

Join in projects:

☎ 'Toads on roads'

☎ Bird boosting'

☎ Dormouse detecting

☎ Web forum

☎ Water monitoring

↓ = more on



Web-site

Wildlife Stories:

Valentine's Offer

Pet Dedication offer

Children's Competition

Volunteering

Wildlife Tips 4U

A ROBERT'S REEDS

FEBRUARY 2015 No.6

- ✚ 'Newsletter of **ACCT**ion for WILDLIFE! (The Anne Carpmael Charitable Trust).
- ✚ Conserves our wonderful but declining local wildlife, & inspires others too.
- ✚ Owns and manages Withymead Nature Reserve and Little Meadow Reserve.
- ✚ Hosts Forest School, runs Wildlife Club for children, puts on events & courses.

GORING HAS RARE HAZEL DORMICE



25 diligent searchers had fun combing Little Meadow's thicket and nearby woods for dormouse-nibbled hazel-nut shells, after Dr. Amanda Lloyd of the Oxfordshire Mammal Group explained how. Endangered Hazel Dormice rotate nuts delicately producing neat holes with grooves parallel to the edge. ☎ Please keep any you find like this and let us know to help protect them.. Very rare Dormice are now European Protected Species. Two 'text-book' nuts were found by the river & 3 'possibles' at Little Meadow; a hibernating Dormouse was once found here.



Wildlife Club identified nibbled nuts too!

So, excitingly, we have this endearing mammal in our area. As it's rapidly declining we need to connect up & improve suitable habitat. Hazel & native Honeysuckle (food and nesting material) are both important - Little Meadow needs both and is also cut off - tree-dwelling Dormice don't cross open space readily. So...here's what you can do below, as endorsed by the fabulous Oxfordshire Mammal Group ↓

Thank you! Payments by cash, direct bank transfer or cheque .Please contact us ↓☺

by Feb.11

GIVE THE ONE YOU LOVE A VALENTINE'S GIFT TO MAKE A LASTING DIFFERENCE!

Sponsor **1 Honeysuckle** plant or **5 Hazel** saplings to help endangered Dormice and other wildlife at your local Nature Reserve – Little Meadow, on the Thames Path next to Gatehampton Railway Bridge.

✚ You receive an attractive Dormouse greetings card for your loved one explaining how wildlife is being helped.

✚ Your honeysuckle or Hazel will be planted on 12 February with a large pink, heart-shaped tag with a message of your choice.

✚ All for £7 (just the cost of plants & materials)



Woolly Bears and Painted Ladies →



We've ordered 50 'woolly Bears' and 10 Painted Lady butterfly larvae! Tiegan, Charlotte and Kathy are old hands at rearing butterflies and will be our consultant experts as we raise them.



Woolly Bears are the hairy larvae of Garden Tiger Moths.

Only two moths have been seen lately at Withymead, both over two years ago. They used to be common but are in serious decline. 'World-wide Butterflies' supply bred-in-captivity caterpillars for release into the wild and we will be temporarily housing these and other native wildlife species in the Study Centre for enjoyment, conservation and education purposes from Spring onwards. .



RSPB'S BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH - RESULTS

Thank you to all those who took part in this 36-year-old RSPB annual event. House Sparrows have declined by 63% and Starlings by 84% in this time, as notable examples. Our wildlife definitely needs help. ☎ See p. 4 → [Bird boosting'](#)

The local results sent in to us were interesting, thank you, reflecting trends in the wider South-east even on this small scale:

- Blackbirds, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Chaffinches, Wood Pigeon, Dunnocks and Robins were always recorded in low numbers.
- House Sparrows, Green Finches and Coal Tits were present only once and Starlings not at all.

Garden bird species were once numerous. The qualified good news is that though most are declining, at least a few like Blue Tits and Chaffinches are increasing now slightly. Blackbirds are rallying a little too, boosted just now by migrants.



TIP! Providing a wide variety of bird feeder offerings helps biodiversity as otherwise just a few species tend to be helped and increase. Avoid cheap seed mixes with large grains - these attract non-native pheasants, & wood pigeons which have increased spectacularly recently; the small, rarer birds then miss out. Clean feeders regularly and sterilise with boiling water to prevent spread of disease. Chaffinches for example are prone to a foot viral infection entering via cuts and scratches.



TRIP! For a fantastic, local 'Winter Wildlife Spectacular' visit Otmoor RSPB reserve at dusk - a large 'murmuration' of Starlings still gathers overhead, wheeling round the big sky before roosting in the reed bed - they descend en masse and chatter loudly for a

[See You Tube video!](#)

while, suddenly all falling completely silent together - uncanny!



It's not proven why Starling numbers have plummeted but roosting sites have reduced as have numbers of soil insects they feed on too - most farmers & gardeners use many pesticides.

☎ See project to help page 4

A 'Squabble' - Hurrah!



Dot's taken up push or kick-scooting after a gap of forty years + - 'fun! Whilst out trying to remember from child-hood how to keep rolling along, she momentarily seemed to time-travel right back to the actual 1960's:

"On the Ridgeway Trail in South Stoke I heard a strangely-familiar squabbling coming from some way behind a thick hedge. I stopped dead, wracking my brain to think what it was ...then... I sang it out loud! - "Lots and lots of House Sparrows!" Sure enough beyond the hedge was a big bramble bush and twenty sparrows at least were in there - an exciting trip down memory lane, as House Sparrow numbers have crashed in the ensuing decades - I've only ever seen one or two in these parts before. So...Hurrah! "

The next step...Robert has made 2 colonial nest boxes (3 'homes' in each) which will be put up. Recent research links House Sparrow decline with lack of nest sites and lack of insects for feeding the young in spring (gardens and farmland host less insects because of non-native plants and pesticide use) along with lack of native flower seeds (+ farm stubble fields) for food. We have planted large areas of native Cornfield Annual flower seeds and are hoping that noisy neighbours may move in!

They feed LOTS of aphids (green-fly) to their young - 'good for our roses (see Page 5)

The Real names for a group of Sparrows are: A Host, a Quarrel or a Ubiquity – they show how times have changed!

Please send us your local Wildlife Stories to publish in the newsletter ☺☺☺☺



LOCAL WILDLIFE 'HOTSPOTS TO ...'SPOT'

☎ Bird boosting'

Survey and Community Offer: Do you know of anywhere within a few miles of Goring where there are House Sparrows and / or Starlings? Please contact us if so. We would like to work with communities to help House Sparrows and Starlings to make a come-back - we have some funding for nest boxes for suitable sites.

Thank you for your new roles: Graham who took up last month's challenge of monitoring birds; to Heather who has joyfully joined the Monday Morning Brews Club; to Shirley and the Wildlife Club children who are creating crafty items for the South Stoke May Fair; to Kathy who will be face-painting / glitter tattooing at the Fair; to Tiegan, Charlotte, Kathy: caterpillar-raising expert consultants (p.2)



← Shirley and Heather saving Snowdrops from being trodden on, on the new path at the Monday Morning Brews Club.

Sterling Volunteer efforts:

Robert has finished fences, mended the boardwalk, cut reed fen; Richard felled trees →



including preparatory ones for the Sand Martin bank project, Christine & Gill cleared these trees and coppiced Willow; Chance is fastidiously and cheerfully book-keeping, Janet & Helen are biodiversity planning, Jo & Alan are working on Friends' and Volunteering schemes, Kathy & Fiona are newsletter producing. Thank you!

Update on South Stoke May Fair - APRIL CRAFT EVENT.



We will be fund-raising at the Fair to help frogs and other amphibians locally - these are suffering in the UK, & globally. Please do get involved in making craft items to sell at our 'ACCTion for WILDLIFE' stall on May 4th if you can. The website Volunteering page has 8 suggested, easy items to make - **PLEASE VOTE for 4 of these items to be offered at a public Withymead 'Special' event on Saturday 18th April.** The Craft event will be great for families and everyone will be making two of their chosen crafted items - one to take home in exchange for a donation to cover materials, and one for us to sell at the Fair. Please vote for your favourite 4 out of the 8 on the Volunteering pages - the winning crafts will be the ones we offer on the 18 April ☺.

Pet Memorial Garden - PET DEDICATION OFFER...



The refurbishment is going on apace thanks to Shirley and Robert. Robert has made a lovely picket fence from old pallets - thank you to everyone who painted it at the 'Withymead' 1-hour 'Special' It was a cold day! This will be a Rose Garden - you can now sponsor a wildlife-friendly hybrid Tea Rose in memory of your own pet and have a plaque (5" x 3") with your Pet's name and message put in the garden permanently with it ☺ This garden will have a proper path & seat, a bird table + bath, and will reflect the character of the Withymead garden in Anne Carpmael's time. Contact us about Rose sponsorship. 'Costs below (materials + delivery only).

Cost of Rose: £9 (bare-root - ask re. potted roses) Cost of Plaque :£21



LOCAL WILDLIFE 'HOTSPOTS TO ...' SPOT'



'Toads on roads'

It's coming up to the time when toads head home to their ancestral ponds to breed...and get flattened on roads, unfortunately. Toads are already massively in decline so Toad Patrols are organised to save them. However there is no active Patrol within 10 miles of Withymead Nature Reserve - **do you know of a Toad road crossing point locally?** We'll organise a patrol if so ☺

Donations ☺ THANK YOU!



Basildon Country Neighbour Association - Books for the Study Centre library have now been ordered + 5 small Mammal traps - Amanda from Oxfordshire Mammal Group is working with us to monitor mammals at Withymead and Little Meadow. Results will feed into our practical management plans.

New donations: Peter - a very large, new tarpaulin and accessories for the teepee and quantities of good wood preservative + 2 pressure sprayers - 'will really speed things up!'; Jamie - wood chippings for the Study Centre path. THANK YOU!

Donation Request: Large terracotta pots for Shirley to plant up for the May Fair ☺ Does anyone have one or two spare please?

VARIED VOLUNTEER ROLES ☺ Please do join the growing team!



From last time:

- Make something crafty for us to sell to help frogs ☺ **NEW!** = great quick & easy ideas on the web-site Volunteer Page. See May Fair up-date p.5.
- More wildlife-watchers needed for both reserves :-) Plus **NEW!** Interesting area to watch **NEW!** TAKING PHOTOS & sending them to us to ID is fine ☺

This time:

- **'Helping Wildlife at Home'** web-site page compiler. Could you gather a few wildlife gardening tips, monthly, for a colourful web page? This aspect is popular- you should generate lots of web traffic & help wildlife.
- February half-term, **Water-quality and Aquatic biodiversity 2-day project** at Withymead Nature Reserve. Sample water bodies for species and chemistry (full training given, no experience necessary).
- **Quartermaster's Stores!** We need materials of all kinds to make and mend things. Could you peruse and snap up things on Free-cycle maybe (collection arranged when needed) or source in other creative ways?
- **Volunteer Wildlife 'keepers'** Spend an hour weekly or monthly looking after an ever-changing collection of live wildlife in the Study Centre. Individual creatures will be kept for just a short time. You'll be looking after + catching or returning to the wild, all sorts of intriguing creatures - e.g. freshwater invertebrates, caterpillars, snails, slow-worms, tadpoles, woodlice, insects and plants too. We're starting with Swan Mussels - filter feeders. You'll be working alongside us; no experience is necessary..

Thank you to **Helen** and **Claire** for volunteering to man the Centre once a month on a Sunday from 1pm - 4pm from Spring onwards (contact us to join the rota).

Children's Competition ☺

For up to 11 yr-olds this time ☺

Write up your own interesting Wildlife TRUE story to publish in the newsletter (200 words maximum). Email or post it to us please WITH your favourite 4 crafts chosen from the 8 on the Volunteer Page. Five winners, judged by a panel, will be published in the newsletter and receive a Wildlife book prize; everyone who enters wins a runner-up prize

Day-light 'Bobbery'

Wildlife Stories:

A sleepy, sunny Sunday afternoon and a relaxed Thames Path walker gets a proper shock - a broiling, subterranean 'monster' commotion in the murky depths of the river - belatedly he stares open-mouthed at the still-swirling water - what was that! 'That' was a beautiful, big, sleek but powerful dog otter, fully 4 feet long seemingly bobbing about playfully in the surface waters just off the Island, before submerging with a roll of its tapered tail, then briefly surfacing close to our Sunday stroller - it saw him before he saw it and quickly re-submerged. Fantastic!

STOP-PRESS: Buzzard pair at Withymead, centring their attention on the large Oak which has hosted nests in the past (buzzards alternate between a few favoured nest sites).

Raven present in the last few days. Reed Buntings roosting in Withymead and South Stoke Marsh reed beds

WHAT'S HAPPENING SOON...

- *Fri 6 February*-. Dusk 'til late Regular **Moth Monitoring** - Moth trap video tonight too! **Drop in event**
- *Sat 7 February 10am-1pm*. ACCT's 1st Saturday-in-the-month **Withymead Volunteer morning**. Jobs include landscaping Pet Memorial Garden, felling small non-native trees, big bonfire, complete tee-pee covering. **Drop in.**
- *Monday 9 February 10am - 1pm* **Monday morning Brews Club** Light conservation tasks and tea. **Drop in EVERY WEEK!** 'Just check web-site.
- *Thursday 12 February 10am - 11am* **1-hour Withymead 'Special'** volunteering session - planting Valentine's Day Hazel and Honeysuckle at Little Meadow.
- *Mon 16 -20 February* **Water quality monitoring** project at Withymead NR
- *Saturday 28 February 9.30am -12.30 pm* **Withymead 'Special'** Volunteer session with Sonning Common Green Gym. **Drop in anytime**
- *Tuesday 3 March 10am - 1pm* **Withymead 'Special'** Volunteer session with National Trails team. **Drop in anytime**
- *Friday 6 March* Dusk 'til late Regular **Moth Monitoring** **Drop in event**
- *Saturday 7 March 10am-12 noon* ACCT's 1st Saturday-in-the-month **Withymead Volunteer morning**. **Drop in event**
- *Tuesday 10 March 10am - 1pm* **Withymead 'Special'** Volunteer session with Wallingford Green Gym. Tara's Piece. Ground preparation, 'cornfield' seed sowing, putting up bollards to protect this piece of land beside the Bridleway.
- **Drop in anytime.**
- *Saturday 14 March 10am -12noon*. For Nature Detectives. 'Animal Tracks, Trails and Signs' event. **Booking essential.**
- *Thursday 21 March 7pm - 9pm* 'Looking back, looking forward' **Slideshow in the Study Centre** about ACCT Wildlife Projects past, present and future followed by refreshments. **Booking essential.**

LOOKING AHEAD - Dates for your Diary and to book (**BE -Booking Essential**)

- *Saturday 18 April* **Withymead 'Special Craft-making' session** Making items to sell at South Stoke May Fair on 4 May on ACCT 'Fair for Frogs' stall **BE**
- *Saturday 25 April 10am-12noon* **Bird song ID talk and walk** with Mike Rogers **BE**
- *Monday May 4th* - **ACCTion for WILDLIFE! stall at South Stoke May Fair.**
- *Saturday 23 May 10am - 2pm* - **Invertebrate Monitoring Event** at Withymead NR with Ivan Wright, Shotover Wildlife **BE**
- *Saturday 30 May 10am-12noon* Club-tailed Dragonfly event at Little Meadow **BE**