

Birmingham
Natural History
Society

Founded 1858

Registered Charity No 500819

President: Ms Kat Clifford

Internet address: <http://bnhsoc.org.uk>

NEWSLETTER No 109 – September 2016

Lecture Programme 2016-2017

Friends Meeting House, Selly Oak, starting at 7.30 pm, except *

21 October 2016

Peter Coxhead – Five Days in the Galápagos Islands

Peter writes, 'The Galápagos, now part of Ecuador, are a volcanic group of islands in the Pacific straddling the Equator. Like many isolated islands, they support some unique species, including marine iguanas, land birds and cacti. Charles Darwin visited in 1835, and his observations later provided part of the inspiration for the development of his theory of evolution by natural selection. Most parts of the islands are strictly protected, with visitor numbers and access limited. I was fortunate to be able to spend five exciting days cruising around some of the islands, observing and photographing the wildlife.'

*12 November 2016
(Saturday)

*Visit to the Lapworth Museum, University of Birmingham. Meet at the Museum. This has been arranged by Sutton Coldfield Natural History Society, which has kindly invited BNHS members. Further details when known; see the SCNHS programme web page (<http://www.scnhs.org.uk/NHS-P-latest.html>) or contact the BNHS Secretary (details below).

18 November 2016

Dr Lesley Batty – Paradise Lost or Paradise Found: does industry always result in ecological destruction?

Lesley is a Senior Lecturer in Environmental Science at the University of Birmingham, with a particular interest in the ecology of industrial pollution and has spent a lot of time working in and around old metal and coal mines

20 January 2017

Dr Chris Young – Southern India: habitats and species of Tamil Nadu

Chris is a Senior Lecturer and Course Leader for the degree in Animal Behaviour and Wildlife Conservation at the University of Wolverhampton, and has led a number of field trips to India

17 February 2017

Professor Robin May – The human zoo: a tour of our unseen microbial friends and foes

Robin is Lister Fellow and Professor of Infectious Disease in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Birmingham. The human body is a walking zoo; at any one time there are ten times as many microbial cells as human cells in the average person, and in a single day we breathe in or swallow billions of microscopic organisms. Most are harmless, but many have the ability to manipulate their hosts in remarkable ways. This talk will look at some of the diversity of microbes and highlight some of the remarkable and often intricate ways in which they can modify the human body to their own ends. It will also cover some recent unexpected findings suggesting that microbes may have a much bigger influence on human behaviour than previously appreciated

17 March 2017

Jon Clatworthy – The Lapworth Museum of Geology

Jon is Director of the Museum at the University of Birmingham, which has one of the UK's most outstanding geological collections, with a recently completed £2.7m redevelopment providing state-of-the-art galleries and a range of innovative and interactive exhibits

21 April 2017

AGM and Presidential lecture: Kat Clifford - Lemurs

John Kiernan

John, a graduate of the University of Birmingham, and with both a Ph.D and DSc from this institution, is currently Active Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Anatomy and Cell Biology at the University of Western Ontario. See:

www.schulich.uwo.ca/anatomy/people/bios/emeriti/kiernan_john.html

He is one of the Society's oldest members, having joined in 1958, and by a long way the most far-flung. In July this year he reminisced as follows:

The newsletter prompted me to look at the BNHS's web pages. There now appears to be only one "Section", Mycology. In my time there were Botany, Microscopy, Entomology, Zoology and perhaps others.

I joined the Birmingham Natural History and Philosophical Society in 1958, before I turned 16, attending indoor and outdoor botanical gatherings for about 7 years, and helping in a very small way with the later stages of the Flora of Warwickshire fieldwork. For a couple of years in the early 1960s I had a key for the rooms in the Midland Institute, and worked there occasionally sorting through the botanical collections of Dr RCL Burges, a G.P. who had recently died and left his herbarium to the society. Not long after that, the society received the collections of another notable amateur botanist, W.H. Hardaker, and other arrangements were made for curating both herbaria. I don't know where these two collections ended up; they needed a lot of space!

Hardaker was a splendid old chap, well into his 80s when I was 18. He and his wife lived on City Road, only about 10 minutes walk from my family's home at the north end of Stanmore Rd. On one occasion he took me for a botanical tour of the grounds of the Mitchells & Butlers Brewery, accessible by way of some allotments (now built on) and a brewery-dedicated branch of the Harborne & Winson Green railway.

Hardaker was from Yorkshire (Leeds?). He had been a science teacher in Birmingham, with geology as his speciality.

Hardaker and the other BNHS botanists of the era were wonderfully supportive to me as a teenager. Christina Goodman was a superb guide in the field for pointing out easy identification criteria that didn't figure in either popular guides or the scholarly Flora. Dorothy Cadbury (a member of the chocolate company) was an expert on waterweeds, and she regularly entertained the Botanical Section of the BNHS at her house in Bourneville.

And in 2012, prompted by my having mentioned to him the then forthcoming floras of Worcestershire and of Birmingham & the Black Country, he wrote:

In my few years as an active member of the BNHS (1958-1965) B'ham Univ's Botany Dept contributed very actively, with JG Hawkes (the boss) and various graduate students and postdocs joining in with us amateurs to gather plant records for Warks. The Warks Flora effort began early in the 1950s, before the BSBI's national (hectad) map scheme for Britain and Ireland, which published after about 12 years of recording. Warwickshire's eventual tetrad-mapped Computer Mapped Flora, 766 big pages, with 2 amateurs and 1 professional as authors, didn't come onto the market until the early 1970s; at least 20 years' work. Some reviews at the time were cynical. Australians questioned the reasons for documenting plant distribution on such a small scale.

*I look forward to seeing the two new floras you mention. I've seen ads for them with literature from the BSBI, of which I'm also still a member. The last flora of Worcs, by Amphlett & Rea (1909) was a real classic - enjoyable to read, not just to look up where things were. Several of the less common species in A&R were still in place more than 50 years later. Much has changed for the worse in Worcs. I visited Hartlebury Common about 10 years ago, and the round pool and long bog had disappeared completely. Only the adjacent line of birches remained. This had been one of very few sites in the county for bog plants like *Andromeda polifolia*, *Drosera rotundifolia*, *Menyanthes trifoliata* and numerous sedges. Whatever happened to this SSSI?*

John – you will be reading this. Many thanks!

Northern Coleopterists' Meeting

This year's Northern Coleopterists' Meeting will take place from 10am on Saturday, 24th September 2016 at **Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL.**

Everyone is welcome, even if they only have a passing interest in the beetle fauna of the UK and beyond.

10.00-10.20 Tea/ coffee

10.20-10.30 **Welcome** Tom Hubball & Dmitri Logunov

10.30-10.50 **The Hignett Collection – from obscurity to NBN**
– Don Stenhouse

10.50-11.30 **The National Longhorn Recording Scheme of Britain, going forward** - Wil Heeney

11.30-12.15

The emerald ash borer *Agrilus planipennis* –
Dr Nigel Straw

12.15-13.00

Conservation of the endangered tansy beetle
Chrysolina graminis - Dr Geoff Oxford

13.00-14.00

Lunch (either bring sandwiches or visit the museum's Café Muse).

14.00-16.30

Informal discussion and identification session
in the Entomology Department.

Tom Hubball
Tel: 01535 678334 after 6.30pm
Email: ukbeetles@blueyonder.co.uk

NEW NATURALISTS: LATEST VOLUMES IN THE LIBRARY



128: Brian Moss: *Lakes, Loughs and Lochs*

Healthy lakes are important ecosystems that can sustain a healthy balance of aquatic life, provide us with much enjoyment, and help support our socio-economic needs. But they also suffer the consequences of human abuses of the land, eg. increasing urbanisation, intensive farming, drainage and an increasing invasion of non-native species. Professor Brian Moss, who died last May, explores the richness of their ecology, emphasizing the need to view these freshwater systems as a whole, and not to manage or assess them in isolation, as well as the importance of on-going conservation efforts. From new techniques using molecular biology to approaches using whole lakes for experiments; from advances in chemical methods that detect traces of organic substances to the development of new electronic instruments, it is becoming increasingly urgent to make use of these advances to help maintain and conserve some of the most damaged of the Earth's ecosystems.

129: Clive A. Stace & Michael J. Crawley:
Alien Plants

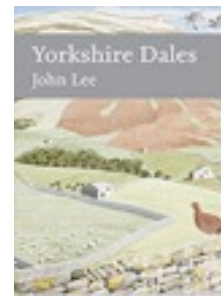
In the British Isles there are roughly as many species of naturalised alien flowering plants as natives. Many species have been an integral part of our wild flora for such a long time that we can no longer be sure whether they are in fact native or alien. Even some recently introduced species are similarly problematic. Aliens have such wide interest because they cannot be ignored, and because they add diversity to our otherwise rather limited flora.



Many of them have profound effects on the environment by competing with native plants or by populating empty ground. Others have altered the course of evolution by genetic interactions with natives. Alien plants, whether they be food-plants or pests, are a major factor in our economy. Their genotypes were forged during interactions with a different set of plants, fungi, micro-organisms and animals from those with which they now cohabit, many of which have been left behind in their countries of origin.

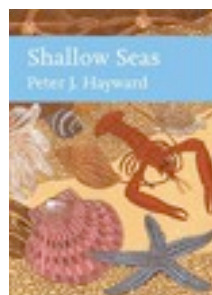
130: John Lee: *Yorkshire Dales*.

A definitive natural history of the Yorkshire Dales, covering the range of wildlife habitats, rich cultural heritage and ecological history. The Yorkshire Dales National Park is a special place: its outstanding scenery and the diversity of habitats are perhaps unrivalled in any other National Park in Britain. To fully appreciate the present-day plant and animal communities, their status and the constraints upon them, it's important to understand the geology and landscape history of the area, including the role that humans have played in modifying the environment. John Lee introduces the national park, exploring its geology and geomorphology, and describing the major habitats that underline the ecological importance of the Dales. He covers the earliest settlement times to the modern day, then focuses on the lady's slipper orchid, arguably the rarest of native British plants, which until recently was thought to be confined to a single plant in the Dales.

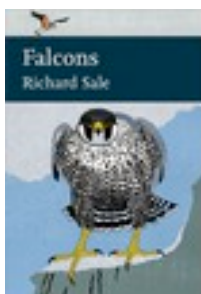


131: Peter J. Hayward: *Shallow Seas*

The margins of the continents, especially broad in the North Atlantic region, are drowned by shallow seas, creating a sea floor environment which is part of the wider and deepening benthic realm. These 'shelf seas' are the most biologically rich and productive areas of the world ocean. Away from rocky coastlines the seafloor is rather flat, often muddy, beneath turbid water with low or no visibility. Benthic faunas mostly live within the sediment of the seafloor, or are sparsely and patchily



distributed upon it, and if at all motile are likely to withdraw into burrows or move quickly away on disturbance. Yet, dredges and grabs reveal an often extraordinary diversity and density of animals, suggestive of complex interacting communities. This is not a textbook of marine benthic ecology, nor is it a comprehensive review of the benthic communities of the northwest European shelf seas. Rather, it describes the natural history of some benthic habitats and associations characteristic of our region.



132: Richard Sale: *Falcons*

Falcons have been a source of inspiration to writers, artists, historians and naturalists alike. In a much-anticipated volume on one of Britain's most fascinating group of birds, Richard Sale draws on a wealth of experience and research, providing a comprehensive natural history of the four British breeding falcons. The book takes each of the breeding species in turn (kestrel, merlin, hobby and peregrine falcon), exploring its form, habitat, breeding biology and status, along with a chapter on the hunting techniques of each species.

Newsletter No 1

The first Newsletter (called Bulletin No 1) was sent to members of the Birmingham Natural History and Philosophical Society in May 1951. Anticipating a quarterly publication, its aims (wrote F.H. Latham) were twofold.

Firstly, to bring the activities of the Society before all members, particularly those who do not attend meetings regularly, in the hope that the latter may be persuaded to take a more active part in the work of the various Sections. Your attention is especially drawn to the Library, which offers a rapidly increasing selection of books on many subjects, both popular and technical.

Secondly, the purpose of this Bulletin is to provide a medium for articles of general interest to all members. If you think your particular interest has been neglected in this issue, please write to the Editor, not to complain, but to enclose a contribution of your own to redress the balance. Short articles, notes, queries, remarks, new records of local species, all are required. The success of the Bulletin, as indeed of the Society as a whole, depends on the efforts of each individual member.

And the thing is, nothing has really changed in terms of aims – but in recent years, apart from notices of various meetings, few people other than the Newsletter Editor have provided material: Brian Perry's last Reserve Report, a splendid piece on spiders by Mrs Joan Condon, and 'Entomological Nature Notes' by Margaret Kingsbury, all in 2009, the Notes from the President in 2010 and his New Year greetings in 2011 and 2012, a request for information regarding butterfly records for South and East Birmingham in June 2012, a short piece in September of that year by Margaret Kingsbury on bird visitors to her porch, and John Kiernan's reminiscences above. More, please, much more!

The Botanical Section, we learn in the Bulletin's report, began 1951 well. Numbers present at meetings have been a little below the average for 1950 but the lowest attendance has been 22. Meetings of a practical nature remain popular, but attendances were also good for the lecture by Dr Rees on 'Vegetation of derelict areas' and by Mr Edees on 'Plant hunting in Staffordshire'.

For a Society that recently has been having an average attendance at its talks of 12-15, to read that in the early 1950s 22 was a low number no doubt drives home our current smaller membership.

Other sectional reports in Bulletin No 1 were from the Entomological Section (which was then undertaking a survey of the Midland Plateau, but a number of other excursions were arranged with the anticipation of filling a 26-seater coach . . .), the Microscopical Section, and the Zoological Section (including a talk on 'The biological uses of radioactivity' and 'The amateur learns something about the man-like apes'). There was an up-date on work on the Warwickshire County Flora (which was eventually published in 1971: 'A Computer Mapped Flora' by D. A. Cadbury, J. G. Hawkes and R. C. Readett), a list of recent acquisitions by the Society's library, a review of V.S. Summerhayes' book on 'Wild orchids of Britain', and small articles on bird life in winter, blue and red pimpernels, the feathered thorn moth, and the two-spot ladybird.

Altogether, eight pages of foolscap produced, of course, on a manual typewriter, and a very interesting commentary of the vibrancy of the Society and the enthusiasms and commitments of its members 65 years ago.

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.
Many thanks to the increasing number of members who have already done this.