

**Birmingham
Natural History
Society**

Founded 1858

Registered Charity No 500819

President: Mr Bryan Wood

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

NEWSLETTER No 102 – September 2013

Lecture Programme 2013-2014

Friends Meeting House, Selly Oak, starting at 7.30 pm

- 18 October 2013 **Roy Ledbury** – When, where and how - opportunity and chance in natural history photography
- 15 November 2013 **Paul Reade** – The *Flora of Birmingham and the Black Country* – some aspects of the project and the local flora
- Paul is the last of the three editors of the Flora to give a talk to the Society. He is an amateur botanist with particular interests in algae, ferns and bryophytes, and his talk will complement those by Mike Poulton in 2010 and Ian Trueman the year before that.
- 17 January 2014 **Simon Atkinson** – The Birmingham and Black Country Living Landscape Nature Improvement Area
- Simon is the Conservation Projects Manager of our local Wildlife Trust. The only urban NIA has been chosen as one of the first twelve Nature Improvement Areas in England. The vision is to achieve long-term environmental gains for the wildlife and people of the region by delivering targeted, on-the-ground, biodiversity projects at a landscape scale. See: <http://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/NIA>
- 21 February 2014 **Dr Julia Myatt** – Locomotor ecology: linking morphology, behaviour and habitat
- Julia lectures in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Birmingham teaching various aspects of zoology. She writes, 'Animals are shaped by their environment, be this ecological or social, through the behaviours they need to perform in order to be successful. Locomotion is a key behaviour, required to find food and mates and to avoid predators. I will introduce a number of studies in species ranging from **orangutans** in the forest canopy to **African wild dogs** hunting in groups, asking how certain behaviours and morphologies have evolved and are influenced by their environment.'
- 21 March 2014 **Professor Peter Tyrer** - Mary Richards – the University of Birmingham's first botanical diva
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- Professor Tyrer, who has been a member of BNHS since 1957, comments, 'Mary Richards, then aged 17, went to study botany at Mason's College in Birmingham in 1902, at the point at which it became the University of Birmingham, and where Mary was taught by Professor William Hillhouse, the only Professor of Botany at Mason's College and the first Professor of Botany at the University of Birmingham - who was also Honorary Secretary of the Birmingham Botanical and Horticultural Society. What happened next? Rather a lot, but one result can be summarised easily – 28 species of plants and one genus (*Richardsiella*, a grass) were named after Mary. Find out what happened in between by coming to the talk.'
- 18 April 2014 **AGM** - followed by **John Reeve** - The Hungarian *Maculinea* project
- In July 2006 a group of ten volunteers undertook what was the first transnational joint conservation project under the auspices of Butterfly Conservation Europe, to prepare a report on Lepidoptera in two of the National Parks in Hungary identified as an ideal project during a visit by three of us from the West Midlands branch during a visit in 2005 in cooperation with the then newly-formed Hungarian Lepidoptera Society. The target species was the *Maculinea* group that includes the Large Blue recently introduced back into the UK following its extinction in the aftermath of myxomatosis.
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Field visit to Park Hall Nature Reserve

Five BNHS members took part in the field visit to Park Hall on 14th July, including our President and Treasurer. Together with three members of Sutton Coldfield NHS they spent a couple of hours (in the heat!) being shown around this interesting site – remnant farmland, ancient woodland, wetland and longhorn cattle-grazed grasland – by Chris Wishart of the Wildlife Trust.



C. Arden (Bookseller)

Members may not realise that we buy many of the new acquisitions for the Society's library from Darren Bloodworth, proprietor of C. Arden (Bookseller) of Hay-on-Wye. Darren, for example, provides a 20% discount of RRP on Collins New Naturalist books (currently being published at three or four new volumes each year).

Darren writes on his website (www.ardenbooks.co.uk), 'We are a family business specialising in books on all aspects of natural history, gardening, botany and beekeeping. Our books can be purchased over the telephone, through catalogues and our website. If you would like to view books here in Hay-on-Wye, please call us and we can arrange a time. We are always interested in purchasing large or small collections in our specialist subject areas. We are quite happy to view collections here in Hay-on-Wye and can travel to view.' Catalogues, free of charge, are available either paper-based or as an email attachment. Catalogues list recently-purchased books, but the website is the best place to view current stock, which numbers around 7000 books.

Darren Bloodworth
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- Mon. to Fri. 9.30am-5.00pm

- Visits to view books can be arranged

Should we feed our garden wildlife?

Lorie Chortyk, a resident of Vancouver, British Columbia, recently criticised people who feed wildlife and it's worth looking at her arguments, though some of them aren't relevant to the British experience – we don't need to discourage bears in our gardens, for instance! (See www.nsnews.com/technology/feed+wildlife)

Wild animals getting food handouts, she writes, become dependent on these, despite natural food being around, and suffer if food is nutritionally inappropriate or unreliable. Animals become habituated to humans, making them susceptible to predators and vehicle collisions, and mammals such as squirrels and foxes can develop food-seeking aggression.

I suspect most of our members provide food for wildlife, directly (for example using bird feeders) and indirectly (providing fruit and nectar-rich plants). Yes, it's important to know something about nutrition, for example hedgehogs don't take well to bread-and-milk, and birds benefit

more from grain than bread, but that shouldn't stop us from helping garden wildlife. And if you start providing food it's also crucial to keep

the meals coming all year, although Ms Chortyk argues we should 'feed only seasonally when natural resources are limited'. If you feed animals such as squirrels, foxes and badgers, however much pleasure it gives us if they come to hand it's far better not to have direct contact with them, so habituation won't be an issue.

Are there indeed downsides and risks in attracting wildlife to our gardens? One might be that leaving out food attracts vermin such as rats as well as desirable wildlife. Are we really doing our bit for conservation, or are we being self-indulgent? What are your views?

Peter Jarvis

(A version of these comments appeared in the Wildlife Trust's *Wildlife Focus*, Summer 2013)

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

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SAVE paper, printing and postage costs: could members let me know if they would be happy to receive the Newsletter by email. Thanks to those who have already done this.