

Birmingham
Natural History
Society

Founded 1858

Registered Charity No 500819

President: Dr Peter Coxhead

Internet address: <http://freespace.virgin.net/clare.h/bnhs.htm>

NEWSLETTER No 96 – January 2012

From the President

I fear that my New Year message this year can only be somewhat gloomy. For many years, the Society has played a formal role in the management of the Edgbaston Pool SSSI; indeed its very existence as an SSSI has been in large part to efforts by members of the Society. With regret, Council decided that we could no longer take on this role: there simply were not enough members willing and able to participate in relevant activities. The very last meeting of the Society's Reserve Committee took place in December. In future the site will be managed by the Golf Club (which has secured a new 99 year lease on the site), in association with Natural England.

It was also very sad to learn of the deaths of Jean and John Osborne; both have been stalwart members of the Society.

In spite of an interesting and varied programme (for which we owe Peter Jarvis particular thanks), the numbers attending meetings this year have been low; indeed they have begun to reach the level at which the Society may no longer be viable. So I very much hope to see as many members as possible at meeting in the coming New Year, ideally accompanied by guests, who are always welcome. Happy New Year for 2012!

Peter Coxhead

Jean and John Osborne

It was with great sadness that the Society learned that John Osborne had died on 14 November, followed by Jean a mere nine days later. They had married in 1945.

Jean had been a stalwart and active member of the Birmingham Natural History Society, serving as Hon Secretary from 1987 to 2006, and as President over the period 2006 to 2008. She gave a number of illustrated talks based on her travels with John, and had an enviable ability to take notes and summarise the talks given by our speakers, these synopses subsequently appearing in the *Proceedings*. Jean was given Life Membership of the Society in 2003.

John, too, came to most of our meetings, and had served as one of the Society's Auditors since 2000.

John and Jean were also responsible twenty years ago for suggesting and securing our current meeting room at the Society of Friends when we were no longer able to meet at Winterbourne.

The Society was well represented at both the funeral service and the memorial meeting. Full obituaries will appear in the *Proceedings*.

Lecture Programme - early 2012

Friends Meeting House, Selly Oak starting at 7.30 pm

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| 17 February 2012 | Sarah Walters and Stephen Briggs – Alvecote Wood: buying and owning a wood for wildlife |
| 16 March 2012 | Dr Jim Reynolds – Unlocking the secrets of oceanic islands: tracking seabirds on Ascension Island |
| 20 April 2012 | AGM followed by the Presidential Lecture given by Dr Peter Coxhead , who anticipates talking about some of his experiences of the countryside, wildlife and conservation in Malaysia |

Moth Training Courses 2012

Following successful training course programmes in 2010 and 2011, the following programme has been put together to give recorders from Herefordshire, Worcestershire, West Midlands, Shropshire and Staffordshire an opportunity to start up or to improve their knowledge of moths and moth recording. Courses are aimed at total beginners to studying moths and also at recorders of intermediate ability. Whatever your skills, the courses will stretch your knowledge.

May 14th, Monday (T1) – An Introduction to Moth Trapping for Beginners - Introducing moth identification of easier moths, moth traps and books – how to get started with moths! At Severn Valley Country Park, Alveley, Shropshire, (grid ref SO754840) 10am to 4pm. (Maximum of 25 participants – booking essential)

June 10th, Sunday (T2) – Woodland Moths for Intermediates - Moth identification training course for intermediates only, looking at woodland moth species caught the night before. At Woolhope Village Hall, near Haugh Wood, Herefordshire, (grid ref SO611358) 10am to 4pm. (Maximum of 15 participants – booking essential)

June 18th, Monday (T3) – Grassland Moths for Beginners - Moth identification training course for beginners and intermediates, looking at grassland moth species caught the night before. At Severn Valley Country Park, Alveley, Shropshire, (grid ref SO754840). 10am to 4pm. (Maximum of 15 participants – booking essential)

July 29th, Sunday (T4) – Dove Dale Limestone Grassland Moths for Intermediates - Moth identification training course for intermediates only, looking at upland limestone grassland moth species caught the night before. At Peak District venue to be confirmed. 10am to 4pm. (Maximum of 15 participants – booking essential)

July 31st, Tuesday (T5) – Micro Moths for Intermediates - Moth identification training course for intermediates only, looking at micro-moth species caught the night before in the Wyre Forest. At the new Wyre Forest Community Discovery Centre, Worcestershire (grid ref SO750740). 10am to 4pm. (Maximum of 15 participants – booking essential)

August 12th, Sunday (T6) – Wetland Moths for Beginners - Moth identification training course for beginners and intermediates, looking at wetland moth species caught the night before. At Feckenham Village Hall, High Street, Feckenham, near Redditch, Worcestershire (grid ref SP009615). 10am to 4pm. (Maximum of 15 participants – booking essential)

August 14th, Tuesday (T7) – Heathland Moths for Beginners - Moth identification training course for beginners and intermediates, looking at heathland moth species caught the night before. At the John O'Leary Centre, Marquis Drive, Cannock Chase, Staffordshire (grid ref SK006153). 10am to 4pm. (Maximum of 15 participants – booking essential)



You need to book in advance for all courses – please don't just turn up on the day!

Please bring a packed lunch for all courses. Training course places will be offered to applicants who apply first. Trainees can book for just one course, several courses or the whole programme of courses. Trainees that book for all or most of the courses should come out of the programme with a good grounding in moth identification and be able to adequately trap and identify most moths on any site unaided.

Training courses will all be classroom based, but with some examination of live moth specimens (that were trapped the night before). Courses aimed at Beginners or Beginners and Intermediates will include a morning talk introducing macro-moth families to attendees. This is a great introduction for beginners and also a great refresher for intermediates. Courses labelled as being for intermediates only will not include this refresher talk (and therefore would be more of a struggle for beginners to take part in). Instead with these courses there will be more time on the course for hands-on identification practice with live moths.

The 2012 Training Course programme is unfortunately not sponsored (due to environmental spending cuts) and therefore places for participants will need to be charged for all dates. The rate for people attending courses is at £20 per day. Firm bookings for courses will only be accepted on receipt of a cheque for £20 per person per day. Refund of cheques will only be possible if four weeks of notice is given of your cancellation for an event. Please make cheques payable to D. Grundy.

If trainees wish to purchase a moth trap or other moth-ing equipment, then this will be possible on the course if they contact Dave Grundy before the event.

Please book direct with Dave Grundy, by phone, post or preferably email. DGCountryside, 5 Melrose Avenue, Woodfield Road, Sparkbrook, Birmingham B12 8TG. Tel: 0121 446 5446 or Mobile: 0777 898 0924 or email: dgcountryside@btinternet.com

When is a Blackbird not a black bird?

Across the country, householders have been seeing Blackbirds with strange white markings. The condition, referred to as 'leucism', is one of a number of plumage abnormalities reported through the BTO Abnormal Plumage Survey, preliminary results from which have just been published. In less than a month, the survey has noted nearly 700 sightings, encompassing more than 35 different species. Three quarters of records have been of leucistic birds and, of these, nearly half have been Blackbirds. Leucistic birds may be confused with albino individuals, but the latter have pink, instead of dark eyes, and only account for 12% of survey records to date. It is not yet clear why Blackbirds appear to be particularly affected. It could be that they are unusually susceptible to the condition.



However, being black or, in the case of female Blackbirds dark brown, any light-coloured feathers show up particularly clearly. Indeed, several other species with all-black, or mostly black, plumage have been spotted with white feathers fairly often, including Carrion Crow (49 records) and Jackdaw (40).

To contact the Hon Secretary or to provide copy for the next Newsletter:

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Could members let me know if they would be happy to receive the Newsletter by email.

