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## Newsletter – Nov/Dec 2019

This newsletter is in a different format than we have long enjoyed, the reason will be seen in the following Committee statement that was read out by HNHS President Roger Patterson at our first winter meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> September.

### **Statement from the HNHS Committee.**

I will read this statement out so there is no misinterpretation or disagreement on the content in the future. It has been approved by all committee members.

By now you should have seen the notice in the September/October 2019 newsletter stating that after careful consideration the committee have decided to introduce the option of an electronic version of the newsletter for those members who wish to receive it in that form. Some of the benefits of this were stated in the newsletter.

You will also have seen the "Statement by your Editor", where it was mentioned twice that Angela would consider her future as Editor if the committee changed the newsletter. As a result, Angela and Nick Sexton have resigned from HNHS.

This does mean we are looking for a newsletter editor, so if you have a little free time and are willing to consider performing this task please speak to one of the committee, Chris, Su, Josie, Roger M or me.

The newsletter is an important way of communicating with members. It doesn't need to be in the current form or under the current arrangement. If you are interested we are willing to discuss. We may have some good ideas put forward.

There should be no break in the newsletter. Something will be produced, but it may be in a different form and style.

The committee are in full agreement that an electronic newsletter is produced and wish to move on.

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As stated, the committee wish to move on and we hope the members will support us. We are now only a small committee who are planning future events and attempting to make the administration easier.

If a member can edit the newsletter it would be much appreciated. All that is needed is someone with a computer who can put the information supplied by others into a Word document, then email it to someone else for distributing. So that we have a newsletter I will organise that until we find someone, but due to other commitments that situation won't last long.

Please accept that I am not very skilled on the computer, so there will be some errors. I have done it in a simple form because it is easy to change. Please let me have any comments. It is your newsletter as well as mine.

The introduction of an electronic newsletter has had an instant impact. Of the first 33 membership renewals 20 have opted for the electronic version. That is much better than expected and suggests there was a need. Thank you to those members, as it is a great saving on paper and time. It is the first newsletter to be displayed on the website. If you lose it or wish to look at previous issues they will be retained in pdf format.

We remind members that we should not use the car park in the front of the hall at winter meetings. To drop off those with walking difficulties is acceptable, but we ask drivers to please use the car park at the rear of the hall. We have an agreement with the church for 3 spaces for speakers and members who have equipment to unload, but only if available. They are not a right.

There are new chairs in the hall, with different stacking instructions that are displayed on the walls. We have noticed already they are not easy to stack, so please don't force them.

The "Blue Book" has been in existence for many years, but little has been done with the information, so we will attempt to include some of the more unusual entries in the newsletter, possibly starting with the next issue. We won't include everything that is seen, just what and the location.

"Cattlestone Cameos" has been an occasional feature in past newsletters. Starting with this issue Madeleine Dougharty has agreed to share her observations with us.

The AGM time is looming. If you get this newsletter in time and you wish to raise a matter or propose someone for a post (or even volunteer yourself!) please contact Su Reed before the meeting. We are in desperate need of committee members to help share the workload. If you have a little time and some good ideas we will put them to good use. AGM details are attached.

This newsletter has been cobbled together rather quickly. I hope you understand if you find any errors. This is the first issue for many years where there are no photographs, but we will try to rectify that ASAP. The important thing is to provide information. We do need copy, so please contribute if you can.

I originally thought this would be a small edition, but Sally, Oliver, Madeleine and Roger have responded brilliantly. Thank you.

*Roger Patterson*

## **Events Diary**

### **Winter Meetings**

All start promptly at 7.30pm on Mondays in the Wesley Hall, London Road. Horsham.

4<sup>th</sup> Nov.

Making a return visit after several years is SIMON DAVEY who is a freelance ecologist based in Sussex, with general natural history interests, but he specialises particularly in lichens. He has travelled the world as a natural history tour leader and as a lecturer on cruise ships. His particular passion is to encourage people to engage with the natural world in as many habitats as possible. He is the author of three books, including the Lichens of Jersey, published in 2015

"**Woodland from the Equator to the Arctic**" will look at examples of woodland from the Amazon Basin, Costa Rica, Ecuador, through Europe, Newfoundland, and Northern Norway

(including Spitzbergen). It will include a snapshot of the flora of these woodlands and will also refer to lichens.

(Chairman Roger Mason)

11<sup>th</sup> Nov.

The talk this evening is "**Spiders of Sussex**" by GRAEME LYONS, who has been working for Sussex Wildlife Trust as their ecologist for the last 11 years and in this time he has developed a fondness for spiders. For the last two years Graeme has been county recorder for spiders in Sussex. In early 2019 he accepted the challenge from Matt Prince, county recorder for Devon, to list the most spiders in a year. At the time of writing (22nd May 2019) Graeme had already seen 250 species of spiders in 2019! This challenge is producing many records of rare and unusual spiders, so by the end of 2019 he is expecting a lot of exciting spider stories from the south east.

(Chairman Su Reed)

18<sup>th</sup> Nov.

**Annual General Meeting.** This will be followed by "**An entomological year with my camera**" by HNHS member SU REED. Su has the ability to spot things that others often don't see. Her presentations always show her ability with a camera as well as her extensive knowledge of wildlife, so we are likely to be in for a treat this evening.

(Chairman Josie Allen)

25<sup>th</sup> Nov.

The Medmerry Management Realignment Scheme, near Bracklesham, West Sussex, is now 5 years old. During this time, the Environment Agency has coordinated and funded many aspects of monitoring, culminating in a conference in March 2019. STEVE WEBSTER is the RSPB Site Manager for the reserve, and for Pagham Harbour LNR. In his talk "**Medmerry Reserve – 5 years on...**" he will be explaining a bit about the realignment scheme, how it works and going through some of the results of the monitoring.

(Chairman Roger Mason)

2<sup>nd</sup> Dec.

In LINDA PITKIN's previous visits she has shown us some amazing photographs of life under water. For this visit she has chosen the title "**Wildlife photography underwater**" which is a bit of a blanket theme that will cover various photographic trips. This will include some photos of weird and wonderful creatures from Indonesia taken on one of Linda's recent trips, and a few other shots closer to home.

(Chairman Josie Allen)

9<sup>th</sup> Dec.

This evening we welcome the return of NEIL HULME who is a well known butterfly enthusiast, conservationist and co-author of 'The Butterflies of Sussex'. His efforts to reverse the declines of the Duke of Burgundy and Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterflies in Sussex were recognised by the award of the British Empire Medal in 2017. He has since reintroduced the regionally extinct Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and continues to work on other locally threatened species such as the Grayling.

**"Butterflies in the countryside west of Arundel"** will focus on the wealth of butterflies found in a relatively small area of the countryside west of Arundel.

(Chairman Su Reed)

16<sup>th</sup> Dec.

**Christmas Party.** Please listen to announcements at meetings for details.

### **Advanced notice: President's Walk.**

I have had my arm twisted slightly to organise a President's walk, with a pub lunch. The date is Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2020. The walk will probably last around a couple of hours and will be a fun event, as the timing isn't great for natural history, but HNHS has a history of spotting things that others may miss. I will try to find somewhere with a variety of lunches. Put the date in your diary now.

### **Field Meetings 2019**

Our six Field Meetings are usually (loosely) connected by a theme; for instance the 2018 meetings were associated with the rivers Adur and Arun. This year I decided to abandon any theme, and just chose six of my favourite locations, Castle Hill, Burton Pond, Stedham Common, the Heyshott Escarpment, Thursley Common and Chailey Common. We collectively decided to abandon the Heyshott escarpment, since it coincided with the hottest day of the year. The South Downs, with the temperature in the high thirties, and no shade, is no place to be. Apart from that the weather was very kind, and we had some very good outings, although the final one was not quite as planned. Chailey Common has six car parks, so I gave precise instructions as to which one we wanted. Guess which one of us ended up in the wrong one?

*Roger Mason*

### **Winter Meeting Reports**

#### **How & Why do populations of ants, bees and wasps change?**

**Mike Edwards.** 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019

The first lecture of the season had us puzzling over statistics and the validity of some observations of population change in insects. Mike showed us a picture of the earth and said that was all we had, it was no use relying on setting up camp on Mars. The world population is going up, though the rate of increase is beginning to slow as people get richer and have fewer children.

More intensive agriculture has led to fewer wild flowers and this in turn impacts on the populations of insect life. Graphs show that there was a decline when guano was brought in as a fertilizer, then later the Haber process was devised to make ammonia, and during the Second World War more land was ploughed up to help feed the country.

Though some species may be declared extinct, they may reappear. This was the case with the Ashy mining bee, *Andrena cineraria*. It is now seen all along the southeast coastline and this is probably because of changing weather conditions. More than 20 new species have arrived since 1980, including the Tree bumble bee, *Bombus hypnorum*. This has spread north through Britain and Ireland and very commonly makes use of bird nest boxes. They will start their nests before the birds, so you have bumblebees in bird boxes instead of birds. The Ivy bee, *Colletes hederæ*, is also frequently seen now and feeds on ivy flowers.

Recording the presence or absence of species depends on manpower and can be skewed by the numbers of observers. For example, there are many keen recorders in the south, but fewer in the north, so it looks as though there are fewer insect populations in the north. Electronic recording of data has transformed the accuracy, when anyone can go to a website and upload what they have seen. Data collection is more reliable and we can only mark the fluctuations in populations with accurate data. Mike said that dead flies on windscreens are simply someone's impression of quantity and this is not acceptable.

There are several ways to present data with graphs, dots, etc. and each has its merits. Sometimes one can assume the presence of a certain insect if its companion insects are all there.

Success of a species depends on availability of food, nesting sites and weather. If flooding is severe in a certain place, any ground nesting bees will be wiped out.

Then Mike was asked why bees frequently ignored "bee hotels". He explained that most of them are made in China, where the bees were bigger, and the holes were too large for our native bees. It is a good idea to put a piece of bamboo cane in the hole, which will provide a smaller orifice, ideally 2mm wider than the bee, which works out as about 5-6mm across. Mike ran around the room to demonstrate that to be attractive, the bee hotels must be against a flat wall or fence, not in the open. He finally calmed down to much applause from the audience.

*Sally Neely*

### **"Wonderful water voles, their life and struggles"**

**Jane Reeve.** 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019

LOTS AND LOTS OF NON-RATS BUT STILL NOT ENOUGH VOLES.....

The image was cast by Wind in the Willows and it lives on affectionately in all our childhood memories. The name, alas, is a misnomer, because ratty wasn't a ratty at all but a vole. And as Jane abundantly showed us, voles aren't to be confused with rats if you know how to look.

Start with their head. Water voles are roundy headed, with their ears only slightly visible, with bright eyes and sleek fur. Their noses are blunt and their whole appearance is much rounder than a rat and their tails are shorter. Easiest of all, they don't run like rats. Rats have a humpy gait and look long and ungainly. They are also a little reluctant to take to the water, whereas a vole will plunge in with a most satisfying plop.

Voles have marvellous teeth. Their front teeth are coated in ferrous oxide to make them extra strong and this orange coating clearly identifies them. Their teeth grow all the time as many rodents do and the front ones are sharpened on the set below.

How will you get close enough to see their teeth? In truth you won't, not while their owner is alive at any rate. You will find these orange incisors in the coughed up pellets of owls and other birds of prey. Avian pellets are the indigestible remains of the prey they swallowed whole and as we know the pellets are often found at the base of roosting trees. So, orange teeth mean there are voles about.

Jane warned us about the declining numbers nationwide of these endearing mammals. The UK's population was about 1.2 million in 1989 which fell by three quarters over the next decade and saw two further drops of 20% each in 2013 and 2015. That would mean to-day's vole population is under 200,000. The usual culprits are to blame, of course: habitat loss, pollution, over exploitation of land and clearing of waterway banks.

The survivors face a doubtful future because once the population splits into non-intersecting groups the gene pool will decline. Studies have shown that inter-breeding leads to extinction in about 8 years.

However, voles do breed at an astonishing rate. A mature female can have six litters of six pups a time in a breeding season and the daughters can breed within a month of their own birth. On this basis, a pair could produce over sixty offspring in a year. Naturally things don't work out like that. The poor female is a pup producing machine and if all survived a waterway would be a heaving mass of unsustainable voles after a few months. The female may well illustrate the principle of Dawkins Selfish Gene, but what a family for voles is food for so many others. Hence the teeth in the pellets.

So, what can be done?

The rapid breeding of this rodent could be its saviour. Given enough territories preserved for them, then their numbers will bounce back quickly. Jane's own work at Chichester could well lead the way and after to-night's talk we all wish her well most heartily.

*Oliver Farley*

### **"Transylvania - the land beyond the forest"**

**Laurie Jackson.** 14th October 2019

Transylvania was Laurie's subject, the land beyond the forests. The very name sounds exotic and in English minds it is forever associated with Bram Stoker's Dracula. There were no horrors in this presentation, only swarms of butterflies, some birds and multiple landscapes. We had hoopoes, Duke of Burgundy's and fire salamanders. We had river banks, hillsides and deep gorges.

Laurie began with a run through the complicated history of this Balkan region, and frankly it's all too involved to remember except that John of Luxembourg got into it somewhere and so did lots of Saxons, that Romania was shackled by a socialist regime under Russian tutelage and is today emerging into the very different world of modern Europe.

Laurie told us that she had been part of a team which did some survey work in the picturesque countryside; they counted butterflies, they plotted field use and they assessed wild life in general.

Now this was what we felt was the crux of the matter. What did they find, where was it, and what did they propose to do with their findings?

Stepping back a moment, we can remind ourselves that the hilltop villages of Romania are most enchanting places. Little traditional houses have a well in front with a long wooden shaft to raise the water; each property has a decorated entrance archway, and their own cow –often just one – is delivered back to the shed for milking every evening. Village life is as old fashioned as the nineteenth century technology in use in the surrounding flower meadows: scythes and sickles, haycocks and wooden turning rakes.

Journey down for twenty minutes to the alluvial flatlands and you meet John Deere. All green and yellow, just as here in Sussex, and just as powerful. The tractor performs in a few minutes the back-breaking work which took a family all morning.

So, what's the future for agriculture and wild life in Romania?

Did Laurie's recital point us in the direction of a possible answer? Should the plains be allowed to prosper as modern food factories -- after all we all enjoy the plentiful, cheap product -- and allow the uplands and hillsides to revert to a form of controlled wild life?

There is plenty of room, and it's wild enough to support an estimated 6.000 brown bears at the moment. There's geological variation and an abundance of flora little disturbed by modern life. There's a beautiful climate and a long coastline. Might not Romania become a wise blend of some up-to-date production methods with vast tracts of less disturbed countryside, deliberately left wild to offset the painful losses across so many parts of western Europe?

Laurie didn't enter on that debate but she showed us enough to set us thinking. There's room for more reflection and good suggestions for this fabled land.

For this and a colourful evening we send her our thanks.

*Oliver Farley*

**"Cattlestone Cameos"** are a brief account of wildlife activity on Cattlestone Farm, Broadford Bridge, the home of Frank and Madeleine Dougharty. Their daughters Sue and Jan live nearby. Those who have visited Cattlestone Farm will know that the farm is a special place for wildlife, where HNHS have had many memorable meetings. Madeleine has kindly agreed to tell us about what has been seen recently. For obvious reasons this feature will be mainly in note form.

### **"Cattlestone Cameos"**

The farm, as well as fields, contains 4 gardens with feeding stations, therefore much activity is observed.

We have huge numbers of blue tits and great tits this year. Regular visits from ravens, kites, bullfinches and marsh tits. Buzzards are resident and have produced two young. The rabbit population is noticeably reduced as a result.

Tawny owls have been very vocal this week (written on 20<sup>th</sup> Oct) after a long period of silence. An injured tawny owl was brought to us and after a few days of TLC flew off, having been admired by visitors. 60 goldfinches were counted feeding on seed heads of knapweed. 15 long-tailed tits seen.

Great Spotted Woodpeckers raised two young and a green woodpecker was seen eating fallen apples where there were no ants to be seen. Two ravens were mobbing a kestrel.

Skylarks successfully reared young. 5 roe deer on Jan's side of the main road had 2 young and 6 on our side also had 2 young. They don't cross the road.

In two of the gardens hedgehogs clear up what drops from the feeders and also eat fallen fruit.

Sue is convinced she has a pet bat that follows her around the field when she walks her dogs after dark. She wears a head torch which attracts the insects -- hence the bat.

Many wasp spiders were found on the HNHS evening meeting and 2 dozen nests were found. purple emperors have been seen, also many small heath butterflies.

*Madeleine Dougharty.*

### **Reminder re Subscriptions for current financial year**

A gentle reminder that the above were due on the 1st September 2019. A Renewal Form was included in the September/October newsletter showing the new membership rates. If you are

going to renew your membership of the Society please do so fairly soon, otherwise this will be the last newsletter you will receive.

*Chris Hamilton. Hon. Treasurer.*

### **Accounts 01.09.2018 - 31.08.2019**

Attached to this Newsletter are the accounts of the Society for the above financial year. All relevant documents have been scrutinised by our Independent Examiner and certified as a true record. These final accounts will be presented at the AGM on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019, when certified copies will be available for members to view if they so wish.

Please, therefore, bring your copy to the AGM as, in order to save paper and money, no further copies of the accounts will be printed. Thank you.

*Chris Hamilton, Hon. Treasurer*

### **Thanks.**

Thanks to all contributors for supplying copy for the newsletter. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.

### **Important.**

Contributions for the newsletter should be with the Editor on the first day of the month preceding publication i.e. February, April, June, August, October and December, unless otherwise agreed. The submission of copy is no guarantee it will be published.

It is to be distinctly understood that all views, theories and opinions, expressed in the pages of this newsletter are solely those of the author(s) concerned. Neither the Editor nor the Officers of the Society can be held responsible for any embarrassment or injury that might be sustained by reliance thereon.

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