

HCCPS Newsletter April 2023



Annual Litterblitz: Our annual litterblitz will be held from **Saturday 1st April to Easter Monday 10th April** and as usual garbage bags will be left at the three main collection points – by the Cricket Pitch; opposite the School; and opposite Church Lane, Hawridge. Filled sacks may be left at the collection points but, if possible, please take any home for your normal roadside collection. If there are items which are too heavy to move, please leave them by the roadside for Council pick up or tell us where they are so that we can move them to the roadside.

Free Litter Picks: If you would like one, free of charge, please contact Lindsay Griffin 758440 or lindsaygriffin@yahoo.co.uk. Whilst it is really helpful for everyone to make a special effort to clear debris from the Commons during Litterblitz and before the vegetation gets too dense, we value your efforts to keep the Commons rubbish free at all times. **THANK YOU TO ALL WHO DO IT. WE REALLY SHOULDN'T HAVE TO!**

AGM: For the first time HCCPS is holding its AGM in spring rather than in the depths of winter. We hope that with better weather and longer light in the evenings we can encourage more of our members and friends to come out to see and hear what we are doing and why.

The AGM will be held on **Tuesday 9th May at Cholesbury Village Hall at 7.30pm**. As it will be just after King Charles' Coronation, we will include a ceremonial tree planting involving participants from the local community to commemorate the event, immediately prior to the AGM. More details will be issued nearer the time. There will then be refreshments at the Village Hall and an opportunity for participants to hear about and discuss the ongoing tree works followed by the general business.

Election of Committee Members:

Office Bearers:

Mark Hobbs – Chairman;

Lindsay Griffin - Vice Chairman;

Philip Prettejohn - Treasurer

Committee Members:

Nick Brown;

John Caple;

Janet Hopkinson;

Rebecca Walton;

Tim Watts

each of whom intends to remain on the Committee.

There will be three vacancies on the Committee since we have not yet replaced Isobel Clark who left last year and, sadly, David Dennis and Sarah Higgins have also decided to step down from the Committee.

David has been a committee member for 8 years and served as Chairman in 2017. He has played an important part in a number of initiatives on the Commons including his work on the ponds and the heathers; providing wonderful photographs for the cards and calendars; helping monitor DofE volunteers; looking for Glow worms; as well as surveying Moths and butterflies; holding Butterfly presentations; writing segments for the Hilltop News; and hosting the very popular annual moth release mornings. Fortunately, David has said that he will continue to monitor the Moths and Butterflies on the Commons with his colleague Peter Bygate and to help in other ways.

Sarah has also been a very active member of the Committee for 5 years that she has checked the reptile mats, keeps an eye on the frog spawn etc. bulb planting, as well as watching vigilantly when she is riding or dog walking on the Commons. She too will continue some of these activities.

Mike Fletcher has also decided to stand down as **Honorary Examiner**. Mike was our Treasurer for 24 years and when he resigned from that position, he became our Honorary Examiner until the present - a further 11 years. This has been a huge commitment for which we are very grateful and Mike's careful examination of our accounts has always meant that our accounts are scrupulously checked.

Ben Lewis, who was our treasurer for eight years after Mike, has agreed to stand as our Examiner. It is not our intention to fill all of the other vacancies at present but to co-opt individuals to specific roles during the year. However, we would welcome expressions of interest in joining the Committee. We take on many different roles. Whatever your skills I am sure we can utilise them. Please contact Mark Hobbs mark@kendrickhobbs.co.uk or me lindsaygriffin@yahoo.co.uk for further information.

Winter works: James Jolliffe and his team completed the winter work in late February just before such work has to stop to allow the birds to nest undisturbed. It is hoped that the extensive work on Rays Hill will make it much safer for riders and walkers in that area. James has also carried out work on the rides to widen them and to make it safer to use the tractor in those areas. This work was approved by John Morris (formerly of Chiltern Woodlands), Christine's woodland advisor. The tree felling undertaken by Pete Leybourne and his team has also come to an end for now. Because the conditions were so wet earlier on some clearing e.g. on Stoney Lane remains to be done. This clearing can go ahead when the conditions are better and is allowed during the nesting season.

Give a Hoot: Lynne Lambert and her colleagues from BORG came in mid-February to check the various nesting boxes on the Commons and also on Christine's farmland. Obviously, it was a bit too early for nesting birds but they cleared out a nest on the Commons which had been used by Jackdaws last year and they mended a Barn Owl box on Christine's land. They also had the added bonus of finding a male adult in one of the boxes which they were able to ring.



Male Barn Owl on Christine's farmland



The ridges on the talons tell us this male is more than two years in age.

Sexing a Barn Owl can be done by looking for flecking on the underparts of the bird with male underparts generally uniformly white and female underparts generally heavily speckled with black, grey or brown flecks. The flecking becomes apparent in females, or is absent from males, from approximately 30 days old, enabling many chicks to be aged when ringed.



There are always exceptions to the rule however, and quite spotty males and almost pure white females are possible.



It is very encouraging that we have a really good breeding site established here and a walk on Christine's valley at dusk will often be a time to see one or more of them out hunting.

We are very fortunate to have had regular visits from BORG since 2014. Their work is all done by volunteers and they erect, repair or replace boxes as well as ringing any Barn Owls, Tawnies, Little Owls or Kestrels that they can. Please watch our short video showing their work with Tawnies on Hawridge Common and Barn Owls on Christine's farm nearby. It can be found on our website hawridgeandcholesburycommons.com, under Conservation - Owl and Kestrel project or on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwLxSNr6HM>

To find out more about BORG please check out their website www.giveahoot.org.uk. **Their Mission Statement reads 'The Bucks Owl and Raptor Group exists to further the interests of Owl and Kestrel conservation within Buckinghamshire. We do this through recording, monitoring, educational work, practical conservation and provision of advice. We work closely with other birding groups and under the guidance of the British Trust for Ornithology.'**

Their website shows ways in which you can help them carry out this wonderful work and meet expenses such as running their 4X4 vehicle. You can become a member, give a donation, sponsor a box or become a volunteer.

You can also do your bit at home to help our wildlife to thrive at a time when so many species are being adversely affected by our actions. A study by the University of Essex,

reported in The Times, has shown that if you use glyphosate (contained in Roundup) you can expect 25% fewer sparrows and 40% fewer if you use slug pellets. Doubtless not only sparrows are affected in this way. In another Times report it was observed that you do not usually find small mammals dead since they are quickly scavenged by other animals. Obviously, these mammals may have been poisoned which can have unintended consequences for their prey. Monitoring Barn Owl carcasses has shown that in 2019 as many as 87% had been poisoned in this secondary way. Of course, other species such as Tawnies, Red Kites, Foxes are also killed in this way and animals such as cats, dogs, pigeons and blackbirds are sometimes killed by directly eating rodenticide baits. Please try to limit or eliminate your use of such poisons.

Moths and Butterflies: Although we appear to have thriving populations of Moths and Butterflies on the Commons, overall, 33% of Moths and 80% of Butterflies are in decline according to Butterfly Conservation. The data which David and Peter Bygate collect on the species they find here are sent to the Bucks Recorder to add to the picture nationwide.

Interestingly, though our native species are in decline there has been an increase in the numbers of European species found here, as a result of climate change. David notes that several European Butterflies are now breeding on our south coast and the Isle of Wight has recorded 50 new Moth species in the last few years. David gives the following examples “The Clouded Yellow used to be a summer migrant to the UK, not breeding here, but it has now started breeding on the south coast. It may not yet be able to survive our winters, but with climate change, it probably will soon. The Large Tortoiseshell went extinct some 50 years ago in the UK, but some are again being seen. A hundred years ago it was a common woodland butterfly and the reasons for its decline are not well understood, but it does now seem to be starting a comeback. In just the last decade, a breeding colony of Long-tailed Blues has become established in Sussex. This migrant butterfly has popped up occasionally for many years, but only recently has it started to tolerate our winters.

The best example (there are many) of a moth following the same trend is our famous Clifden Nonpareil, always until recently a rare migrant in the south west, but now being found, and breeding – in small numbers – all over the southern half of England. “



Long-tailed Blue



Clouded Yellow



Large Tortoiseshell



Clifden Nonpareil

Once again, our thanks to all who share their knowledge and expertise on the Commons.
We are fortunate to have such diversity!

Lindsay Griffin