

The Loughborough Naturalists' Club

50th Anniversary



Golden Jubilee Publication

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A Celebration of 50 Years



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A Celebration of 50 Years of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club



*Marcene Crocker and Peter Gamble
cutting the cake at the 50th Anniversary Exhibition
at Snibson Discovery Park*

50th Anniversary Dinner



50th Anniversary Exhibition



Loughborough Naturalists' Club

Welcome to the exhibition by the Loughborough Naturalists' Club, which celebrates the natural history and diversity of our past and animal life from and found in Leicestershire.

This Exhibition

- tells the story of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club
- showcases the collections of club members that have been donated to the museum service and are housed at Leicestershire County Council's Collections Resource Centre
- underlines the importance of records held at the Leicestershire Biological Records Centre
- explores the rich diversity of local wildlife from differing local habitats
- celebrates half a century of walks, talks, outings, fieldwork, recording and enjoyment of our natural heritage

The exhibition has been compiled by members of the Club, supported up north from Leicestershire County Council's Heritage and Arts Service. The objects in this exhibition are from the Museum Service's Natural Life Collections and Resource Bank service.



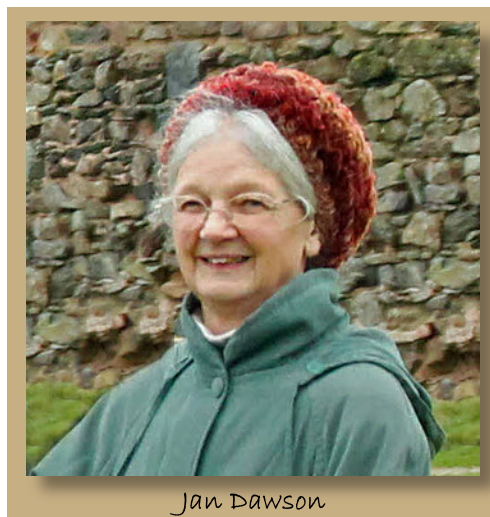
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Foreword

Celebrating 50 Years of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club

Naturalists, with their lively curiosity about the natural world are some of the most fortunate of people. It has been suggested that this was a basic attribute of our hunter-gatherer ancestors – the knowledge of what was where and when being essential for survival and that it remains hard-wired into our present-day psyches. Be that as it may, the habit of observation and enquiry means that wherever naturalists find themselves, there will always be things of interest to hand. This habit, of course, can be transferred to other disciplines but the natural world is enormously complex yet open to interrogation at every level from general appreciation, to pattern recognition, to genetic analysis. What could offer a more enjoyable challenge?



And clubs? Once beyond our immediate survival, the study of natural history became generally disregarded except for those areas where it had a direct bearing on our well-being. Early botanists, for example, were almost always medicine men, which diverted investigation away from the plants themselves for generations. Isolation even affected Pulteney in the 1700s and Harley in the 1800s, both local naturalists who received stimulation and support only through extensive long-distance correspondence with like-minded enthusiasts. Clubs provide the answer – community of interest, shared effort, shared knowledge, the possibility of first-hand experience under expert guidance and a heartening sense of good fellowship and support. And this is all as sorely needed as ever today when natural history receives scant attention from schools, universities and the public in general. We are lucky in that Information Technology effortlessly provides the answers to so many of our enquiries but it is hardly companionable and necessarily second-hand. Here the sustained achievements of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club speak for themselves – an admirably inclusive programme of talks and excursions, an excellent newsletter, collaborative projects such as public exhibitions and surveys, with the recording of long-term datasets. Unusually for a local society, the Club has also provided several specialist publications of exceptional quality, e.g. *The Spiders of Leicestershire and Rutland*, *The Leicestershire Coleopterists* and *Birds of East Leicestershire*.

But it's the Loughborough Naturalists' Club we are celebrating here. Concentrating on a particular patch has often been found to pay dividends, especially when it's home territory. John Ray and Gilbert White are among many famous naturalists who have known their local areas intimately and whose factual information could be relied on because it was first hand. The Club was fortunate in having the Charnwood Forest on their doorstep, an area of considerable natural history interest and one which they have serviced most thoroughly. It has largely been the focus of their field trips and record collecting, these datasets now being computerized to allow of

ready access to the information they contain. And the Club undertook the field-by-field usage survey of the Forest, complementing that organized by the Museum for the rest of the county. Initially members were involved in monitoring the local Sites of Special Scientific Interest and of the Club's publications, most have dealt with the local area. For example:

Charnwood Forest: A Changing Landscape

Swithland Wood

Grace Dieu Wood

Bradgate Park & Cropston Reservoir

Poultney Farm & Ulverscroft Pond

Benscliffe & Blakeshay

Grobby Pool

The Badger on Charnwood Forest

Like the rest of VC55 (Leicestershire and Rutland), Charnwood Forest has faced its fair share of environmental degradation through drainage, quarrying, agricultural intensification, urban development and pollution. The Club's long-term datasets and publications provide the hard evidence for change regarding the condition of habitats and the status and distribution of species. Planners and politicians responsible for strategic development in VC55 need this evidence to ensure that environmental issues and possibilities are not overlooked in their future proposals – the protection of endangered species and the enhancement of habitats. No-one knows the Forest better than the Loughborough Naturalists. The relevance of their information is obvious. Ensuring a productive collaboration with those whose business is the welfare of the countryside is the most essential job yet.

Hearty congratulations to all!

Jan Dawson

President, Leicester Literary & Philosophical Society (Natural History Section)

Preface

Helen Ikin

This publication is a celebration of the people who have been 'The Loughborough Naturalists' Club' over the past 50 years. The ambitions of the Club may be directed at Natural History but the company and stimulation of other like-minded people, who have become our friends, has changed and enhanced the lives of many of us. We have felt the fulfilment that comes with working together for the aims of the Club. At the same time, the Club has been about people and we have valued and delighted in the many and varied characters who have made up our membership.

We owe our existence to the foresight of the 18 founder members and, to their vision and dedication, we owe the fact that we are still here after 50 years, with the same aims: *"To foster the study and recording of natural history and the conservation of wildlife, especially that of the Loughborough district."*

Our President, Peter Gamble, was a founder member and is the only founder member who is still active within the Club. Several generations have benefited so much from his wide knowledge and his pleasure in sharing his knowledge with anyone who is interested. I can only echo Ian Evans' words in his article *Loughborough Naturalists' Club: An Appreciation on its 50th Anniversary*.

I have my own cherished memories of all the people who have made my meagre 32 years in the Club a time of great pleasure in the company of fellow naturalists, as well as a time when my interests were encouraged and I learnt so much about the fauna and flora of our county and further afield. If I tried to make a list I would be sure to miss out someone who has been important to other members, so I will allow you all to remember your friends in your own way.



Peter Gamble, John Crocker & Alan Wildig
at the Presentation to John on his retirement
as Club President

However, I do have to mention John Crocker, a man of vision and the determination to make that vision into reality. An inspiration to those of us fortunate enough to know him, even if, sometimes, we did have trouble keeping up with him!

We have lost so many of our Loughborough Naturalists' friends over the past years and this year, with the 50th exhibition and dinner, has given us an opportunity to think of them and their contributions to the Club and to our lives.

We have asked long-standing members and people who were members as youngsters to write about the Club and its influence on their lives and I hope that you will enjoy the articles. We have tried, as far as possible, to include all the memories in full with very little editing as we feel that every word is important.



Personal Memories

We asked a selection of members how they felt the association
with the Club influenced their lives.

The Loughborough Naturalists' Club: Looking Back, Personal Memories and Thoughts about some Critical Issues

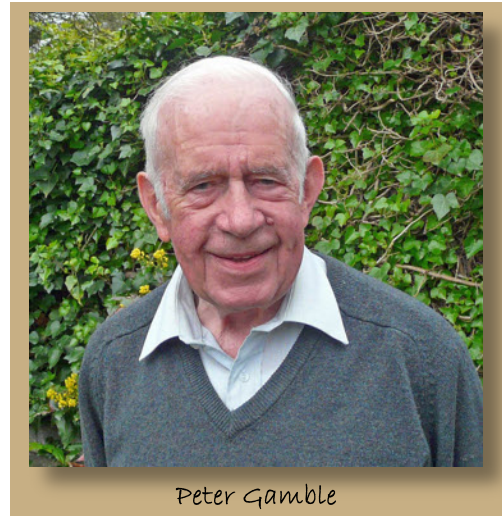
Peter Gamble - President

When we first discussed forming the Club in the autumn of 1960 the three of us (David Binns, John Crocker and myself) had met up purely by chance whilst sheltering during a heavy shower on the north side of Loughborough where we had been bird watching. As we sheltered we were bemoaning the modernisation of nearby Loughborough Sewage Farm which had robbed us of one of the county's best bird watching sites - a large area lying between the Grand Union Canal and the Wood

Brook, and formerly resembling natural fen. On this and subsequent meetings we decided to attempt forming a natural history group, rather than a single interest group as this would help us and its members to broaden our interests into a wide spectrum of fauna and flora thereby, hopefully, increasing our knowledge of lesser studied groups and helping us to learn from one another on account of a diversity of interests within the group. We were already aware of numbers of natural historians we hoped would join us.

Looking back over the 50 years of the Club's existence I feel that many of these early hopes have proved justified. We were in fact joined by many of the most knowledgeable local naturalists and week by week over this period of half a century members have contributed records of a wide cross-section of our local wildlife which have then been written up in our quarterly newsletter, *Heritage*, producing an impressive, reliable record of the changes that have taken place to much of the fauna and flora in this time. In addition many of us helped in the production of the publication *Charnwood Forest: A Changing Landscape* under the guidance and watchful eye of John Crocker, the Editor. This included two important sections by long-standing Club members: 'History of the Charnwood Forest Landscape' by Tony Squires and 'Agricultural Land-use on the Forest' by Harry Clements. Another section in the book was on 'Geology and Mineral Extraction' by J B Mousley. A large portion of the book was taken up by details of a field-by-field survey covering the whole of the Forest area in which many members took part. The book, which was published in 1981, also included many excellent photographs of views and habitats within Charnwood Forest. In addition we have surveyed many of the most important wildlife sites within Charnwood Forest and followed these up with detailed reports covering the fauna and flora followed by recommendations and suggestions for their future management. Individual members have also written books and reports on different aspects of local wildlife. Our surveys of local habitats have also been instrumental in justifying the designation of various Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Wildlife Sites.

However, our great concern at the moment is the lack of young members within the Club for if this continues it must lead eventually to the Club closing down through lack of support.



Peter Gamble

Already we have great difficulty in getting sufficient support on the Committee where four of us are over 80 years old. This present lack of young members has prompted me to ask some of those members who were young in the early days of the Club to write accounts of how the Club may have influenced their lives for our special anniversary publication and I trust their contributions may demonstrate the positive aspect of joining others with similar interests early in one's life. I sincerely believe that the study of natural history and ecology can enrich a young person's life immeasurably, providing an environment full of wonder and an interest which will stay with them throughout life no matter where life's fortunes may take them.

Sadly, today, the great majority of people in Britain live in urban situations and conurbations with little close contact with the natural world and this at a time when it was never more important that we understand more about ecology and the need to conserve what is left un-spoilt of the natural world, to allow for the proper functioning of the biosphere.

In being worried and concerned about the plight of our own local wildlife it is natural and sensible to feel concerned about what is happening to wildlife and wild places around the world. In a relatively short period of time many of the world's most important ecosystems have been destroyed, or greatly damaged, leading to the loss of innumerable species of fauna and flora, and indigenous peoples, who have lived for generations in a high degree of harmony with the natural world are left devoid of the life support systems integral to their cultural existence.

Our wealth is largely derived, directly or indirectly, by exploiting the natural world and, as I understand it, we have consumed more of the Earth's resources during my lifetime (84 years) than all previous generations of mankind added together and yet many of the so called advanced nations still cannot balance their finances and must rely on continued 'economic growth' and exploitation to solve their financial problems!

With the world's population of *Homo sapiens* estimated to be around seven billion and rising fast we as a species should be concerned and worried, no species at the end of a food chain can afford to be as numerous as we humans are, for the real necessities of life, food and water, can never be relied on to be sufficiently constant over long periods and our sheer numbers and demands on resources put ourselves and many other organisms at risk.

Regrettably, today, we are not only putting our own species in great danger but we are destroying many of the beautiful, intriguing and precious plants and creatures which no one generation has the right to destroy.

To naturalists and country lovers this seems obvious but sadly many people, including many of those with real power to change things, seem oblivious of what is happening.

Early Memories of the Club

Graham and Anona Finch

Interested in natural history since childhood we were both encouraged and inspired to enjoy the world around us by enthusiastic and interested teachers.

Anona - at Cobden Junior School in Loughborough I looked forward to the weekly nature walks with my classmates, led by Mr Buswell, as he took us around Southfields Park and Burton Walks. My working life began as a knitwear cutter (in

those days using hand shears) in the hosiery factories of Loughborough where I quickly learned to adapt and try new skills when short-time working hours loomed, thus managing to keep earning a 40-hour weekly wage packet. My supervisor would say, "Being adaptable and prepared to learn new skills such as seam-covering, sock-turning and mending is another feather in your cap and will help you to earn money when the outerwear orders are low". I moved to the Coalville area and had a variety of jobs, until finally a five year stint as a temporary employee at Palitoy came to an end when the factory closed down. My contract was always renewed each year after a short break but this time it was bad news for Coalville as the company moved its operations overseas.

As one door closes another opens so they say and for me 1986, which began with bleak prospects, provided a wonderful opportunity to work for Ian Evans at Leicestershire County Council Museums Service. I had all the necessary requirements for the work he had in mind, which was to look after the Parish Ecological Sites Databank. I was very capable and happy to work indoors and not be involved with survey work. In those days Ian was often at meetings around the county or at County Hall and he also made site visits so he was only in the office for an hour or so. I could work unsupervised and was not worried about long stints of solitude as colleagues were in offices next door if an emergency situation arose – which it never did. Five former graduates who had done this work for Ian had between them managed to work a grand total of 18 months before leaving for more challenging opportunities and less boring work. A protégé of factory life, renowned for its repetitiveness, I immediately settled into my new role with ease and I never found any work within my 26 years with Leicestershire County Council boring. I helped local naturalists, natural history societies, GCSE, A-level and university students, find their way through the maze of filing cabinets to retrieve that specific document that allowed them to complete their various environmental projects. The Loughborough Naturalists' Club has a long association with the Museums Service, which began with Ian Evans in 1960 and continues until the present day. I for my part have taken care of the survey notes written by LNC members as they travelled to all corners of VC55 (Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland). These surveys range from the original Leicestershire Flora Committee survey and habitat study cards, involving



some 20 years fieldwork by stalwarts of the LNC and culminating in the 'Flora of Leicestershire' published by the Museums Service in 1988. Members were involved with the 1975 Leicestershire Roadside Verge survey and would alert Pat Evans to any verge within VC55 that they considered worthy of her expert botanical eye. Many of those verges became Roadside Verge Nature Reserves either for their plant community or for their invertebrate interest such as Glow-worms and Bloody-nosed Beetles. When Ian Evans needed to know what species were on a particular site anywhere in VC55, the LNC members always sent him lists. All of the original documents, including handwritten documents and sketch maps are now available parish by parish, in digital format. A major feat accomplished in about 18 months by teaming me up with Rocio Rodriguez, a Spanish colleague, who quickly got to grips with digital scanning and inputting relevant information on to an Excel spreadsheet. I checked through the documentation annotating them as I saw fit and passed them to Rocio who assigned a number to each paper and completed the task.

My adaptive nature was utilised in 2004 until my retirement in 2011 when I worked alternate weeks between the Historic and Natural Environment Team (parish site files) at Holly Hayes and the Museum Natural Life Collections at Barrow upon Soar. I was now able to provide specimens for major LNC exhibitions and events. Over the years Kate Ward and Peter Wilkinson came to see me and we would discuss what exhibits I could tailor specifically for LNC use. LNC members had donated many specimens since 1960 and I knew where they were in the collections. Display cases that allowed the public to appreciate the life-size and diversity of the insect community. The Harlequin and UK native ladybird display case is one of the most popular I ever put together, using some of Claude Henderson's UK specimens collected between the 1920s and 1930s. His specimens allow people to see the difference between our native species and the relative newcomer, the Harlequin. It has travelled to entomological annual exhibitions around the country, in county to various natural history societies and to many public events. Dorothy Fieldhouse's 'Bird's-nest' fungus, nicely presented in the door knocker box in which she originally kept it, never fails to amaze the audience wherever it is on display. It has that certain wow factor, as do Claude Henderson's Coleoptera and Lepidoptera display. Derek Lott's neatly displayed tiny *staphylinid* beetles also amaze and intrigue the viewer, with comments, such as, "They are so small, how on earth did he manage to find them - are they from Leicestershire"? "How did he manage to set such a tiny insect showing all of its legs?" "How on earth did he manage to dissect that – you can hardly see it".

When the Club attends public events the members often take living insects and invertebrates for people to look at. Natural Life team supplied magnifiers that allowed living aquatic invertebrates to be seen 'close-up' in their watery environment. The complementary set specimens and informative text from the museum collections gave the public an opportunity to learn more about the creatures. LNC members have for many years supported events such as the 'Annual Wood Fair' at Beacon Hill and the 'Rempstone Steam and Countryside Show'. The LNC exhibition at Ashby Museum was an opportunity to showcase the work of the club in North-West Leicestershire and reflected the importance of post-industrial coal and quarry extraction sites in this part of the county for its wildlife. The 50th Anniversary Exhibition held at

Snibston Discovery Park displayed the members' expertise in many fields of natural history and was complemented by the members' superb photography.

It has been a privilege to support the Club members for the last quarter of a century. What a lucky break - to have a career that was also my lifelong interest. When I joined Leicestershire County Council I had an 'A' grade in English Language GCE 'O-level' obtained when I was 28 years of age. In 1988 I studied for the 'Advanced Certificate in Ecology and Environmental Management' followed by the 'Advanced Certificate in Modern Biology' and their respective 'Diplomas' with the University of Leicester. This involved evening and weekend sessions at Vaughan College and the University with lots of personal hours of study between classes that finally, after five years, resulted in my BSc. in Human and Environmental Sciences. I was now better placed to deliver services and help colleagues at work. I would not have got through this hard study without Graham's support, but as I took the opportunity to improve my education, which meant spending less time with him, he was given the opportunity to travel.

Graham - at Castle Rock Secondary Modern School, mid-1960s my classmates and I were members of the 'after school' Biology Club hosted by Tony Squires who encouraged us to write down our observations. Some of these are now in the personalia files in the care of Leicestershire County Council Museums Natural Life collections. 1967 was my final year at school and I suggested to the careers teacher that I would like a job in Forestry. She returned some weeks later with the news that the best she could do was Painter and Decorator; at least I would be outdoors some of the time. No natural history was undertaken during the first four years, as I seemed to be so preoccupied doing nothing sensible - as most teenagers do.

We both joined the Loughborough Naturalists' Club in 1977 and soon settled in because the Club members were so friendly and gave lots of advice and assistance in identifying wild flowers, birds, mammals and insects. In 1982 we became involved with the Charnwood Forest moth survey and accompanied Peter Gamble and Jack Ward in regular fieldwork sessions using the club's portable generator. Forfeiting an annual holiday one year, in order to buy our own generator, set us on a continuing path recording the moths of VC55.

Regularly recording moths at the Ulverscroft NR with daytime visits or evenings spent with a battery operated actinic light-trap then later with our very own Suzuki generator. The convenor for Ulverscroft at the time was Stuart Musgrove, a Club member, who introduced Anona to the Green Long-horn moths that swarmed around the small oak trees on the reserve and her love for the micro lepidoptera began. Since those early days, we have carried on regularly monitoring the moth fauna on Leicestershire County Council Country Parks, Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust Reserves and on privately owned land often at the request of the landowner. We have enjoyed writing up the Moth section for *Heritage* since 2008, when Peter Gamble asked if we would like to do it.

From the early 1970s to mid-1980s I was assigned to Fitchett's building site at Markfield when most springs and autumns I would first hear and then see Buzzards passing overhead. There were also a couple of rough fields, sadly now built on, which held Chimney Sweepers, Mother Shiptons and Burnet Companions; these would have been district level sites today.

Winters were quite exciting too as flocks of Redwings and Fieldfares visited the hedgerows, even the odd Brambling was seen occasionally. Most of my 'natural historying' had to be kept under wraps: hey! I was on a building site, quite a large building site with very little harmony among workmen with every other day fraught with disagreements - not a great deal of empathy for someone looking at birds and moths.

By 1973 I met Anona and we both had a passionate interest in Natural History and motorbikes. How ideal was that? Trips to the Isle of Man TT Races armed with leather jackets and binoculars: we had the best of both worlds. Only about 30 miles from tip to tip, it was easy to get around and cover a whole range of habitats from shingle beaches at Point of Ayre and the wooded central valley, the high peak of Snaefell, then down to the rugged coast of Castle Town and the stunning Calf of Man. Birdwatching was taking over and I did my share of twitching, charging from one end of the country to the other in the hope of seeing magical birds previously only seen in field guides and at the time I had a reasonable British list. The next obvious move was to get myself over to that mythical rare bird mecca 'The Scillies'. Rare birds came thick and fast. European, Siberian, Asian and American species all on this stunning archipelago in the same week, sometimes within walking distance of each other, "What is it with this place"? This led me to thinking that actually seeing these birds on their home grounds would be the way to go. After a few trips to the French Alps with members of the Club, destinations further afield began to call. Things got really serious in 1990 when we planned a five week holiday to Nepal. So after months of planning an itinerary, making lists of the birds likely to be seen at various locations, off we went. No accommodation, tour guides or anything else was pre-booked, we made it up as we went along. On return and reflecting on where we had been and what we had seen, did we really do all that..... on our own? Other trips with LNC members to Canada, Israel, Venezuela, Gambia and Zimbabwe, does it get much better than this? The thrill of travelling to exotic places; finding and watching such wildlife spectaculars with like-minded friends. Returning home and being able to share memories and experiences at AGMs and members evenings with slide shows. Another opportunity to join two friends for a four-week trip to Kenya, too good to miss - but just a minute, how about adding on a couple of weeks and scooting off to Madagascar? If any single trip set me on a quest for travel, it was joining three Geordies on a seven week manic jaunt around Ecuador. We did everything and went everywhere. For my sins, I was appointed chief negotiator and translator, which was amazing really as my Spanish vocabulary amounted to less than a dozen words, but considerably more at the end of the trip. My world bird list was growing at a pace hence, it got me thinking of going for broke. So, I set a target to see half the world bird species, around about 5,000, depending on which checklist you follow. This would take me onto most continents, many countries and the most stunning habitats this planet has to offer, extended periods in North, Central and South America; Africa, Australia and numerous visits to Asia including over four months hitchhiking through India, Thailand and Malaysia. All this eventually brought me to my goal of around 4,800 species, give or take a dozen! Whew, time to slow down and rekindle the recording of our local wildlife. That old Suzuki generator did us proud, but was beginning to show signs of age, so in January 2000 we treated ourselves to a brand new Honda EU7i. Light, portable, quiet and most importantly powerful enough to run at least four moth traps, we were raring to go. Making up for lost time, we made the necessary

arrangements with the County Trust, County Council and other landowners for access to many of our key sites - we've been hard at it since. It's amazing how opportunities arise, a chance meeting with Paul Waring, at believe it or not a rock-and-roll do in Northants, was one of these. The band was none other than Bill Haley's original Comets, all at a ripe old age behaving like teenagers and playing like them too, totally faultless, what energy. We had recognised Paul from moth trapping at Chippenham Fen years ago. He asked us if we would be interested in joining him on a British Entomology and Natural History Society three week moth survey to Belize. What a silly question, we had the most incredible time, with a week in each, the north highlands, the central forests and the southern lowland forests. A superb chance to have a little taste, and take part in, an overseas expedition to record moths with a true professional. We also arranged a couple of personal trips to Gambia in West Africa, all the equipment was already out there, including an almost brand new Honda EU10i, all we had to do was get ourselves out there. Each session was a week in Abuko Nature Reserve, a marvellous area of riverine woodland and a world-renowned destination for birdwatchers. This again was an amazing experience, in a way more so as this time we were able to offer training to the local wardens and park staff, I guess you just never know where a chance meeting will lead.

In the background, VC55 moth recording is ticking over well with some moth recording activity occurring most weekends, winter included. The Charnwood Forest Moth Survey has helped to concentrate our efforts on this priceless area we have on our doorstep and hopefully we have complemented Peter and Jack's early work here. Putting in the time pays the dividends and we have been pleased with our results. We have been able to confirm some old records, discover new additions to the county list as well as monitor local movement and also pick up European migrants within a few days of their arriving at the southern coastal hot spots. Nature does not stay still for long, and all survey work needs to be continued, we will never know everything about our favourite places.

We have had fantastic training, encouragement and friendliness from the LNC from the day we joined, oh and the decorating has come in handy too, as I even managed to do some work for quite a few members.

Club Memories

Bas Forgham

I have many times thought that little decisions can make huge differences in life. For instance a friend of mine had a relative who bought a ticket for the Titanic but then couldn't travel!

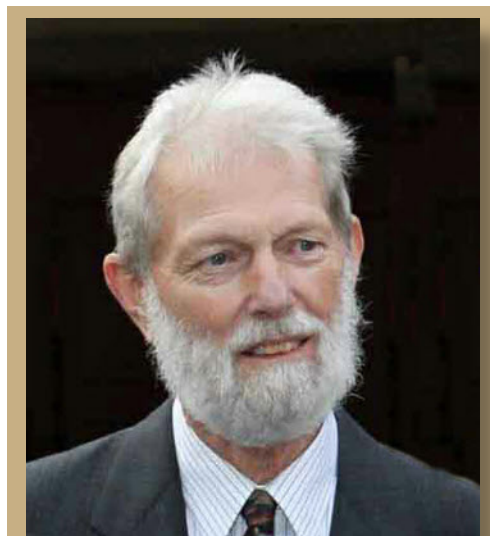
A very minor incident some years ago changed my life forever. My father worked all his adult life in the rail weigh office at Snibston Colliery in Coalville. One day in the colliery canteen he found himself sitting next to a stranger who turned out to be a senior surveyor at the Coal Board local headquarters. During their conversation he asked my father if he knew anyone who would be interested in taking up an apprenticeship in mining surveying. As I would be leaving school that year he mentioned it to me and I decided to apply. In the letter I hedged my bets somewhat and also mentioned the drawing office (as there was less underground work involved). A few weeks later I was employed as an apprentice draughtsman at Coleorton Hall and really enjoying it. I cycled to work, as many more did at that time, and eventually cycled along with two young ladies who lived quite close to me. Some years later I married one of them, hence the first life changing event.

A couple of years before that we had an influx of new draughtsmen, one of whom came from Morris's in Loughborough, his name was John Crocker. Both having an interest in natural history we tended to gravitate together and spent our lunch breaks walking in the beautiful grounds of our headquarters. We also used to argue a lot about various aspects of natural history, my knowledge was very limited and I usually lost. John then announced that there was going to be a new naturalists' club in Loughborough and would I be interested in joining. I did and it has been my regret ever since that I was not able to attend the inaugural meeting, hence missing out on something big but it was another life changing event.

Those early days were wonderful for me, meeting people who knew about all aspects of natural history and learning little bits from each of them. On the nights before the outings I hardly got a wink of sleep as I was so excited about going to new places and looking forward to seeing new birds and butterflies, etc. In spite of being a very shy speaker eventually I got to be Chairman and then shared the writing of the bird notes in *Heritage*. Through my connection with the Club I joined the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust becoming a Council Member and then North West Group Chairman for 22 years and Trust Secretary for 13 years.

My life for the last 50 years has revolved around natural history and nature conservation.

There are many things that we should have thanked our parents for but I think my father would have been surprised if I'd thanked him for choosing that seat in the canteen back in the summer of 1954!! I wouldn't have met my wife and I wouldn't have joined this wonderful Club of ours.



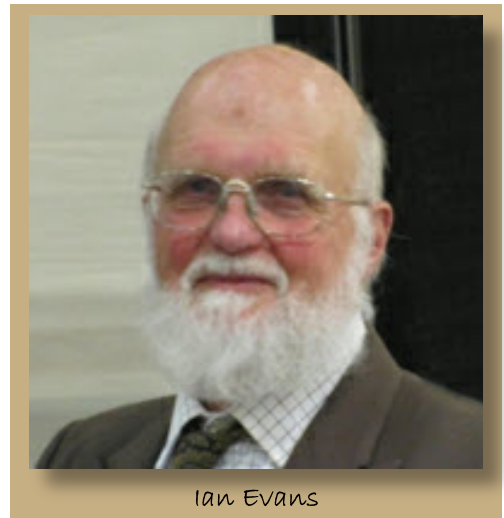
Bas Forgham

Loughborough Naturalists' Club: An Appreciation

Ian Evans

When the Club was set up in 1960, it established in the north of the county a community of interest in natural history which has survived and flourished, perhaps beyond the wildest dreams of its founders.

Its continuing success is due in no small part to the large number of members who, over the years, have contributed to its activities, but also to the outstanding dedication and expertise of some individuals in particular.



It is invidious to single out just three, but I do so because they are, or would have been, far too modest to sing their own praises.

First and foremost, Peter Gamble, quite the best all-round naturalist Leicestershire produced in the 20th century. He is 'long-suited' in birds, insects and plants, but with a lively curiosity about a much wider range of organisms, and the encouragement he offers to others is an example to us all.

Secondly, the late John Crocker, whose single-mindedness and striving towards perfection resulted in two quite exceptional publications on Charnwood Forest, as well as doing much more for the Club. Although his early interest was birds, he became an arachnologist of national standing, and served Leicestershire well in this specialist field.

Thirdly, and she will not bless me for it, Pat Evans (formerly Candlish), Honorary Secretary 1964-68 and Editor of *Heritage* 1968-85 (and who came up with its name). Her botanical skills made a major contribution to the *Flora of Leicestershire*, on the title page of which her name appears.

The affairs of the Club, and its excellent publications, are now in the hands of a younger generation, with an enviable grasp of modern technology, and whose contributions are of the highest calibre.

Long may the Club continue to serve as a focus for the natural history interests of its members and the encouragement of good fellowship in their pursuit.

Memories of the Club

Ian Gamble

I was only four years of age when the Loughborough Naturalists' Club came into being and it would be true to say it played an important part in my life for thirty years. I made many friends in the Club and shared many memorable experiences both at home and abroad with them.

In the summer months field trips with the 'Nats' were really exciting for a youngster. You might be given a sweep net to pull backwards and forwards through tall herbage or a beating tray to catch insects and caterpillars that fell from leaves and branches after they had been given a sharp tap with a stick. Then there was also the butterfly net! I have spent many an hour tiring myself out chasing butterflies, moths and other flying insects. Once you had caught your quarry it was either sucked up using a pooter (which was often lent me by John Crocker) or if a larger specimen, put into a glass bottle, tube or 'pill box'. I would then run off and show an adult what I had caught. With the depth and breadth of knowledge that the Club had at that time there was very little that was not identified. It has to be said, however, that to a child, a long Latin name sometimes left one bemused!

The coach trips during the first two decades of the Club gave me the opportunity to go to many interesting places that I would otherwise not have been able to get to. As you recollect those days you realise that today we miss out on the social interactions and camaraderie and genuine fun that we had on the early coach trips. Many of the members of the Club were real characters and they had led very colourful lives. As a young lad I listened in awe to Lou Pratt telling tales of his wartime exploits in India. I have vivid recollections of the coach getting stuck in a snow drift on Wardley Hill in January 1963 while on a trip to Eyebrook Reservoir, all the men having to get out to free the bus by pushing! In those early days we visited the east coast often during the autumn and winter and during the spring and summer areas in the Peak District. Favourite sites in the west included the Wildfowl Trust's Slimbridge and Hilbre Island which lay off the Wirral Peninsula.

Over the years we had many memorable trips. I will never forget the trip to Wrangle Flats on 4th January 1970. It was a bright sunny day but bitterly cold. The salt marsh and edges of the sea along the shoreline were frozen. Here we saw Shore Lark, Snow Bunting and Twite, while in the afternoon further along the coast at Gibraltar Point I saw my first Waxwings. Gibraltar Point was always a favourite destination and during the late summer and early autumn the Club took over the residential field station there over a weekend on a fairly regular basis. An abiding memory I have of the area was to see the multitudes of waders flying along the shoreline of the Wash on the autumn evenings as the tide turns, and see the clouds of Knot and Dunlin twisting and turning and looking, for all the world like smoke being blown by the wind. It is truly an amazing spectacle. In 1974 we saw the reserve's first Red-necked Phalarope and during our 1984 visit, a Wilson's Phalarope - a rare visitor from North America.



Ian Gamble

On our trip to Hilbre Island on 10th October 1970 I had another 'red letter day'. We spent much of the day on the Dee Estuary but during the afternoon we visited Frodsham Sludge Pits, an area of artificially created marshland, near the Manchester Ship Canal which is also in Cheshire. On some adjacent fields to the marshland was a flock of Golden Plover and with them was my first American bird species - a Buff-breasted Sandpiper. Although it is one of the more regular trans-Atlantic vagrants it was shot to the verge of extinction between the late 1800s and early 1900s and its population has never really recovered. At present its population is estimated at 15,000 individuals. On the 17th September 1978 we again visited Hilbre Island. This day will live long in my memory as I witnessed a sight that I doubt I shall ever witness again. Our visit just happened to coincide with one of the largest movements of Leach's Storm-petrels ever to be seen along our coast. These small sea birds had been shoved onto the shore by a strong storm. As we walked across the sand to the main island, petrels could be seen flying between the spread out group within just a few feet and on reaching the island many hundreds of these small dark birds could be watched skimming low over the sea.

On the 17th April 1971 I was woken by my father just after one o'clock in the morning, and after a quick cup of tea and a bite to eat we set off. We headed northwards to small moorland called Swallow Moss, just inside Staffordshire about five and half miles north east of Leek and a mile and half to the north west of the small village of Warslow. Swallow Moss is typical of so many moorlands in the Peak District lying on acid soils which overlay bedrock of millstone grit. The vegetation consists of mainly Ling, Bilberry with *sphagnum*, cottongrass and Bog Asphodel in the wetter areas. We arrived at the site just before dawn, and as the first vestiges of light appeared on the horizon, our quarry could be heard and before long the silhouetted shapes of the Black Grouse could be seen. We had come to see one of nature's extravagant displays: the lek of the Black Grouse. As dawn broke on a still clear morning up to 15 blackcock were assembled at this ancestral display ground watched by five greyhens. The males cocked their lyre-shaped tails and with wings and heads lowered, strutted around on nature's dance floor. In the half-light the birds looked entirely black except for the odd flash of white being caught from their undertail coverts as they turned. It was an amazing experience but unfortunately not one that could be done today as the Black Grouse became extinct in the Peak District in 1999. After leaving the display ground we 'bird watched' in the surrounding area and within a short time, I had found another new bird for myself. As I rounded a bend in a small gully a Long-eared Owl stared at me from the branch of a small tree before deciding to take flight. On the moorland we found several Red Grouse which gave a harsh guttural call as they sped away after being flushed. Curlew were much in evidence with their wild calls and display flights. They would rise on tremulous wings and glide before rising again. There were good numbers of Ring Ouzel present and they had already started taking up their breeding territories. There are many other outings I could mention here such as seeing the last few pairs of Red-backed Shrike to breed at Minsmere. This species became extinct as a breeding bird in Britain in 1990. There was also the flock of Stone Curlew we saw at Weeting Heath long before it became an RSPB reserve but time and space prohibit this.

Claude Henderson was an amazing inspiration to all who knew him. He was a Scotsman with a child-like enthusiasm for the natural world. My father had first met him in 1948 and had remained friends with him ever since. During my childhood they worked together as laboratory technicians at the Loughborough Technical College. Claude was a very interesting man. He had been a cabinet maker by trade and he was a gifted painter. His interests included beetles, in which he was one of the county's leading authorities; he also knew a huge amount about mammals, Lepidoptera, astronomy, alpine plants and orchids. As a child I spent many hours talking to him about butterflies. He would often bring a large book of tropical butterflies to show me. In it were huge birdwing butterflies from South East Asia and dazzling iridescent blue *Morpho* butterflies from South America. When he got to the plate showing the jewel-like *Agrias* butterflies also from South America he pointed to *Agrias claudia* and with a twinkle in his eye and a large grin he said "It is named after me you know". At that time I never imagined that I would ever see some of these insects for myself in the wild. Claude drew a picture of *Morpho rhetenor* on a card and sent it to the family one Christmas. I kept the card and had it framed in my bedroom for many years. One day in the summer of 1990 I was in Amazonas, in southern Venezuela and found myself standing at the edge of a river; I looked along the river which had tall rainforest trees lining each bank, when I noticed an amazing blue butterfly flying towards me. It was a large butterfly that must have had a wingspan of about six inches and every time it opened its wings they flashed an intense blue that took your attention in a way that a lighthouse does on a dark evening. The butterfly in question was *Morpho rhetenor* one of the most iridescent of all the *Morpho* butterflies. This sighting was an experience of a lifetime and I only wish that I could have shared it with Claude. I was fortunate enough to go on several European holidays with Claude. His sense of fun was infectious and I will never forget his sheer joy and exuberance on finding a rare orchid or some unusual insect and he left me with many treasured memories.

On the 22nd September 1963 an adult Death's-head Hawkmoth was found in the castings yard at the Brush works on Meadow Lane in Loughborough. This wonderful creature ended up for a short while in an old biscuit tin on the window sill in our front room and for a young seven year old this was insect heaven! This moth actually squeaked as I lifted the lid and gingerly looked in. The Death's-head Hawkmoth has a characteristic skull marking on its thorax from which it gets its name. This started a passion for moths and for my birthday from then on for much of my childhood I either had set specimens of moths or butterflies which were brought from dealers. The insects mainly came from old broken up collections. During the sixties I collected mainly British butterflies and hawkmoths. For my eighth birthday I received a Death's-head Hawkmoth of my very own. This specimen was actually stuffed and it had been caught in 1901. My hawkmoth collection was finally completed by Tony Squires on his return from Uganda where he had been teaching in the mid-1960s when he gave me an Oleander Hawkmoth. My first ever talk was given to the members of the LNC at the exhibition evening in 1967 when at the age of eleven a proud young boy showed off his hawkmoth collection.

During the mid-sixties my father and other friends started to travel around Leicestershire recording moths. This was generally undertaken on a Friday night and I often went along. This

too was a very exciting adventure for a youngster. You would be taken to some remote area of woodland, moorland or marsh and arrive just as it was getting dusk. I got the job of carrying the Tilley lamp, while the adults carried the portable generator and other accessories. We often had a long walk from where we could park the car to a good area for catching moths. A large white sheet would be laid out on the ground and an old tripod erected over it. Then the bulb was suspended from the tripod with the lead extending back to the generator. During this period my father's colleagues were Don Tozer and Barry Oldfield. Don was a real character and at that time would have been in his late fifties or early sixties. He was a close friend of Claude Henderson's and like him he had a boyish enthusiasm that was infectious. Don collected beetles, as well as butterflies and moths, but he was a man of his generation and one of the last that I would describe as a 'Victorian collector'. Don's knowledge was immense and this had come about through many hours spent in the field. At times he would amaze me in the way he could find caterpillars or eggs of butterflies or moths on the wayside undergrowth. Barry Oldfield was a younger middle-aged man who was always smartly dressed. Barry had had rather a colourful life and for a period he had spent time in the United States travelling around with a circus. I believe he had been training large cats and bears and had once been badly mauled by them. Being out in the middle of the night with a bright light can at times be amusing and I remember one instance when we were mothing near the old quarries in Swithland Woods when out of the gloom stepped a wary policeman. Apparently he had had a report that the Martians had landed. Well it was the sixties and science fiction was in its ascendancy!

I first met Kingsley Lloyd on the 9th April 1969. I was bird watching along the Buddon Brook and was walking towards Rabbits Bridge and Swithland Reservoir. The footpath had just recently been moved to follow the edge of Buddon Brook and large machinery had been busy grubbing out the old hedgerows. Kingsley had just been watching a female Black Redstart feeding on the disturbed ground but it had unfortunately flown off just before I arrived. It was a lovely warm spring morning and Kingsley and I walked to the reservoir together. On reaching the overflow we found the Black Redstart feeding on insects from the stonework of the overflow channel and bridge. After this first meeting Kingsley and his then wife Valerie became close friends and Kingsley and I went on many birding adventures together.

Gerald Felstead returned to live in Leicestershire in 1971 and for many years he had been a committed bird watcher and ringer. On Gerald's return to Leicestershire he soon undertook bird-ringing activities and in 1972 he gained two trainees, Graham Walford and Michael Webster. Graham had almost completed his training when I became a trainee bird ringer in December 1974. For the next six years Gerald and I spent many hours around Leicestershire ringing birds and I have many happy memories of that time. In 1956 the mist-net was first introduced into Britain from Japan. The nets are made of very fine nylon and are nearly invisible when in use. Mist-nets are easily transported and take up very little space when folded up. The nets form a large invisible curtain when strung between poles which birds fly into and drop over a taut nylon shelf string into a pocket of netting. It was with the advent of mist nets that bird ringers were able to catch large numbers of birds in many, varying habitats. It is amazing what you learn about birds being active in the countryside when most people are tucked up in bed. In the summer

you are up before it gets light and you have the mist-nets in place in a reed bed by dawn, just as the first rays of sun are breaking through a thin veil of mist. At the other end of the year, after roost ringing, you struggle to take down the equipment on a frosty evening when there is ice on the poles and a bright hunter's moon overhead. We ringed at several sites on a regular basis and these included Swithland Reservoir, Roecliffe Manor near Woodhouse Eaves, Buddon Brook Meadows, Cossington Gravel Pit in the Soar Valley and East Goscote or Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake Gravel Pit in the Wreake Valley.

I spent time bird ringing at Gibraltar Point on the 20th and 21st August 1977 while on a Club weekend at the reserve. During that weekend I ringed my first Wheatear, Redstart and Pied Flycatcher as well as being able to handle a Wryneck! Large numbers of warblers were also on the move and we ringed several Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap, Sedge Warbler, Reed Warbler and many Willow Warbler, some of which were very light in weight indicating they had probably travelled a great distance. Normally a Willow Warbler on its nesting grounds in Leicestershire would weigh between 9 and 10 grams, but some of these birds were weighing as little as 7.4 grams, which is quite a difference in body weight for such a small bird.

I was up late on Sunday morning and did not get to the observatory at dawn. On my arrival Barrie Wilkinson the warden met me. He was holding a bird which he handed to me and said "what do you think this is"? It was obviously a large warbler, but very nondescript. My mind raced through all the European warblers but I could not identify it! He then put me out of my misery and shame and told me it was a first-year Barred Warbler. This species can be found in Central Europe and is a rare but regular passage migrant to our east coast mainly on autumn passage.

In 1968 the Club undertook to help the British Trust for Ornithology with its breeding bird survey, the details of which were published in *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland 1968-1972*. The Club took on two 10 km squares SK41 and SK51. These squares were broken down into tetrads each encompassing an area of four square kilometres. An experienced birdwatcher had to walk through the tetrad for a period of three hours, through varying habitats and record the path taken and the distribution of species encountered. My father surveyed the tetrads containing Buddon Wood, Buddon Wood Meadows and Swithland Reservoir. I would often accompany him on his survey walks and we had a marvellous time. He would wake me very early in the morning around 5 am and we would walk from our house along the Buddon Brook to Swithland Reservoir. We had special permission to go into the reservoir grounds and around the margins of the reservoir. The highlights of this time were finding a breeding colony of Lesser Redpoll, a Turtle Dove's nest with two eggs and my father climbed a large oak to a Heron's nest to find it contained eggs. That was the first proof of breeding for this species at the reservoir. It was during this period and afterwards when I was bird ringing around the margins of the reservoir between 1975 and 1986 that I really started to appreciate this wonderful area. During the 1980s Colin Green was working for Severn Trent Water Authority and I would help him in the evenings during the spring and summer months, leading guided walks around the reservoir grounds. The site inspired me that much that in 2001 I was able with the Club's help to publish the *Birdlife of Swithland Reservoir*. Later on I was also very grateful to the Club for helping me to publish a piece of work on Gerald Felstead's and my ringing activities during the late 1970s at Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake Gravel Pits.

While writing the *Birdlife of Swithland Reservoir* I spent hours going through past *Heritages* extracting notes and I came to realise what an amazing legacy the Club is leaving future generations. Over the last 50 years it has faithfully recorded the plants and animals to be found mainly in Leicestershire and particularly on Charnwood. Who would have thought that in the lifetime of the Club, a once common species, the Wall butterfly, would become almost extinct in the area? A close relative, however, the Gatekeeper, has gone from relative obscurity in the early 1970s to being plentiful. This is only one example of many changes that can be charted through the pages of *Heritage*.

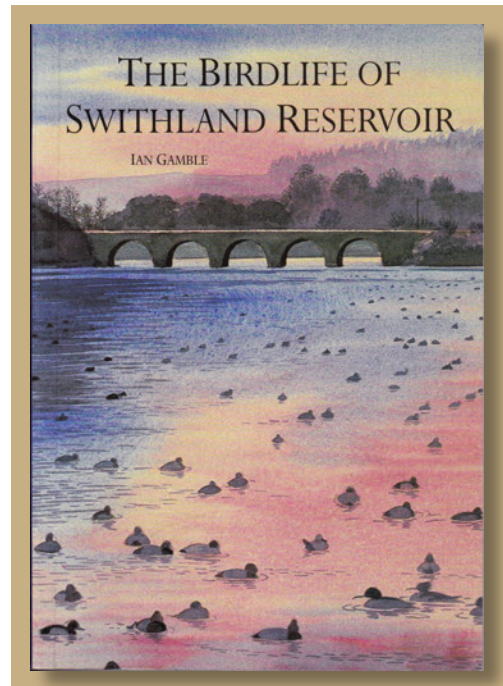
In 1991 I moved from Leicestershire to Hertfordshire when I got married. I have still continued with my bird ringing and have now processed well over 15,000 birds. I still ring birds occasionally in my father's garden in Quorn. Birds have been ringed in that garden

now for over 50 years and over that period we have seen many changes. The Spotted Flycatcher was last recorded here in 1990, the Willow Tit in 1993, and we have ringed only three Marsh Tits since 1991. All these birds bred locally and were of annual occurrence up until the early nineties. Ringing in gardens over a long period has its benefits. We had three Great Tits that lived to be over eight years from the day they were ringed and the oldest was only two months short of nine years old. One Blue Tit and one Blackbird survived to eight years of age. We had one Wren that was over five years and five months old - quite an age for a small bird!

Over the years one of my favourite birds has been the Siskin and last year I ringed my thousandth individual. I have ringed these small finches in my gardens in Leicestershire and Hertfordshire and had some interesting recoveries. The fourth Siskin I ever caught back in April 1976 had a Russian ring on its leg! It had been ringed a few months earlier in Latvia. Since then I have caught a bird wearing a Norwegian ring and my birds have been recovered in Sweden, eastern Germany and the Netherlands. At home I have had four birds recovered in Scotland, two in Northumberland and one in Cumbria. One bird I caught in January 2011 had initially been ringed in January 2008 in the garden and it had returned for its fourth winter! So next time you see these delightful little finches feeding in your garden just give a thought to where they might be heading.

The best recovery I personally have had was that of a Garden Warbler that I ringed at Swithland Reservoir in June 1982. This bird was killed by a young boy in Ghana in February 1989 and at that time was only the fifth British record of this species south of the Sahara.

Probably my most memorable and unexpected bird ringing experiences came on the 4th November 2008. Pamela and I drove from Hertfordshire on a day's outing to Norfolk. The day



started off well by my finding the Red-flanked Bluetail which I had gone to see at Muckleburgh Hill, near Weybourne, before 9 am. I then drove down the coast to Holme Bird Observatory. The warden Jed Andrews was telling me of some of the birds that they had recently ringed which included Yellow-browed Warbler and Pallas's Warbler. I can remember saying to him I would love to catch a Yellow-browed Warbler! He said "You are in luck! I have just been told we have caught one. Do you want to take it out of the net and process it?" It was a dream come true! The Yellow-browed Warbler weighed just 5.7 grams. This small warbler breeds across Siberia. It winters in southern Asia from the Persian Gulf eastwards through India and South East Asia through to southern China. My amazing day did not end there. Just over an hour later, the warden walked up to me holding a bird bag and said "You can now go and process this bird". I felt the small bird inside the bag and as I drew it out I was amazed to see it was the mystical seven-striped sprite, better known as a Pallas's Warbler - this tiny warbler weighed only 5.6 grams! The Pallas's Warbler breeds in southern Siberia east from Altai Mountains and south to Northern Mongolia and winters in southern China and northern Indo-China. Both birds have, over the years, become annual migrants to Britain though neither breeds within a thousand miles of our shores. When I was born, there had been only two Pallas's Warblers seen in Britain and to me it will always remain the most enigmatic of birds and that even one of these tiny birds makes it to our shores is nothing short of a miracle. I have always considered it to be a great privilege to be able to hold birds and this experience must take pride of place.

My passion for moths and butterflies has also not diminished over the years, although the only collecting that I do now is with the camera. In the past few years I have spent hours on the local chalk grassland getting to know some of our more uncommon butterflies. In early May the target species have been the Duke of Burgundy, Grizzled and Dingy Skippers and Green Hairstreak. Later on in the year the local grasslands hold Silver-spotted Skipper, Small, Adonis and Chalkhill Blues. Living in the south of England I am also fortunate to live close to some very good woodland which was at one time part of the ancient forest of Bernwood. This area lies close to Oxford and is under an hour's drive from home. The woodlands hold some of Britain's more uncommon species of butterfly, but if the weather is sunny and warm and your timing right you can be rewarded with sightings of Purple Emperor, White Admiral, Wood White and Black and Brown Hairstreaks.



I have many happy memories of going through the egg cartons in my father's moth trap as a young boy and there was always a sense of excitement never knowing what might be lurking under the next carton. As a child the large brightly coloured Garden Tiger always got the pulse racing. It is hard to believe that this once abundant insect in Leicestershire has become rather local in the county in recent years. I have my own moth trap now but even in my mid-fifties the excitement of looking at what has been caught next morning still remains. In Hertfordshire I



Privet Hawkmoth © Ian Gamble

now catch moths some of which are quite different to those my father was catching in our garden in Quorn and these include large species like the Lobster Moth and Privet Hawkmoth. Last week I was fortunate enough to catch a Light Feathered Rustic, a species of limestone and chalk grassland that was thought to be extinct in Hertfordshire as a breeding insect since 1938. This illustrates what I said earlier that anything can be hiding under the next egg carton and that is the wonder and excitement of mothing!

If you study natural history over many years you soon discover that as in life there will be disappointments, elations and there is always the unexpected. What you will be left with through all the ups and downs of studying nature are memories that will last a lifetime. An example of this happened to me at the beginning of the year and it all took place in my suburban garden surrounded as it is by houses and having roads bordering two boundaries. Most bird watchers will have been aware of the large Waxwing invasion that took place in the autumn of 2010. Birds arrived in Scotland and on the eastern coast of Britain and gradually over the course of the winter moved inland and southwards. It has long been an ambition of mine to catch and ring one of these handsome birds and to this end I hung up apples on strings on my by then fruitless Crab Apple tree. My Rowan had lost its berries by early November but my weeping Cotoneaster was red all over with fruit. Towards the end of January my hopes rose as a flock of 57 Waxwings fed on Rowans just up our road. Just after lunch on the 6th February a loud scream from my wife Pamela alerted me to the fact that 20 Waxwings had just landed in our garden two metres away from my mist-net. Unfortunately it was an extremely windy day and the billowing net frightened the birds away. Earlier in the day however it had been the same strong wind that had caused a lot of loose netting to gather at one end of the net that had stopped an adult female Sparrowhawk from escaping. Apart from the Waxwings and catching the first Reed Bunting in my garden and several Redwings during the snow in early December the winter of 2010/11 was turning out to be very average on the bird ringing front. Towards the end of February Pamela and I went on a long weekend to the north Norfolk coast. On our return I noticed that my Nyger feeders were nearly empty and I had only filled them up the day before I left four days previously. Over the next few days I started to catch large numbers of Lesser Redpolls and by the time they departed in early April I had caught 218 individuals. Nine of the birds had been ringed in the garden in previous winters, 203 were new birds and six were already ringed. Of the six that were already ringed, two were ringed in Yorkshire and the others had been ringed in Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey and Gloucestershire. Catching large numbers of Lesser Redpoll was not the end to this amazing event. With the Lesser Redpoll were their larger and paler looking cousins the Common or Mealy Redpoll, an uncommon winter visitor to our shores from Fenno-Scandinavia and during March and early April, 18 of these handsome birds were also ringed!

My generation has been very fortunate in that we have been able to travel. I have travelled to six continents in order to look at wildlife - a luxury not many in previous generations would have had! We have been able to identify much of what we have seen with the aid of the many and varied field guides that are now available and these are mainly a legacy of previous generations.

The greatest gift we can impart to our children and the next generation is a love and understanding of the natural world. This is what was imparted to me from a very early age by members of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club. They gave of their time and shared their passion and enthusiasm for nature and that is a very precious gift. In the Bible not much is spoken about Solomon's wisdom except this: "He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish". Surely throughout generations, nature has inspired scientists, artists, writers, poets, musicians and anybody with time to consider its diversity and beauty. It is also fundamental to our survival and we neglect it at our peril.

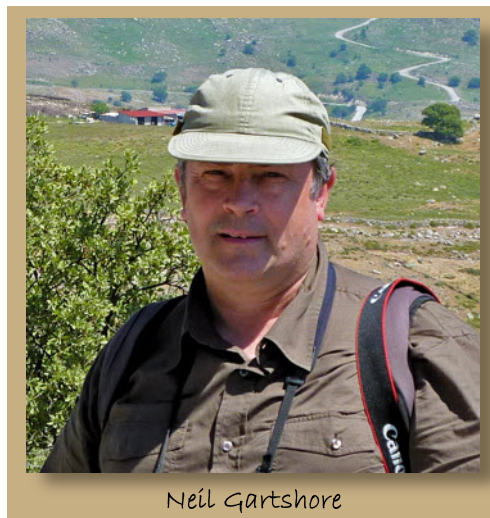
The Loughborough Naturalists' Club: An Early Influence

Neil Gartshore

They say that your past will come back to haunt you but it was a pleasant surprise to receive a copy of *Heritage* and a letter from Peter Gamble earlier this year about the Club's 50th Anniversary. The Club played an important part in my early years, helping to develop an interest that has lasted a lifetime.

After leaving school in 1978 I worked for the Midland Bank and began spending holidays volunteering on RSPB reserves. By the end of 1981 I was looking to leave Loughborough and took a few exploratory trips to places that I thought that I might like to move to. In the end though my choice was made by looking through a road atlas to decide where the birding would be good..... Shetland!

I worked in Lerwick for 18 months where the birding didn't disappoint but I decided that a banking career wasn't for me and ended up back in Loughborough. My initial plan was to find long-term voluntary work with the RSPB to gain experience but an unexpected six month contract turned up at the local dole office that I had no choice but to take. As a consolation though, I spent weekends volunteering at Coombes Valley.



Neil Gartshore



Arctic Tern © Peter Gamble

In January 1983 I was volunteering full-time at Coombes but by April I had landed my first conservation job as an Assistant Warden for the National Trust on the Farne Islands.

I stayed on the Farnes for three brilliant seasons (1983-85) and took the opportunity in the winter of 1984/85 to spend three months travelling in South Africa. Friends with whom I had worked with in the dole office had moved there - no dole job, no South Africa.... one of life's twists and turns!

I fell in love with the country and through 1985 pursued a job at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute for African Ornithology. To cut a long story short I was back in Cape Town in 1986. In April I was heading south to sub-Antarctic Marion Island employed as a Research Field Assistant with a brief to study Giant Petrels, albatrosses and other southern ocean seabirds.... all of these great birds and getting paid too.

After my two-year South African adventure it was back to Loughborough (again!). A short summer contract in 1988 on Coquet Island (RSPB) was followed by a return to the Farnes in the autumn. In January 1989 I had my first long-term contract with the RSPB and began 17 years of continuous service with the organisation.

Contracts on the Mawddach (north Wales) and Minsmere were followed by a full-time Assistant Warden post at Arne in Dorset. Over the next 15 years I stayed here progressing to the post of Senior Warden. By 2005

I was given the role of Dorset Site Manager and moved off the reserve. This turned out to be the push I needed to actually do what I had been thinking of for a while - to leave the RSPB and work for myself. In 2006 I bit the bullet and left.

I now make a living running my own bird/wildlife guiding service in Dorset (and beyond including trips to Spain, South Africa and Japan), trading as Calluna Books in out-of-print natural history books, and working as a freelance bird surveyor. The work I do now is much more varied and interesting, and I'm able to do far more birding than I had been doing in the latter years of my time with the RSPB - in many ways I have rediscovered my roots.



But how did it all begin? I can't actually recall exactly how my interest in birds began, I would have been about 10 or 11 at the time, but I do remember some early experiences. I remember my mum buying me a job lot of Ladybird books that included the five bird titles. I remember a school friend's parents having an interest in natural history. I remember a school trip to the Isle of Man, seeing my first Gannets and Razorbills. I would have been well into my bird watching by the time I was 12 when I got my first pair of binoculars. It was Christmas 1972 and I had them on my Christmas list. I remember being very disappointed when I'd opened my presents - no binoculars - but then being over the moon when asked to fetch something from a cupboard, and found a hidden box with a pair of binoculars in it.

Not long after this interest began I was a junior member of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club and, from then on, the Club's activities nurtured my interest in natural history, particularly birds.

Over the next few years I regularly went on coach trips and this probably continued until I left Loughborough in 1982. Visits to the north Norfolk coast were certainly a spectacular event for a youngster just starting out. One of the first excursions that I still remember was to the Holme/Hunstanton area in January 1973. Although I can no longer remember all of the new birds I saw it was, I think, about a dozen including my first Fulmar off the cliffs at Hunstanton and a variety of waders.

I found an old notebook recently and between 1975-78 see that I visited the Norfolk coast a few times as well as other parts of the country where I saw some great birds for the first time including: Minsmere (Avocet, Marsh Harrier), Covenham Reservoir (Red-necked Grebe, Long-tailed Duck and Merlin), Long Mynd (Dotterel) and Hilbre Island (Leach's Petrel).

In particular, I always looked forward to one trip each year - the Gibraltar Point week-end. The anticipation of some great birds usually didn't disappoint. I remember seeing my first Bonxie and Arctic Skua here and in one year saw Red-backed Shrike, Wryneck and Barred Warbler, the latter two in the hand.

Maybe without my early connection with the Club I might still have ended up with a career in the conservation field but the help and experiences of these early years can't be underestimated and played a large part in developing my interest in birds.

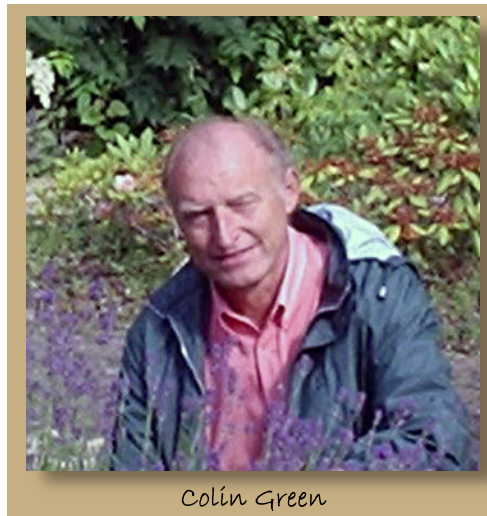
Congratulations on the 50th Anniversary.

Memories of The Club

Colin Green

From a very early age, I have always been fascinated with the natural world. My passion started when I stayed with my grandmother at the weekends, she managed a smallholding which consisted of a vegetable garden, chickens, a large orchard and a hay meadow. It was located between the Mountsorrel hills and the Soar valley. When I wasn't helping my gran, I would go off exploring the surrounding countryside, wandering along the River Soar, watching Water Voles and Kingfishers, discovering rocks and fossils from the local quarry, climbing the hills and getting lost in Buddon

Wood. On my rambles I was always a loner, in those days you never mentioned to your school chums that you were interested in birds, animals, insects and especially not wild flowers, not unless you wanted fun poked at you. Other than my gran I had nobody to share my passion of the countryside and its wildlife. It would be around 1962/63; I came across information about the Loughborough Naturalists' Club in the local library. At the time John Crocker was the



Colin Green



Outing to Ravensdale in 1983

Secretary. I visited John at his home to find out more about the Club and soon realised he was as passionate about the countryside as I was and specialised in spiders. Could there be more experts like John in the Loughborough Naturalists' Club? After attending various meetings and going on some of the outings with the Club, I was not disappointed. There were experts on beetles, micro moths, snails, mosses and fungi, whatever the subject there was an expert to cover it.

Here in my own town, I had discovered a group of people who were prepared to share their knowledge and experience with a 'Green' young naturalist: I would have been about 15 or 16 years old at the time.

I have been motivated by these experts ever since, to learn more about our natural world. They have enthralled and encouraged me to be enthusiastic about the countryside. These experts have helped me both in my professional life and in my hobbies.

What has made the Loughborough Naturalists' Club so special, are its members, both past and present, too numerous to mention. It's been a pleasure to have known these self-taught field naturalists, full of enthusiasm, with a passion for the countryside and recording its natural history for posterity and at the same time passing on their knowledge to those who want to learn.

Peter Gamble writes: *Colin makes no mention of the many things he has done for the Club in past years. For example the many memorable indoor and outdoor meetings he arranged for us when he was Meetings Secretary for five years during 1980-84. Bus trips for instance to exciting places such as Minsmere, Dane Valley in Staffordshire, Cley Bird Reserve, Dee Estuary and the Derbyshire Dales. Also visits to the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, Kew Gardens, The Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge and long week-ends at Gibraltar Point Field Station to mention just a few. He also helped*

us a great deal when we carried out flora/fauna survey work at Swithland Reservoir whilst he was Estates Manager there for Severn Trent Water Authority and when we organised exhibits during open days in the Waterworks grounds. Our thanks are also due to him for contributing many valuable records for both Swithland Reservoir and Buddon Wood.



*Outing to the Natural History Museum
in 2007*

Recollections of a Young Naturalist: Where from – Where to?

Margaret Greenway

Associate Professor in Environmental Engineering
Griffith University, Brisbane. Australia

My interest in nature started when I was very young. One of my earliest memories was finding a huge Privet Hawkmoth caterpillar sitting in my pushchair; I was probably about three years old. Fortunately my mother was a nature lover herself so gave me lots of encouragement. I can remember her bringing home abandoned baby Hedgehogs which we tried to rear with a pipette. Other memories of living in Kent were the Primroses, orchids and Cowslips in spring; seeing a Grass Snake swimming in a huge ornamental lily pond and finding Great Crested Newts.



Upon moving to Loughborough when I was eight, we lived in a new house in a new estate on Pantain Road off Outwoods Drive. Our house at the time was the last in the street and next to us were the fields that led down to the Wood Brook. Our side boundary was a hedgerow. I attended Mountfields Primary School and walked through the fields and along Wood Brook to get to school. At Mountfields I met Anne Wigmore and together with my brother and several of her brothers, we spent most of our weekends and holidays 'playing' in the fields and the brook; always getting a 'wet socker' which we dried by hanging on low lying willow branches. Walks to Pignut Spinney and The Outwoods were regular outings.

My father built us a large fishpond which soon became home to sticklebacks caught in the brook. I even 'tickled' a trout and rushed home with it in my hands - almost one mile and put it in the pond. Remarkably it survived until one really cold winter (1963) when our pond froze from top to bottom.

We also caught loach and Miller's Thumb in the brook. The loach made a tasty meal for my pet Grass Snake and fried in butter a tasty meal for me. One day walking home from Mountfields I pulled an old boot out of the water that was home to about 20 loach; these also went into our fishpond.

My interest in natural history was further promoted through my teacher in Form 4, Mr Jacobs. One class project was to make a pressed wildflower collection. I topped the class with some 150 species assisted by my father who, as a travelling 'rep', went all over the Midlands, and in his travels would collect flowers for me. I was one of four pupils from Mountfields to attend a special Field Studies Camp at Robin Hood's Bay. During this week we did many different activities, but most memorable was fossil hunting along the cliffs where I found a perfect 'golden' ammonite.

After Mountfields, Anne and I attended Our Lady's Convent High School. We both continued our interest in nature. Outings with our siblings were extended to include the Beacon and cycling to Bradgate Park. On one of our trips to the Beacon we discovered Palmate Newts - the first record for that area. I was also in the Nanpantan Girl Guides and undertaking various 'proficiency badges'; this is how I came to meet John Crocker. John was the examiner for the Bird Watchers and Nature Lovers proficiency badges. After obtaining my badges I continued to visit John and Marcene. John introduced me to the Loughborough Naturalists' Club and together with Anne Wigmore, Jonny Allen and Marion Logie we became part of the Junior Naturalist Club. Excursions with the Club included Bradgate Park and Rutland Water but the most memorable was to Gibraltar Point - the Wash, in mid-winter (1967). We trudged through thick snow and had our picnic lunch sitting in the snow. I'm sure we saw plenty of different migratory wading birds but all I remember was the bitter cold.

John Crocker arranged for us to see Badgers at dusk emerging from their sett, we even hand-fed them with rank bacon pieces whilst the midges swarmed around us. I also met Tony Squires and was inspired by his accounts of teaching and travels in East Africa.

After completing my A-levels in Botany, Zoology and Chemistry I went to Reading University. Here I studied Geology, Botany and Zoology. For my Zoology honours thesis I did an ecological survey of the Pocketgate/Wood Brook from its source to its confluence with the River Soar. Again John Crocker was a champion. He gave me every encouragement throughout the project from its inception to proof-reading my final report *The Ecology of a Charnwood Forest Brook* in 1970. Jan Stead and Marcene Crocker expertly typed the manuscript for me. I was awarded ten pounds from the Loughborough Naturalists' Club for my "outstanding work carried out on the Wood Brook". Copies of my report were presented to both the Loughborough Naturalists' Club and Leicester Museum. I was awarded a High Distinction for my thesis to which I attribute my receiving First Class Honours from Reading University in 1971.

Leaving aside my freshwater studies, I decided to do my PhD in Marine Science in the tropical waters of the Caribbean, so off I went to Jamaica to study seagrass ecology at the University of the West Indies. After completing my PhD - where to next? I was now spoilt by the tropical climate so in 1978 I headed 'Down Under' to the Great Barrier Reef and remained in Australia ever since. I frequently returned to the UK and Loughborough to visit my mother and of course John and Marcene Crocker.

In Australia I continued my love of nature with a new and exciting flora and fauna to discover, and I'm still discovering more. As an environmental consultant I got to travel to some very remote areas doing flora and fauna surveys and environmental impact assessments. However as university academic my greatest achievement has been to inspire my students to appreciate the natural environment. There is no doubt that the inspiration that John Crocker gave me in my early teens contributed to my university studies in the natural sciences and my career as an environmental scientist; he will always be my champion!

Early Days Remembered

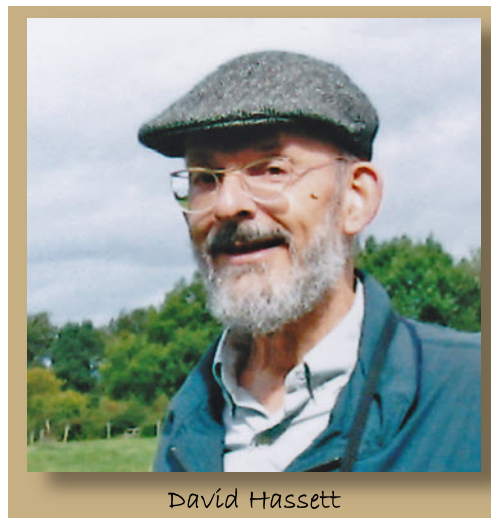
David Hassett

If schooldays turn out in retrospect to be the happiest days of one's life, then one's childhood hobbies often occupy the very heart of this nostalgic landscape, surrounded by the warmth of family life and the appreciative enthusiasm of one's circle of friends. And the Loughborough Naturalists' Club shares this precious niche in my memory.

Mountfields

At ten years of age I was already running a tiny nature-study club, which met once a week during the school dinner break. Our reference sources were the much beloved *I Spy* booklets, one or two treasured Observer's Pocket Guides and the beautifully devised series of Brooke Bond picture cards. These cherished cards not only resulted in a permanent surfeit of tea-leaves in our mothers' larders but ended up kindling the wrath of our teachers, due to furtive swapping activities when their eyes were elsewhere. Although there was little competition from other clubs, it was not an easy job to keep the group going. I remember opening the classroom window to call indoors the reluctant members, who were doubtlessly loath to lose their place in the annual 'conker' championships or unwilling to risk losing their secret dens to hordes of bloodthirsty marauders. For, behind the orderly world of the three-Rs and the Eleven-Plus, there lay a playground saga of heroic proportions involving gangs of warring outlaws in the 'Secret Passage', an overgrown carriageway which separated the recently-built Mountfields County Primary School from nearby Glebe House. On reflection, it was not so much the formal teaching but these coveted dens under the laurel and holly bushes which taught us social skills and civic pride! The ground within them was always cleanly swept, rules of conduct were invented and passwords frequently altered. Girls were treated with a code of chivalry which would not have shamed the Knights of the Round Table!

In the face of such competing attractions I had to resort to awarding fossil heart-urchins and other tempting gifts to entice my schoolmates indoors! Our fourth-form master at Mountfields, Mr Jacobs, was himself keen enough on natural history to escort the whole class to a field studies centre near Scarborough for a five-day residential course, quite a bold enterprise at the time (1960), considering our age (11), and quite an adventure for most of us because it was the first time we had been away from home and out of sight of both parents and teachers. Possibly the most exciting moment was scrambling up crumbling rock embankments to prise out spiral gastropod shells of astonishing size from marine deposits laid down in the Jurassic period. However, by some quirk of memory, what stands out most vividly in my mind is the last day of our course, when we wandered confusedly in small groups down the wooded slopes of one of the Yorkshire Dales, trying to spot differences between the plant and animal life at the different levels. I chose Wood Anemones, but did not find any obvious patterns that might throw light on their habitat preferences or their interrelation with other species. It was rather a let-down for the instructor, who was anxious to



glean any evidence which might illustrate the workings of 'ecology', then still a dubious concept that had not yet come into widespread use, even in the academic sphere.

Numerous aspects of junior school life helped the pupils to connect with nature. One was the opportunity to care for other living creatures. In those days one did not need to don safety masks, goggles or gloves to outwit the deadly allergens and arboviruses which so complicate the lives of schoolteachers nowadays. We took it in turn to feed the varied inhabitants of the bowls and aquaria spread on shelves and desks around the edge of the classroom – hamsters, stick insects and so on. My first job was looking after the frogspawn. Although most of us were already familiar with tadpoles, it was the first time we had witnessed the whole process of metamorphosis from start to finish, including the disappearing act at the end! I especially enjoyed taking care of the silkworms, which meant making early-morning treks to the mulberry tree, normally out of bounds to pupils, to collect fresh leaves and, if one was lucky, to gobble down a few fruits! In these 'hands-on' science activities even everyday plants were a source of wonderment: I remember the excitement of watching cress and mustard seeds germinate on blotting paper and Horse Chestnut buds burst into leaf in a jam jar full of water. Another important aspect of Junior School education was the initiation of the class into homely country crafts, such as basketry, sewing, potato printing and the complete wool cycle – carding, spinning, dyeing and weaving or knitting. I still treasure the colourful bamboo flute made and tuned under the guidance of the same inspired (though uncommonly strict) fourth-form master who organised our trip to Scarborough.

All this is mentioned because learning about wildlife and natural resources through simple first-hand experience seemed more effective at this time, when buzz words like 'environmental education' and 'sustainable development' had not yet entered circulation and there was no national curriculum to promote them in schools. I doubt if any classroom lesson could have encouraged respect for wildlife as convincingly as the Headmistress placing the far end of the Secret Passage out of bounds in the hope that a Nuthatch which had been spotted there by the gardener might go ahead and make its nest in a tall Ivy-covered tree stump. And it is difficult to imagine what moral sermon could have better shaped our childish attitudes towards the cultural heritage than the same lady, Miss Mills, lending her awesome name and protection to the ancient Cedar of Lebanon which spread its soothing boughs over the lawn of The Conservatory building, presumably a relic of the arboretum planted when this house belonged to the first Lord Mayor of Loughborough.

Incidentally, Mr Edmund F Jacobs later joined the Loughborough Naturalists' Club, by which time he was working as Head Teacher at Highcliffe County Junior School in Birstall (1966).

For those who spent their formative years at Mountfields School, it was difficult not to become a naturalist, or at least a nature lover. Both pupils and parents appreciated its delightful setting at the edge of The Green Belt, sheltered from the traffic of Forest Road by the Alders, Ash trees, limes and oaks fringing Wood Brook and cushioned from the residential areas on the other three sides by gardening allotments, a sports club and the extensive grounds of Glebe House and the Holt. It was here that the limpid waters of the brook began the last leg of their journey to the River Soar, through culverts and cuttings. Only a short stroll across The Green Belt lay Lodge Farm and from there it was a pleasant afternoon's ramble across the fields behind Outwoods Drive, where we lived

at the time, to Pignut Spinney for blackberry-picking or to the bracken-filled woods where we could play hide and seek. In those days, although Taylor's Bell Foundry, Herbert Morris Cranes and Brush Electrical works had already carried the name of Loughborough far and wide, it was still very much a quiet provincial town, invaded twice a week by the bustle of the cattle market and street traders' cries and once a year by the mayhem of the funfair.

Collecting Instinct

At the time the Loughborough Naturalists' Club began, I was especially interested in palaeontology, having been started off along that road by a handsome donation of fossil ammonites, 'sea-lilies', giant horsetail ferns from the Carboniferous coal swamps and other delights, received from a family friend whose niece had left the collection behind when she emigrated to Australia. Further gifts came from the good-humoured retired geologist Bernard Wale, to whom I was introduced by Miss Mills after I weeded her garden during Boy Scouts' 'bob-a-job' week. However, different sorts of collection had preceded the fossils for short spells: feathers, birds' eggs, caddis-fly larvae cases, wild flowers, sea and snail-shells and so on, whilst more demanding types of specimens, such as seaweeds and butterflies, came later. As I moved into adolescence, I also started building up a reference set of pond flora and fauna mounted on microscope slides, an activity brought to an unwelcome halt by the competing demands of O- and A-levels.

I was lucky to have very understanding parents: my mother was surprisingly forbearing about the constant mess of chemical reagents and collecting tubes in the covered side passage of our house, while my father was forthcoming with cheques to buy everything from pooters to pipettes from the venerable Manchester firm of Flatters & Garnett, before it sadly closed down in 1967. Neither of them complained too much about the geology museum which had been installed in the garden shed nor about the other natural history finds which were steadily invading the four corners of the attic.

The Loughborough Naturalists' Club

It was the first Honorary Secretary, John Crocker, one of our close neighbours, who brought me in to the Loughborough Naturalists' Club soon after it sprang into being in 1960. He explained how the small group of founder members had apportioned the different groups of invertebrates between themselves, which was how he had come to adopt the arachnida – spiders, harvestmen, false scorpions and (briefly) mites – whilst others took up the lepidoptera, coleoptera and so on. I am not sure if it was in this way that Mike Walpole took on the study of mosses and liverworts and unwittingly launched himself on a solitary crusade for untold years. Ornithology, of course, was a great favourite with most members and, indeed, has always been the great flag-bearer and mainstay of the international conservation movement. Obviously, however, the coverage of the huge realm of natural history was only partial, with some enormous gaps. Fungi, for example, only came to be fully researched a few years later, with the arrival of Dorothy Fieldhouse, whilst fish remained an enigma until the 1970s. Some of the naturalists' spouses also played a significant role. Marcene Crocker, particularly, was not only an eternal pillar of support for John but a fellow student of spiders and a participant in the plethora of other projects he engaged in, stretching from nature reserve management plans into cultural matters such as the social and industrial heritage of coal-mining in Coleorton.

As can be imagined, I was absolutely thrilled. Here was a group of gifted amateurs devoted to extending the frontiers of knowledge following the tradition of my childhood heroes Humboldt, Darwin and Bates, whose works, picked up for a few pence in school jumble sales, occupied pride of place in my tiny natural history library. What a privilege it was to become an apprentice of these LNC founder members, self-taught enthusiasts, who made up the backbone of such learned scientific bodies as the Mammal Society of the British Isles and the British Arachnological Society and had friendships with museum curators keen to foster the spirit of enquiry among the lay population.

Natural History Clubs: The Great Tradition

Of course, natural history has quite a considerable pedigree in the UK. We owe that to diligent nature-lovers like the Rev Gilbert White, who published *The Natural History & Antiquities of Selborne* in 1789. Not only is this keen diarist and letter-writer credited with being England's first ecologist but also with helping originate what is now called environmental ethics. Certainly, he preached respect for 'the wonders of the Creation'. He was preceded by enlightened groups such as the Temple Coffee House Botanic Club (1689), with a total membership of 40, which met on Friday evenings and organised field excursions on Sundays to places around London, which were reached on horseback and by carriage. This was probably the first natural history society in the modern era, but the fashion must have quickly taken hold, for, already by 1763, the *Critical Review* was able to declare "Natural History is now, by a kind of national establishment, become the favourite study of the time". However, the hobby really burgeoned in the 19th century, becoming what can authentically be called a social activity, indulged in even by the Royal Family, as anyone can confirm by visiting Queen Victoria's seaside home on the Isle of Wight.

I suppose it was the British Naturalists' Association, founded in 1905, that served as a focus for the numerous natural history clubs with a national, regional or thematic focus which blossomed during the Victorian period and first half of the 20th century. The London Natural History Society, whose study area was defined as a 20-mile circle around St Paul's Cathedral, was formed in 1913 by a merger between the City of London Entomological and Natural History Society and the North London Natural History Society, themselves founded respectively in 1858 and 1886. The entomological society mentioned was something of a pioneer in nature conservation, organising a petition with two thousand signatures against the building of a railway line through Epping Forest, in 1883. By virtue of their meetings, outings and bulletins, such clubs provided opportunities for simple nature-lovers and country-goers to rub shoulders with recognised specialists and thus deepen their understanding of the web of life. They helped foster the skills of observation and recording, and the sharing of knowledge about the living landscape which is such an important aspect of being British. Even dyed-in-the-wool academics had something to gain from this interchange, through the broadening of their field of knowledge and the inspirational effect of mutual enthusiasm!

The Loughborough Naturalists' Club carried on this great tradition. Many of the members of the Club also took part in other organisations: Mike Walpole, for example, was for over 20 years Honorary Treasurer of the Botanical Society of the British Isles, to which the LNC was affiliated. The publications of these other bodies were available to all the Club members, either via the circulating

portfolio or through the rapidly expanding Club library, which soon outgrew members' sitting rooms and had a hard time finding a permanent home!

Inspiration vs. Perspiration

During those very early years of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club, I believe I was one of the youngest participants, beginning as an informal member during the Chairmanship of Harry Clements and joining up officially in 1963 when I was 14. It should be pointed out, however, that most of the other members were barely much older, probably in their late-twenties or early-thirties, and seemed to have bathed in the flame of eternal youth! Club policy restricted full membership to practising field naturalists, but several of the associate members were also very active in the field and would send in their notes to the official recorders, whose job it was to vet the information and include a judicious summary in the quarterly Club bulletin. A sprinkling of associates also helped with the county wildlife surveys, filled in BTO Nest Record Cards or participated in Conservation Corps work. As befits a serious research body, the emphasis was on accuracy of observation, fidelity of description and thoroughness in recording the findings. Another policy of the Club right from the outset was to shuffle the posts of the Honorary Club Officers and Committee Members so as to give everyone a chance to savour the pains and the pleasures of management. Despite this enlightened principle, it was a very small nucleus of stalwarts who kept the LNC torch alight during the first decade of the Club's existence, serving in various capacities and powering it with their enthusiasm and drive. As a result of John's experience as the first Honorary Secretary, administrative duties were later divided up so as to spread the increasing workload of the institution, not only on account of the growing membership (over 100 by the mid-sixties and 150 by the end of the decade) but because of the new projects taken on board. Whenever the Annual General Meeting came round, there was a democratic exchange of hats amongst the hard-working organisers so as to redistribute the most demanding posts. Nevertheless, some of the staff lasted out their full five-year term of office in a single role – Pat Candlish, as Secretary, for example – or even carried on way beyond, as was the case of Owen Black, the Honorary Treasurer.

Annual Programme

Indoor meetings were held in Woodgate Baptist Church rooms, located right in the centre of town behind the Essoldo cinema. They were restricted to the opening and closing months of each year, with a wide gap in between (from May to September) to allow for outdoor activities. The AGMs were always the most well attended functions, probably as a result of the opportunity they gave for members to appreciate each others' colour slides, after formal matters had been concluded. In those times of smoky coal fires and pea-souper fogs, when cars still had crank handles, and generally needed them, hot tea and biscuits were a 'must', rather than a casual option, especially during the long, hard winter of 1962/63, when the Thames froze over at Windsor and ice covered the sea for as far as one mile out in sheltered locations off the Kent coast. Little did we imagine what was to come weather-wise in 2009-11 as a result of climate change! Each field outing was an occasion to be treasured, thanks to the leadership of the more advanced enthusiasts and the handful of seasoned collectors who had the facts at their fingertips and who helped unlock new doors for the rest of us. During those early years, almost every field trip yielded fresh species for the site

visited and sometimes new county records as well. Memorable excursions were made to neighbouring counties and even further afield, to naturalists' paradises such as the Ouse Washes, Slimbridge and the New Forest, and I regret having missed some of these opportunities. Trips were also organised to the Leicester Museum (where our host was the LNC member Ian Evans), Kew Gardens and the British Museum of Natural History. The National Nature Week display and members' exhibition evenings gave everyone a chance to take stock of their colleagues' advances in the different branches of natural history. For those members who lived far away or had to move abroad, the mimeographed quarterly bulletin brought the Leicestershire countryside and cycle of the seasons vividly to life, whilst the annual report helped give a candid view of Club affairs.

On field outings I especially recall walking beside, and listening spellbound to, the spider-specialist John Crocker, who brought out the incredible artistry and diversity of lifestyles of these little-loved creatures. Other born teachers were the professional farmer Bob Green, who knew the secret haunts of many rare species of flowering plants and ferns, and Peter Gamble, the sensitive all-round naturalist who penned the Club bulletin. Peter was a veritable font of wisdom about birds, mammals, plants, butterflies and many other interesting things in between, garnered during years of daily rambles around his house in Quorn as well as countless evenings bent over a mercury-vapour moth trap. Another founder-member, Harry Clements, also took a wide menagerie under his wing: mammals, reptiles, amphibians, beetles and bugs; and many other participants whose names I cannot now recall enriched such occasions with their comments and anecdotes.

Values

Two stray memories seem in retrospect to reflect key personal values of the LNC founders, those special and varied qualities that helped forge a well-meshed team, setting the Club on a productive course right from the start and propelling it to early achievement. On one occasion, possibly stimulated by a remark I had made, Mike Walpole lifted from his bookcase a recently-acquired botanical volume, opened it carefully at one of the hand-painted illustrations and held a magnifying glass over it to reveal to me the minute hairs rendered along the stem of the plant by the Victorian lady artist. What on earth can have led this closeted perfectionist to resort to a hand-lens and devote painstaking hours to portraying details which only the sharpest-eyed mortals could detect? I recall the hushed, confiding tone of voice with which Mike spoke, conveying both the awe of a discerning appreciator of beauty and the excitement of a born collector who recognises his equal. By owning such works, he was able to commune with the great spirits of the past who shared his passion for nature in all its intricacy. Similarly, I recollect the secretive smile and the gleam in John Crocker's eyes, one grey autumn evening, as he went into his back room and fetched out the latest curiosity – an outsize richly-patterned specimen which had been passed on to him by one of the office staff from the Brush engineering works. It was the first Death's-head Hawkmoth I had ever seen and John was also obviously enraptured by it. Superstitions aside, the image of a pallid human skull on the thorax of this dark insect and the yellowish rib-like markings down its abdomen are probably part of an elaborate trick in the fight for survival. For this moth has developed the ingenious practice of trespassing into bees' nests to steal their honey, protected from their stings, one presumes, by some combination of visual, auditory and chemical ruses which mimic or confuse the unsuspecting host. Another element of this strategy may be the moth's habit of

squeaking and flashing its abdomen when molested. What quirk of fate had led such a rarely-seen migrant species to break its journey in Loughborough, perhaps attracted by the lights of the factory yard? How surprising that it had been captured and passed on to the LNC, at a time when the Club was still practically unknown! Had it bred locally? Presumably it was heading over to France, and perhaps onwards to North Africa, because it was hardly likely to survive the English winter. John was thrilled by the enigma of it all and stimulated by the challenge it represented. Throughout his life he was impelled by this spirit of wonder and enquiry, which he tried to share with others.

It was John who inspected the colourful specimens of crab spiders and orb-web builders I had obtained on our family holidays in France; Claude Henderson who very kindly mounted and identified my collection of butterflies, mantises and flying grasshoppers from the Holy Land, returning them to me in an attractive storage case; Peter Gamble who patiently looked through some of my puzzling pressed plants and Mike Walpole who started me off on a personal Charnwood project for biology A-level, but I am eternally grateful to everyone in the Club who led me along the numerous paths of natural history and to a life devoted in large part to the conservation of the threatened landscapes of north-east Brazil.

Future Perspectives

Changing times, changing values! Is natural history still a popular pastime for our children and grandchildren? It seems that the 'virtual' social networks and glittering shopping malls have become a more important venue for blithe spirits than well-pruned country footpaths and chilly church meeting-rooms. How likely are you to encounter the youngsters of today with binoculars at the ready, delightedly spotting unusual species of wintering waterfowl at Eyebrook Reservoir? However, the important thing is to ensure that the option is still there, so that when the wheel turns full circle, as it may do a generation or two hence, children will still be able to experience the thrill of hunting for fairy rings at Charnwood Lodge NR, of learning about the Bronze Age hill fort on the Beacon and of watching the development of thriving nature reserves from brownfield sites, like the splendid example at New Lount Colliery. Surely, at least some of our descendants will value the simple pleasures of making elderberry wine and sloe gin from unsprayed hedgerows, of picnicking in our growing National Forest, surrounded by the friendly buzz of summer insects, of feasting their eyes on bobbing Dippers in limpid streams and, at the end of the day, of following the Rooks in the dying autumn light, as they wend their way over the ploughed fields to their roost in the spinney.

What could be more heartening than the LNC symbol of a Curlew coming inland to feed (or, who knows, to breed) in the Soar Valley flood meadows, heralding the arrival of a new spring – a birdsong and bluebell-filled spring, not the silent one prophesied by Rachel Carson in the decade when the Club began. Our hearty thanks must go out to the band of luminaries, many of them now sadly departed, who began this great crusade!

So, with these sentimental reflections and speculative comments, my congratulations across 5,000 miles of ocean to the Loughborough Naturalists' Club on the completion of its first 50 years!

The Effect the Club has had on my Life

Stuart Musgrove

Perhaps I was always likely to be interested in wildlife; I was born in the very heart of the country in Swithland in Charnwood Forest. The village was very different to that you find today being feudal until 1953; we did not have electricity, hot water or flush toilets until I was about eight years old.

The village infant and junior school was very much old-style and in the summer (when the sun shone all the time) the teacher, Miss Dixon, would take us on nature walks into the local fields showing us animals and plants. There was a quiz once a year where you had to write down all the birds you could remember and I won the contest one year.

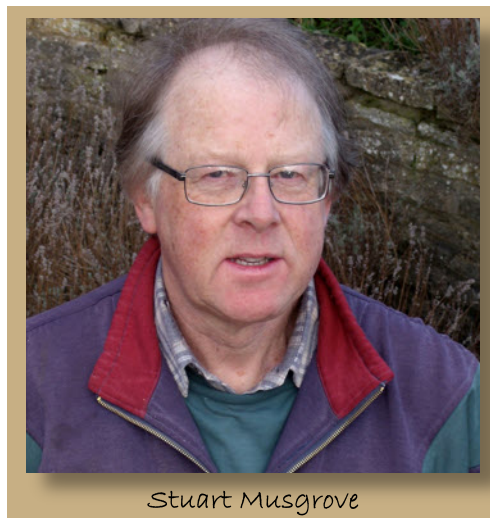
My grandparents lived down the road and my grandfather worked for the local Leicester Water Company and had the idyllic job of working around Swithland Reservoir. He was profoundly deaf, so did not hear the birds but told me of the birds he had seen. He also had two essential tools for bird watching, a pair of good binoculars and the first edition of *Collins Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Northern Europe*.

I was persuaded to join the Club by a friend of the family and local chimney sweep, Harry Handley who described what they were about. This was the mid-1960s and I remember the evening that I attended my first meeting in the Chapel on Woodgate, Loughborough. Also there for the first time was another teenager, by the name of Colin Green and I swear for the next 30 years we were the youngest members.

The Club members were all very friendly and supportive, very knowledgeable and good teachers and we were soon made at home. The more I attended the meetings the more I became involved; I tried to help out by supplying lists of plants when we visited sites locally and particularly around Swithland village which was sufficiently rich to be of considerable interest; but it was not until I got a car that I was able to travel independently and visit more widely.

In the early years we went on many memorable trips, sometimes locally taken by Pat Evans (then Candlish) in her Morris Minor convertible, but for longer journeys by Housdens bus. There were so many visits to classical sites - Wicken Fen in a monsoon, Kettlewell in idyllic June sunshine, after it had snowed the previous weekend, Hilbre Island in the winter and many, many more.

In the late 1960s the concept of a new Leicestershire Flora emerged that was driven by several of the Club members. So it was not unexpected that I should become involved and I was put with Harry Handley and his long-suffering nephew (and for many years, Club Treasurer) Owen Black so we were known as the 'Black Hand Gang' and we had the area around Bagworth



and Desford to survey. Also I, by then, had a very understanding girlfriend who carried my cameras around on our weekend forays into SK41.

After getting married and now living in Whitwick, I was asked by John Crocker to look at the Ulverscroft Unit of the Club's survey of Charnwood Forest which had remained dormant for some time. That simple request was life-changing and Ulverscroft NR became one of the core interests of my life for over two decades as I developed into being Reserve Convener for the Wildlife Trust, and working for the Trust ultimately as Chairman of the Conservation Committee - following several former, far more illustrious, Club members in that role.

The effect of the Club has not just stopped there; as my children grew up, they were dragged around Ulverscroft but their love for the countryside has remained, two being professionally involved with nature conservation in some form.

The Club gave me some of my proudest moments when they made me Club Chairman in 1977. It was a time of considerable change and a time when there was some questioning how such organisations could survive - but the Club survived and prospered and produced the splendid publication *Charnwood Forest: A Changing Landscape*.

We were delighted to see so many members come down to Somerset a few years ago to have a look at our current county.

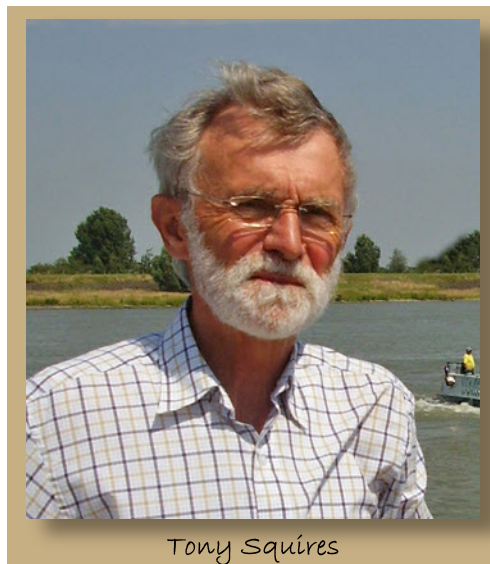
The Club has given me a continuing interest for almost half a century, and although I have now not lived in the Charnwood area for two decades, I still look forward to receiving the well-named publication, *Heritage*, to keep me up-to-date with the changes that are happening and I treasure the many friendships that have lasted over the years.

The LNC 50 Years On: Some Memories

Tony Squires

I joined the LNC some months after the inaugural meeting. During the early 1960s there were fewer than 30 of us and we communicated using two systems: the flash news and the portfolio.

The former was used to inform members of important and urgent items of natural history such as the discovery of a rare plant or the presence and location of Waxwings feeding on berries in winter. The system was operated by the observer concerned mailing post cards to those who had chosen in advance to be informed. The portfolio system was certainly slower. One entered one's own wildlife observations on a monthly or so basis in a loose leaf folder before passing it on to the next member on the circuit. The accumulated reports eventually formed the content of *Heritage*.

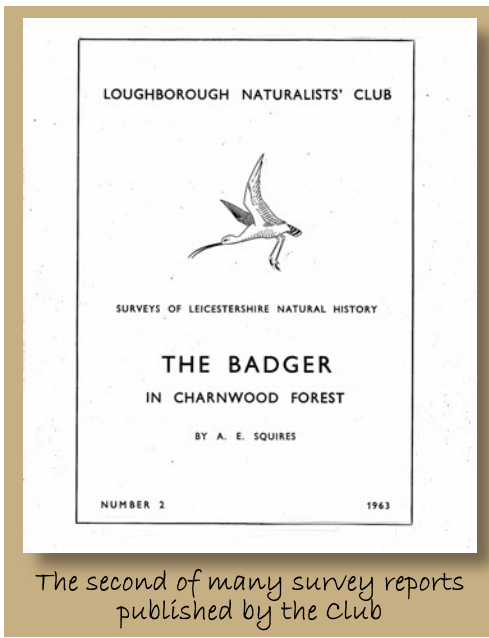


In retrospect we see that with the post-war resurgence of interest in the natural world the formation of the Club in 1960 was not before its time. Here, in the Loughborough area, was a disparate group of energetic and knowledgeable naturalists wishing to share their interest with others and promote the emerging ideas of nature conservation. In 1960 I was very fortunate to meet the late John Stacey of Coalville who had a wide knowledge of wildlife and a fine skill with a camera. John was not a 'meetings' man but we enjoyed more than 30 years friendship in the field, visiting ponds to record amphibians, plotting Rookeries and counting nests and noting the annual arrival of a single pair of Curlews at Far Coton near Market Bosworth and attempting to locate their nest. John died in 1992.

Another Club member who stood out among the rest of us was Claude Henderson. His range and depth of knowledge of natural history was astonishing. It was he who encouraged my early interest in entomology and particularly coleoptera. I would present him with a collection of mounted beetles I had caught and he would check the identifications. I remember we had particular problems with specimens of the genus *Chrysomela* where some of the species of which are rather small and rounded but bright and shiny. Claude's identification was always to be trusted.

Ian Evans joined the Leicestershire Museums Service at about the same time that the Club was formed and set about establishing the biology department on a modern footing. I was able to send him Harvest Mice for display in the museum from Wiltshire. The species was abundant there in the hay stacks at threshing time. Later, in Leicestershire, we roamed the county in search of Badger setts in a bad-tempered Second World War field ambulance which the museum owned.

During the 1960s I had the great good fortune of making two tours of East Africa: one to Uganda and one to Kenya. The whole place was a naturalist's paradise of course and I sent live



mosses in plastic bags to Mike Walpole and spiders in tubes of alcohol to John Crocker. From the first year of the Club to his death in 2006 John remained my closest friend. But while abroad I was keen to learn what was happening at home. Several Club members wrote and I still have some of our correspondence filed away somewhere. John Crocker and John Stacey kept up a supply of mini tapes for my cassette recorder. I still have some of those too.

One aspect of the LNC which was very popular in the 1960s and '70s was the field outings conducted by private car but more by coach. Happy days were spent at Scotton Common, Wicken Fen, and Wrangle Flats (to see the ducks—very cold!). And who remembers pushing the bus up Wardley Hill in snowy weather on the way to Eyebrook Reservoir?

I was chairman of the Club in 1972 and could look back over the previous 12 years with a sense of pride. Membership was very healthy, there was a strong sense of identity and the Club was held in considerable esteem locally. The indoor meetings attracted interesting and occasionally distinguished speakers and were all well attended even if they were held in the incredibly gloomy Loughborough Baptist Church Hall (now demolished) in Woodgate; and there was occasional drama to liven up an AGM!

Towards the end of the 1970s I found the focus of my interests in wildlife shifting more to the study of habitats. By the early 1980s this had moved further still so that I was asking why a particular patch of woodland came to be where it stood. Since the entire landscape of this county is the product of human activity over the millennia I wanted to know who was concerned with the changes and how the woodland had served the many generations. My initial serious foray down this route was with Charnwood Forest, long the Club's unofficial 'territory' and the Grey family of Groby who had owned much of it over five centuries. It was a great pleasure to be able to combine my dual interests of natural history and landscape history when writing the first section of the Club's *Charnwood Forest: A Changing Landscape* (1981). The combination of the two has proved beneficial in not only identifying ancient woodland sites but also in their management and conservation. It is pleasing and reassuring that so much planting, especially new planting is taking place and that Club members are consulted by the planners on this and other landscape matters.



Memories Are Made of This.....

Katherin Ward

Early in 1961 I received a handwritten letter signed by John Crocker welcoming me as a full member of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club. Becoming a full member in those far away days involved being nominated by two members who regarded you as a genuine naturalist.

Growing up on a small traditional farm gave me the opportunity to appreciate the natural world and its seasonal changes at first hand. In spring I knew in which of the ponds newts and frogs would spawn. I watched the skittish antics of the occasional Hare and recall the brush-like fur of the Moles when they surfaced from their subterranean runs. We could almost set the calendar date to April 16th for the return of the Swallows which nested in the cowshed and at the same time the call of the Cuckoos heralded the arrival of our spring.

A particular childhood memory stands out of the time when my father brought home a lame Corncrake for me to see. He described it as an "old Crake". It was released and ran along the edge of a field. In the early 1950s it must have been one of the last in the county never to be officially recorded. At harvest time we would see the newly-born Field Mice packed into their nests under the stooks of corn. We were also fascinated by the little Shrews scuttling about. During the winter months a hibernating Toad always seemed to take up residence on the third step of our cellar.

At an early age I was beginning to understand the interdependence of different species. This was brought clearly into focus when a solitary and venerable hollow oak tree blew down in an overnight gale. It was where the Tawny Owls nested and raised their young. I felt an intrinsic sadness that this area was now empty. Something special had been lost.

Flowers of the countryside became my main interest. The hand-cut hedgerows of Hawthorn, Sloe, Holly, Elderberry, willows, Hazel and pink Dog Roses were lined with Bluebells, Greater Stitchwort and campions: in a few places there were clumps of Violets. Alongside a damp ditch we were guaranteed a profusion of golden Celandines.

The arable weeds which grew at the headland of a particular cornfield were very different, not beautiful but very interesting for their habit. Mayweeds, especially the Pineapple Mayweed, Lesser Bindweed, Goose-grass, Fat Hen, Chickweed and the ever present Scarlet Pimpernel, carry memories of this being a rich habitat which also attracted many insects.



Katherin Ward

From the traditionally cut and turned hay meadows came the names of the grasses: Fox Tails, Cocksfoot and Yorkshire Fog, whilst growing around the mounds of an old bell pit there were Harebells, Salad Burnet and Ox-eye Daisies.

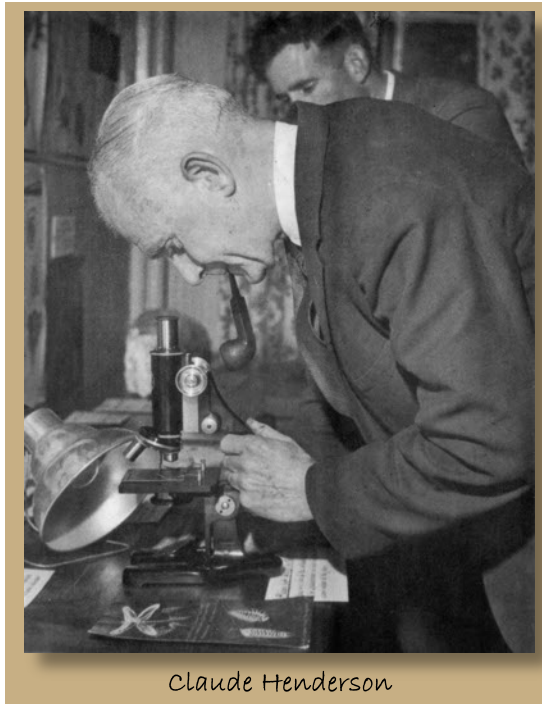
I realise with hindsight that I was gaining a real understanding of the different conditions which contributed to the making of the various habitats dotted about the fields. These were the days just before intensive cultivation became the norm and as far as I can recall, the farming methods ran easily alongside the different areas which were cherished for their wildlife.

Participating in making a collection of pressed flowers as part of a school holiday project confirmed my love of botany. I was helped by a family friend who at that time worked for the Forestry Commission. He was a coleopterist but brought a variety of new plants to my attention. This collection of over a hundred species later proved to be my introduction to Claude Henderson, who was one of the founder members of the Club. Claude became a family friend and over many years my personal mentor and one of the greatest influences in my life.

At that time Peter Gamble and Mike Walpole (also founder members of the Club) and Claude were busy photographing the orchids of Great Britain. Claude, like all genuine naturalists, was generous in sharing his knowledge. During the following years I was taken to see the orchids and other notable plants at many of the prime sites in the country.

My first outing with the Club was to Millers Dale. John and Marcene Crocker made a special journey to collect me. It was a kindness which also founded a lifelong friendship. On this trip Claude was at his effervescent best, the aim of the day being to find the Grass of Parnassus. One had to experience the exuberant blowing of a whistle and the shouts of joy which announced that these particular plants had been found. I spent many of my student days studying the ecology of many of the Derbyshire sites. It is a county which has continued to reward us with its rich flora and glorious days.

As a coleopterist, Claude occasionally took us 'beetling'. We visited Wicken Fen for its variety of water beetles and Bedford Purlieus for the tiny iridescent *Apion astrogali*.



Claude Henderson



Death's-head Hawkmoth painting by Claude Henderson

On his visits to view the beetle collections at the Natural History Museum Claude would return with gifts of boxed specimens of exotic butterflies and moths. I still retain these together with his letters, paintings of beetles and a small sample collection of beetles and one of his paintings of the beautifully coloured diurnal moth *Chrysidia madagascariensis*. This was kindly given to me by John and Marcene Crocker.

My membership of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club is not that of a high-flying naturalist but that of someone with a genuine regard for the well-being of the countryside and therefore, for the members who are dedicated to recording our local natural history with a view towards aiding its long-term conservation.

I have often served on the Committee and various sub-Committees. For a short time I was the Membership Secretary and for over 25 years I have been involved with and organised many of the exhibitions.

Peter Gamble and John Crocker always led by example when it came to the importance of good record keeping. They also had a long-term vision towards publishing. Originally members' records were circulated in *The Portfolio* and we were informed by postcard of any 'must-see' sightings. This system was soon superseded by the introduction of the newsletter and *Heritage* - our quarterly bulletin.

In the early days, any reprographics were done on a hand-turned 'Banda'; then came the photocopying machines. Kay Gilbert (the then Club Secretary) and I spent days at John Storer House in Loughborough turning out page after page for the Groby report. Nevertheless, after all this prolonged work the report appeared. Such reports, together with other publications and our extensive records, now form part of our growing archival collection.

The publication entitled *Charnwood Forest: A Changing Landscape* was based on the Charnwood Forest survey undertaken by Club members and directed by John Crocker. It was based on years of systematic recording which included the field-by-field survey and the woodland and hedgerow survey. Also included were sections on the geology and the history of the area. Much hard work and dedication were shown by the Publications Committee as well as everyone involved in the fieldwork and those involved in writing scripts, fund raising, historical research, photographing sites and in producing the finished maps. This landmark publication was brought to a successful conclusion in 1981.

As the secretary to the Publications Committee I witnessed the many debates, some with an eye to humour. A discussion on the dating of hedgerows based on the number of species to be found in a given length. The following comment caused general amusement, "Well, in that case, my row of runner beans is getting on for 500 years old!"

Our reports and publications continue and with the introduction of digital photography and computer technology, text and illustrations are easier to assemble.

Over the years our exhibitions have provided a vital link with the general public. My involvement with exhibitions began with the preparation for the exhibition in Loughborough Town Hall celebrating our 25th Anniversary. For the celebration of the 40th Anniversary we held



Page from Pulteney's 1747 manuscript
Image courtesy Leicestershire County Council

an exhibition at the Charnwood Museum in Loughborough. The 50th Anniversary was celebrated at Snibston Discovery Park Museum.

The various museums services have always supported our exhibitions. From the beginning Ian Evans and Jan Dawson were supportive of our exhibitions and loaned us prime specimens from their collections held at the New Walk Museum. Collecting and ensuring the safe return of a particularly fragile freeze-dried Adder on several occasions was quite a nerve-racking experience for me. Equally, transporting a beautifully mounted Lapwing and chick dated 26th May 1886 together with other precious specimens through the Leicester

rush hour and on to our exhibition to celebrate the opening of the new museum at Ashby-de-la-Zouch in 2007 proved a similar experience for Peter Wilkinson.

In the course of researching the history of the early Leicestershire naturalists for the Ashby exhibition we have been privileged to look through the records contained in the work of Dr Richard Pulteney (1730-1801). He was responsible for the first records of many plant species to be found in Leicestershire; particularly in Charnwood Forest. His precious and lovely little flora contains his botanical illustrations accompanied by pages of hand-written script. Thanks for this are due to Jan Dawson at the New Walk Museum.

We have also been able to view some of the herbarium specimens of the genus *Rubus* dated 1850 and collected by the Rev Andrew Bloxam.

Being involved in the activities of the Club brings its own rewards whether it is in fieldwork or research. The camaraderie too is marvellous.

With regard to fieldwork, my special spot has always been Cademan Moor. From a very early age I loved the rocky outcrops and the 'feel' of the place. I recall walking through the moor up to the little 19th century sepulchre chapel which stood in gothic decay in the vicinity. In 1953 it was rebuilt in the grounds of Mount St. Bernard Abbey.

It is with some satisfaction that my few articles in the annual reports recorded something of the nature of this precious example of local acid heath. My days spent there with Peter and Margaret Gamble looking at the flora and the insects, 'beetling' about with Derek Lott and Gillian and Phillip Carpenter and most recently, observing the systematic recording being undertaken by Helen Ikin and Stephen Woodward, as part of the larger Grace



Helen Ikin and Steve Woodward
weighing a small mammal

Dieu Survey, are worth a lifetime's experience and show what a wonderful place this area has proved to be. Due to the encroachment of Birch over the moor, conservation work has now begun, under the auspices of Natural England, to help to reinstate this important local habitat.

Living in Markfield, I have always been aware of the importance of the underlying geology (Southern Diorite). At the old Markfield Quarry I recall a few plants of the Common Polypody Fern *Polypodium vulgare* agg. growing there. Recently, I had difficulty in locating any. One conspicuous plant grew by the side of a steep footway, but in recent years has not been seen. At Hill Hole and Altar Stones, John Crocker discovered the nationally rare spider *Mastigusa macrophthalma*. Derek Lott worked on collecting beetles in the same areas. Altar Stones is a Regionally Important Geological Site and is now managed by the LRWT. The outcrops of the rocks are a visual delight and the site of many important lichens.

In recent years, alongside the Markfield by-pass (A50) a glorious stand of the Southern Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* caused great enthusiasm, but with the lack of continuous and caring maintenance these plants are in a sad state of decline. On the southern side of the road we have a road-side nature reserve. Growing on the steep bank with a shallow substrate, the Bee Orchid has been recorded. Now nature has taken its course and sadly there have been no records for a few years.

To me, one delight still to be seen in the remaining small stone-walled hay fields around the village is the Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*.

As environmentalists and conservationists, we have our work cut out to make sure that our treasured sites, whether large or small, are recorded and protected for the precious species which we all find delight in recording.

Early Memories of the Club

Michael Webster

Born in the city of Leicester in the shadow of the Cathedral, I spent much of my childhood roaming the fields around Leicester Forest East, listening to Woodpigeons cooing and watching the passage of seasons marked by such things as where the Robins nested and the Ringlet butterfly was to be seen.

Teenage years were spent in angst, so I left school as soon as I could for a job. A few years later I decided to complete my education. I went to Loughborough Technical College and came into contact with the two technicians of the science department, Peter Gamble and Claude Henderson. With their help, biology lessons became more associated with the field natural history that I loved, but knew so little about and they suggested that I join the newly formed Loughborough Naturalists' Club which I did in 1968. Here I met others keenly interested in the natural world such as Jack Otter, John Crocker and Michael Walpole.

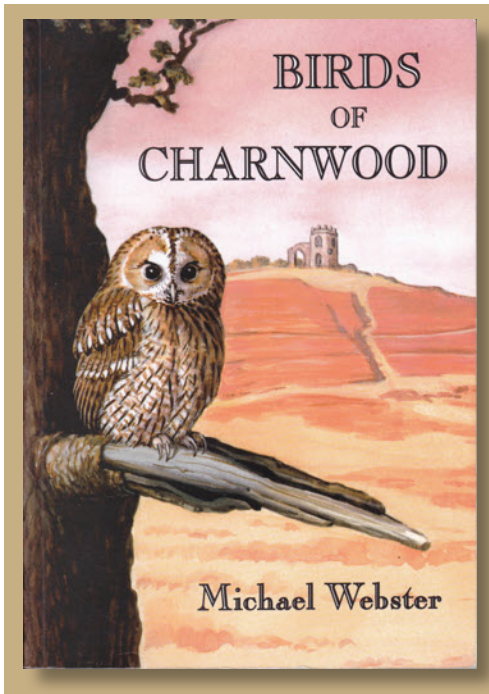
The Club organised many coach outings and I joined in as many as I could. One such outing was to Malham Tarn on a gloriously sunny spring day. There were perhaps 50 or so people, members, their families and friends. Later that season we visited the Wisbech Sewage Farm, this location has now been closed for many years, but then, its stinking gooey settlement beds were a magnet for migratory birds and on the day in question I remember seeing two remarkable sights. The first was a flock of buoyant Black Terns coursing up and down feeding on the wing. I had never seen these birds before and they were a marvel as they passed within 20 yards of where we watched. The second vision of beauty, far eclipsing the Black Terns, was a girl with fuzzy bright red hair. The Black Tern is a species that I see only a few times a year and sometimes not at all. Our paths cross usually in the springtime at our local reservoirs as the birds pass through on migration, occasionally windblown from Eastern Europe. Not so the girl with red fuzzy hair; we have been happily married for over 30 years!

The first overseas field trip the Club made was to Majorca in the spring of 1972 and for this trip Claude Henderson produced a wonderful 20-page guide to the wildlife we might find there. Shortly after this I was away to university, with my head full of the thoughts of Marmora's Warblers and rare orchids.

I have always retained my membership of the Club for the very good reason that the Club has within it many of the foremost field naturalists in the county. Many of these have distinct skills honed over time spent in the field but more importantly they together form a formidable fount of knowledge as to local ecology. Most of what I know about natural history I have learnt from them.



Michael Webster



I returned to Leicestershire and have lived in Charnwood Forest ever since. For quite a few years I edited both the bird and mammal notes for the Club and realised then how many Club members have both natural history expertise and a passion for it. In subsequent years my field recording gave way to more direct conservation and education efforts and a close association with the Wildlife Trust. Family life inevitably dominates most of our lives and our son who is now a professional zoologist living in Canada spent some of his early years going to LNC events.

There is no moral to this story except that being a member of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club has provided me not with just happy memories, but moreover with an added purpose in life and a reason to get up every morning, for as the great social psychologist Edward de Bono said of memories: "memories are what is left when something happens and never completely un-happens".



Flora and Fauna: Fifty Years of Change

Since the Club was formed in late 1960 some species have undergone a marked change in status: many species have declined whilst some have been lost, a few species have increased and an appreciable number of new species have colonised our Vice-County 55.

The following accounts represent our attempts to mention and look at some of these changes.

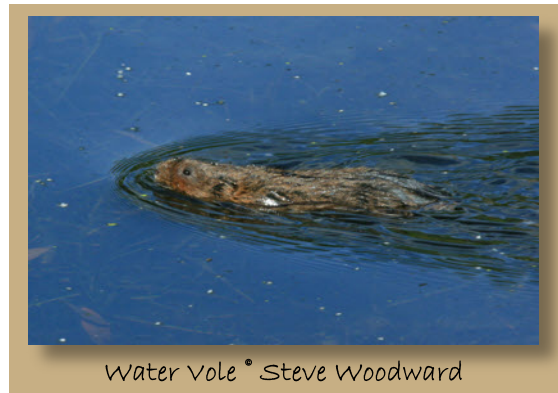
Mammals

Peter Gamble

The **Hedgehog** has declined and is no longer seen in many areas where it was formerly common and away from large town and city parks is a rare animal in most large conurbations. In rural areas they must be affected by the large quantities of molluscicides used on arable fields destroying would-be food sources. Throughout the period under discussion huge numbers of this particularly susceptible animal have been killed on our roads and the reduction of road casualties over more recent times is doubtless indicative of the scale of decline in this species.

The **Water Shrew**, although formerly recorded at a good number of wetland sites, appears less frequent nowadays and I know of nowhere today where one could reasonably rely on seeing one. Considering the big increase over recent decades of apparently suitable habitat for this species in the shape of flooded gravel pits there must be something preventing its spread. Could this, as with the **Water Vole**, be the presence of **Mink**?

Largely through the work of the Leicestershire Bat Group we know that rare bat species such as the **Greater Horse-shoe**, **Brandt's**, **Leisler's** and **Barbastelle** have been recorded in VC55 during the period under review but numbers of bats in general continue to remain low, an all time low in my experience. The big reduction over recent years in their insect prey, the lack of suitable hibernacula and breeding places in modern and modernised buildings plus the widespread use of toxic insecticides and fungicides used in timber treatment in lofts and roof spaces must all be factors in this decline as also must be the paucity of really old veteran trees in the countryside and lack of suitable insect rich habitat in large areas of intensively cultivated farmland.



The **Brown Hare**, while still locally frequent in some rural areas, has disappeared from some parishes such as mine at Quorn. In some cases the decline, or disappearance, may be due to the lack of suitable tussocky fields for the leverets to lie up in cover, something particularly necessary for them in areas with high populations of Foxes, Badgers and Buzzards. Populations can remain satisfactory in large arable areas with a good diversity of crops giving some cover throughout the year. In at least some cases their absence may be the result of night time poachers with lamps and dogs. Significant numbers are also killed on our roads where Hares sometimes try to outrun fast cars.

The **Grey Squirrel** is especially numerous at present and there can be little doubt that the fact that they are cashing in on the abundant food put out for birds is helping to keep their numbers high in both towns and countryside; it is now frequent in many gardens situated well away from woodland. Though not generally accepted, the current high numbers of this small 'predator' may well prove to be partly responsible for the decline in various song birds.

In 1962 two hibernating **Dormice** were found in ground level nests of leaves and moss in Owston Wood and in 1974 a typical summer nest was found in replanted coppice at the same locality. Two years later a **Dormouse** was found and photographed running along a wire fence on the eastern side of the wood and in 1985 Dormouse-opened nuts were found at the same locality. In 1987 a **Dormouse** was found in Launde Park Wood and in the 1990s several males and females of this attractive species were found in Pickworth Great Wood during a summer nest-box survey carried out by the Forestry Commission. However, since this time the only reports have come from Owston Wood where it has been reported on a couple of occasions. Such small, localised populations must be considered highly vulnerable and I worry at how they may cope nowadays with the present huge numbers of Grey Squirrel.



Grey Squirrel © Jim Graham

The arrival and rapid spread of the American Mink in the 1980s and '90s brought about a catastrophic decline of our local populations of **Water Vole** and it is now absent from our waterways where it was once so common. It will be interesting to see how new populations fare in places such as Rutland Water where it is currently being introduced or reintroduced.

Recent reports of the **Harvest Mouse** have been few and far between and attempts to find nests in some of their former haunts, such as Swithland Reservoir, have so far proved negative. However, plenty of suitable habitats still occur for this easily overlooked species and concerted efforts to search suitable places may well reveal new colonies.

During recent decades extensive quarrying in Leicestershire has destroyed many, if not most, of the best ancestral breeding and foraging areas of the **Badger** and the spread of housing and other forms of development have greatly restricted suitable foraging areas adjacent to setts, often resulting in them invading gardens to the annoyance of the people concerned. Also, whereas much suitable foraging habitat still remains along the river valleys where sand and gravel have been extracted, these places are often unsuitable for breeding setts on account of their high water tables and flooding. However, despite the reduction in suitable habitat and the high numbers of road casualties, the numbers of **Badgers** throughout most of our countryside remain high.



Stoat on Rabbit © Steve Woodward

Both the **Stoat** and the **Weasel**, though still recorded regularly, seem to be less common than formerly and are rarely noted crossing our country lanes nowadays whereas in the Club's early days this was a common sight.

The arrival of the **American Mink** two to three decades ago was in many ways a disaster as far as our

aquatic environment is concerned and having become established only limited control would seem possible. It is sad that the **European Mink** is struggling to survive throughout much of its range while the closely related **American Mink** has found no difficulty in spreading quickly throughout much of Britain.

Having spread from remnant strongholds in central west Wales, the **Polecat** is now found throughout the West Midlands and in July 1994 a road casualty, apparently a genuine **Polecat**, was found in Leicestershire on the A5 near Wibtoft. Other **Polecat** road casualties have since been reported in VC55 suggesting this formerly widespread species may be on the verge of re-colonising our local countryside.



Polecat © Ian Gamble

As in other Midland counties, the **Otter** has spread along and re-colonised many of our waterways during recent decades and although rarely seen, their spraints (droppings) are widely reported as are, unfortunately, road casualties. It will be interesting to see if, as some believe, their presence brings about a reduction in numbers of Mink. In addition to being recorded along our brooks and rivers sightings have also been reported for reservoirs, including Rutland Water, Eybrook Reservoir and Swithland Reservoir.

The **Chinese** or **Reeves' Muntjac** is now frequent and widespread throughout our woodlands and places which offer good cover but because of its small size can be easily overlooked. Favoured habitat includes large residential gardens in which many sightings are reported. It has a distinctive barking call.

Since 1990 the **Roe Deer** has, after a long absence become resident again in VC55. The first positive sightings came from east Leicestershire having spread, presumably from German stock introduced into Norfolk. In recent years it has been seen along the Soar Valley and in Charnwood Forest. It is a small attractive deer and a welcome addition to our fauna.

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Acknowledgement:

I am grateful to Jan Dawson for allowing me to read her unpublished notes: *Leicestershire Mammal History, 1795 – 2007*.

Birds

Bas Forgham

Natural history is ever changing and from the start of time there has been constant change. It would seem therefore that the changes in 50 years would be infinitesimal within that time span but this is far from the case.

Global warming is a subject that was in its infancy 50 years ago and although still controversial has had an effect on some species but most of the changes we have seen are not related to this problem, more the changes to habitat. Although most of the changes have been detrimental some have been for the good; Rutland Water being a case in point.

Amazingly some of the bird reports submitted to *Heritage* nowadays would have been queried at least, and probably ignored, for publication by the first editor. These reports concern birds that are reasonably common now which were rare or virtually non-existent in the country at that time. Likewise birds which were quite common in those early days are far rarer now and there are a few examples below.

Obviously all species cannot be looked at but some generalisations can be made and only 'snapshots' into old *Heritages* have been considered, not the maximum counts ever, etc.



Farmland birds have declined probably more than any other group and here the changes are obvious. **Tree Sparrow** records are few and far between these days and the only regular place I know is Staunton Harold Reservoir feeding station. In *Heritage* No 4 (winter 1961/62), it was stated that **Tree Sparrows** were more plentiful and there was a mixed flock of sparrows and finches near Cropston which contained probably a thousand **Tree Sparrows**. If that record was to come in now it would probably be queried by the editor! **Corn Buntings** cannot be guaranteed anywhere in the county

nowadays but in 1961 there were seven pairs on half of Loughborough Big Meadows and in 1965 there were ten singing males there. In 1970 it was thought that the birds were extending their breeding range probably due to 'prairie farming'. From the 1980s the numbers dropped gradually to the numbers we have today.

Although we assume that the numbers of **Yellowhammers** have reduced in the last 50 years there is evidence that the reduction happened before the birth of the Club. In 1973 a walk from Woodhouse to Swithland produced none "but 25 years ago there would have been many pairs". At Charnwood Lodge NR in 1978, 38 pairs were found. There are actually as many reports of this species now as there were 50 years ago but unfortunately not as many breeding pairs. The same can be said of **Skylarks**: there are no records in the early years of large flocks and it would appear that the demise took place before the Club existed. The saving grace for this

species is that the old colliery spoil-heaps, the opencast coal reclamations and old gravel workings are good habitats to replace the old meadows. In the spring of 1961 **Whinchats** were thought to be getting scarcer with only one or two pairs at Loughborough Big Meadows and others at Scraftoft, Stoughton, Bradgate Park and Bosworth. There was a good number of reports in 1969 but they slowly tapered off after that. In the summer of 1967 **Yellow Wagtails** were breeding in many areas and the records show that the demise of this species as a breeding bird did not happen until much later in the eighties and nineties. Some still breed today but are few and far between. In autumn 1963 several hundred **Linnets** were feeding in fields at the now much altered Loughborough Sewage Farm. **Turtle Doves** were already in decline in those days but in 1968 there were “good numbers” with breeding at Ratby Burroughs, Ashby Pastures and Burrough on the Hill. Interestingly the **Grey Partridge** is mentioned infrequently in the early bulletins but in 1967 “the Common Partridge for the most part being more plentiful” (relative to the **Red-legged** in the county). In 1969 “the Common Partridge seems to be undergoing a marked decline”. That decline has continued until now when very few **Grey Partridge** are reported.



Yellow Wagtail © Jim Graham

I doubt if a **Common Snipe** has nested in the county for a few years but in the sixties they were not common but regularly bred at Ulverscroft, Botcheston and Charnwood Lodge NR. Winter flocks were large, 400 at Kelham Bridge in January was one record in 1969, the same site can just about produce a double-figure winter count nowadays. **Lapwings** nested throughout the county in those days but there were very few breeding records mentioned in the records. Winter flocks of up to 3,000 were recorded with some regularity. “Nests suffered in the wet weather” in 1967 was one of the few reports of nesting birds. In 1984 an article in *Heritage* was asking for all records of these two species as there were very few reports of either bird. Unfortunately the demise continued.

Woodcock can still be found roding in Charnwood but in the sixties they were seen regularly over most of the local woodlands with some areas supporting more than one pair. There has been a slow downturn in numbers since 1994 when Michael Webster, in *Birds of Charnwood* estimated that there were 41 males in the Charnwood woodlands.

Though not classed as a farmland bird, the **Spotted Flycatcher** “was more numerous” in 1963 and a great many family parties were well in evidence throughout the county. This bird appears to have been a regular breeder until at least the late seventies but there was a steady decline after that. Two pairs of **Wood Warbler** were present in Swithland Woods and at Beacon Hill in 1964. The birds hung on until the eighties (singing was heard in seven different areas in 1981) but there was a rapid decline after that. In 1963 the **Redstart** was still to be found locally and “13 nests were located on Charnwood Forest” There were “many breeding pairs” the



Redstart © Jim Graham

following year. Like the previous species nesting birds were found until the late seventies but after that the reports were much reduced and there were no breeding records of **Redstart** in 1984.

Many members of the public can be heard bemoaning the fact that they “have not heard a **Cuckoo** this year” and indeed the numbers have dropped over the last 50 years. However our members have not been good over the years at reporting numbers. They were exceedingly scarce in 1962, increasing in 1963, 1964 and 1965. Apart from arrival dates they were not mentioned again until 1975 when “they were very late and scarce”; there were many more in 1978 and even more in 1982. Numbers have obviously fluctuated since then but generally downwards. With previous differences year-on-year there is still hope that numbers will increase in the future.

All the above birds have very few reports and sometimes none at all in *Heritage* nowadays.

Even the species which we still think as common like the **House Sparrow** and the **Starling** have suffered big declines but as they started from a large base population the demise has not been fully appreciated yet. Unfortunately many more species will have decreased in number.

One bird that has a similar number of reports now as 50 years ago is the **Collared Dove**. This is not because the numbers have been constant but exactly the reverse. In 1960 the **Collared Dove** had only just established itself in England and the first reference to it in *Heritage* is a breeding attempt in Sibleby in 1964. In the following year it became more common and since that time has become so numerous that it now appears in everyone’s gardens and so there are few reports as members are blasé about this all too common species.

Most summer passerine migrants are less common nowadays with conditions in Africa probably as much to blame as our own habitat loss. Without checking facts I imagine that only two birds are holding their own: the **Whitethroat**, although that went through a bad patch in the late sixties and early seventies due to severe drought in the Sahel in Africa and the **Blackcap** some of which (not necessarily the same birds) now also overwinter.

Surprisingly all the changes have not been for the worse. One bird that could be classed in the farmland category is the **Goldfinch**. In recent years it has become a garden regular thanks to the public’s love of feeding birds. In this case the increase is probably due to the sale of nyger seed which the birds can’t resist!

One summer migrant that has certainly become more common is the **Common Tern**. In the early years most reports were of Common/Arctic Terns passing through but in 1967 the first pair of **Common Tern** to nest in the county was found at Wanlip Gravel Pits. In recent summer months nesting birds can be found on many of the water bodies and in large numbers at Rutland Water. Another migrant that has increased in numbers is the **Hobby**. The Club was 12 years old

when the first sighting occurred, around Swithland Reservoir; a pair was present there the following year and records gradually became more frequent. Although still not very common it would be unusual to have no reports during the summer months. The **Greylag Goose** is very noticeable around the Soar Valley with goslings early in the season every year at various sites. It is difficult to believe therefore that a note in 1966 read: "It is many years since a **Greylag Goose** was recorded in the county so consequently one seen at Hugglescote on 17th April is of particular interest". It was noted afterwards that six birds had escaped from Peakirk Wildfowl Reserve shortly before that date so it need not have been a wild bird, but the increase in numbers since then has been remarkable. **Ruddy Ducks** are not as common as the previous species, their

numbers reduced in recent years due to culling. The first reference to them in *Heritage* was in 1969 when there was one at Stanford Reservoir in September. Knowing the amount of **Cormorants** seen at most of the reservoirs nowadays and breeding at some of them, it is surprising to note that in 1961 "a **Cormorant** was seen on several occasions at Swithland and Cropston Reservoirs". Not uncommon along streams and reservoir margins in the area is the **Little Egret**. Back in 1960 it would have been unheard of to report this species and it was not until 1982 that the first was seen in the county. This is



Little Egret © Ian Gamble

one of the birds which has probably moved north due to global warming and no doubt will breed locally in the near future.

It would be quite possible and not unusual now to submit a bird report containing **Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, Peregrine and Raven**. Back in 1960 this would have been unheard of. There may well have been a lone high flying passage Buzzard or Peregrine but that would be all.

In the late 1950s and early '60s birds of prey were suffering from pesticide poisoning, the **Sparrowhawk** being the only local bird to suffer as there were no Buzzards or Peregrines in the vicinity. (**Kestrels** did not appear to be affected as much as the other predators). By the end of the first quarter 1962 a note in *Heritage* stated "No positive reports of **Sparrowhawks** have been received this year". Later in the year only three were noted. In the following year a note said "It really looks as though this not so long ago frequent resident species may have ceased to exist as a local breeding bird" Such is the resilience of birds that we now get around 50 records every quarter!



Raven © Ian Gamble

Buzzard records began to increase in the early 1990s, when reports started coming in from the Belvoir area. Before long, into the teens of birds could be seen from vantage points in that

area. Similar sightings soon became regular over Charnwood and the North West of the county with many breeding pairs. Now in some quarterly bulletins this species is recorded more than any other predator.

Peregrines nationally suffered the same fate as the **Sparrowhawk** with pesticide poisoning but they also recovered their numbers, surprisingly moving to the county as they did so. Sightings became regular around Swithland Reservoir and in 1994 a pair successfully reared young. Since that date it would appear that there are pairs breeding in all of the county's suitable quarries and at least one man-built structure in the north-west of the county.

The **Barn Owl** population is always difficult to assess; sightings, usually in car headlights are the main source of records. In the early years there was a regular one or two records per quarter with minor variations. Through the eighties the numbers dropped slightly with records coming mainly from the east of the county. The advent of Barn Owl nest boxes and the recent run of mild winters have increased the population but in some quarters the records are back to one or two sightings.

The first **Raven** recorded in *Heritage* was in October 1974 when two were seen at Eastwell. There are few if any reports after that until the early 2000s when odd birds were seen around Charnwood. In 2004 a pair bred at Breedon Quarry and since then they have spread to other sites but are not yet common.



Mention must be made of the **Red Kite**. The records in the early years were few and far between; single sightings in 1976, 1978 and 1982. The observations would have probably stayed at that frequency had it not been for the introduction of the species into neighbouring Northamptonshire in 1995. The birds gradually spread to the county and can now be seen infrequently in any part of the county.

Other birds which I think have increased in number, without checking for evidence are **Gadwall**, **Tufted Duck** and **Water Rail**.

Let us hope that in the next 50 years there will not be as many losses and that the tide can be turned. This will take a great effort by all of us but we are obliged to make that effort.

Reptiles and Amphibians

Tony Onions

The Amphibians and Reptiles tend to live rather secretive lives: going about their business unnoticed, except for the period of the breeding season. They tend to be rather secretive, unobtrusive creatures, which are not readily observable unless you go out of your way to look for them and this does have implications for our records: it is very possible that some species may well be considerably under-recorded and it does make it very difficult to come to any meaningful conclusions concerning the status of some species in Leicestershire.

In Leicestershire we have four species of reptile, and five species of amphibian, although the **Pool Frog *Rana lessonae*** was recorded from Rutland Water during the Bioblitz in 2012.

Common or Viviparous Lizard *Zootoca vivipara*

It appears that, in the past, the Common Lizard, like the Common Frog and the Common Toad, rather lived up to its name. During the nineteen-sixties and seventies this species appears to have been very common all over the Charnwood Forest area, with specimens – often more than one – being reported from Shepshed Cemetery, a disused quarry near Whitwick, and the Coalville area. In the early 1960s there were also reports from Windmill Hill, Woodhouse Eaves, and a garden at Nanpantan. Perhaps not surprisingly, Bradgate Park was also a hotspot throughout the 1960s. Populations also existed on Mountsorrel Common and on the Charnwood Lodge NR. Specimens were also found at the boundary wall of Buddon Wood, at the Brand and at Ulverscroft. During the 1970s, there were regular sightings in the Charnwood Forest area: at High Sharpley, Roecliffe, and Beacon Hill. In addition to Bradgate Park, Swithland Reservoir also appears to have been something of a hotspot. During the 1980s, up until 1985, there were regular sightings at Benscliffe, Bradgate Park, Buddon Hill, Beacon Hill, and the Brand. Additionally, during this whole period, there were sightings from time to time from the eastern side of the county, from Eastwell, and from the Luffenham area in Rutland.



Common Lizard © Steve Woodward

According to the 1997 Red Data book it had been found in 30 localities in the county since 1979. Recently we have had several sightings of the Common Lizard, all from the Charnwood Forest area. However, it is noticeable that these days the sightings tend to be of single specimens, or small numbers, rather than the much larger numbers seen in the 1960s and '70s.

Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*

It seems that our commonest reptile here in Leicestershire is the Grass Snake, very simply because we receive regular reports of sightings for this reptile from different areas of the county, including some sites which are fairly close to human habitation. It seems that the Grass Snake

has three simple requirements: water, warmth, and a plentiful supply of food! This explains why we typically find them at lower altitudes, near watercourses. Back in the 1960s I can well remember coming across Grass Snakes at the side of the Ashby Canal, near Market Bosworth, and at the side of the River Wreake, near Thrussington; and I can see no reason why they should not still be there. It seems that Grass Snakes like to lay their eggs in manure or compost heaps, taking advantage of the heat which is generated by the rotting vegetation - which explains why they often turn up in places like the allotments at Birstall. In recent years we have had regular sightings from a number of different locations, as well as sloughed skins turning up from time to time. Since 2010 we have had sightings in Birstall and at New Lount NR; while on the eastern side of the county they have been seen at Holwell and the Melton Mowbray Country Park. We have also had reports from a lake, near Gaddesby.



It seems that the Grass Snake is probably under reported and is in fact thriving, especially in areas where it is not unduly disturbed.

Adder *Vipera berus*



The Adder tends to be mainly associated with dry heathland and moorland so the uncultivated areas of Charnwood Forest, such as Beacon Hill and Bradgate Park, would appear to be ideal habitat, and certainly we have a history of sightings of Adders from these areas. However, in the past, the Adder has actually been found elsewhere in the county. During the first 25 years of the Club, during the 1960s and '70s, we had regular sightings of Adders from various sites in Charnwood Forest: Beacon Hill,

The Outwoods, Charnwood Lodge NR, Benscliffe Wood, the banks of Cropston and Swithland Reservoirs, Buddon Wood, and, of course, Bradgate Park. However, there were also sightings in the 1960s from Waltham-on-the-Wolds, Saltby and the woodland adjacent to Willesley Lake, near Ashby.

However, according to the Red Data Book, between 1988 and 1997, only four sites for the Adder had been recorded, and those four were all near Ketton, in Rutland. During the last couple of years, we have had records of Adders only from Ketton and Bradgate Park.

Although we do need to be careful about the conclusions we reach on the basis of these sightings, it does seem that the Adder is one of those species which has seen a decline in recent years.

Slow Worm *Anguis fragilis*

Sadly, the Slow Worm appears to be another reptile whose populations have declined here in Leicestershire in recent years. During the first 25 years of the Club, between 1960 and 1985, there were annual sightings of this reptile from Charnwood Forest and adjacent areas. In 1963 several specimens were found in a disused quarry near Whitwick. Specimens were also seen at Shepshed Cemetery, and near the ruins in Bradgate Park.



In fact, we continue to have sightings every other year from different areas within Bradgate Park, up until 1985. During the same period we also have sightings from Buddon Wood and Swithland Woods, as well as sightings in Ulverscroft Lane, and Abbots Oak Drive in Coalville. During the 1970s, there were sightings from a meadow at Mountsorrel, the dam at Blackbrook Reservoir, Priory Road in Loughborough, a garden in Quorn, and Benscliffe Cottage and Benscliffe Wood. During the 1980s, there were sightings at Buddon Wood, Benscliffe Wood, and The Outwoods, as well as the occasional road casualty.

However, according to the 1997 Red Data Book, there had been a steady decline in the numbers of this reptile in recent years, particularly in the Charnwood Forest area, with recent reports having come from Rutland. Sadly, the lack of recent reports tends to bear this out. In the last year or two we have not recorded any sightings for this reptile. However, we had sightings in Quorn during 2011. Nevertheless, it does appear that there are real questions concerning the status of this reptile in Leicestershire.

Common Frog *Rana temporaria*



In the past, the Common Frog was indeed common and was found all over the county, and although its populations may have been reduced in some areas as a result of urban sprawl, it seems that it still remains our most common amphibian, not least because of its willingness to exploit small garden ponds as spawning sites. The Common Frog prefers relatively still water in which to spawn, and that can mean anything from a shallow ditch to a reservoir – or even a very slow-flowing stream. And so I propose to list only a variety including the more

important breeding sites, listed by Bell, and a few less likely sites, in order to show how flexible the Common Frog can be in its choice of breeding sites.

In the early 1960s, Frogs bred in four ponds on Bardon Hill, and also in a nearby stream. On Beacon Hill they spawned in a pond and presumably still do. They also spawned at various

sites on the Charnwood Lodge NR, including Colony Reservoir. As one might expect, Bradgate Park and the surrounding area was a hotspot, with 11 sites altogether. These included not only several ponds, but also three sites on the Ulverscroft Brook, and 'flowing ditches'. Frogs were also found in the reedswamp at the southern end of Cropston Reservoir. Other spawning sites in the area included one at Benscliffe Cottage and one at Mountsorrel. Further afield, there were also spawning sites at Kegworth, Kirby Muxloe, Ravenstone, Sileby, Swannington, Whitwick and at various sites around Loughborough. Other records came from the south and east of the county and within the city of Leicester.

In recent years, our sightings have come from two main sources - Ulverscroft NR, and Grace Dieu Wood and other reports tend to have come from people's gardens. In 2010, the writer found large numbers of young Frogs in the grass surrounding Dishley Pool, on the northern outskirts of Loughborough: back in the 1960s Dishley Pool did not exist! It may perhaps be true that the Common Frog is not as common as it used to be; however it is willing to colonise new sites as and when they become available, and consequently its decline has not been as dramatic as that of some other species.

Common Toad *Bufo bufo*

As with the Common Frog, the Common Toad appears to have lived up to its name in past times. During the 1960s and '70s, it seemed to be distributed all across the county, albeit more thinly than the Common Frog. However, it is more of a lowland species than the Frog, and has traditionally been scarcer on the uplands. The main difference seems to be that the Toad appears to be more selective in its choice of breeding grounds. In the past, it has often used the same sites as the Common Frog, but not necessarily all of them. The suggestion is that the Toad tends to favour larger bodies of water, rather than streams and ditches. Outside the brief period of the spawning season, the Toad is very much a terrestrial animal. It crawls, rather than hops, and therefore does not travel as quickly as the Common Frog. It may live at some distance from its breeding site: as much as two miles away. On the other hand, unlike the more agile Frog, it does have an inbuilt defence mechanism to protect it from predators. The 'warty' skin contains glands which release an irritant and poisonous fluid in the event of an attack.



Common Toad ° Steve Woodward

Generally speaking there are records of Toads from more or less every part of the county; however, there are not that many well-recorded breeding sites. According to Bell, on Charnwood Forest, the Common Toad tends to spawn slightly later than the Common Frog. And so, for example, in 1964, at Benscliffe Cottage, the Frogs spawned on the 6 April, and the Toads on the 13 April at the same site. During that period there were a number of recorded sites on the Forest, including several sites in Bradgate Park. In the Park itself there were five sites: two ponds and

three silt ponds on the River Lin. Toads were also found around Cropston Reservoir and Bell felt that they almost certainly bred there. There were also sites on Bardon Hill, later destroyed, the pool at Benscliffe Cottage, a pool on Beacon Hill, and in Blackbrook Reservoir. They also bred in the Colony Reservoir on the Charnwood Lodge NR, in a quarry at Markfield and in another at Mountsorrel. There were also breeding sites at Loughborough, Lount, Sileby, and Whitwick. Other breeding sites were noted in the south of the county and in Leicester city. Sightings of individual specimens were, however, far more widespread across the whole of the county.

As individuals, it seems that Toads are quite likely to turn up in gardens, and indeed most of our recent recorded sightings have come from suburban areas.

Smooth or Common Newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*

As its name implies, this is our most common species, and in the past has been recorded from many sites all across Leicestershire. In addition, this species appears to be happy to colonise garden ponds, and now that is where our sightings seem to come from. Having said that, no species of newt appears to be very common; it may be that these species are simply under-recorded. Interestingly, the Common Newt appears to favour small ponds with no preference for the type of soil, or the water quality. Consequently, although there appear to be more and larger populations in the Charnwood Forest area, they are also found in the areas of lime-rich soil on the eastern side of the county. Bell lists 19 breeding sites for the Common Newt in the Charnwood area, and 26 on the eastern side of the county. As far as Charnwood Forest is concerned, it seems that in the past Bradgate Park boasted a large breeding population. Elsewhere on the Forest, there were breeding records from Anstey, Bardon Hill, Benscliffe Cottage, Groby quarry, Mountsorrel, Newtown Linford, The Outwoods and Whitwick. Bell also notes that the Smooth Newt had survived surprisingly well within the city of Leicester itself, with breeding populations being found at several sites in Braunstone, Humberstone, St. Margaret's Mills and the grounds of Leicester University.

As Bell points out, the Common Newt seems to be a rather resilient species, which will take up residence in urban areas and garden ponds. In the last two years we have had one or two sightings from Ulverscroft NR, and Grace Dieu Wood, but our other sightings have come from gardens in Quorn, Swithland, Markfield and Birstall.

Palmate Newt *Lissotriton helvetica*

This species is the smallest of our three species. It is found all across Europe, but it is typically a species of moorland and mountain, breeding in small pools, which may be temporary, in upland areas where the soils are acidic and the water 'soft'. It spends more time in the water than the preceding species, and tends not to venture very far from water. As far as this country is concerned, the largest populations are found in Scotland, Wales, the West Country, and the Pennines. However, here in Leicestershire it is found in the upland area of Charnwood Forest where the soils are acidic. Throughout the 1960s and '70s, populations were regularly recorded at four sites on Charnwood Forest: these were ponds at Bardon Hill, Benscliffe Cottage, Beacon Hill and The Outwoods. A single, positively identified adult male was also found under a stone in Bradgate Park. However, there were also a number of less reliable records.

To make matters more complicated, there are problems with the reliable identification of the Palmate Newt. In two of the ponds on Charnwood Forest the Palmate coexisted with the Common Newt, and while it is easy to confuse the adults, the juveniles are virtually indistinguishable. Apparently, coexisting populations of Palmate and Common Newts are also found in other parts of the country. Although we have few recent records this does not mean that the newts are no longer there, it simply means that no one has gone out to look for them lately!

Great-crested Newt *Triturus cristatus*

The last, but by no means the least, of our three species of newt is the Great-crested Newt, also sometimes known as the 'Warty' Newt. It is a more distinctive species than the other two, and appreciably larger. Its distribution is virtually identical to that of the Common or Smooth Newt, having been found all across the county, including the higher ground of Charnwood Forest. Nevertheless, it does appear to prefer lowland habitats. It appears that it has always been more thinly spread in Leicestershire than the Common Newt, although the reasons for this are unclear. The Great-crested is also happy to spawn in larger ponds. Like the Common Toad, it has a 'warty' skin which contains glands which can produce an irritant and poisonous fluid, in the event of an attack. It also differs from the preceding two species in that it may spend much of the year in the water, only venturing on to dry land to hibernate, which it often does communally, during the autumn.

During the 1960s and '70s, according to both Bell and our own records, there were breeding populations all across the county. In the Club records we have specimens being sighted during the 1980s at Launde, Cossington, and Beeby: there is even a record for 1977 from the grounds of Loughborough Technical College!

According to the 1997 Red Data Book the Great-crested Newt was thought to be in decline in the East Midlands generally, including the Leicestershire populations. (It seems that Leicestershire was actually regarded as a stronghold of the species.) It is certainly true that during the last two years, our members have had sightings only from Bradgate Park but the Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre have a number of recent records from all over the county. As this is a protected species, sites are not always publicised but the species does seem to be thriving.

Conclusion:

According to an information sheet on Leicestershire's Amphibians, produced by the Museums Service in 1977, there had been a marked decline in the numbers of amphibians in the county since the Second World War. The reason for this was, quite simply, the destruction of their breeding sites:

"A recent survey of field ponds in the Melton area of Leicestershire showed that 30% had been filled-in since 1930. Of those remaining, 63% were no longer used to water cattle and could well be lost in the near future. The result is an inevitable decline in numbers and restriction in distribution of all our amphibians."

“Although the problem is serious for the Frog, Toad and Smooth Newt, these species are not in immediate danger of extinction in Leicestershire. This is due mainly to their tolerance of human pressure and their ability to survive in new urban situations – such as park ponds and garden ponds. Many garden ponds are now centres for quite substantial colonies of frogs, toads or newts and it is important for the continued survival of these species that such populations be allowed to prosper...”

“...This move to urban surroundings has done little to help the remaining two species. Palmate Newts and Great-crested Newts resent the intrusions of man into their breeding areas and seem less inclined than Smooth Newts to colonise garden ponds. Their numbers have declined accordingly and they may now be in danger of extinction in the county.”

However, the story does not end there. While the old field ponds may have disappeared, in the years since 1977 many new ponds have appeared, constructed as purpose-built fisheries, as farmers have sought to find new ways of generating income. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the fact that with so few people taking an interest in these creatures, it is also possible that they may all be under-recorded.

And so, in conclusion, there are at least some grounds for optimism: we can at least hope that the situation is perhaps not as bad as we think it is!

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Fish

Tony Onions

Many people who enjoy the countryside take pleasure in the sight and sound of water: the babbling of the brook, the still calm of the mill pond, rivers great and small, and the waves lapping upon the sandy shores of reservoirs whose expansive waters resemble an inland sea. Yet beneath the surface of these various waters there remains a world of secrets. It is perhaps for this reason that people may remain unaware of the enormous changes which have taken place with regard to the waters in our landscape over the last 50 years. Some changes, like the development of reservoirs and the excavation of gravel pits, have been readily observable, but equally, some have been subtle - changes in the quality of the water - and have happened so slowly that they have tended to pass unnoticed, except to those with a particular interest in this area of natural history.

The Rivers and Streams

Perhaps the most obvious place to begin is with the rivers. Rivers are a finite resource: it is easy enough to destroy rivers, but it is not easy to create new ones! It is in the river systems that, over the last 50 years, the most dramatic changes have taken place. Within Leicestershire, the Soar above Leicester, and the Eye and Wreake, from their junction with the Soar, upstream to the source above Melton ran clear and clean. The Soar from Leicester downstream and much of the Trent itself fell into the category of 'semi-polluted': polluted to a certain extent and incapable of supporting the more sensitive species of insects and fish, but some of the hardier species could survive there. No rivers in the county came into the badly polluted category.

During the 1950s and '60s, the River Soar supported, in the main, three species of fish: the **Roach** *Rutilus rutilus*, the **Gudgeon** *Gobio gobio*, and the **Three-spined Stickleback** *Gasterosteus aculeatus*. My father and I also acquired, at some point in my childhood, a couple of specimens of the **Stone Loach** *Noemacheilus barbatulus*, from the Abbey Park section of the Soar in Leicester. There are two other species of Loach found in European waters. One is the **Spined Loach** *Cobitis taenia*, which is patchily distributed across eastern England, and occurs in the River Mease, in west Leicestershire. The third species known as the **Pond Loach** *Misgurnus fossilis* is not found in Britain.

In those days, there were large shoals of Roach, Gudgeon and Sticklebacks in the River Soar. However, the predators which one would have expected to find with these species - the **Perch** *Perca fluviatilis*, the **Pike** *Esox lucius* and the **Chub** *Leuciscus cephalus* - were absent. These species were too sensitive to pollutants to survive in the river. However, things began to change, with the decline of some of the manufacturing industries and at the same time, sewage treatment systems were improved and enlarged. Initially, much of the impetus for the cleaning up of the rivers came from the angling community who started to take polluters to court – a role that has largely been taken over by the Environment Agency. These days, incidents of pollution still do happen, but they are almost invariably accidental and limited in their effects and efforts are made as quickly as possible to repair any damage done.

As a consequence of this cleaning up process, the rivers, both here in Leicestershire and elsewhere, are probably cleaner now than at any time during at least the last hundred years, and this is reflected in the return of many species which were formerly absent from our rivers. In the River Soar we now find the predator species mentioned above – the Perch, Pike, and Chub. Additionally, in the slower parts of the River, we also have the **Common Bream *Abramis brama***, and the **Ruffe *Gymnocephalus cernua***; while in the faster parts of the river we now have the **Barbel *Barbus barbus***, which was deliberately introduced. Another species which has found its way into the river in recent years, and which I believe is now becoming fairly well established, is the **Pike-Perch or Zander *Stizostedion lucioperca***. This was originally a continental species, and was first introduced into this country in the 19th century.



Brook Lamprey © Steve Woodward

The position with regard to the **Brook Lamprey** is rather more straightforward. Brook Lampreys are found in Leicestershire streams, including the Ulverscroft Brook (River Lin). On April 9th, 2008, the writer found an adult Brook Lamprey in the stream in Bradgate Park, near the Newtown Linford entrance. In the past, Brook Lampreys have been seen spawning higher up the stream near Ulverscroft Priory. Once again, they are probably more common than is generally suspected, but under-recorded.

At risk of stating the obvious, when a tributary stream is cleaned up, the improvement in water quality will have a ‘knock on’ effect on the water quality in the river into which the stream flows although, as far as I am aware, no adult Salmon have as yet turned up in the Soar. Fifty years ago, when the Rivers Soar and Trent were polluted, the **European Eel *Anguilla anguilla*** was quite uncommon in Leicestershire, and one might have expected that with cleaner water the Eel populations would have increased. However, in recent years, there has been a dramatic decline in the numbers of Eels reaching Europe from their breeding grounds in the Sargasso Sea. Thus, to the best of my knowledge, the Eel remains an uncommon fish in Leicestershire.

There are two species of Salmonid fish which breed in Leicestershire waters. The first of these is the **Brown Trout *Salmo fario***, a native species which is widespread in cool, upland rivers and lakes. It occurs in the streams on Charnwood Forest, and also – according to the Red Data Book – in the fast-flowing streams on the eastern side of the county: the Gwash, and the Chater. The second species is the **European Grayling *Thymallus thymallus***, which is normally found only in rivers, and is even more



Brown Trout © Peter Gamble

demanding in terms of water quality than the Brown Trout. It appears that there had been a population of this species in the west Leicestershire Sence, but they were wiped out by pollution.

In recent years the Grayling has been re-introduced to the Sence, and according to the last report I received, a year or two ago, they were doing well. In the 1970s, there was a population of Grayling in the Gwash, but I have no information as to what has happened to that population. This was before the construction of Rutland Water.

Finally, there is one other river species which deserves mention, and that is the **Bullhead *Cottus gobio***. It seems that the Bullhead is a rare species in continental Europe, and yet is quite common in upland streams in the British Isles, including the streams of Leicestershire. There is a large population of Bullheads in the Wood Brook, surprisingly close to the centre of Loughborough.



The Reservoirs

Reservoirs come in all shapes and sizes. Some have been created in order to supply water for domestic or industrial use. Others were originally created to supply water to 'feed' canals. They vary enormously in water quality, depending on the underlying geology, and the origins of the water which feeds them; and consequently in the numbers and the species of fish which they will support. Upland reservoirs like Cropston and Blackbrook should be relatively poor in nutrients – at least in theory - and cool enough to support Salmonids like the Brown Trout, providing that the trout have access to running water in which to spawn. In contrast, lowland reservoirs will tend to be far more eutrophic and consequently capable of supporting much larger populations of fish. As a general rule, if a reservoir is deep enough to remain cool enough during periods of very hot weather, then it will usually be run by its owners as a trout fishery, and this is equally true of both upland reservoirs like Cropston and Blackbrook, and lowland reservoirs like Eyebrook and Rutland Water.

The two species normally used are the Brown Trout, mentioned above, and also, rather more commonly, the **Rainbow Trout *Oncorhynchus mykiss***. Over the last 50 years, the Rainbow has become the Salmonid of choice for the commercial fish farmer. The reasons for this are very simply that although it is shorter-lived than the Brown Trout, it grows more quickly during the first three years of life, and it is also more tolerant of intensive rearing conditions: i.e. less susceptible to disease. In this country, at the present time, as far as I am aware, there is only one river where we have a population of Rainbow Trout co-existing with a population of Brown Trout, and that is the Derbyshire Wye.

Reservoirs which are deemed to be unsuitable for trout will normally be run by their owners as 'coarse' fisheries, and this is particularly true of lowland reservoirs. Some species of 'coarse' fish i.e. non-salmonid fish, seem to appear in new waters as if by magic: they include the Roach, Perch, and Pike. Actually, it appears that the sticky eggs of these species are transferred by waterfowl.

However, the one fish which has transformed coarse fisheries during the last 20 years has been the **Common Carp *Cyprinus carpio***. Fifty years ago the Common Carp was a relatively scarce fish in Leicestershire as although the Common Carp will feed at comparatively low temperatures and is long-lived (perhaps several decades), it does require a sustained period of water temperatures from 17-20°C in order to spawn successfully. Heating water artificially is not a problem in a hatchery, and in recent years vast numbers of Carp have been bred to satisfy the demands of the angling community.

There are several other important species which are at home in rich still-water habitats. These include the **Tench *Tinca tinca***, the **Common Bream *Abramis brama***, the **Silver Bream *Blicca bjoerkna***, the **Rudd *Scardinius erythrophthalmus***, and the **Crucian Carp *Carassius carassius***. All of the above are members of the Carp family.

Gravel and Clay Pits

Here in the East Midlands, over the last 50 years, a considerable number of pits have been excavated to supply the construction industry with sand and gravel. Once the sand and gravel have been extracted the hole may be allowed to fill with water and become a fishery, a sailing lake, or a nature reserve. The water tends to be comparatively rich in nutrients and consequently gravel pits tend to make excellent fisheries and an excellent fishery tends to become a magnet for other forms of wildlife.

Gravel pits in this area will typically have a maximum depth of from four to seven metres so they tend not to be successful as trout fisheries; but they do make excellent 'coarse' fisheries. Left to their own devices, gravel pits rapidly acquire rooted water plants and the reasonably deep waters provide relatively stable temperatures.

Most of what has been said about the gravel pit applies equally to the clay pit. Many of them around Loughborough have been filled in, but Charnwood Water is a good example of a former clay pit which has been landscaped and is now an interesting 'coarse' fishery. When set up as 'coarse' fisheries, both types of pit will normally be stocked with the usual range of fish species.

Conclusions

Over the last 50 years, we have seen enormous changes in the numbers and types of fisheries available, and the quality of those fisheries. In general terms, there are now more fish species, and larger populations of fish in Leicestershire than at any time during the last century. Although the impetus to create these fisheries has often been driven by purely commercial considerations, the creation of these fisheries has also often provided additional refuges for other forms of wildlife, and as such, their creation can be considered to have been beneficial.

Dragonflies and Damselflies

Helen Ikin

In my first summary of the LNC dragonfly records in the spring of 1982 there were seven species reported. A total of 11 species were recorded by members during this year which was also the year that the **Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*** began to be recorded regularly in the county – see Peter Gamble’s article in *Heritage* 89. This heralded the start of a substantial increase in the numbers of species commonly seen in VC55. Global warming has been cited as the reason for so many species spreading north.

Dragonflies of Leicestershire by Howard Mendel published in 1980 contained records of 19 species but some of these were only represented by the occasional sighting.



Broad-bodied Chaser © Jim Graham

We have seen the **Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa*** and the **Four-spot Chaser *L. quadrimaculata*** become reasonably common, the **Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum*** has spread from its few strongholds – although I expect increased expertise in distinguishing it from **Common Darter *S. striolatum*** has helped. The publication of some very good identification books, in the 1980s and subsequent years, made dragonflies available to all naturalists and there was a surge of interest in recording.

The **Emerald Damselfly *Lestes sponsa*** has always been a fluctuating species, maintaining small populations at a few sites and occasionally expanding to other ponds.

It was exciting when the **Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator*** and the **Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum***, which were unknown as breeding species in the county before 1986, began to be seen and they are now firmly established. Fred Smith regularly recorded Odonata along the Ashby Canal (among other places) for many years and the **Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma najas*** was there in the 1980s but hardly anywhere else. Now we see it at many sites. We used to make the pilgrimage to the River Eye near Melton to see the **White-legged Damselfly *Platycnemis pennipes*** at its only Leicestershire site but now it is all along the Grand Union Canal south of Leicester and in other places too. The **Variable Damselfly *Coenagrion pulchellum*** has



White-legged Damselfly © Helen Ikin

been known from the Grantham Canal for many years and also has started to spread.

Recent additions to the regular sightings have been the **Small Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma viridulum*** (new to this country in 1999), the **Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense*** and an increase in the occurrence of migrant species such as the **Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii***, **Yellow-winged Darter *S. flaveolum*** and **Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope***.



We expect the **Scarce Chaser *Libellula fulva*** next.

There have been odd records of the **Black Darter *Sympetrum danae*** and the **Common Hawker *Aeshna juncea*** for many years and these species have not increased in the same way although the more recent records of Common Hawker have been accompanied by good photos which has made the records more credible. The acid pools liked by both species are in short supply in the county and Common Hawker is a species with a northern distribution so may move even further north with global warming.

The creation of new waters such as flooded gravel workings along the Soar Valley and , fishing and amenity pools such as those at Groby, Barlestone, Priory Water and Bagworth Heath, to name but a few, have increased the available habitat and have been monitored by some very keen recorders. Leicestershire Museums, Arts and Records Service published Leicestershire Dragonflies by Steve Grover and myself in 1994. In 2002 the Leicestershire Dragonfly Group was formed which resulted in an increased recording coverage of the county and a very good website which encouraged new recorders. The recording surge has lost momentum in recent years but the stalwarts are still out there monitoring the county's watery sites.

How satisfying to have been writing up the records during a time of such change and being able to report an increase in the numbers of species and of individuals: a stark contrast to some of the other groups.

Butterflies

Peter Gamble

The bulk of our local resident butterflies have shown no significant trends during the last half century and populations have, from year to year, gone up and down largely in response to environmental factors such as the annual weather variations. In addition several local species requiring restricted habitat conditions such as the **Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*** and **Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*** can easily go unrecorded any particular year unless someone makes the effort, or is able to visit, one or more of the few sites where they occur on a decent, sunny day during what can be a short flying season.

Several species have, however, undergone a marked change in status and distribution since the Club was formed in 1960 and in some cases this may well be caused by long-term changes in climate.

The **Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*** was apparently not known to occur in VC55 until 1978 when it was found to be present on the margins of Rutland Water. Ten years later it had started to move into other grassy sites and by 1997 it was found to be present in some dozen widely spread localities across both Leicestershire and Rutland.

It is good to report that the **Black Hairstreak *Stryium pruni*** is hanging on, albeit in small numbers, in its Rutland locality where it was first discovered in 1968. Interestingly, in 1968 the **Chequered Skipper *Carterocephalus palaemon*** was still present at this same locality.



Black Hairstreak ° Ian Gamble



Brown Argus ° Steve Woodward

Prior to 1960 the **Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*** was scarce and local and was rarely reported in the latter half of the 20th century. Since the year 2000 however, when it was recorded at Dishley Pool, Loughborough it has been noted at many widely spread sites where the larvae, formerly restricted to feeding on Stork's-bill *Erodium cicutarium* and Rock-rose *Helianthemum chamaecistus*, are now feeding on small species of Geranium such as the Dove's-foot Crane's-bill *G. molle*.

At the present time the **White Admiral *Limenitis camilla*** has a tenuous hold in a few woodlands such as Barketstone Wood on the Belvoir escarpment and Pickworth Great Wood, situated on the Rutland/Lincolnshire border. In the first half of the 20th century it was known to occur in Tugby Woods and woodlands south

of Uppingham in east Leicestershire, but was apparently not recorded in the years following the 2nd World War until July 1986 when it was seen in Owston Wood and Martinshaw Wood. More recently, apart from a few casual appearances away from woodland sites, it has reappeared at Owston Wood and a few other east Leicestershire sites in addition to Barketstone Wood in north-east Leicestershire. However, as it currently appears to be extending its range in Britain it may well colonise more of our woodlands in the near future.

Small colonies of **Dark-green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*** survived at Bradgate Park and in East Leicestershire into the 1940s but since 1960 the occasional sightings reported would seem to represent casual visits of this strong-flying species from neighbouring counties. However suitable habitat still occurs in VC55 and future re-establishment seems possible.

The **Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*** is another species which could be on the verge of re-colonising some of our woodlands. In recent years a few casual sightings have been reported and in 2006 five scattered sightings were reported, some in suitable breeding localities. In 2011 it was reported to have colonised numbers of its old haunts in eastern England, some not far from Rutland and east Leicestershire, after a long absence.



Speckled Wood ° Jim Graham

Prior to 1982 the **Comma *Polygona c-album*** was uncommon and thinly spread but during recent decades it has become common and widespread.

Until the late 1980s, when it showed signs of increasing, the **Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*** was extremely local in VC55 but during the last 20 years it has become common and widespread and a welcome resident in many of our gardens. In the year 2003 Club members recorded it in 50 localities. The increase in numbers and spread of the Speckled Wood, a species of dappled shade, contrasts with

the fortunes of the related **Wall** butterfly ***Lasiommata megera***, a true sun-lover often seeking out the hottest places to rest, for although still numerous, by 1990 it was showing a marked decline during the following decade and since the year 2000 has become rare in VC55 as in much of midland Britain.

The **Marbled White *Melanargia galathea***, though largely restricted to limestone grassland as at Ketton Quarry and Bloody Oaks Quarry in Rutland has appeared in small numbers during and since the 1990s at a number of sites in Leicestershire on railway margins at Broughton Astley and Wigston Triangle, also at Croft Hill and Brown's Hill Quarry at Holwell though at some of these sites it does not appear to have a permanent hold.

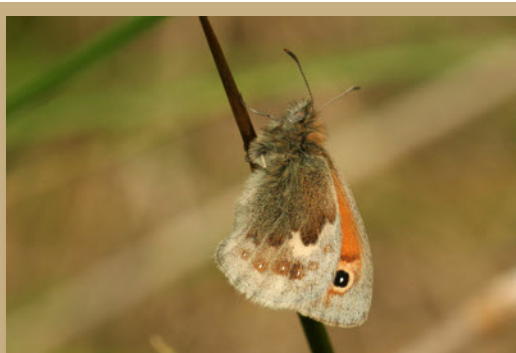


Wall ° Ian Gamble

The attractive **Gatekeeper**, or **Hedge Brown** *Pyronia tithonus* was rarely seen in the county prior to the hot summer of 1976 but has since spread throughout VC55 and as well as being widespread and common in the countryside has become a frequent butterfly in our gardens.

The **Small Heath** *Coenonympha pamphilus* which during the 1940s was a common and widespread species throughout much of our countryside has, during recent decades, undergone a marked decline and can now only be relied on being seen at only a few of its original sites.

Finally mention must be made of the **Ringlet** *Aphantopus hyperantus*, an uncommon and extremely localised species during the early years of the Club, which started to increase in the late 1980s, becoming widespread by 1989, expanding its range during the 1990s and towards the end of the decade visiting some of our gardens. Today it is now an abundant species in many rough grassy places from late June to early August.



Small Heath © Steve Woodward

Moths

Graham and Anona Finch

The number of people who venture out away from their gardens to record moths has changed very little over the years, amounting to about half a dozen regulars. The most noticeable changes are in modern equipment and the amount of new literature which is easily available.

Richard South's double volume of *Moths of the British Isles*, published in 1908 had been the 'moth-ers' bible up until 1984 when Bernard Skinner published the *Colour Identification Guide to Moths of the British Isles*. In 2003, Paul Waring, Martin Townsend and Richard Lewington provided us with perhaps the most important field guide to our macro moths ever produced. Richard Lewington's meticulous artwork, with over 1,600 illustrations, shows our moths in their normal resting positions. This guide has been responsible for encouraging more people to become interested in moths and those already interested to take the pursuit a little further. The illustrations in the previous two guides showed moths as set specimens as found in museum collections. The 'Waring' guide shows how we are likely to find moths in their natural positions when out in the field and therefore has won the affection of many.

Not too long ago one choice for a night's moth recording was to be armed with a Tilley Lamp and white sheet, and occasionally a jar of a secretly guarded and affectionately mixed recipe of treacle (the easy way). Alternatively, if it was working and you felt strong enough you could wrestle an enormous army surplus generator from the boot of a car onto the site (the hard way). While both options would provide the necessary results, the former with somewhat limited results, the latter, enabling the use of special Mercury Vapour lamps, would attract many more species for the effort involved. This had been the case up to the late 1960s and early '70s when several, mainly Japanese companies produced small portable generators, which opened up the range for which the necessary equipment could be comfortably carried away from the car. This meant being able to get deeper into each site with relative ease. Twenty years on these portable generators became lighter and even more powerful allowing up to four 125W Mercury Vapour lights to be operated. With six or seven, 50-metre cable reels, quite a significant area of each site or reserve could be accessed during a single night. This method has led to huge species lists and sometimes, incredible numbers of individual moths per session. Even now, these portable powerhouses are being improved upon and can run up to seven 125W lights per evening.

Whatever the methods used, all will result in 'lists'. Lists include at a minimum, the name of location, date, recorder and methods used plus any other relevant information. Lists are transcribed from field notebooks, neatly into yearly ledgers, card indexes, Biological Record Cards or various other hand-written formats, all stored in boxes cluttering up attics, sheds and garages, under the bed, under the dining room table, anywhere and everywhere. No-one dare dispose of this paperwork containing crucial and often the only source of such data, but everyone dreading the day when he or she is asked to supply the answer to a certain request for information, be that for a site, species, year or whatever, knowing full well that it is going to take an age to dig out and provide. At one time all records would be sent to Leicester Museums Service where Don Hall-Smith started the VC55 Lepidoptera Recording Scheme and up until the

mid-1980s, he and a dedicated band of volunteers would painstakingly fill in by hand record cards and blank county grid maps. Adrian Russell has taken over this arduous task and over the years has managed to enter an astronomical amount of data onto his computer at home, which is now the VC55 Lepidoptera Database. Now all this data has become digitised, it is no longer the onerous task to supply almost every request. There has been a huge increase in macro moth records from c3,300 in 1985 to c15,000 in 2009. During 1985 the amount of moth trapping nights away from gardens was around 30; this has increased to over 200 from 2009. The use of computers in the early days seemed to be only for the academic and/or the very brave involving some knowledge of a complicated language or so it seemed. Nowadays most of us own a computer and we are spoilt for choice with custom-written natural history recording programs, Recorder and MapMate being the two most popular. Once over the initial horror of going digital, the whole system becomes a breeze, even enjoyable. MapMate, a particular favourite is easy to use and has the added advantage of automatically producing dot distribution maps for all species entered. Once the data is in the computer it is quite easy to see trends of certain species, good and bad.

Over the years most of the 'hot-spot' sites have received some recording effort by someone, but we still have a limited knowledge about many other areas. The county Wildlife Trust Reserves, County Council parks and a number of privately owned sites have received the most attention. This leaves huge gaps in between. Fortunately, some of these gaps are getting filled by the ever-increasing amount of people, about 50 in total, operating a moth trap in their gardens. This provides a constant site recording strategy and thus a very valuable data set. Most of the recording away from gardens is undertaken on sites where one's vehicle can be kept behind locked gates. Sadly, gone are the days when cars were safely left at the roadside whilst moth trapping several fields away to return four or five hours later with confidence to find your vehicle as you left it - unharmed. Very few of the sites we visit have remained unchanged, either naturally maturing or physically managed and are still in a state of modification. It is questionable whether these changes have been beneficial to our moth fauna. This has always been a contentious area, but bramble, nettles, thistles and ragwort are incredibly important to many invertebrates not only moths and yet these are the very species on which war is waged. We all know part of the problem as many of our key historical wildlife sites have been destroyed and remaining sites fragmented. The habitats have changed dramatically and although some have been lost, new areas are made available. Many of these new areas are of considerable size, planted with native species and are now becoming impressive new woodland and grassland sites in their own right, some with ponds and lakes with their associated marginal vegetation. This alone will have a significant effect on all of our wildlife.

We have always had species which seem destined to hang on in low density, even though suitable habitat (or at least what we think of as suitable) has always been available. For example, areas of the Charnwood Forest have been improved but our true heathland moths still remain scarce; species such as **Emperor Moth *Saturnia pavonia*** and **Fox Moth *Macrothylacia rubi*** have not had an abundance explosion to follow suit. **Golden-rod Brindle *Lithomoia solidaginis***, a classic moth of heathland, with Bilberry and Heather included as its main food plants was last

recorded at Charnwood Lodge NR in 1980. With significant patches of both food sources, particularly at Charnwood Lodge NR, one is led to think this species would at least be capable of holding a small but thriving population, instead it looks as if we have lost it altogether. Another instance is where the site has remained in a similar state for years, such as Stoneywell Wood.



This is our most reliable site for **Barred Umber *Plagodis pulveraria*** and although singletons have been recorded very scantily nearby, it never seems to spread out into adjacent suitable-looking woodland, preferring to stay put in its Stoneywell stronghold.

We have species, which are expanding their range but incredibly slowly. **Barred Hooktip *Watsonalla cultraria*** has always favoured the Beeches of Charnwood but is very gradually being recorded further afield. **Blotched Emerald**

Comibaena bajularia relies on oaks in well-wooded areas but odd ones turn up in less than classic habitat now and again. **Pine Hawkmoth *Hyloicus pinastri***, first recorded in the county in 1995, is slowly putting in an appearance in gardens. The first record for **Chocolate-tip *Clostera curtula*** was in 1985, then followed over ten years with no sightings but from 1997 there has been a steady increase to the present with numerous records. Even the **Black Arches *Lymantria monarcha***, once restricted to woodland in Rutland, has expanded its range with three or four

records on Charnwood Forest, recently in double-figures from The Outwoods and at least one from a garden, unheard of at one time. The **Netted Pug *Eupithecia venosata*** first recorded in 1963 at Uppingham (subsequently recorded on 21 occasions in 50 years) is well known for putting in infrequent appearances, usually as singletons and almost exclusively in the east of the county. Ketton Quarry seems to be the most reliable site, being recorded on three occasions in the last ten years including three individuals in June 2010. Of particular interest



is the record of a solitary specimen at Watermead Country Park during an organised 'Bioblitz' also in 2010 and well away from its usual haunts. All records of this species are of adults from light traps. The larvae feed on Sea and Bladder Campion, so a search for early stages could be productive in future. The sporadic occurrence of this moth makes one ask where do species such as this come from when there are several years in between sightings, and where are they when they are not being recorded? Are they around but just in low density, do they get introduced with new seeding or plantings or are they blown in from afar during inclement weather?



Orange Footman ° Graham Finch

Some moths are simply charging across the county, none more noticeably so than **White-pinion Spotted *Lomographa bimaculata***, from singletons recorded in the 1960s to being widespread throughout and regular nightly totals of 40 plus. **Orange Footman *Eilema sorocula*** was first recorded in 2003 and has gone from hardly being seen to widespread, having 20 or 30 individuals regularly at light traps. **Scarce Footman *Eilema complana***, **Dingy Footman *Eilema griseola*** and **Buff Footman *Eilema depressa*** are showing similar trends, but usually not quite so dramatically. Unfortunately, **Red-necked Footman *Atolmis rubricollis*** never seemed to colonise in the same way. Things looked promising with several sightings in 2004 to 2006 but the hoped-for colonisation never happened. We even have a few records of **Rosy Footman *Miltochrista miniata*** way over in the east of the county,

appearing first in 1999 with over a dozen records since. The advancement of lichen species, the food source for many Footman species, has no doubt had a massive influence in the continued increase in sightings of these moths, following the introduction of the Clean Air Act.

Garden moth trappers can be rewarded in many ways. **Grey Shoulder-knot *Lithophane ornitopus***, first seen in 1992 and **Blair's Shoulder-knot *Lithophane leautieri*** first seen in 1979 are now regulars and widespread. There are many species associated with ornamental conifers including several micro moths. These are garden regulars, some rarely recorded away from gardens, if at all.

The stunning **Merveille du Jour *Dichonia aprilina*** is now a regular and expected autumn moth to the point of our being disappointed if, as moth trappers, we don't record several in a year. The **Oak Nycteoline *Nycteola revayana***, once a county rarity, is now recorded with some regularity from almost any month of the year.



Merveille du Jour ° Graham Finch

When we first started moth recording with Peter Gamble and Jack Ward in the late 1960s and early '70s, most **Peppered Moths *Biston betularia*** were of the melanic form *carbonaria*. Now we very rarely see this dark form among the nominate normal pale form. **Black Rustic *Aporophyla nigra***, **Pale Pinion *Lithophane hepatica*** and **Tawny Pinion *Lithophane semibrunnea*** have all gone from very rare sights to light-trap regulars. **Least Carpet *Idaea rusticata***, **Treble Brown-spot *Idaea trigeminata***, **Brown-tail *Euproctis chryorrhoea*** and **Waved Black *Parascotia fuliginaria*** are species we never thought we would see in VC55, but they have all been recorded



Small Ranunculus ° Graham Finch

and we wait with anticipation of their potential spread. One of the latest colonisers is the pretty, little **Small Ranunculus *Hecatera dysodea***, once common in the south of the country it became extinct in the early 1900s. It has re-established itself in Kent and Essex then spread rapidly across most of the country. All our county records are from garden moth traps, in the suburban fringe of Leicester, the larvae feeding on the flowers and seeds of both wild and cultivated lettuce.

Climate change, from both natural processes and human interference, is having a phenomenal impact on moth distribution. Species at the southern edge of their northern range seem to be gradually retreating further northward: the opposite effect can be seen in some of our southern species at the northern edge of their range. However, it is not as

simple as that - many species carry on as normal regardless. It seems inconceivable that the once common **Garden Tiger *Arctia caja*** whose woolly-bear caterpillars were collected by every schoolboy, has now almost totally disappeared. The mild, wet winters and earlier, warmer springs are not to this moth's liking and there is a possibility that this could become an endangered species. The intensification of agriculture, removal of hedgerows, use of pesticides and genetically modified crops, etc., have all had a vast impact on many invertebrates, not only moths, in such a short period.



Garden Tiger ° Graham Finch

Most of the above refers mainly to the plight of our macro moths, but the same applies to micro moths, the difference is the amount of recorder-effort they have received and therefore information we have. This has been due to the lack of, or at best the fragmented, literature that has been available. With just over 900 macro moth species there has been no problem in fitting them all into a comprehensive guide, not so with the micros. Over 1,500 species of micro moths present several complications. Apart from their sheer numbers, it takes many authors a significant amount of time to become expert enough to write up reliable text to allow field recorders to accurately identify to species level. Therefore it is impossible for any single volume to cover all our micro moths; instead we have numerous books that cover certain families. So the need to possess multi-volumes at considerable expense has been somewhat of a deterrent, plus all the micros are generally described using their scientific names - it may be a scientific name but you need to learn only the one name. Back in 1976 John Heath started the

multi-volume *Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*. Due to the difficulties explained above, the production of this series has been sporadic and is still incomplete. Fortunately, many of the volumes dealing with the micro moth families are in print and these are the best purchase anyone could make if thinking of studying this group. Recent years have seen the publication of numerous books on micro moths, particularly from continental authors describing in great detail their biology and identification features. These relatively inexpensive books have helped us to become more confident when dealing with this group as most families are covered. The use of modern equipment plus availability of new reliable literature has led to a surge in micro moth recording and consequently a surge in micro moth records. Although far from complete, the interest in micro moth recording has been one of the biggest changes in moth recording ever.

The World Wide Web is now a household item and despite all the trials and tribulations it brings, it is a very welcome addition. The UK Moths website illustrates some 2,255 species with almost 6,468 photographs and is updated almost monthly covering many early stages and not just the adult stages. This has got to be the most useful resource we have. There are many other websites to choose from dealing with larvae, leaf mines and even dissection; also from photography to the latest equipment suppliers. Practically everything we need to get the most from our hobby is there - very different from the early days of thinking yourself lucky if you had copies of Richard South. As well as up-to-date identification and distribution information, we have instant access to the latest migrant news particularly from the coastal hot-spots. We can follow weather patterns and even track Saharan dust clouds which often result in considerable migrant activity along the coasts, maybe tempting us onto high ground a couple of days later in the hope of bagging a goodie; sometimes it even works.

Communication has never been so easy and fast including the passing on of data and the forwarding of photographs of tricky species for a second opinion. Decades ago, this high tech mothing was not even a fantasy, owning your own generator was about as good as it got.

More questions than answers

Clearwings: with the use of artificial pheromones, a manufactured copy of the female scent, great breakthroughs have been made with knowledge of the whereabouts of these difficult to find moths. Do we have overlooked species in county?

Light Orange Underwing *Archiearis notha*: do we still have this in VC55? In neighbouring counties it has had several good years - it needs searching for.

Garden Dart *Euoxia nigricans* and Dotted Rustic *Rhyacia simulans*: seem to have disappeared from the county – why?

Galium Carpet *Epirrhoe galiata*: seems to have appeared from nowhere. Will it stay and if so, where will it spread to?



Barred Chestnut *Diarsia dahlia*: is it still on the Charnwood Forest, maybe in low density, or are we simply missing it altogether?

The changes have been enormous and have encompassed virtually every aspect of our hobby. The principle may be the same but the advancement in equipment, techniques and communication has been colossal. Access to quality information, a surge in numbers of individuals studying moths and a huge increase of interest in micro moths will add to the progress of our knowledge of the moth fauna. The ability to use the digital age to our advantage in many ways has had an enormous benefit. Moth recording in VC55 at present is at a peak, with about 33% of all moth records fed into Adrian's VC55 database provided by the LNC. The level of the quality of records has never been so high, let's all keep it up. The LNC can be extremely proud of being major contributors to our knowledge of VC55 moth fauna.

Beetles

Graham Finch and Howard Bradshaw

We have been exceptionally privileged in our county to have benefitted from a long line of authoritative coleopterists who have diligently collected and recorded beetles for over 200 years. Without their collections, notebooks and correspondence, our understanding of our past beetle fauna would be very limited. Our current knowledge owes everything to the endless hours spent engaged in scouring the countryside for their next prize, then home to the study to prepare, identify and add to the cabinet. Fortunately over the years the Leicestershire Museums Services managed to acquire significant amounts of their data and specimens and this has been the baseline for our current atlases and checklists.

The nature of serious beetle recording requires taking specimens to 'key out' for accurate identification and a natural progression on from this is to form a reference collection. Starting a collection is not to be taken lightly; it needs curation and maintenance, both demanding huge amounts of time and also considerable space. So it is no surprise that very few naturalists take on this pursuit but opt to make casual records instead. Admirably Loughborough Naturalists' Club members have done both and over the last 50 years have continued to record beetles year in, year out and have contributed a formidable amount to an already impressive database.

Most of the casual records from members have come from decades of Club outings and Wednesday morning walks, plus members' personal excursions into the countryside mainly resulting in observations of the larger, colourful and more obvious species. These species are a little more prominent and it is here where we are able to detect some of the more noticeable changes, losses and additions.

Fortunately the local **Green Tiger Beetle** *Cicindela campestris* has managed to survive, particularly at Bradgate Park, where it has long been known to occur and where suitable habitat still remains. This species has recently been found at Newfield Colliery. Few years passed by without mention of the, mainly nocturnal, **Minotaur** *Typhaeus typhoeus*, the conspicuous males armed with three, horn-like projections to their heads but the females lacking any horns. Now it seems the complete opposite; we get very few years with records of this species. The formerly abundant **Dor Beetle** *Geotrupes stercorarius* seems to be much less common than several decades ago, as do many of the larger beetles we used to see along footpaths. The **Cockchafer** *Melolontha melolontha* once found by the hundreds, and a pest to farmers and green keepers, is now more often recorded at moth lights. It is a large, showy species and frequently makes itself known at household lights from the early summer. The use of Avermectin and Ivermectin products since 1981 to control internal and external parasites of livestock, has had a dramatic effect especially on the **Scarabaeoidea**, the dung beetles. Field



studies have demonstrated the dung of animals treated with Ivermectin supports a significantly reduced diversity of invertebrates, and the dung persists for longer; there are no invertebrates to break it down.

Ladybirds are a favourite group. **Orange Ladybird *Halysia 16-guttata***, first recorded in 2001 at Castle Gardens, Leicester and Attenborough Arboretum in Knighton, has since become more widespread; a classic species that is often found as a visitor to moth lights. The handsome **Adonis Ladybird *Adonia variegata***, a species favouring limestone grassland, has become thinly widespread and often well away from its preferred habitat since being first noted in the 1990s. Much less welcome, the **Harlequin Ladybird *Harmonia axyridis***, first noted in VC55 in 2006, is in no time at all being found in huge accumulations countywide. Although they devour vast quantities of aphids they are also carnivorous on other ladybird and moth larvae. First noted from Ethel Road, Leicester where it was found in 2006 on Sycamore trees; at the time of writing it is as abundant as ever, with winter aggregations of hundreds of individuals. Recently there are signs that the Harlequin Ladybird is being parasitised and if it is going to stay with us, we can only hope that its numbers will stabilise and cause minimal damage to other species in future years.

Another new species for the county has been recorded at Cloud Wood, ***Corticeus unicolor*** a Red Data Book 3 in 2012, a member of the ***Tenebrionidae*** or Darkling Beetles. This one was found deep inside a very rotten birch log.

The striking flower-frequenting **Swollen-thighed Beetle *Oedemera nobilis***, used to be largely restricted to the south and east of England. Recently however, it has been showing signs of colonising VC55. It was found at Freeman's Common, Leicester in 2007 and had spread through most of the county by 2011.



Dusky Longhorn Beetle © Peter Gamble

Being most big, bold and colourful, the Longhorn beetles are another popular group. One member discovered, in her Loughborough garden, a specimen of the **Red Longhorn Beetle *Stictoleptura rubra***, a local and naturalised immigrant whose larvae are associated with dead wood of various conifer trees, predominantly in eastern England. This constitutes a first record for the county. The **Tawny Longhorn Beetle *Paracorymbia fulva***, a very local Red Data Book 3 species of broad-leaved woodland in central and southern England, was recorded at Sapcote in July

2009 and again in 2011, another county first. The **Dusky Longhorn Beetle *Arhopalus rusticus***, another species which is currently spreading its range which may become a regular to Mercury Vapour moth traps, was recorded initially from Charnwood Lodge NR in 1998 and then more recently from Martinshaw Wood and Quorn in 2011. On the down side, the **Musk Beetle *Aromia moschata*** was last recorded at Pillings Lock in 1985 by Derek Lott, so a focused survey would be interesting to establish whether it is still with us.



Lily Beetle © Peter Gamble

The **Lily Beetle *Liloceris lili***, one of the leaf beetles, has been causing alarm with local gardeners growing Lily and Fritillary species for a good many years and is now widespread and often numerous in VC55. Species such as ***Clytra quadripunctata***, once found with the now locally extinct **Red Wood Ant *Formica rufa*** on Buddon Wood for example, have sadly suffered the same fate as their host and are with us no longer.

There are way too many species to give a blow by blow report of in this article and readers are urged to read the Club's own superb publication, *The Leicestershire Coleopterists*, by Derek Lott (2009) for a far more comprehensive account.

The above species are few in number and make themselves evident with their size, colour and behaviour but what about the 1,600 or so smaller, more secretive species? Without dedicated thorough survey they all escape our attention and we would know very little about their situation. Yet this is another area where "the Club" has been fundamental in supplying a huge amount of data, particularly through the Unit Surveys especially for sites in Charnwood Forest.

Recent years have seen a small increase in awareness of invertebrates in general and as a result through pitfall trapping, flight interception traps, pond netting, beating and sweeping (and not forgetting collection from moth traps) knowledge of our coleoptera has benefited too. The Club has been able to put all of these methods to good use during many site-based and unique surveys it has been involved in over the years.

This invertebrate interest has resulted in an increase of beetle records, no doubt spurred on in no small way by the upsurge in digital media, particularly the ease of obtaining quality photographs that digital cameras produce, plus the speed that such information can be sent over the Internet. A huge library of photographs is far easier to assemble and manage than going down the actual specimen route, although only a very small proportion of our coleoptera will be noticed and recorded by adopting this practice and not all of the identifiable characteristics will be visible on the photograph. The UK beetle list stands at around 4,000 species and we have recorded just over 1,800 species in our county; the majority of these need to be collected for positive identification to be made. This means we all need to try that bit harder and seek out the less noticeable individuals to stand a chance of furthering our knowledge of this fascinating and diverse group.

Whatever the reasons we give, weather patterns are changing and global warming is happening and we know it is affecting our flora and fauna, not just beetles. Happening at a faster rate though is the ongoing loss of prime habitat - this will surely have the greatest effect on our beetle fauna. A change in species distribution caused through climate change is an ongoing but relatively slow process, but habitat destruction is immediate and in many cases permanent.

Ours is one of the least wooded counties and several years ago it was the in-thing to plant trees. The earliest of these plantations are now approaching 20 years old and are turning into important wildlife habitats. Already interesting species are being found in them and with any luck they can only improve.

If some of the beetles seem to be having a mixed fortune, then coleopterists themselves have never had it so good. A new breed of beetle identification literature is available with revised, re-written and lavishly illustrated keys making life easier than ever. The latest Royal Entomological Society publications, *Handbooks for the Identification of British Insects*, are copiously illustrated with crisp, clear line drawings and superb colour photos. Here again, Derek Lott has been instrumental in leading this trend, with his magnificent two volumes on the *Staphylinidae* parts 5 and parts 7 and 8. Also *True Weevils part III*, by M G Morris, has just been released. This completes a five volume treatise on this group of over 600 species. This final volume includes a key to all species plus a note informing you which volume you need to go to next. This set will have a substantial impact on our knowledge of this, up until now, quite daunting group. The latest addition to our arsenal of books is the first of an intended four volume set, *Beetles of Britain and Ireland* by Andrew G Duff. This first volume provides us with a comprehensive key to all the beetle families in Britain. This is over 25 years since Unwin's Aidgap key from 1984. The present volume deals with approximately 900 species of 18 families including the water beetles, ground beetles and burying beetles, plus others. Fifty years ago affordable options were very limited and the preferred single choice would have been Norman H Joy, *A Practical Handbook of British Beetles*, published in 1932. A two volume work was reprinted by E W Classey in 1976, the first part is the introduction and keys to all species, the second part is line drawings. This would remain the standard work for decades and is still of value today, although many species have been added to the British list since and there have also been considerable name changes too. What would we have done without the amazing publications from Frederick Warne and Co. in the Wayside and Woodland series? Here E F Linssen's classic two volume *Beetles of the British Isles* published in 1959 provides detailed information on most of the common species and also some of the rare ones found in this country. Together both volumes contain 127 plates, half of these in colour, allowing numerous species to be viewed in colour for the first time.

The Internet has a vast collection of information on coleoptera from identification to distribution plus national recording schemes for several groups. In fact, the original Royal Entomological Society Handbooks have now been made freely downloadable. Several beetle family recording schemes are on line with all sorts of up to date information, checklists and distribution maps. Those responsible for running the schemes are often quite willing and enthusiastic to help with any issues. We have whole websites dedicated to beetles; most have identification features with superb photosets and notes on distribution and habits.

The way we keep records has changed with most of us taking advantage of various computer programmes as opposed to probably keeping an index card system. Sharing and communicating is now done in an instant with emails and mobile phones, the latter able to take photographs, record video, work out grid references through GPS location applications and then

send all this information anywhere in the county, country or even the world. It really is marvellous that we are able to use a significant amount of this advancement in technology to our benefit.

High-quality tuition is available too with The British Entomological and Natural History Society holding frequent specialist identification workshops led by experts in their field, as do the Field Studies Council. Many natural history groups and societies hold their own workshops and courses and are usually only too happy to accommodate enthusiasts from outside their particular county.

Last but not least we must remember the County Council possess not only a most incredible reference resource of specimens but also a very comprehensive library holding several, almost impossible to obtain, books. The collections and notebooks of several coleopterists mentioned in Derek Lott's book are housed with them too. An appointment needs to be made to view these and make use of the books, but they are there for us to use.

The need to get out into the field and record what we see has never been so important and the Loughborough Naturalists' Club has been actively involved in gathering information for 50 years. There is no doubt that over this period members of the Club have accumulated an extensive amount of detailed documentation. All this has been presented in *Heritage*, Annual Reports, Survey Reports, special publications and countless exhibitions. The Loughborough Naturalists' Club has also remained instrumental in spreading the news and supplying encouragement in all areas of natural history in every way possible. This has all been accomplished to a high standard, left in an impressive legacy and we have not finished yet.

Other Insects

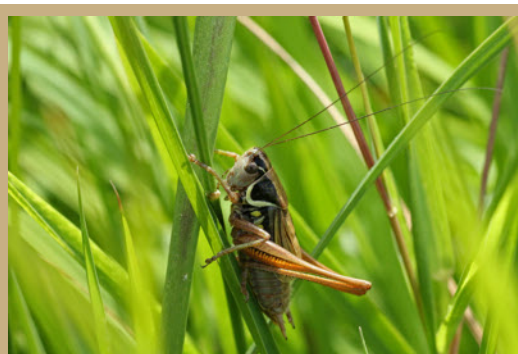
Howard Bradshaw and Peter Gamble

We have still got a lot to learn about most of the invertebrate groups but we do know that many species are susceptible to slight changes in the environment, such as those connected with the climate, and it is not surprising, therefore, that recent years have seen some big changes in certain species.

The following examples are far from comprehensive but hopefully give some idea of the kind of changes that have taken place.

Among the Orthoptera there have been some spectacular movements in recent years, the **Lesser Marsh Grasshopper *Chorthippus albomarginatus*** has been with us quite a few years now, and has become the dominant species in some habitats, whilst others such as the **Meadow Grasshopper *Chorthippus parallelus*** have become much less commonly found, particularly in the county where suitable meadowland habitats have become less widespread than in former years. It is more common in Rutland.

The most spectacular advances have been made by bush-crickets from mostly southern coastal habitats, particularly the **Long-winged Conehead *Conocephalus discolor*** and **Roesel's Bush-cricket *Metrioptera roeselii***. The former was first recorded in the county at Aylestone Meadows in 2001 and can now be found in many areas, a small colony was even found in a small marshy area at Willowbrook Park in Leicester in 2010. **Roesel's** is also relatively common in many areas at the present time. It was first recorded in 2001, at Rutland Water and at Priors Water, Asfordby in 2004.



Roesel's Bush-cricket © Steve Woodward

In 2007 the **Short-winged Conehead *Conocephalus dorsalis*** was recorded at Rutland Water and this too will probably continue to spread.

A Hemipteran bug ***Chorosama schillingi***, a species of coastal sand-dunes feeding on Marram Grass, has recently been found in a few inland sites. First recorded at East Goscote in 2005, it has since been found at a few other sites in the county. It may have been overlooked, particularly in the instar stages where it strongly resembles many of our commoner Mirid bugs. The bug ***Rhopalus subrufus***, a southern species, has also spread into VC55 during recent years. The colourful red and black ***Corizus hyoscyami***, another member of the Rhopalidae and usually confined to coastal dunes and southern heaths, was also found in August 2010 at Ulverscroft NR and at Launde Park Wood in east Leicestershire.

The **Western Conifer Seed Bug *Leptoglossus occidentalis***, a large impressive Squash bug up to 2 cm long when adult and a native of the western parts of North America, was first reported



Rhododendron Leaf-hopper ° Steve Woodward

in Europe in 1999 in Italy following accidental introduction by sea or air. It spread remarkably fast and reached northern France and the Low Countries by 2007. The bug is a powerful flier and colonisation of Britain took place in 2007 and 2008 when large numbers of adults reached the south coast of England during the autumn and were recorded at Mercury Vapour light traps. One was recorded at a light trap at Quorn in October, 2008. Another North American bug, the **Rhododendron Leaf-hopper** *Graphocephala fennahi* was first introduced into the south of England in the early 1900s. Recently it has shown a tendency to move northwards and in

October, 2008, was recorded at Woodhouse and now seems fairly common, particularly in the Charnwood Forest region.

Another leaf-hopper, the strange, unmistakable **Eared Leaf-hopper** *Ledra aurita* is also currently spreading northwards from its main strongholds in the south and was recorded at moth light traps at Quorn in 2006 and 2009 and at Ketton Quarry (Rutland) and Sapcote in August 2011.

A mention must be made of the hoverflies ***Volucella inanis*** and ***Volucella zonaria*** both fine, large species. The former was first recorded in 2001, at Knighton whilst ***V. zonaria*** was first noted in Birstall in 2006 and at Quorn and Knighton in 2008. Until recent years both of these species, which have larvae which scavenge the nests of bees and wasps, were confined to the most southerly parts of Britain. Several other hoverfly species such as ***Criorhina asilica***, recorded at Cloud Wood, appear to be recent new records for VC55.



Volucella inanis ° Peter Gamble

Recent years have seen a big reduction in some Hymenoptera species and in the 1960s we finally lost the **Red Wood Ant** *Formica rufa* from its sole station at Buddon Wood, now greatly changed by the huge quarry. However, a new ant species, the so called **Ghost Ant** *Tapinoma melanocephalum*, was found haunting property at Freeman's Common in Leicester in 2007 and has been reported at other sites in the city.



Red Wood Ant ° Peter Gamble



Hornet © Peter Gamble

The **Hornet *Vespa crabro*** which became established in VC55 in the 1970s has continued to increase over the years, particularly in the Charnwood Forest area and equally in the east of the area, and on frequent occasions makes life difficult for moth recorders at Mercury Vapour moth traps.

The **Median Wasp *Dolichovespula media***, which first arrived in Britain in the mid-1980s is now becoming locally frequent in Leicestershire.

A welcome addition to our depleted bumblebee fauna, the **Tree Bumblebee *Bombus hypnorum***, arrived in Britain from the Continent in 2001 and arrived in Leicester in 2007. In 2010 and 2011 the first breeding colonies were located in bird nest-boxes at Quorn, Woodhouse and Grace Dieu.

The last half century has seen big changes affecting our local invertebrates and the above examples attempt to demonstrate some of these changes. However, it is relatively easy to record new arrivals but less easy to be sure when we have lost species. Also it should be appreciated that newcomers can arrive by accidental introduction via garden centres or by being transported along roads or railways.



Tree Bumblebee © Helen Ikin

Flowering Plants and Ferns

Eric Webster

The following article is based on my personal experience with help from Peter Gamble and Michael Jeeves' book *The Flora of Leicestershire and Rutland: Checklist and Rare Plant Register 2011*.

There has been much talk recently about the effects of climate change but its effect locally does not seem to be very obvious. The main change it has had is on the weather. The world's weather seems to be becoming more extreme and it may not be coincidence that we have had two fairly severe winters in 2009/10 and 2010/11. One thing that disturbs me, is that it has been suggested that the Gulf Stream may be diverted further north and will miss Great Britain altogether. If so, we will experience a much more continental climate with warmer summers and colder winters on a regular basis.

The factors affecting our flora are many and various, virtually all of them are man-made: the effect of expanding towns and villages; the increase in the number of roads and road traffic; and the changes in agricultural practice, particularly in the use of herbicides and pesticides, have all had a tremendous effect on the flora. Add to this, the increasing pressure on the countryside from people visiting the more attractive areas, for example, Bradgate Park and the increased use of waterways for leisure. All these activities create problems which will not go away.

Fortunately, a greater awareness of the effect of these activities on the countryside is recognised by many people and organisations. Also, an increasing number of societies and groups of people have taken steps to protect, as far as possible, the remaining unspoilt areas from further harm and I am pleased to say that the Loughborough Naturalists' Club is playing its part.

However, unfortunately the precise effects of these changes are not well documented as many plants cannot be comprehensively surveyed although specialist groups which are uncommon and/or easily seen, such as orchids, can be dealt with reasonably well.

The rest of the article is concerned with particular species and the changes which have been noted over the last 50 years or so and, of necessity, does not dwell too much on the commoner species.

Plants – New or Increasing

Norway Maple *Acer platanoides*: Now frequent and widespread.

Garden Angelica *Angelica archangelica*: Has become a common plant along waterways in the Soar Valley.

Small-flowered Winter-cress *Barbarea stricta*: Once a very rare plant but is now more common - particularly along rivers and canals. Probably



Garden Angelica © Peter Gamble

introduced, and one of the plants which benefits from the increase in industrial pollution, particularly sulphur.

Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*: Has colonised new sites such as the South Mound in Buddon Wood, quarry spoil heaps at Mountsorrel and the lake margins at Albert Village. This plant is self-fertile and so can spread quickly in suitable areas.

Butterfly-bush *Buddleja davidii*: An alien which has shown a great capacity to spread and has become a ubiquitous weed particularly in urban areas. Because of its small wind-dispersed seeds it can colonise even building gutters high above the ground.

Red Valerian *Centranthus ruber*: A wall plant which has increased greatly in the last half of the century. It occurs as both red and white forms. Often a garden escape.

Danish Scurvygrass *Cochlearia danica*: Another maritime species which has increased dramatically over recent years, once again from the increased use of salt. It can line the roadside edges for miles along main roads and motorway reservations.

Canadian Fleabane *Conyza canadensis*: A plant which has increased tremendously in recently years and has become a common weed, especially in urban areas.

New Zealand Pigmyweed *Crassula helmsii*: A pestilential alien extremely difficult to eradicate once established and highly damaging to small freshwater shore plants.

Sowbread *Cyclamen hederifolium*: A plant which was introduced from Southern Europe in 1778 and is grown in gardens but is quite often found as an escape, more frequently of late. Also found occasionally is the **Eastern Cyclamen *Cyclamen coum*** but this is much closer to cultivated gardens.

Deptford Pink *Dianthus armeria*: Not recorded in VC55 until 2003 when it was discovered at Asfordby Hill. This is a diminishing species now occupying only 7% of its original area. Apparently it relies on the ground being disturbed after which many seedlings can appear.

Japanese Knotweed *Fallopia japonica*: This menace continues to increase along road and rail margins and waste ground and is virtually impossible to eliminate. Research has not yet found a good control method.

Bristly Oxtongue *Helminthotheca echioides*: Has increased greatly in the last half century especially fairly recently and is now abundant in many areas.

Floating Pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*: Since it was introduced into Essex, it has spread far and wide along waterways and is now locally abundant along the River Soar and some lesser brooks. It is a very invasive species which forms dense rafts and out-competes native plant species. Reduced light levels below the rafts makes other water plants less able to thrive. It also reduces the oxygen levels thus endangering fish.

Indian Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*: A very successful species which has shown a great capacity to spread, especially in wet woodland and along waterways. I have also seen it thrive in ordinary garden soil in the centre of Loughborough in dry areas where little else would grow.

Prickly Lettuce *Lactuca serriola*: This was formerly local and uncommon but is now abundant and widespread especially in urban areas on disturbed waste ground.

Great Lettuce *Lactuca virosa*: Although not common, this plant seems to be found more often than in the recent past. It has been found to have increased nationally over the last 30 years.

Reflexed Saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia distans*: This occurs occasionally together with Danish Scurvygrass on heavily salted road verges.

Lesser Sea-spurrey *Spergularia marina*: Locally frequent along some regularly salted roadsides. The commonest of the sea-spurreys and the only one regularly found inland.

Some Diminishing or Lost Species

Pale Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla xanthochlora*: The last sighting of this species was in 2000.

Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*: Has been lost from several former sites including Herbert's Meadow at Ulverscroft but there are recent records on Charnwood.

Deadly Nightshade *Atropa belladonna*: At one time this was quite frequent in central Loughborough around old and derelict buildings, but now many of these sites have disappeared. This plant thrives around the ruins in Bradgate Park but has been eradicated from many public sites for Health and Safety reasons.

Betony *Betonica officinalis*: A declining species lost from several old pastures and along road verges but can still be found.

Spreading Bellflower *Campanula patula*: This seems to have disappeared from its only known station in Buddon Wood since 2001.

Crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*: Was lost from its only site at Charnwood Lodge NR in the early 1970s.



Spreading Bellflower ° Peter Gamble

Marsh Helleborine *Epipactis palustris*: Apparently lost from its only recent station, Botcheston Bog, since 1974.

Wood Horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum*: A large colony which occurred in the north section of Grace Dieu Wood until recently, seems to have been lost. It has been recorded in recent years in the Ulverscroft area.

Petty Whin *Genista anglica*: One large plant, plus possibly one or two small ones, are just hanging on in Charnwood Lodge NR.



Petty Whin ° Steve Woodward

Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria*: Several colonies of this, including a large colony at Blackbrook Reservoir, have gone during recent decades.

Stag's-horn Clubmoss *Lycopodium clavatum*: Apparently has not been seen at its last remaining site on Bardon Hill since 1973.

Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*: Has been lost from several sites such as Twenty Acre Piece, Six Hills and has been recorded only from Grace Dieu, Cademan Moor and Swithland Wood in the last three years.



Lousewort ° Steve Woodward



Saw-wort ° Steve Woodward

Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*: Has gone from several sites such as Twenty Acre Piece, Six Hills and is increasingly scarce in the sites where it still exists.

Common Meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum*: This plant has been lost from several sites along the Soar Valley but still occurs occasionally.

Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*: Four known roadside colonies of Bilberry have disappeared during the last half century but it is still found locally on Charnwood Forest.

Isolated Records

Green Spleenwort *Asplenium viride*: Last recorded from railway bridges in the Loughborough area in 1971 in company with **Rustyback Fern *Asplenium ceterach*** which still exists at several sites.

Brittle Bladder-fern *Cystopteris fragilis*: There is an old brick wall covered with this fern on an industrial estate in Loughborough. It is now found at only two other sites.

Floating Water-plantain *Luronium natans*: last seen at Frying Pan pond on Beacon Hill in 1989 and is assumed to have been brought in by birds.

Ribbon Fern *Pteris cretica*: A small colony of this fern has been established on the cellar steps of a Loughborough Church.

Besides the above, there are many cultivated plants which occur as escapes but they are usually transient and only time will tell if they will remain with us.



Rustyback Fern ° Steve Woodward



Aspects of The Club

We asked a selection of members to summarise the various aspects of the Club over the years.

What is a Club?

Judy Johnson

It may be significant that we call ourselves a Club and not a Society. Although the two terms are more or less interchangeable, Club sounds rather more friendly and welcoming and Society more serious and learned. On reflection, however, it seems to me that our Club has all of these attributes.

The serious interests and expertise of the Club are evident in the many publications that have been produced over the years. The major work, *Charnwood Forest: A Changing Landscape*, is outstanding and the Unit Surveys of specific areas indicate dedication and detailed knowledge of all aspects of natural history. Several members have produced publications concerning their own fields of expertise and we must not ignore *Heritage* which is an ongoing record of our area and which is circulated not only to local groups but to such august bodies as the Natural History Museum in London, the BTO, Natural England and others.



Judy Johnson Celebrating the Club's
40th Anniversary

The welcoming and accessible side of the Club is very evident both at indoor meetings and on outdoor activities. At meetings, we have had talks on every conceivable subject and many of the speakers who have visited us have appreciated the knowledge shown by the audience and the interchange of ideas. Meetings also present an opportunity for members to chat and catch up on news and to examine specimens which our experts bring along. The Wednesday walks are an extension of all these things as they provide an opportunity to talk and learn from our experts how to identify what we see and perhaps more importantly, how to look and observe.

In past years, the Club held outdoor field trips by coach but these have lapsed since most people prefer to use their own transport. I can only write of outings since 1980, but judging by old photographs, these meetings were well attended and greatly enjoyed and productive. I remember days spent in the wildflower meadows of Derbyshire, a winter trip to the East Coast and an outing to the Warburg Reserve in Oxfordshire where Peter Gamble found plants of which the warden was unaware and the Brecklands of Norfolk and Suffolk. There were many others as memorable. There were also weekends spent at such venues as Gibraltar Point, Malham Tarn and the Minsmere area. All of these were very companionable and on the coach outings, great fun was often had on the homeward journey.

So, are we a Club or a Society? I think both, though it is quite unimportant. We treasure our experts but welcome anyone who has an interest in natural history. May we continue to enjoy our Club/Society for many more years.....

Indoor Meetings

Katherin Ward

Indoor meetings have always been an important part of Club life and perhaps more so now that we have fewer field meetings.

Heritage keeps everyone aware of up to date records but for many people the indoor meetings are their main means of contact with other members. The most valuable role of indoor meetings is the opportunity they give to meet like-minded people to discuss findings and to be able to ask for help in identifying specimens. It is a rather sad fact that most people apart from noticing eye-catching things such as birds, butterflies and bluebell woods do not share our obsessions and it is pleasant to be in sympathetic company.

Over the years we have enjoyed talks on almost every topic, ranging from the geology of the landscape to butterflies and from amphibians and birds to mammals. Given by visiting speakers and also by our own members who are experts in their own subject, our talks have also included fungi, lichens, mosses and liverworts through to the wide ranging world of flowering plants and their habitats. Other memorable talks have included moths and butterflies and a talk solely on caterpillars.

We have seen wonderful photographs of varying habitats from around the world and the special sites to be found in Britain as well as those which are locally important to us.

Ecological problems have been covered as exemplified by the spread of Japanese Knotweed and the problems that have beset the Oak and Horse Chestnut trees. We have seen a decline in the Bee population and are constantly reminded in all of these talks of the importance of conserving our natural habitats on which our interests and life depend.



Presentations about the vertebrate groups have provided some memorable moments of 'close encounters', when an owl flew around our lecture theatre and when a snake (non-venomous) was passed round for everyone to handle.

Technology has changed in recent times and we now have digital presentations alongside the more conventional slides and talks. Whichever medium is used, our members always excel with their wonderful photographs.

We also learn a great deal from our dedicated members who are willing to share their expertise by bringing along chosen botanical and entomological specimens. The introduction of a microscope linked to a screen now enables us to view and discuss certain specimens with ease.

We have been fortunate in finding suitable venues for our meetings which are at present held in Quorn Church Rooms - a comfortable place with, more importantly a good kitchen where our team of ladies and gentlemen provide welcome refreshments at the half time interval (not forgetting the mince pies at Christmas).

Other indoor meetings activities have also been important. At Quest House, workshops have been held by members on topics such as dragonflies, fungi, liverworts and mosses.

The Club has worked with other natural history groups. Together with the Loughborough branch of the RSPB occasional public lectures were held at the university. Notable among these was a visit by Heather Angel, a noted broadcaster and photographer and by Eric Simms the sound recordist.

Indoor meetings form the hub of the Club at present. Friendliness and shared interests create a warm and welcoming atmosphere where those with much knowledge or only a little can feel a part of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club.

Wednesday Morning Walks

Peter Wilkinson

These walks take place on the first Wednesday morning of each month throughout the year and they have become one of the most popular of the Club's activities with usually from fifteen to twenty members turning out. They are hardly ever cancelled unless conditions are really unsuitable such as continuous heavy rain. We usually set off at 9:30 am for a two hour leisurely ramble through one of our many local areas with opportunities for observing interesting wildlife.

The walks have taken place regularly over more than twenty years. Monica Gillham was the organiser for a number of years and many members, too numerous to mention here, have acted as leader for walks in areas well known to them. Peter Gamble took over the task of organising the walks from Monica and he has continued to do the job sometimes in partnership with other members down to the present day.

Many of the walks take place in the Charnwood area but we also venture further afield to, for example, the Soar Valley, Kelham Bridge, Burrough Hill, Albert Village Lake and many others. Obviously we are restricted to places that can be reached in time for a two hour walk in the morning. There are some places of special interest, such as Charnwood Lodge NR, that are visited every year but we also welcome offers from members to lead walks to places in their local area that they know well.

A short report on each walk is published in the Club's Newsletter. Marion Watson began this task and her reports were always well written and comprehensive. Members now take it in turns to write the report.

Although important observations may be recorded along the way by one of our experts in a particular field this is not the only objective of the walks. They are also pleasant social occasions as members chat about many topics as they walk along through the beautiful countryside. However, as soon as something of interest is spotted people gather round and the talk concerns the identification of the specimen and discussion of its points of interest. This provides an excellent opportunity for beginners and indeed long-standing members to add to their knowledge of our ever fascinating wildlife. The group always contains some really skilled naturalists such as Peter, willing to generously pass on their in-depth knowledge and understanding.

After the walks some of us often adjourn to a local cafe or pub for lunch which is a pleasant way of rounding off the morning.



Wednesday Morning Walks

Coach Outings

Helen Ikin

From the beginning the Club organised coach outings for the members to such interesting places as the Ouse Washes, Scotton Common, Tring Museum, the Natural History Museum, Wicken Fen, Box Hill, Hilbre Island, Minsmere, the Yorkshire Dales, Derbyshire, the Wyre Forest, Savernake Forest and reserves in Wales and the Cotswolds.

Coaches were usually well-filled by members and their families and as well as seeing species not found in Leicestershire, outings were good social occasions with members taking packed lunches and having picnics in many scenic places.



Outing to Ferndale July 1984



Outing to Porton Down July 1997

Leaders had a hard time keeping track of everyone and certain members, who shall remain nameless, were notorious for disappearing when the coach was due to leave for home. Sometimes members forgot that their families were with them and there are several stories of spouses being left behind and one of the coach having to be pushed up Wardley Hill in the snow.

Longer trips to Yorkshire, Anglesey and the New Forest and regular weekends at Gibraltar Point were also organised.

Club Holidays Abroad

Peter Gamble

Many early members of the Club, some sadly no longer with us, treasured or treasure precious memories of holidays spent abroad in unspoilt countryside amongst a wealth of wildlife, many species of which were often new to us.

The first such holiday, in 1972, was organized by Claude Henderson whose painstaking research into what we could expect to see ensured that we got the maximum benefit from our fortnights stay. This set the scene for future trips, all of which proved exciting and memorable. Surely few things can be more pleasurable than discovering and observing the fauna and flora of previously unvisited places!

The following is a list of the localities visited:

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Majorca | March/April | 1972 |
| Northern Greece | April | 1973 |
| Italian Dolomites | July | 1974 |
| Andalucia, Spain | April | 1976 & 1989 |
| Italian Alps, Val Malenco | July | 1977 |
| Corfu | April | 1979 |
| French Savoy Alps | July/August | 1983 |
| Italian Alps, Stelvio- Trafoi | July | 1985 |
| Julian Alps, Slovenia, Jugoslavia | June | 1990 |
| Crete | April/May | 1991 |



Sasso Alto, Italian Alps July 1977



Kassiope Peninsula, Corfu April 1979

French Exchange Visits

Peter Wilkinson

In 1987 the first of a series of exchange visits took place between the Loughborough Naturalists' Club and Le Societe des Amis des Sciences Naturelles de Rouen. The initial contact was made by Derek Lott via the International Twinning Association. The visits continued on a reciprocal basis for many years. These events involved a considerable amount of hard work in terms of organisation on both sides but this was more than repaid by the opportunity to visit so many new places of natural history interest and equally to forge lasting new friendships and enjoy mutual hospitality in each other's homes. I always felt that the English had the better half of the bargain because of the relative richness of both the French fauna and flora and their wine and cuisine not to mention the weather. However our French friends always seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves whilst staying with us.

1990 was a significant year as 46 people came over from France and the signing of the Charter cementing officially the friendly links between the two Clubs took place with due ceremony and conviviality. On the Sunday morning hosts and guests went to Rutland Water. Our French friends were extremely impressed by the hides, particularly the first floor one at the Visitor Centre. We didn't see any rarities but our guests were delighted to see Ruddy Duck which they hadn't seen in France. Another surprising thing was the botanists in the group didn't know Oxford Ragwort. They enjoyed the story of its escape over the wall from Oxford Botanic Gardens.

There were many memorable occasions over the years. In 1995, anxious to show our guests the work of one of our most famous naturalists, we took them to Selbourne to visit the Gilbert White Museum and the unspoiled countryside where he did his recording. We also saw the lovely stained glass window in the church full of lively depictions of animals and plants associated with White before enjoying a traditional English cream tea. On other occasions we explored the Derbyshire Dales and one such visit ended with a picnic beside the river at Bakewell.

Needless to say, the weather was not always kind and in fact the last visit took place in 2007 over a weekend during which the rain seemed to continue from the Friday when the French arrived to the Tuesday when they left. We had a car-bound picnic at Pitsford Reservoir followed by a walk as the rain eased a little. We showed them Bradgate Park in the rain. The most successful day was at Coton Manor as the Bluebells were out and the owner took us on an excellent tour of the gardens which our visitors appeared to greatly enjoy.

It is probably invidious to mention individuals as so many members were involved in ensuring that the visits were a success. In the early days Fred and Kay Gilbert took part in a number of visits and more recently Eva Penn-Smith with her lively personality, botanical and linguistic expertise ensured that the exchanges continued.

Publications

Loughborough Naturalists' Club Publications

Helen Ikin

One of the priorities of the LNC has been the publication of reports thus making the records and observations available to everyone.

| | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|------|
| Bradgate Park and Cropston Reservoir margins | | 1962 |
| The Badger in Charnwood Forest | A E Squires | 1963 |
| Badger Notes: Observations at a Charnwood Sett | T J Whall | 1963 |
| The Birds of East Leicestershire | J Otter | 1965 |
| Loughborough Canal: An Introduction to its Wildlife | | 1968 |
| Swithland Wood: a preliminary survey | | 1970 |
| Grace Dieu: Interim and preliminary reports | | 1976 |
| Charnwood Forest: A Changing Landscape | | 1981 |
| Ulverscroft | | 1986 |
| Groby Pool | | 1987 |
| Benscliffe & Blakeshay | | 1990 |
| The Spiders of Leicestershire and Rutland | J Crocker & J Daws | 1996 |
| Beacon Hill Country Park | | 1998 |
| The Spiders of Leicestershire & Rutland Millennium Atlas | J Crocker & J Daws | 2001 |
| Birds of Ulverscroft Nature Reserve | S F Woodward | 2001 |
| The Birdlife of Swithland Reservoir | I B Gamble | 2001 |
| Bardon Hill. A site visit re: the rare spider <i>Mastigusa macrophthalma</i> | J Crocker | 2001 |
| Bardon Hill Spider Survey 2001-2002 | J Crocker & J Daws | 2002 |
| The Birds of Ratcliffe on the Wreake Gravel Pits | I B Gamble | 2007 |
| Poultney Farm & Ulverscroft Pond. Provisional report | S F Woodward, P H Gamble & H Ikin | 2007 |
| The Leicestershire Coleopterists | D A Lott | 2009 |
| Poultney Farm and Ulverscroft Pond | S F Woodward, P H Gamble & H Ikin | 2010 |
| <i>Heritage 1 – 100 Index</i> | | |
| Scans of Biological Records 1961-2010 | | 2013 |

Heritage - Our Quarterly Bulletin

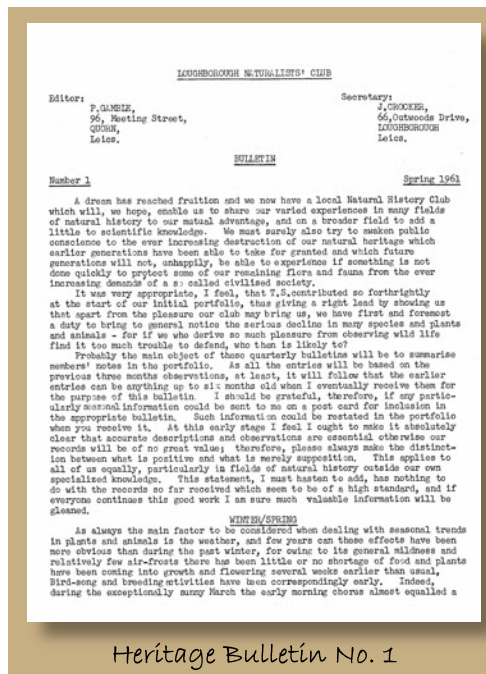
Helen Ikin

The Loughborough Naturalists' Club was formed as a recording club and originally a portfolio was circulated among the members and everyone added their observations.

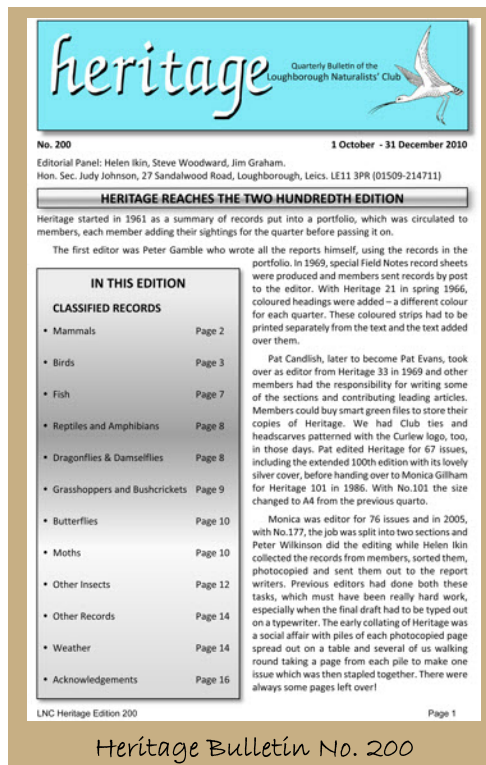
In 1961 *Heritage* was started as a quarterly summary of the records under the editorship of Peter Gamble, who wrote all the reports himself, using the records in the portfolio. In 1969 special Field Notes record sheets were produced and members sent records by post to the editor. With *Heritage* 21 in spring 1966 coloured headings were added – a different colour for each quarter. These coloured strips had to be printed separately from the text and the text added over them.

Pat Candlish, later to become Pat Evans, took over as editor from *Heritage* 33 in 1969 and other members had the responsibility for the writing up of some of the sections and contributing leading articles. Members could buy smart green files to store their copies of *Heritage*. We had Club ties and headscarves patterned with the Curlew logo too, in those days. Pat edited *Heritage* for 67 issues, including the extended 100th edition with its lovely silver cover, before handing over to Monica Gillham for *Heritage* 101 in 1986. With this edition the size changed to A4 from the previous quarto.

Monica was Editor for 76 issues and in 2005, with No. 177, the job was split into two sections and Peter Wilkinson did the editing while Helen Ikin collected the records from members, sorted them, photocopied and sent them out to the report writers. Previous editors had done both these tasks, which must have been really hard work, especially when the final draft had to be typed out on a typewriter and then copied with a Banda machine. The early collating of *Heritage* was a social affair with piles of each photocopied page spread out on a table and several of us walking round taking a page from each pile to make one issue which was then stapled together. There were always some pages left over!



Heritage Bulletin No. 1



Heritage Bulletin No. 200

We now have an editorial panel of Helen Ikin, Jim Graham and Steve Woodward and the task has become easier with the advent of computers and desk-top publishing programmes.

The different sections have been written up by a number of members one of whom, Peter Gamble, has been doing it for the full 50 years.

Mammals: Peter Gamble, Harry Clements, Gerald Felstead, Helen Ikin

Birds: Peter Gamble, Bas Forgham, (1972 and still doing it), Kingsley Lloyd, Keith Harper, Steve Lister, Jim Graham

Amphibians, Reptiles & Fish: Peter Gamble, John Stacey, Dorothy Jones, Tony Onions

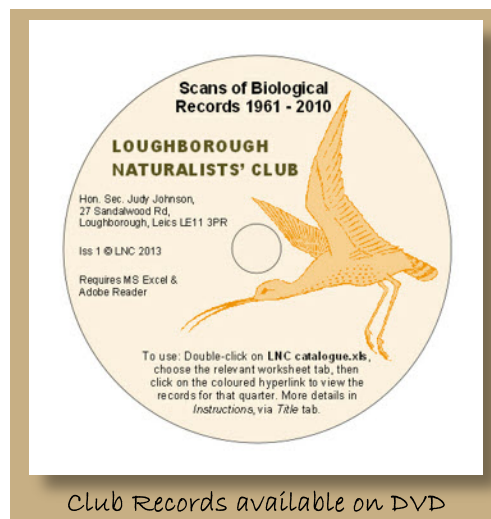
Insects and Other Invertebrates: Peter Gamble, Simon Davey, John Crocker, Derek Lott, Monica Gillham, Graham & Anona Finch, Howard Bradshaw, Helen Ikin, Jim Graham

Flowering Plants and Ferns: Peter Gamble, Bob Green, June Horwood, Pat Evans, Steve Bishop, Eric Webster, Eva Penn-Smith

Fungi & Lower Plants: Mike Walpole, Dorothy Fieldhouse, Derrick Palmer, Angela Marmont, Les Hall

Galls: Angela Marmont

Weather: Alan Wildig, Phil Morrish



Club Exhibitions

Katherin Ward

Since its founding, exhibitions have been an integral part of the Club's agenda. In 1963 the highlight of the Club's celebration of the National Nature Week exhibition featured two huge hemispheres of the world filled with exotic butterflies proclaiming "This is Natural History".

One of the first pieces of Club hardware was the Club stand, a heavy timber structure with a wayward transformer. The stand was topped by an artistic metal Curlew (our logo) made by Claude Henderson.

The early exhibitions were held in the Baptist Church Rooms in Woodgate, Loughborough and over the years exhibitions have also taken us to various locations in Loughborough. These have included the Charnwood Museum, the Library and Quest House. At Quest House our exhibitions were often accompanied by courses which were run by Club members and open to the public.

My involvement with the exhibitions began with the preparations for the 25th Anniversary. It was supported by a large number of enthusiastic members who each put on their own display. The stands and quality of displays were spectacular. Maps and graphs showed the extensive amount of fieldwork that had been achieved through the ongoing Charnwood Forest Survey. The list of displays is memorable and included fossils collected along the Soar Valley, spiders, beetles, moths, butterflies, dragonflies, birds, mammals and live specimens of reptiles and amphibians. Flowering plant records and charts were also on show and a collection of fungi. Precious books were on loan for the day and overseen by Ian Evans, Keeper of Biology at Leicester Museum. Weather charts were meticulously prepared from masses of data by Alan Wildig. Members produced this massive display for one day only.



25th Anniversary Exhibition at Loughborough Town Hall



Discover Like Darwin Exhibition 2007

Weather charts were meticulously prepared from masses of data by Alan Wildig. Members produced this massive display for one day only.

Exhibitions have informed a wider public of the work and interests of the Club. They also promote and present a glimpse of the wonderful world of natural history to be found in our area.

Staging exhibitions is hard work. The Club has been fortunate in having members dedicated to the task in hand. The support and camaraderie of team members has seen us through some unusual situations. Excessive heat and high winds at both

Beacon Hill and the Rempstone Steam and Country Fair required a certain determination to see the days through. At an exhibition held at the Severn Trent site at Swithland Reservoir torrential overnight rain required Colin Green and his team to use diggers to create a moat around our marquee. However, the show goes on.

Exhibitions have continued during the intervening years since the major 25th Anniversary. The venues have been varied. At the Anstey Village Festival, recorded bird song echoed from the United Reformed Church pulpit as snails actively sped along the tops of the pews. The 'Think Green' exhibitions held at Granby Halls in Leicester were massive and enjoyable for the enthusiasm of other clubs and societies whose interests matched our own. The crowds too were fantastic. We have had stands at both the Swithland and Cropston sites on the Severn Trent Open Days. The Club was also invited to stage a week-long display at the Egleton Centre at Rutland Water.

The Leicestershire Museums Services welcomed our presence at the Summer Open Days at Holly Hayes Environmental Centre. Carolyn Holmes and her team have consistently given support to our exhibitions. At the British Gas Research Centre on the Loughborough University campus we were asked to stage an exhibition which would introduce Charnwood Forest to staff who were new to the area. For this event we also produced a specially illustrated booklet.

Colin Green always invited the Club to attend the Rempstone Steam and Country Fair. In the "Countryside Tent" we included displays which would interest the younger generation. Water life, garden ladybirds, insect houses, nest boxes, disused wasps' nests and displays of moths and butterflies were always popular with the general public.

We have also regularly attended the National Wood Fair at Beacon Hill where the microscope work, showing the variety of aquatic life provided by Peter Wilkinson, was extremely popular.

As technology increased in availability and popularity it became an integral part of exhibitions. Graham and Anona Finch provided a digital display of moths and butterflies as a part of our exhibition to celebrate the opening of the new Ashby Museum. Helen Ikin and Steve Woodward introduced us to the world of microbiology on screen. This proved a great favourite at the Beacon Hill Country Fair and at Rempstone.

Photography has always played a part in recording natural history. Throughout our exhibitions members have been very generous in granting us the use of their first-class photographs. Looking back, we can recall just how much photography has changed over the years.

For the 40th Anniversary we held a major exhibition at the Charnwood Museum in Loughborough. This was followed by a smaller exhibition depicting the work of naturalists in the field and producing their written records.

Having previously held a successful exhibition at Snibston Discovery Park, we returned there to celebrate our 50th Anniversary. We showed the history and activities of the Club, together with displays of areas of interest in and around Charnwood Forest and North-West



50th Anniversary at Snibston

Leicestershire. At these events specimens of mammals and birds, together with collections of butterflies, moths and other insects, were provided by the Leicestershire Museums Services. Some of the specimens had been collected by members of the Club.

Exhibitions do not just happen. They require a great deal of unseen work and input by the willing members who, over the years, have formed a long-standing exhibition team. They have always found

time and energy to contribute interesting visual and interactive displays which tempt the passerby into the world of natural history.

As the exhibition organiser over many years and on behalf of the Committee, I thank them for their continued and active support. The exhibitions have been an achievement of which we can be proud.

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Social Occasions

Over the year, the Club's calendar has provided time for special anniversary celebrations.

Following the 25th Anniversary exhibition we held an evening meal at Loughborough University.

For the 40th Anniversary we had a picnic in the grounds of 'The Brand'. On a lovely sunny afternoon the highlight was witnessing a respected member doing a celebration head-stand at the age of 91.

We returned to the custom of enjoying an evening meal for the 50th Anniversary. This was a special occasion shared by many members and friends some of whom had travelled long distances to attend.



John Fieldhouse doing a head-stand

Farming and Wildlife in the Belvoir Area

Michael Stanley

I was born at West End Farm in Eastwell. The farm had none of the modern amenities. I have lived all my life in north-east Leicestershire. At the age of 14 I left school and began working with the horses on our farm. It was not until 1941 that we had our first tractor to help with the heavy work.



Wendy and Michael Stanley

Although the work was hard and at times unprofitable it proceeded at a slower pace than today. Ploughing, drilling seed, hoeing weeds, cutting corn with a binder drawn by horses, stooking, loading and stacking the sheaves, kept us in the fields for long hours. Threshing took place during the winter and usually involved ten people, the corn being fed to livestock with some left for sale. At that time we worked closer to nature and throughout the seasons the sight of different plants and animals enriched our lives.

Over many years, the constant changes in agricultural practice have affected the wildlife on the farm. The bird populations and their numbers have changed dramatically.

Until the early 1980s, Snipe bred in the boggy flushes in Eaton Parish and could be seen every winter in the wet grassland both here and at Eastwell. Curlew with young were also seen one year in the 1960s and bred regularly in some nearby parishes about this time.



Curlew ° Ian Gamble

Lapwings bred in many arable fields and in the meadows. A certain sign of breeding was the ducking and diving over anyone who ventured close to their nests. One year, my father counted 18 nests with eggs in a particular field as he worked the fallows. The eggs were moved and then replaced after passing. The birds always returned to the nest scrape. It would seem that with so many birds in the air, the Lapwings were able to drive away the Carrion Crows, which in those days were less common than today. The Lapwings have not bred in this field since the war.

During the winter large flocks of Lapwing fed on the fields. Sometimes flocks of up to 500 birds could be seen. Sadly, this is no longer a country scene with the exception of those at Rutland Water and Eyebrook Reservoir and at several wetland nature reserves. The sights and sounds of nature are important. One heard the harsh 'creaking gate' call of the Grey Partridge in the evenings as they gathered to roost, a rare sound today with few farms in Vice-County 55 supporting this species. In some summers, Quail were also present in the long grass in the fields



Lapwing © Ian Gamble

at Eaton and on the old railway track where I believe they are still regular.

The Corncrake bred in a 24 acre field known as Copley's Close, on Harby Road in Eastwell (c1937). At the age of six, my father showed me the broken shells after the chicks had hatched.

Wheatears, with their beautiful plumage, are now very much scarcer. During the 1920s and 1930s I am told that they bred in the turfs that were replaced after the quarrying of ironstone. I do not often see this distinctive bird today. It was always a pleasure to see their return on passage, early each spring. It was also good to see the related Whinchat which used to pause to feed as they passed through the farm in late August or early September. Flocks of Yellow Wagtails, the males as bright as buttercups, usually arrived in April and still a few pairs breed in arable fields in our area, but since the 1980s they have become scarce and local.

The Turtle Dove seems to have disappeared during recent years. I last heard it calling in 2007 in Eaton cemetery. Turtle Doves also occurred at Stonesby Quarry and at Combs Meadow, where they bred until recently in the old hedgerows. Some still return each year to the bushed-over railway banks at Plungar.

Redwings and Fieldfares, arriving in October, were a common sight in the berry-rich hedgerows and in the fields on the pasture land, the former remaining until early March and the latter staying until April or May.

In 1982 Hobbies nested in the top of an ivy-clad Ash tree on our farm and successfully raised three young. These or another pair returned the following year and bred in the top of a similar ivy-clad Elm tree.

Although the Sparrowhawk is now common it was not seen during the late 1950s and '60s because of the widespread use of certain agricultural pesticides which are now, thankfully, no longer used. Kestrels often hunted over the farm fields and sometimes bred in old crow nests.

Swallows bred in many of the farm buildings. The calendar date of April 14th was their anticipated date of arrival. Some years they managed to raise three broods, resulting in some large congregations by the end of summer. House Martins bred in varying numbers under the eaves and were sometimes displaced by the House Sparrows. The chirping of the House Sparrows and the chattering of the Swallows and House Martins were familiar sounds of early morning. Swifts also bred in the farmhouse roof.

Cuckoos could be heard all day long during May and June, a welcome sound rarely heard in many villages today. Quite a number of parishioners have reported that they have not heard a Cuckoo for a number of years. In recent years I have heard a Cuckoo only once each spring, suggesting that these may have moved off to find more suitable breeding sites farther afield.

In February an early sign of spring was the sight of the Rooks carrying the first twigs for nesting in the nearby rookery.

Yellowhammers bred on the roadsides and could often be seen and heard at regular intervals on the tops of the hedgerows. Local youths often discovered their nests which contained the distinctively marked eggs. They were sometimes referred to as Scribble Larks because of the markings on their eggs. Linnet was another common bird breeding in the hedgerows.

Tree Sparrows bred on the farm, where they fed in mixed flocks with finches in the fields and often bred communally in holes in the old Ash trees and in Elder bushes with holes in trunks and hollow branches. The stubble left in the winter fields provided valuable feeding areas throughout the winter months.

Spotted Flycatcher nested around the old farm buildings where insect food was plentiful.

Meadow Pipits, in flocks of up to 100, occurred at certain times of the year, particularly when there was a plentiful supply of invertebrates. They could often be seen going to roost in the thick lines of straw left by the combine harvester. Fields with their surrounding hedgerows and stubble are no longer left. They provided valuable foraging areas for birds and mammals.

Skylarks could be seen feeding on the stubble but their numbers are now greatly reduced. In former years their song was a feature of the spring and many pairs bred locally.

Goldfinch numbers have increased in our gardens due to the Nyger seed provided in garden feeders but large flocks are less often seen feeding on teasels and thistles in the countryside. The overall numbers of the finch family have declined greatly.

Over the years some 90% of the old meadows have been lost during my lifetime. Old meadows are now replaced by leys with new strains of grass. They are heavily fertilised and mown in May. The grass is then put into heaps or silos. Should enough rainfall follow the first cut, another is taken in July and occasionally a third cut can be made in September. This method, together with the newly bred strains of grass has virtually eliminated many of the common species of wild flowers. Many of the old meadows supported up to a hundred or more species of wild flowers. These in turn were responsible for attracting a wealth of insects.

Many of the orchid species have declined and species like the Green-winged, Common Spotted, Heath Spotted and Twayblades were found only in some of the older meadows. The Cornflower became extinct around 1953/54 due to the changes caused by the new methods in the cultivation of arable crops. However, the Night-scented Catchfly was still being recorded in 1988 in the arable fields. Corncockle became extinct on the farm during my father's time. The Corn Gromwell, which is now rare in Leicestershire, used to occur on our farm and the Corn Buttercup whose old name was 'Waxwheels' after the shape of the seed heads, is not now recorded. The Dropwort, Small Scabious, Wild Thyme, Field Madder, Common Milkwort and Field Mouse Ear still occur on old pastures at Eaton.

The old meadows on the farm provided ideal habitats for butterflies such as the Common Blue and Small Copper. Wall Brown appears to be extinct and I haven't seen one for several years at Eaton where they could until recent years be seen every year.

Badgers and Foxes frequented a belt of trees along one boundary of the farm. I have even seen partially-white Stoats in their winter coats in very hard winters. The potato clamps attracted good numbers of small mammals. Over the years Field and Bank Voles, Wood Mouse and Common and Pygmy Shrews were found breeding in them and on one occasion a Water Shrew was noted. The ponds on our farm were habitats for pairs of Moorhen and for Frogs, Toads and Newts, whilst Grass Snakes frequented the manure heaps where they laid their eggs.

Vast changes in farming methods have taken place in my lifetime and I would think more so than at any time since Eaton Parish was enclosed by the Belvoir Estate. They have had a drastic effect on the presence of the wildlife. The rotation of crops has speeded up.

More spraying now takes place and there are few of the smaller fields which provided the varying habitats which sustained a variable range of plants and animals.

I have always had a keen interest in the wildlife of north-east Leicestershire in particular. I became a member of the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust in 1962 and was the Chairman of the Melton Group for ten years and have worked on various Trust reserves, especially at Holwell.

It was Ian Evans who persuaded me to keep a wildlife notebook when I attended a Workers Educational Association class at Melton Mowbray which he was leading and when Peter Gamble took over the class in 1964 I was introduced to the Loughborough Naturalists' Club, which I joined in 1977. I left the Eastwell farm in 1988 and went to live in the same village and then moved to Eaton where I continued to record the natural history in this interesting parish. I became the Club Chairman for 2003 and 2004 and have continued to contribute many natural history records from the Belvoir area since 1967.



Wildlife Recording and Nature Conservation in Leicestershire and Rutland

Michael Jeeves

The recording of our fauna and flora by naturalists has a long tradition in Leicestershire, but it would be a mistake to believe that naturalists are necessarily conservationists. The early naturalists collected huge numbers of specimens presumably because these activities satisfied some sort of innate hunting instinct, or else they thought that they were contributing to science. In some cases there was a practical purpose to studying the natural world, for example Richard Pulteney, who can be considered the father of Leicestershire botany, was an apothecary at Loughborough in the mid-eighteenth century, using plants to try and cure people's ills.

It seems doubtful that Pulteney recorded plants in his journals as an aide for nature conservation, yet he and other early naturalists must have noted declines in the populations of some species. Despite this, many carried on with the collecting mania. In the nineteenth century another Loughborough naturalist, James Harley, was more interested in the fauna of the county and he wrote detailed diaries of his observations. It is clear from these that collecting was an important component of the naturalists' pursuit and he mentions, for example, bringing home an Adder from Bradgate Park in 1840 and that his companion on the same day shot "a fine male" Wheatear for 'preserving' (Hickling 1995). Harley was an avid egg collector, as were many naturalists until comparatively recently. What seems remarkable is that the nineteenth century saw a massive onslaught on birds and mammals in Leicestershire by those interested in game shooting, leading to the eventual local extinction of Polecat, Pine Marten, Red Kite, Buzzard and Raven, yet it is surprisingly hard to find any evidence of naturalists' regret at this.



Richard Pulteney

Image courtesy Leicestershire County Council

Montague Browne (1889) records the shooting in 1827 of the only Cream-coloured Courser ever seen in Leicestershire, on Timberwood Hill (now part of Charnwood Lodge NR) without comment and A R Horwood (Horwood & Noel 1933) describes the agricultural improvement of Leicestershire's grasslands almost in heroic terms, but still thought that "around Burrough and farther Northwards some of the pastures are very much in need of improvement. These pastures and many around Newbold are covered with ant-hills, and full of noxious weeds ..." There is no mention of the need for conservation. Perhaps the early naturalists thought that there was an inevitability about it all, in much the same way that the Ancient Greeks did.

It was not until the 1940s that action started to be taken on nature conservation in

Leicestershire and Rutland. Naturalists now seemed to want to do something to preserve a few of the places that they valued most, aware that in the post-war years of economic recovery the landscape was changing rapidly, and much was being lost. The records of naturalists were used to identify the best sites and many of these were later notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. In 1956 the organisation that later became known as the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust was formed, with the goal of establishing nature reserves. Again, the records of local naturalists were crucial in enabling the Trust to target sites for acquisition, although it was some time before it was able to secure a great deal of land.

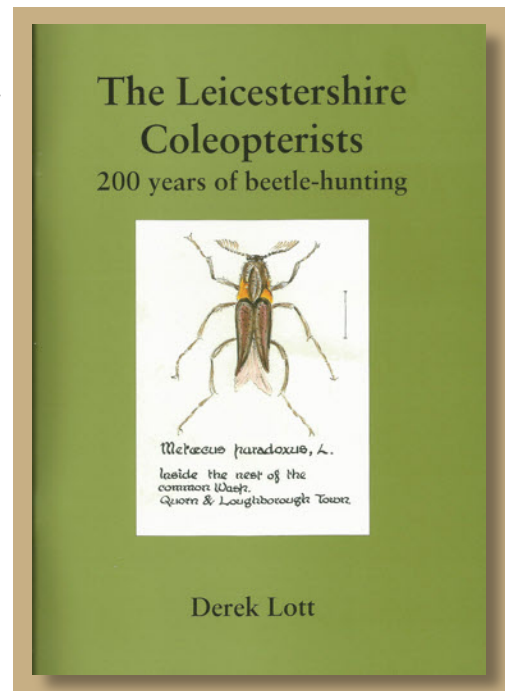
The early naturalists covered a remarkable amount of ground considering the fact that they had to get around without the aid of the motorcar. Communication between naturalists must also have been a slow business, yet despite this and the transport problem a comprehensive account of the counties' flora and fauna was put together. Since Horwood & Gainsborough's Flora, for example, the work for which had probably been completed before about 1920, hardly any new native plants have been discovered. The recording of plants was inevitably more comprehensive than that of animals other than vertebrates, because plants are generally easier to find and identify, and this led to most SSSIs being selected on the basis of their flora and vegetation.

However, we can speculate that hopefully those making the selection also had in mind whether a site might have a particularly important fauna, in addition to a good flora, even if they could not demonstrate it. What is not in doubt is that of the 80 or so biological SSSIs eventually selected, nearly all of the best sites were included. This was not the case in some other counties and it is testament to the work of the naturalists who recorded the wildlife of Leicestershire and Rutland in such tremendous detail. A small number of exceptional sites were missed in the initial lists, for example Burley Wood in Rutland, Saddington Reservoir and Roecliffe Manor Lawns. Burley Wood at least had not been recorded particularly well by the early naturalists, but after the formation of the Rutland Natural History Society in 1965 it became one of the society's favourite locations. The wood's flora, however, was not known to be exceptional and that may be why it was apparently not considered to be of SSSI standard. Then in the 1980s Burley Wood was threatened by a proposed golf course development, but fortunately the Leicestershire Museums Arts and Records Service was able to mount an in-depth study of the site's natural history. A team of naturalists, including myself, was deployed and the wood was found to be exceptionally important for a range of species, including lichens, bryophytes, deadwood invertebrates, bats and birds. This was an object lesson in the need for broad-based survey work in order to truly discover the value of a site. The golf course proposal was not pursued and Burley Wood was later notified as a SSSI.

Saddington Reservoir was notified as a SSSI mainly because of its beetle fauna, thanks to the efforts of local coleopterist Derek Lott and Roecliffe Manor Lawns was notified because of its fungi. The latter group have been particularly poorly represented in SSSI notifications in Leicestershire and Rutland, but the emergence of the Leicestershire Fungi Study Group led to a substantial increase in knowledge of fungi and the discovery of the Roecliffe site.

It followed that the knowledge of local naturalists also enabled the Wildlife Trust to acquire a fine nature reserve estate, which now includes perhaps 13 out of the current best 25 wildlife sites in the two counties at the present time. I have compiled the list shown in Fig. 1 using published and unpublished information on the natural history of Leicestershire and Rutland. There is inevitably some subjectivity and bias in it and further recording work may well result in changes. It should be added that some exceptional sites have been lost or badly damaged, so do not appear in the list. These include Buddon Wood, once probably the most valuable woodland in Leicestershire and Rutland, before quarrying started in the 1970s.

Publications have played a very important role in promoting natural history, enabling researchers to benefit from the work of naturalists and encouraging more people to become naturalists. I was inspired myself by Jack Otter's wonderful book on the birds of East Leicestershire (Otter 1965 – published by the Loughborough Naturalists' Club). In the late 1960s I discovered a copy of the book in my local library and was enthralled by its content, which was presented in the author's captivating style. I read it from cover to cover and then cycled out from the city to explore the places described, such as Owston Woods. I made notes that I still have, to compare my observations with those in the book. For example, I recorded 35 Willow Warblers singing in Owston Woods on 19th May 1971, which at the time disappointed me because the book reported that "for a number of years about 80 singing males were counted in Owston Wood" However, in 2004 I walked through the woods and heard none at all, which was extremely depressing, but nevertheless is valuable information. The Willow Warbler is probably one of many species of the woodland edge that have suffered from the neglect of woodlands, leading to the loss of the open spaces they require, although there are almost certainly other factors affecting Willow Warbler numbers, perhaps including conditions in its winter quarters in Africa. Nevertheless, the records of Willow Warblers at Owston gave us information that the Wildlife Trust has used to plead with the Forestry Commission, who manage most of the site, to undertake management work to benefit species of the woodland edge. This, then, is one of the ways records can be used, as facts to help justify sometimes costly site management work. Not that it is always that easy, of course. Naturalists seem to have become increasingly specialised, resulting in conflicts between enthusiasts. Ketton Quarry, which is well known as one of the counties' best wildlife sites, is a case in point. Here there are numerous notable species, across many groups, but heated debate amongst specialists has taken place. Practical work proposed to assist the Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, was met with concern by naturalists worried about the impact that it would have on other wildlife, such as Glow-worms. Natural England, the government's advisors on nature conservation matters, seemed unconcerned with all of these



invertebrate species, concentrating on the calcareous grassland vegetation for which the site was notified as a SSSI. The value of the scrub to many species at Ketton is also unrecognised by Natural England who consider it a threat to the grassland.

Another issue is that nature conservation is not as scientific a subject as some would like us to believe. Cute, cuddly and charismatic species, particularly those with fur or feathers, tend to get more resources and support from the government, the public and funders than the less showy and more obscure animals and plants. Naturalists often struggle with this fact. The argument given that mosses, liverworts, invertebrates and others will be assisted by conservation work aimed at birds, mammals and plants is a difficult pill to swallow, because it appears that some species are more important than others. Are not all species of equal value?

Some would consider nature conservation to be about allowing change to occur, by not interfering with natural processes. This might mean the loss of some species though, with them replaced by others. For example, reedbeds are only normally transitory habitats, which develop into woodland if unmanaged. Even if they are managed, by cutting and tree removal, it is extremely difficult to prevent a build up of decaying plant material which ultimately leads to drier ground and invasion by other plant species. Naturalists, who may have an interest in a particular group of animals or plants, sometimes find these changes difficult to accept, especially if 'their' group is being adversely affected. But trying to prevent change is often ultimately futile. Also, naturalists may not like processes such as predation, if their study group is at the sharp end of this. On a recent visit to the Nene Washes, it was interesting to learn that Marsh Harriers, amongst a number of predators, are not warmly welcomed because they eat the wader chicks that are the subject of conservation work there, yet other conservationists may not only see that process as part of nature, but revel in the sight of these magnificent raptors. Ironically, it was not long ago that the Marsh Harrier was a threatened species itself.

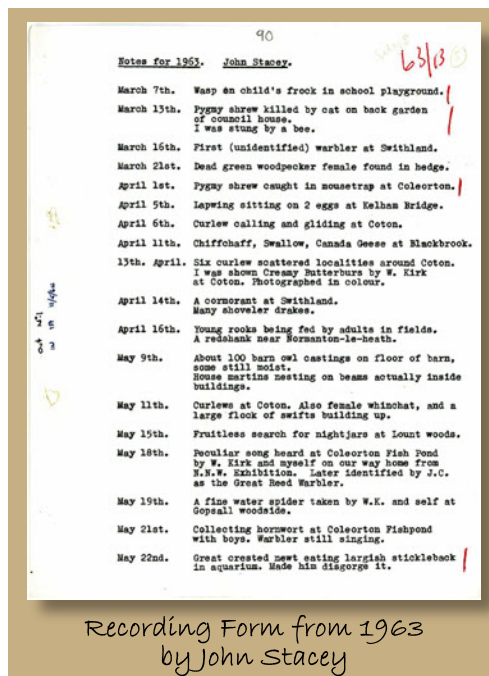
With the growth in the membership of non-governmental conservation organisations came greater protection for wildlife in the planning system, and this led to the recognition of Local Records Centres as repositories of biological records. There the records could be used by consultants working for developers, and by local authorities, to try and reduce the impact that development was having on wildlife. The records were also put to other uses, such as the targeting of agricultural grant schemes, but increasingly the planning system demanded more focus on good sites, identified by simple criteria, and a small number of legally protected species. The overwhelming majority of threatened species were unprotected, but the customers of Local Records Centres had little interest in them.

Local Records Centres tried for many years to secure funding that would enable them to employ a team of skilled staff, make use of modern technology, and carry out regular surveys to ensure that good and up-to-date information was available to those who wanted to use it for conservation purposes, but no-one really wanted to foot the bill for this professional service.

Local authorities will have to continue employing ecologists to help them implement their obligations under the planning system, but especially following the global financial crisis of the early twenty-first century, this is likely to be at a very basic level. Support for naturalists

generating records of species that the planning system is not really interested in will wane even further, but nature conservation still very much needs this information. Recording is essential in order to identify new SSSIs and new nature reserves, to facilitate long-term monitoring of both, and to monitor wildlife outside of these special places, the 'wider countryside'.

The wheel has turned full circle and amateur naturalists must take more control of biological recording, just as they did before the idea of Local Records Centres had been thought of. The naturalists also need to consider just what they want to do with their records. They must also, if they decide that nature conservation is important to them, re-invigorate their involvement in Leicestershire and Rutland for the local Wildlife Trust. The Trust is the best hope of protecting the wildlife and wild places of Leicestershire and Rutland that the naturalists value, and the only organisation that they can really influence. Naturalists also need to understand that, as I have suggested, nature conservation is only an idea. It is subject to fashion and change, embracing a multitude of different concepts. The naturalists must fight their corner, which they have not done so vigorously in recent years, leaving others to occupy the decision making positions on the Trust's Council of trustees. The day of the naturalist has not gone, as one professional conservationist told me once, because naturalists are the real experts on the natural history of their area. Conservation organisations, whether they are government agencies, local authorities or non-governmental organisations, employ very few wildlife experts these days, and there is a worrying trend towards a sort of 'conservation by the manual' approach as a result of this. The naturalists need to make themselves heard, while acknowledging and understanding the views of others.



Recording Form from 1963
by John Stacey

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Figure 1: The best 25 wildlife sites in Leicestershire and Rutland

| Site | Main interests include | Conservation Status |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Bloody Oaks Quarry | Vascular plants; butterflies | SSSI; LRWT NR |
| Bradgate Park | Vascular plants; mosses & liverworts; lichens; fungi; bats; reptiles & amphibians; fish; beetles; crayfish; other invertebrates | SSSI |
| Burley Wood | Lichens; mosses & liverworts; bats; birds; invertebrates | SSSI |
| Charnwood Lodge | Vascular plants; mosses & liverworts; lichens; fungi; birds; spiders; butterflies & moths; beetles | NNR (LRWT); SSSI |
| Cloud Wood | Vascular plants; butterflies & moths | SSSI; LRWT NR |
| Cribb's Meadow | Vascular plants; butterflies | NNR (LRWT); SSSI |
| Croft Pasture | Vascular plants | SSSI; LRWT NR |
| Donington Park | Beetles | SSSI |
| Grace Dieu Wood | Vascular plants; invertebrates | SSSI |
| Grantham Canal | Dragonflies | SSSI |
| Ketton Quarry | Vascular plants; beetles; spiders; bats; butterflies & moths; dragonflies; reptiles | SSSI; LRWT NR |
| Launde Big Wood | Vascular plants | SSSI; LRWT NR |
| Lea Meadows | Vascular plants; beetles; moths; crayfish; other invertebrates; fish | SSSI; LRWT NR |
| Lockington Marshes | Invertebrates; vascular plants | SSSI |
| Loughborough Big Meadow | Vascular plants; beetles | SSSI; LRWT NR |
| Luffenham Heath Golf Course | Vascular plants; butterflies; birds | SSSI |
| Merry's Meadows | Vascular plants | SSSI; LRWT NR |
| Muston Meadows | Vascular plants | NNR (NE); SSSI |
| Owston Woods | Vascular plants | SSSI |
| Rutland Water | Birds; moths; grasshoppers & crickets; vascular plants | SPA; SSSI; LRWT NR |
| Seaton Meadows | Vascular plants | SSSI; Plantlife NR |
| Soar Valley Gravel Pits (Cossington Meadows, Wanlip Meadows, Watermead CP, Willows Farm) | Birds; dragonflies | Part LRWT NR; Part Country Park |
| Swithland Reservoir | Vascular plants; birds; spiders; beetles; moths; other invertebrates | SSSI |
| Swithland Wood | Vascular plants; beetles; moths; invertebrates | SSSI |
| Ulverscroft NR (including Herbert's Meadow) | Vascular plants; beetles; moths; crayfish; other invertebrates | SSSI; LRWT NR |

Key to abbreviations:

LRWT: Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust

NE: Natural England

NNR: National Nature Reserve

NR: Nature Reserve

SPA: Special Protection Area

SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest

Note that the SSSIs were not necessarily notified for the species groups shown, which is an important matter, when it comes to legal protection.

The Loughborough Naturalists' Club in a Changing World

David Hassett

On reaching half a century of age in good health and spirit, with many accomplishments to its name, the Loughborough Naturalists' Club can surely be said to have become an institution, a homely institution which has made a distinctive mark on society and on civilisation!

How does the Club fit into the wider historical setting? What was it that spurred the development of an ecological conscience as a driving force in public affairs during the 1960s and '70s? What is the special recipe which has made the nature conservation movement in the UK so successful, in comparison with many of its European neighbours? How much of the progress achieved can be credited to each of the four key players: the Government, NGOs, the corporate sector and the mass media? And finally, what might the future hold in store for us?

Action plan: heads, hands and hearts

In the LNC, right from the very start, it was determined that, to achieve the Club's goals, a three-pronged approach would be necessary:

1. Strategic evaluation of the state of the Charnwood environment;
2. Immediate practical conservation measures focused on threatened habitats and species; and
3. A slower process of public awareness-building.

This all-round course of action more-or-less followed the principles of the great Swiss social reformer Pestalozzi, who believed that education should develop the powers not only of the 'Head', but of the 'Hands' and 'Heart', in order to improve society and bring peace and security to the world.

Most of the Club's founder members had, of course, grown up in the 1930s and had witnessed the damage wrought on our countryside during the war years, as much by unwise British government policies as by enemy air raids. Amongst other indignities, large pockets of ancient relict woodland (including part of Buddon Wood, for example) had been clear-felled and burned, extensive quarrying had been carried out and many wild areas had been brought unnecessarily under the plough. The wave of devastation continued in the post-war reconstruction period. To contain this, shortly after the Club was established, a fairly comprehensive list was drawn up of local sites especially worthy of preservation, besides those already registered officially as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or suchlike. These unprotected areas were to be researched and monitored by members so as to forestall any possible threats, and the landowners concerned would be sought out to encourage their co-operation. It was hoped that legal and financial assistance to this end could be obtained from the recently-founded Leicestershire and Rutland Trust for Nature Conservation (now the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust), to which the Club was affiliated, and which had an LNC member on its council. At the same time, long-term appraisal of particularly endangered species would be attempted through involvement in countrywide projects such as the national bat and otter surveys. The third main policy aim of the LNC, that of public persuasion, was to be carried out both directly

(through Club activities and publications) and indirectly, via the local news media. As it happened, National Nature Week, an annual event promoted by the Council for Nature, to which the LNC was affiliated, provided an opportunity to reach out to the public and foster its interest and support through exhibitions, talks and nature trails.

Tony Squires took this three-fold task (strategic planning, direct protection measures and public persuasion) squarely on his shoulders, before he departed for Africa, and Peter Gamble thereafter was its most eloquent advocate, although all the Committee was conservation-conscious and indeed it was a constant theme permeating Club activities. A number of excellent publications were issued by the Club in an attempt to attract a wider audience to local wildlife, including both monographs on specific animals, such as *The Badger in Charnwood Forest* (1963), and reference guides on a complete group, like *The Birds of East Leicestershire* (1965). The Badger monograph was prepared by Tony Squires, and issued together with a supplement *Badger Notes: Observations at a Charnwood Sett* by John Whall, whilst the bird book, the culmination of 40 years of field observation, was written by Jack Otter and illustrated by another member, the wildlife artist John Stacey, with the co-operation of a further ten members in its production!

Birth of the Modern Conservation Movement

To the modern generation of youngsters who were born at the turn of the millennium, the 1960s may seem like ancient history. Those of us who lived through it as children or young adults will remember it as a tumultuous but formative decade which embraced iconic events like the rise to stardom of the Beatles, the brutal escalation of the Vietnam War, the birth of Flower Power and the flare-up of university campus protests. It was a time when idealism seemed to be on the upsurge. When the LNC began, the great outdoors was still a challenging adventure: Mount Everest had only recently been scaled for the first time, Yuri Gagarin had not yet been hurled into earth orbit and Francis Chichester had not yet braved the seven seas single-handed. David Attenborough was only just beginning his wildlife film-making career, with the black-and-white *Zoo Quest* series (1954-63) and Johnny Morris had not yet presented his first weekly magazine show for children, *Animal Magic*, which now seems so quaint and outdated with its comic dialogues and animal impersonations. However, it was also a time when new post-war development thrusts were starting to devour large areas of landscape. The first section of the M1 motorway (from the Watford Bypass to Rugby) had just been opened (1959), threatening to slice through the very heart of Charnwood Forest and heralding a huge expansion in the highway network. Chemical-based agribusiness was rapidly ousting family-style mixed farming based on crop-rotation. Hedgerows were being grubbed up in fenland, roadside verges were being sprayed for the first time and Peregrine Falcons and other top predators were beginning their rapid decline. Unique ecosystems were being destroyed without forethought for the future: species-rich limestone pavements in North Yorkshire and Lancashire were being demolished to satisfy the demand for garden rockeries and decorative walling, moorland areas in Somerset and Devon were being ploughed up for agricultural use, whilst peat mires in Northumberland and elsewhere were being drained and afforested, or exploited to supply the growing market for garden peat. Forestry Commission conifer plantations, originally intended as a strategic reserve for future wars, had come to represent half of the total woodland area,

forming an eyesore in such cherished landscapes as the Lake District. An undercurrent of public anxiety was giving way to open protest. Britain had just completed nine hydrogen bomb tests on islands in the Pacific Ocean (1956-58). The first Polaris missile had been launched (1960) and was about to be adopted by the Royal Navy for its new fleet of submarines. The mysterious Minamata disease in Japan, whose terminal symptoms were insanity, paralysis, coma and death, had recently been traced to the consumption of fish and shellfish contaminated with Methylmercury from industrial effluents (1959). A year after the LNC was formed, the new 'wonder drug' Thalidomide was withdrawn from the market after being found to induce severe birth deformities when taken by pregnant women (1961). The fire at Windscale nuclear power station in Cumberland, which had been set up to produce Plutonium for atom bombs (1957), the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the Torrey Canyon oil spill of 1967 were just a sample of the events which intensified the Doomsday scenario. Bhopal and Chernobyl, with their countless thousands of deaths, were still to come.

Heritage Management

The name soon adopted for the LNC bulletin, *Heritage*, reflected this growing concern, which was voiced in long visionary articles throughout the sixties by Peter Gamble. Another sign of this concern was the *Surveys of Leicestershire Natural History*, a series of publications launched with a conservation focus when the Club was still in its infancy. The first two were interim reports on Bradgate Park and Cropston Reservoir. Obviously, the want of specialists in many branches of natural history meant that there were significant gaps in coverage, but these temporary shortcomings were felt to be overridden by the urgency of the need. On looking through the old annual reports it becomes clear that, whilst Club outings and additional field notes sent in by members from scattered spots were gradually building up a reliable picture of local ecosystems, it was the survey of the old Charnwood Lodge Estate, subsequently bequeathed by the owner Miss Clarke to the Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, that represented a turning point in the Club's development, setting it on a challenging new course. It offered the first real opportunity to build up a systematic database on the natural history of a specific area with a view to providing reliable advice for its ecological management. Monthly visits were paid to this fascinating site, with its many rare species and famous 'bomb rocks', extending over a much longer period (over five years) than was originally envisaged. It would be difficult to overstate the significance of this undertaking and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to its tireless organisers. This project in turn led to the even more ambitious Charnwood Forest Survey, initiated in 1965, which really helped put Leicestershire on the conservation map at national level. Not only did the Club undertake to record the species but also the types of ecological habitat and current land uses in the entire Charnwood area. This established a more complete baseline for monitoring future changes and a framework for more detailed research. Pioneering use was made of aerial photography to support the field observations over this 35 square mile area. Mention should also be made of the Swithland Wood survey, a draft report of which was presented to the Bradgate Park and Swithland Wood Trustees in 1970, with suggestions on how to manage this SSSI to ensure continuity of its typical oakwood flora and fauna.

From Pure Conservation to ‘Sustainable Development’

As a result of its timely and comprehensive fieldwork, the LNC was able to play a crucial role in local conservation planning. Heaven knows what might have happened had it not existed or had it not acted promptly. These initiatives are all the more remarkable if placed in a wider context. The world had not yet fully woken up to the environmental challenge. Grzimek’s moving documentary *Serengeti Shall Not Die* (1959) and Joy Adamson’s book *Born Free* (1960), about the orphaned Lion cub Elsa, were just beginning to arouse public awareness about global threats to wildlife. Rachel Carson’s disquieting book *Silent Spring* was about to be published (1962). The Club of Rome had not yet been founded (1968) nor published its famous manifesto *The Limits to Growth* (1972). The Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment had yet to introduce ecological concerns to the political arena (1972) and the epoch-making Brundtland Commission was still two decades away with its stirring report *Our Common Future* (1987) which linked together the environment and development as one single issue whose solution demanded the active participation of all sectors of society. All this paved the way for the international sustainable development agenda agreed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Unfortunately, it has now begun to seem as if these supposed milestones of enlightened thinking were mere markers of successive retreats from the battlefield.

Role of the Mass Media

In Britain, one must acknowledge that the burgeoning mass media played a significant role in propagating the conservation ethic. From the very beginning we were fortunate enough to have really articulate spokesmen, whether institutional scientists like Julian Huxley and Desmond Morris or field naturalists of the calibre of David Attenborough, Gerald Durrell, James Fisher, Gavin Maxwell, Guy Mountfort, Peter Scott and Tony Soper, to name but a few. Not only were they passionate about wildlife, but they were gifted with the right communication skills and often had useful contacts in high places. They managed to turn what was still a minority interest into a national pastime and helped popularise the conservation cause through their books, paintings, interviews, lectures and broadcasts. In this respect they were greatly assisted by the rapid expansion of the mass media. Odd as it may seem, it was probably the BBC radio series *Children’s Hour* which nurtured the growth and development of this whole generation of naturalists! The programme started in the early 1920s and went out on the air at tea-time every day of the week, as some of the LNC members will nostalgically remember. The first regular nature spot on *Children’s Hour* was *Out with Romany*, which featured ‘Romany’ (in real life, George Bramwell Evens, a country vicar whose mother had been a gypsy), his young friends Doris and Muriel, his horse, Comma and faithful spaniel, Raq. Despite being limited to dialogue and sound effects and being recorded wholly in the studio, this programme became immensely popular and ran from 1932 until shortly before Evens’ death in 1943. Romany was probably the UK’s first regular natural history presenter and nature writer, but Peter Scott also began broadcasting in the 1930s, acting as commentator in a variety of outdoor events and later becoming a regular member of the panel of *Nature Parliament*, a monthly feature on the same *Children’s Hour* which started in 1946 and lasted for almost 20 years. Subsequently, as those of us who were born in the post-war ‘baby boom’ will recall, he became a household name as

presenter of the weekly magazine show *Look*, on BBC television (1955-69). This featured, amongst other things, the saving of the Hawaiian Goose from extinction through captive breeding at Slimbridge, for later reintroduction into its native habitat. This was one of the first successful attempts at preserving vanishing species through off-site scientific breeding. There were, of course, other names in radio broadcasting, now practically forgotten, like the producer Desmond Hawkins, whose popular radio series *The Naturalist*, began in 1946 and later expanded into *Out of Doors* and *Birds in Britain*. It was Hawkins who played a key role in setting up the BBC Natural History Unit at Bristol in 1957, along with Tony Soper, Christopher Parsons and others. This timely step established what was to become the largest corporate producer of wildlife documentaries for radio and television in the world.

We also owe a lot to the two pioneering couples Armand & Michaela Denis (*On Safari*) and Hans & Lotte Hass (*Undersea World of Adventure*) who helped revolutionise natural history broadcasting in the 1950s and early '60s with their enterprising wildlife films in which they themselves starred as well as being presenters. Those were the days when few homes could afford television receivers, as witness the crowds of passers-by who would gather to watch football matches through shop windows, rubbing their hands to keep warm! Programmes were still in black and white, of course, because colour TV was still cutting-edge technology, restricted to the USA. To put things in context, the first regular colour broadcasts in Europe began only on 1st July 1967, spearheaded by BBC2. Surprising though it may now seem, the first of David Attenborough's TV blockbuster series, *Life on Earth*, came out only in 1979, when the LNC was almost 20 years old!

UK Takes the World Lead

It seems difficult now to believe that it was not until 1961, a year after the LNC was born, that the first truly international conservation Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) (now the World Wide Fund for Nature), was founded, with its headquarters strategically located in Switzerland. Stranger still, the creation of the WWF was not the logical outcome of high-powered meetings between representatives of national conservation NGOs. In fact, it was the impulsive brainchild of a Czech-born hotel-owner, Victor Stolan, who somehow managed to convince Julian Huxley and Max Nicholson to take his idea on board before he was casually dropped from the planning sessions, without further consideration. Peter Scott, founder of the Wildfowl Trust, was its first chairman (1961-82) and combined this role with that of Chairman of the Survival Services Commission of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) (1962-81). The first IUCN Red Data Book of endangered species came out a year later (1962), largely through Scott's influence. Other international voluntary organisations like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace arrived on the scene much later. I think it is not just parochial pride to claim that the UK took the lead in the international conservation movement, well before this great cause was taken up by other countries, leading to initiatives such as European Conservation Year (1970) and the founding of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1972. It was Peter Scott who oversaw the launch of the World Conservation Strategy (1980), formulated by the IUCN with the advice and co-operation of the WWF and UNEP. This promoted the fledgling idea of 'sustainable development' – the

concept of living within the reasonable limits of the natural environment, summarised in the phrase “development and conservation are equally necessary for our survival and for the discharge of our responsibilities as trustees of natural resources for the generations to come”.

Role of the Amateur Societies

In hindsight, the LNC and its chain of fellow clubs around the country, strengthened by their links with the county Wildlife Trusts and with national associations like the Amateur Entomologists’ Society, as well as by personal contacts with zoo and museum curators, can be seen as the boughs and branches sustaining the nationwide nature-conservation movement. Historically, of course, nature conservation goes back a long way in Britain. As early as the 11th century King Canute established Forest Laws to protect natural resources and the oldest surviving protected area, the New Forest, was declared a reserve in 1079. However, nature conservation as a popular movement is much more recent. It had late Victorian and Edwardian roots and involved the establishment of the Society for the Protection of Birds (1889) (now the RSPB), the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty (1895), the Society for the Preservation of the Wild Fauna of the Empire (1903) (which has changed names three times and is now called Fauna & Flora International) and the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (1912) (now the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts).

Most of these early campaigning bodies seem to have been elite rather than mass membership organisations and probably made headway in the class-dominated society of that time because of the social and political influence of their founders. Their strategy was basically two-fold: regulatory (i.e. lobbying for the introduction of enlightened legislation) and preemptive (acquisition of endangered areas). They were followed in the inter-war years by associations with a slightly broader membership base, such as the Council for the Preservation of Rural England (1926) (now the Campaign to Protect Rural England) and the National Council of Ramblers’ Federations (1931) (now simply called the Ramblers). The CPRE was an umbrella group which included the National Trust, RIBA and over 30 other bodies representing landowners, architects, planners, road users, etc. Its urgent aim was to pressure the powers-that-be with a view to curbing undisciplined and unsightly urban expansion through the enactment of rural planning controls and through the creation of protected areas. Its member organisations foresaw that the uncontrolled spread of roads, railways and housing estates would kill the goose that laid the golden egg, destroying the landscape which was just then coming into widespread recreational use. Largely as a result of energetic lobbying by the CPRE, the innovative Town and Country Planning Act of 1932 was approved during the sombre years of the Great Depression. However, it was the 1947 Act which finally established the modern, comprehensive land-use planning system, whose aim was to strike a balance between economic development and environmental quality.

Enlightened Land-use Planning

Besides the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, two government measures can be seen in hindsight to have been of special importance to the nature conservation movement. They were the Restriction of Ribbon Development Act of 1935 (which brought under control all new

building projects within 220 feet of classified roads) and the Green Belts Circular of 1955 (in which the Housing Minister, Duncan Sandys, invited local planning authorities to consider the establishment of clearly-defined green belts). These measures helped restrain the prevailing tendency towards urban sprawl and industrial expansion along all the main roads, which was causing the merging together of neighbouring villages and towns, to the detriment of their scenic appeal and unique historic character. It was also understood that, by safeguarding the open countryside from encroachment, local government would be providing opportunities for outdoor leisure close to urban areas, as well as for nature conservation and agricultural activities. The importance of this measure can be gauged from the fact that the area now officially designated as green belt land just within England (as at 31st March 2010) is estimated at 1,639,560 hectares, about 13 per cent of the total land area! It represents a good head start in promoting sustainable lifestyles, in comparison with many other countries, which have little option other than to buy up and demolish unsightly developments, at great cost, or reclaim damaged and derelict industrial land to create urban parks. We now need to hold fast to these green oases to prevent them from being whittled away in the name of social priorities!

Threads Within the Tapestry

These varied themes – the great tradition of natural history clubs dating back to the 19th century and earlier, the birth of the modern environmental movement, the introduction of comprehensive town and country planning, the role of the mass media and so on – are included here not just as passing thoughts but to provide a reasonable overview of the numerous strands which are interwoven into the rich fabric of nature conservation in the UK. Of course, many other factors played a part in the development of this great cause, such as the rapid expansion of the scouting movement, with its emphasis on outdoor adventure activities, the spread of youth hostelling and other country holiday options for people of limited means, the social mixing induced by the second World War both by national service in the armed forces and by mass evacuation of children to rural areas, the growth of the Welfare State (in which the state assumed primary responsibility for the economic and social well-being of its citizens) and even the national hobby of gardening!

Post-war Voluntary Initiatives

Out of all these influences there emerged in the 1940s and 1950s new public-spirited initiatives that would play a great role in refashioning people's relationship with the countryside. Amongst the new institutions which arose were the Field Studies Council (1943), Severn Wildfowl Trust (1946) (now the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust), the Council for Nature (1958) and the Conservation Corps (1959) (now known as BTCV). The FSC's first Field Centre was opened in 1946, just a year after jubilant crowds gathered in the streets to celebrate VE Day. Fittingly enough, the Centre was situated at the Grade I listed Flatford Mill, immortalised in the paintings of John Constable, which is about as nostalgic as one can get! In its varied courses for individuals, families, schools and environmental professionals, the Field Studies Council combined a wealth of historic, cultural, scenic and wildlife elements which, taken together, epitomise better than anything else the special essence of the conservation movement in the UK. The Conservation

Corps developed yet another facet of this man/countryside relationship through its accredited training courses and hands-on conservation work for volunteers. The Council for Nature served as an umbrella organisation, that is to say, a national representative body, of the voluntary environmental sector. It acted not only as a hub for the exchange of information and forum for the discussion of collective issues, but as a hatching-ground for campaigns to influence government policies, both at domestic and international levels. This helped maximise the effectiveness of the voluntary conservation movement, at least in the early years, before the Council became weakened by internal dissent.

Emergence of the Protected Area System

Whatever might be one's political leanings, it is a credit to the post-war Labour government that they established a committee to consider the question of national parks (resulting in the White Paper known as the Hobhouse Report, 1947) and set in motion an ambitious plan for nature conservation, despite the many competing demands of a country, a people and an economy wrecked by war. Surprising though it might seem, practically the whole of our protected area system was dreamed up and set up in the immediate post-war years, that is to say, during the 15 years preceding the birth of the LNC (1945-59). It should be remembered that, for much of this period, food and petrol rationing was still in force while life slowly returned to normal. Britain had undergone six years of bombardment and blockade, and there was a shortage of many of the basic essentials of living, including clothing and housing. It was in this austere economic climate, with a large number of soldiers still to be 'demobbed' and destitute millions to be fed in Europe, that the official report *Conservation of Nature in England and Wales* was published, in 1947. As a result, the Nature Conservancy Council (predecessor of English Nature and Natural England) was formed as a government agency in 1949 with the following brief: "to provide scientific advice on the conservation and control of the natural flora and fauna of Great Britain; to establish, maintain and manage nature reserves in Great Britain...; and to organise and develop the research and scientific services relating thereto". As Director General of the Conservancy, Max Nicholson (who had helped found the BTO in 1932 and the IUCN in 1948 and was later instrumental in setting up the Council for Nature (1958) and Conservation Corps (1959)) successfully blended these two functions – research and practical conservation management – from his appointment in 1952 until he retired in 1966, shortly after the body lost its independence and was taken over by the National Environment Research Council.

During this pioneering period, the first comprehensive national policy was established for wildlife conservation, a network of protected areas was set up and ecological research was carried out in support of these activities. For all its faults, this was a breathtaking achievement! In the same year as the Nature Conservancy was created by Royal Charter (1949), the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was approved and, by 1957, ten national parks had been established under the aegis of the new National Parks Commission. Unfortunately, despite this excellent start, the government frequently backtracked and allowed unseemly developments within or across park boundaries, such as the CEGB nuclear power station in the Snowdonia National Park (1958), the Esso oil refinery and terminal at Milford Haven in the Pembroke Coast National Park (1960) and the Ballistic Missile Early Warning Station at Fylingdales, on the North

York Moors (1962). Still, how much better it is to have a flawed diamond in the hand than a flawless pebble, as the saying goes! Apart from National Parks, other categories of protected areas were defined and promoted in the 1949 Act: National Nature Reserves (NNRs), Local Nature Reserves (LNRs), 'Areas' of Special Scientific Interest (now called 'Sites' - SSSIs) and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Furthermore, the 1949 Act required all local authorities to undertake a thorough survey of rights of way within their areas of jurisdiction and empowered them to create new rights of way, as well as to divert and close existing ones. By these expedients, the national footpath network was set up and eventually extended to include long-distance trails across scenic tracts, the first being the Pennine Way. The Act also provided for public access to open country, whether by access agreements and orders or by acquisition of the land. It is sobering to think that all these measures were taken just 60 years ago and to imagine what might have occurred had the first post-war government not enacted this enlightened legislation.

Counter-currents

However, as usual, national interest pulled both ways. As most of us will remember, when WW2 ended, in 1945, food rationing was in force and, indeed, was continued until 1953 or later for certain essentials such as sugar and meat. In an attempt to stimulate food production an Agriculture Act was passed (1947) which established guaranteed prices and assured markets for most farm products. Figures were negotiated annually between the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Farmers' Union. The 1957 Agriculture Act refined the system of safeguards, permitting farm incomes to rise and encouraging farmers to undertake capital investments, especially for the production of arable crops. As a result, higher-yielding varieties, herbicides, fertilisers and machinery were introduced and profits rose rapidly. Perversely, as already remarked, this agricultural boom accelerated destruction of the natural environment, undoing what the Nature Conservancy was trying to do! The reason for this paradox is not hard to find. Instead of interlinking nature conservation with other rural needs to form a single unified rural development policy, the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 established a compartmentalised approach, with each major type of rural land use – agriculture, forestry and nature conservation – following its own independent course. The Nature Conservancy's job was to identify and protect prime habitats by designating them as National Nature Reserves or Sites of Special Scientific Interest. It had a limited say in relation to other land use policies. In the case of NNRs, where protection was assured by formal agreement, lease or purchase, nature conservation was the primary land use, prevailing over other interests. In the case of SSSIs, conservation had to coexist with divergent land uses; the assumption was that rural landowners and land managers were true guardians of the countryside, who could be relied upon to do their part. In fact, what most of them wanted was to maintain their traditional freedom to do as they thought best without interference! And the government was there, offering grants and subsidies to increase agricultural productivity! As a result, the integrity of the extensive SSSI system became ever more compromised whilst the Nature Conservancy Council looked on helplessly, with its hands tied! By the late 1960s, habitat loss was proceeding apace. Areas of potentially high conservation value which had not been designated as NNRs, Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)

or SSSIs were subject to speedy destruction by the abandonment of traditional land use practices. SSSIs themselves were frequently affected. And, even where they were respected, the SSSIs which were situated in areas of intensive production became fragile wildlife refuges, increasingly reliant on the species reservoir contained within their narrow boundaries, which brought an increased risk of genetic erosion. Such are the perils of piecemeal planning!

The situation was not helped by the fact that it was not until 1970 that a cabinet position of Secretary of State for the Environment was created by the Edward Heath administration, with responsibility for the new Department of the Environment (DoE). This incorporated three former Ministries: Transport, Housing & Local Government, and Public Buildings & Works, as well as dealing directly with environmental protection. However, such later developments will have to be left for a future article, for reasons of space!

Growth of Public Support

This long chain of favourable and adverse happenings before and during the LNC's first decade of existence seems to have had a multiplier effect on nature conservation NGOs, whose membership numbers started to mushroom through a positive feedback loop, some of them incredibly so. Thus, the RSPB saw its membership rise from 10,000 to 50,000 over the period 1960-70, and the figure now stands at an astonishing 1 million, whilst the Wildlife Trusts now collectively boast 800,000 members. New NGOs also developed, some of them with dramatic success, such as the Woodland Trust, which was founded as recently as 1972 and has managed to win 200,000 supporters. The combined UK membership figures of all the environment-related voluntary bodies must now (in 2010) be in excess of 7 million, although there is obviously some degree of overlap due to people belonging to two or more organisations. This phenomenal growth of what has come to be called 'the third sector' should hopefully help change the face of democracy in Britain and the world, serving as a check both on governments and on the rampant capitalism which is flourishing under the guise of 'neo-liberalism' and 'globalisation'. Whereas in the 1920s it was necessary to write to one's MP or seek to pull strings in high places through social influence, nowadays we have a wide range of pressure groups, capable of formulating well-structured initiatives, criticisms and demands based on sound research. Local bodies like the LNC have helped build up this civic framework from the grass roots, catalysing the learning process and spreading awareness amongst the public about wildlife and wild places. Over the crucial period of technological change and political reshaping which accompanied the transition from the second into the third millennium, the voluntary sector in the UK has managed to keep a reasonable kind of unity, to broaden its base and increase its fire-power to face the growing challenges. All this has helped save a large part of our precious natural and cultural heritage, in a way which few other countries have managed to do.

Ongoing Controversies – The Name of the Rose

It would be misleading to conclude this brief analysis without casting a glance at the looming storm clouds which might put at risk some of our hard-won victories. Most readers will be familiar with the following controversy, but it is included here for the sake of completeness. On examining the latest UK Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) at both national and local level, one

is struck by two unexpected revelations. In the first place, the numerous laws and governmental rearrangements over the years have led to a vast assortment of names and rules for protected areas. Many of them overlap and some are now being superimposed as part of the selection game. Is this truly efficient? In second place, there seems to be no common consensus as to the best conservation strategy to adopt. What will be the outcome of such indecisiveness?

Protected area designations can be divided (with a certain degree of simplification) into three main categories: nature conservation, landscape conservation and heritage conservation. As everyone knows, until recently (2006) the organisations which looked after nature and landscape conservation were separate (English Nature and the Countryside Agency) but they have now been merged together as Natural England, funded by DEFRA. The historical and cultural aspects of our outdoor environment are looked after by English Heritage, funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The advisory body on the scientific aspects of national and international nature conservation is the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), which includes representatives from Natural England and corresponding bodies in other parts of the UK. Can it be said that these different bodies interact with reasonable efficiency?

Most of the protected area designations relate to nature conservation and seem to be defined primarily on scientific criteria. Limiting ourselves to England, we have NNRs, LNRs, SSSIs, Bird Sanctuaries, Areas of Special Protection for Birds (AOSPs), Nature Conservation Review Sites (NCRs), Geological Conservation Review Sites (GCRs), Regionally Important Geological & Geomorphological Sites (RIGS), Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) and County Wildlife Sites. In the same category at European Union level there are Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Biogenetic Reserves. At global international level we have Ramsar sites.

In the landscape conservation field there are fewer options, including Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), Heritage Coasts, Country Parks and Community Forests.

In the heritage conservation bracket we have Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks and Gardens, etc., Conservation Areas, Areas of Special Local Character and, arguably, National Parks, as well as those farmland areas included in the Environmental Stewardship Scheme. The UNESCO-designated Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites comprise a mixture of nature, landscape and historical conservation.

These diverse categories of protected area are designated through differing mechanisms and not all of them are statutorily protected. In addition, of course, there are the voluntary nature reserves set up under varying names by the National Trust, Wildlife Trusts, Woodland Trust, RSPB and other NGOs.

Over the years the Site of Special Scientific Interest/Area of Special Scientific Interest designation, which is barely mentioned in the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (Part III Section 23), has become the main site protection measure in the UK, reinforced by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, amended in 1985 and again in 2000 by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. All NNRs, SPAs, SACs, terrestrial Biosphere Reserves, Natural Heritage Sites, Biogenetic Reserves, Areas of Special Protection for Birds and Ramsar

Sites have first to be notified as SSSIs/ASSIs. Indeed, new NNRs can only be declared if the area is already an SSSI with the additional designation of NCR or GCR. How much further can we go with this cumulative naming process? Is it really productive to have so many different categories?

Conservation Strategies – Who Decides?

The second curious fact is that, although 60 full years have passed since NNRs, LNRs and SSSIs were introduced by the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949), there are still a surprising number of alternative models for biodiversity conservation and enhancement vying for supremacy. This mirrors the controversy at international level about in situ conservation of species, habitats and ecosystems. Where should one focus one's limited resources? There are many contenders: biodiversity hotspots (where there is high species richness, high endemism and high threat), individual threatened habitats, complementary areas, individual threatened species, flagship species and keystone species, to name but a few. Sadly to say, all strategies involve some degree of loss. But it is necessary to reach some form of consensus on priorities, to avoid the risk of working at cross-purposes.

As LNC members will recall, the first Biodiversity Action Plan for the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland region (1998, revised and simplified in 2005), abbreviated here as LLRBAP, was put together by representatives from 19 organisations, led by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. It was modelled fairly closely on the national proposal *Biodiversity: The UK Action Plan* (UKBAP), issued by the government in 1994 in obedience to the international Convention on Biological Diversity (1992). It was subdivided into 17 local Habitat Action Plans and 14 local Species Action Plans. The current LLRBAP, covering the period 2010-15, and divided into 19 local Habitat Action Plans and 16 local Species Action Plans, is more outspoken and is aptly entitled *Space for Wildlife*. It calls attention to the large proportion of land in the two counties which is farmed (84%), the increasing scarcity of good habitats and the resulting loss of wildlife, reflecting the long-term decline in biodiversity at national level over the period 1970-2007. SSSIs, which are the very best sites, occupy only about 2 % of the total land area of the two counties, and only a small proportion of these SSSIs consist of UKBAP national priority habitats (e.g. calcareous grassland, heath grassland and wet heath). In addition, many of the priority habitats are clustered together, leaving large parts of the two counties almost uncatered for.

Responding to this challenge, the LLRBAP for 2010-15 emphasises the need to create new local habitats such as the Wildlife Trust's wetland nature reserves at Cossington Meadows, Wanlip Meadows and Rutland Water and much of the ongoing work in the National Forest. Many of these new sites fall outside the UK BAP priorities and yet have apparently had a beneficial effect on local wildlife. Another implicit criticism of the national plan is that nearly half of the 19 local types of habitat have no equivalent at national BAP level, e.g. fast-flowing streams, floodplain wetlands, mature trees, sphagnum ponds, roadside verges and even the urban environment! In the light of all this, the new local plan announces the adoption of complementary objectives. On the one hand, it continues to commit its efforts to high-quality

national priority habitats, toeing the line of the UK BAP; on the other, it proposes fresh habitat creation of a more general kind, in an attempt to reverse the marked decline in once common farmland fauna. Another preoccupation is the provision of natural green spaces accessible to the public at a reasonable distance from people's homes. Clearly, all this effort needs to be backed by the promotion of good land management practice, public awareness-building and community participation in wildlife surveying and recording. It goes without saying that the Loughborough Naturalists' Club and fellow organisations have a key role in all this.

However, the plan for 2010-15 goes even further in its pioneering ideas. It advocates a new 'Living Landscapes' concept, as a realistic alternative to the narrowly defined SSSIs and official nature reserves, scattered like stray islands in a sea of agricultural, urban and industrial development. 'Living Landscapes' involves establishing habitat networks to overcome the effects of fragmentation and to recreate fully functioning ecosystems with a high 'permeability' to wildlife. This obviously requires the co-operation of landowners and others who live, work in and visit these areas. Under this 'patchwork quilt' concept, isolated good habitats (which act as vital reservoirs of wildlife) are connected up via corridors (which are restored, expanded and recreated where necessary) to produce a varied pattern of nature reserves, farmland, amenity land and the built environment, managed sympathetically so that both wildlife and people can have access and enjoy it. The increased connectivity not only extends the living space of wildlife but enables it to move more freely across the countryside as necessitated by climate change and other unpredictable conditions which may arise in the future.

Restoring the Soar and Wreake floodplain to natural functioning is probably the most successful of the Leicestershire and Rutland Trust's Living Landscape schemes to date. It has involved the purchase of several hundred acres of land, the rendering of guidance to numerous landowners and the carrying-out of extensive habitat restoration work. The important point is that natural processes and interactions are being conserved as well as the elements of biodiversity.

The moral of all this is that no one owns the absolute truth, if there is such a thing! The Establishment is, to some extent, working at cross-purposes to the Wildlife Trusts, which are the grass roots of the nature conservation movement. It should take cognisance of this. Whereas the government with its academic advisers is trying to hone to perfection the definition of a worthy scientific site, the Trusts are trying to broaden the base, arguing that complete Living Landscapes are what is really needed in nature conservation. The argument continues while Rome continues to burn!

Global Panorama

What about controversies at the international level? What is the global panorama for the next ten years? Since the 1960s, when the LNC was founded, conservation has been transformed from the narrow concern of a few conscientious citizens to a worldwide, scientifically acceptable movement backed by enlightened governments. But, as everyone is aware, it is beginning to lose space to manipulative planning, based on high-minded arguments about economic growth and social needs. Barely 30 years after it was created, the term 'sustainable development', has

become a buzzword, misappropriated and tossed around pretentiously by politicians and business people. It is perverse that this should happen precisely now, when the focus of our anxiety has widened from the survival of wildlife and wild places to the very future of our planet! But it is a mistake to think that logical argument and scientific evidence are sufficient to convince people. It is worth remembering that the WWF Panda logo, the RSPB Avocet and the Oak sprig of the National Trust have become powerful partly because of their emotional appeal. For emotions are as important as facts in the crusade to educate the population about the environment. We need to show that sustainable development, in the true sense of the term, is a global, humanitarian issue affecting all life forms, that it comprises a common purpose uniting religions, peoples and countries. Unfortunately, the technological brigade with their 3-D television sets, Google Earth and iphones have stolen a lead on us old-fashioned romantics. The rapid success of the new art of genetic manipulation, of stem-cell therapy, of nanotechniques, and so on, has bolstered up the dangerous belief that man is omnipotent.

Taking Stock

To an Old Loughburian who has spent most of his life outside the UK, the 50th anniversary of the LNC offers a welcome chance to take stock of the dramatic changes which have occurred in Shakespeare's 'Scepter'd Isle' over the past century. For all the reasons explained, the 1960s, when the Club began, now stand out as a watershed period in the relationship between man and nature. As a recent BBC documentary showed, it was during this period that Britain 'went wild' and that wildlife study and protection became an intrinsic part of popular culture. Prior to this, many urban dwellers knew very little about the natural world or about the cumulative impact of unchecked economic growth – the very words 'ecology' and 'environment' were hardly recognised, and any mention of 'endangered species' appeared to be a vast overstatement.

In Leicestershire, and more especially in the Charnwood area, the fruit of these 50 years of hard work by a small band of enthusiasts, with their deep and contagious love of nature, is a better known and better preserved countryside for everyone to enjoy. But serious challenges confront us on all sides. The global population, which currently stands at seven billion, continues to climb steeply and is expected to reach as much as 10.5 billion by the year 2050. Poor levels of general education and a dearth of democratic institutions impede the worldwide advance of human rights. Global issues like energy, water, food and poverty could probably be solved if we applied to them the same concentration of brainpower that has been applied to the science of computing, and the same degree of international co-operation that has been manifest in the control of epidemics. But will this come about? After over 50 years of noble efforts, the United Nations has not got very far. Pollution is escalating despite green initiatives and continues to stray beyond national boundaries, in the form of acid rain, radioactive fallout, crude oil spillages and so on. Armed conflict barely dies down in one location before it erupts in another; indeed the desire to dominate others seems to be an inescapable and integral aspect of human culture. In this respect, it does not bode well for humanity that new national governments with extremist viewpoints have entered the world's nuclear league.

Even in countries with a fairly stable or slowly increasing population, like the UK, urbanisation is proceeding apace and car numbers continue to multiply, while the 'temperate' climate we used to enjoy sways drunkenly between tropical heat-waves and polar blizzards. Many of the listed sites constitute irreplaceable habitats, but will they be sacrificed one by one as time advances, like pawns in a relentless chess game, to satisfy society's ever-evolving needs or the government's grand designs? In Loughborough, new housing estates are invading green areas like the old Grammar School playing fields on Beacon Road and threatening to turn The Outwoods into somebody's back yard. Acute Oak Decline is adding to the devastation already wreaked on wayside trees and shrubs by Sudden Oak Death and the Horse Chestnut leaf-mining moths. Where will all this end? What sort of planning measures are being undertaken to combat this depressing picture?

Fifty Years Hence

For those of us who care deeply about wildlife and wild places, what is the most prudent way forward? Not only the tidal waves of massive development projects but those whirlpools, eddies and cross-currents which keep emerging within the environmental movement itself, like the ones relating to Biodiversity Action Plans, leave one wondering. The going seems to be getting choppier and choppier. Who will take up the helm when we 'veterans' leave off?

Even if the junior wing of the RSPB, 'Wildlife Explorers', has over 190,000 members, it only takes a stroll through the crowded marquees of the annual Bird Fair at Rutland Water to see which way the wind is blowing. Where are the new recruits from the younger generations? Where are the university students committed to good causes? Where are the ethnic minorities which now make up a significant part of the British population? The author of this text left Loughborough in 1967, the year in which Margaret Greenway created the Young Naturalists' Section of LNC, with its own programme of indoor meetings and outings. It all seemed so promising. However, the teenager of the third millennium is turning to other seductive leisure pursuits and the biggest challenge for 'oldies' like us is to guarantee the longevity of the nature study, country ramble and wildlife conservation movements in the face of these other attractions.

Changing Times, Changing Customs

Perhaps the answer lies in more effective use of what our children and grandchildren seem to prefer: electronic media, outdoor competitions, festive occasions and travel opportunities. The blogs and social networks on the Internet which take up so much of their time may be a blessing in disguise. They can offer new channels for caring and sharing. They can give voice to a much wider constituency with much greater celerity than the old-fashioned 'write to your MP' or 'sign this petition' approach. The new social circles which are constantly emerging on the Internet can help to draw more people out into the countryside. Indeed, through the massive interchange of ideas and experiences which is under way, the rising generations can derive as much profit and pleasure from the great outdoors as did our generation even if much of their involvement occurs via the web. Many of the top-membership NGOs are already taking full advantage of the new interactive resources on their websites. For example, the homepage of

WWF UK recently included links to You Tube (which it was using for a 'Make your own Bio-movie' competition), Twitter ('follow our head of campaigns'), online surveys ('vote for your favourite renewable idea'), fundraising ('adopt a tiger!') and online shopping, whilst that of WWF-Brasil also featured Facebook and Flickr. On the international WWF site you could even record and submit your own personal version of the Tiger's roar (using audio, video, image or text message) to help save this animal from extinction!

Back to Nature

A more difficult challenge is to discover how to coax young folk away from the screen and out into the field to learn more about nature through direct contact. The adolescents of today speak their own language and like to have their own say in things. For this reason and to make sure they rise to the occasion, it may be a sound idea to involve them in any initiatives right from the 'brainstorming' phase. Adventure trails, obstacle courses, sponsored marathons and suchlike activities need to be planned so as to offer both thrills and intellectual stimulus in profusion, bearing in mind the ever-quickenning pace of life. Special festive events can be created or refashioned in provocative modern style to call attention to environmental themes. Hands-on conservation opportunities and voluntary 'gap-year' placements of the ecological type should be restructured where necessary so as to be both instructive and motivating to the new crop of teenagers. In short, we need to find new ways of reaching out to the adults of tomorrow so that they are ready to receive the baton from us when it sadly becomes our turn to pass it on.

Golden Jubilee of the Loughborough Naturalists' Club

So, on that hopeful note, we end this long trip down memory lane. One thing is certain: as global civilisation continues its headlong rush into a murky future, conservation issues will continue to preoccupy those who care deeply about our common heritage. The Loughborough Naturalists' Club and its kindred institutions around the UK include some of the country's most sensitive and thoughtful citizens. It is their sacred duty to hold fast and continue to act as guardians of our ancient legacy. Hats off to them all for bringing us this far along the long and winding road! And very best wishes for the future!



Officers and Committee Members

The following is a summary of officers and committee members who have served the Club over the years 1960 - 2010.

Officers and Committee Members

Main Positions of Responsibility:

| | Chairman | Treasurer | Secretary |
|------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1960 | D Binns | D A Bird | J Crocker |
| 1961 | D Binns | J C Oswin | " |
| 1962 | H A B Clements | " | " |
| 1963 | M Walpole | " | " |
| 1964 | F R Green | S M Pearce | P A Candlish |
| 1965 | R Storer | O H Black | " |
| 1966 | J Otter | " | " |
| 1967 | D S Fieldhouse | " | " |
| 1968 | J Crocker | " | " |
| 1969 | R W Black | " | B E M Bowler |
| 1970 | P H Gamble | " | " |
| 1971 | P A Candlish | " | " |
| 1972 | G E Bowler | " | " |
| 1973 | D B Forgham | " | " |
| 1974 | A E Squires | " | M J Gillham |
| 1975 | E G Webster | " | " |
| 1976 | A W Wildig | " | " |
| 1977 | S D Musgrove | " | " |
| 1978 | C Green | " | " |
| 1979 | P W Jones | " | P M Richardson |
| 1980 | W K Lloyd | " | " |
| 1981 | M J Gillham | " | " |
| 1982 | J E Ward | " | " |
| 1983 | I B Gamble | " | " |
| 1984 | W S Moffat | " | K E Gilbert |
| 1985 | D A Lott | " | " |
| 1986 | L E Hall | " | " |
| 1987 | M W Wykes | " | " |
| 1988 | E J Darby | " | " |
| 1989 | I M Evans | " | M A Finch |
| 1990 | H Smith | " | J Johnson |
| 1991 | E M Penn-Smith | " | " |
| 1992 | E M Penn-Smith | " | " |

Continued over:

Officers and Committee Members

Main Positions of Responsibility:

Continued:

| | Chairman | Treasurer | Secretary |
|------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1993 | A W Wildig | O H Black | J Johnson |
| 1994 | A W Wildig | J G Ward | " |
| 1995 | M B Webster | " | C A Hallam |
| 1996 | M B Webster | " | " |
| 1997 | M Gamble | " | J Johnson |
| 1998 | M Gamble | " | " |
| 1999 | P M Richardson | " | " |
| 2000 | P M Richardson | " | " |
| 2001 | P T Wilkinson | " | " |
| 2002 | P T Wilkinson | " | " |
| 2003 | J M Stanley | " | " |
| 2004 | J M Stanley | " | " |
| 2005 | M C Hall | " | " |
| 2006 | M C Hall | " | " |
| 2007 | M Hall | " | " |
| 2008 | M Hall | " | " |
| 2009 | M C Dimitrov | " | " |
| 2010 | M C Dimitrov | " | " |

Club Officers Past and Present

1960-2010

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| D Binns | D A Bird | O H Black | R W Black |
| J Blunt | B E M Bowler | G E Bowler | T Brister |
| G Brooks | P Clayfield | H A B Clements | J Crocker |
| E J Darby | M C Dimitrov | J Edwards | I M Evans |
| P A Evans | D S Fieldhouse | M A Finch | D B Forgham |
| M Gamble | P H Gamble | I B Gamble | F Gilbert |
| K E Gilbert | T Gilfoyle | M J Gillham | J Graham |
| C Green | F R Green | L E Hall | M Hall |
| C A Hallam | K Harper | C W Henderson | P Hipkin |
| H Ikin | J Johnson | M Johnson | P W Jones |
| A J Keeping | J Killingback | W K Lloyd | D A Lott |
| A M Marmont | W S Moffat | S D Musgrove | J C Oswin |
| J Otter | R R Parker | S M Pearce | E M Penn-Smith |
| P M Richardson | H Smith | A E Squires | J M Stanley |
| R Storer | F Wainwright | M Walpole | J E Ward |
| J G Ward | K Ward | R Ward | D Webster |
| E G Webster | M B Webster | T J Whall | M W Wykes |
| A W Wildig | P T Wilkinson | C Williams | S F Woodward |

There are many members of the Club who have played vital roles over the years and any list will not be complete but people who come to mind are: Pat Evans, formerly Candlish, who edited *Heritage* for 11 years; Monica Gillham – *Heritage* editor for 19 years; John Ward, treasurer for 18 years; Peter Jones – expert photographer and always willing to help; Philippa Richardson – could turn her hand to anything; Kate Ward, talented stalwart of the exhibitions; Peter Hipkin – librarian; the many roles of the Hall family: Les, Maira and Megan; Alan Wildig – weatherman; Kay Gilbert – social secretary; Judy Johnson – secretary beyond the call of duty. Plus the many enthusiastic and inspiring naturalists such as Jack Ward, Claude Henderson, Jack Otter, Harry Clements, Eva Penn-Smith, Dorothy Fieldhouse, Ian Evans, Derek Lott, Tony Squires, John Stacey, Steve Woodward, Graham and Anona Finch. Let us not forget the ‘behind the scenes’ teams who have provided the very welcome refreshments at the indoor meetings for many years.

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