasonably accurate location. preferably as a minimum 6 figure map reference.

WHEN - The date of the original observation.

Any other information that seems appropriate such as the Sex, Stage, i.e. larvae, Quantity etc., if appropriate, can be added. A spreadsheet can be provided for those that find them useful, phone and it can be emailed to you.

Please pass your records to Martin in whatever format is convenient to yourself. By email if possible, Royal Mail or just a phone call.

Email : martin[AT]halburnecology.co.uk (replace [AT] with @)

Phone : 07884 308454 to request the spreadsheet or report a sighting direct or indeed for the postal address.

Thank you

Future Events

Wednesday 21st June Holme Farm Community Project, with Andi Roy. Meet 10am Holme Farm, Woodham Park Rd, New Haw KT15 3TG

Sunday July 2nd Chobham Common for Nightjars with Eric Sloan. Meet at 8.45pm, the roundabout car park, Chobham Rd. Bring torch insect repellent and binoculars. Grid Ref 965648

Sunday 23rd July Feltham Marshalling Yards with Phil Cribb. Meet at 10.30 in Pevensey Rd by Hanworth Crematorium. Grid Ref 122732

Sunday 30th July Staines Moor with Phil Cribb. Meet at 10am in Moore Lane just before the bypass bridge. Grid Ref 031723

Saturday 12th August Ranmore Common with Phil Cribb. Meet at 10am in the NT car park, Ranmore Common Rd. Grid Ref 142504.

Ash Link Local Nature Reserve

Ash Link is now formally recognised as a Local Nature Reserve. (Local Nature Reserves are a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949).

The Management Plan has now been updated for the next 10 year period.

Work Group

The Society's nature conservation working group "The Friends of Ash Link Local Nature Reserve" (FOAL) has continued to meet and carry out works including the reduction of nettles and bindweed and pond clearance.

The next newsletter will be out late summer 2023.



Poem

Home Thoughts, from Abroad (Abridged)

Robert Browning

Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there.....
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows.....