

**Birmingham
Natural History
Society**

Founded 1858

Registered Charity No 500819

President: Ms Kat Clifford

Internet address: bnhsoc.org.uk

NEWSLETTER No 113 – January 2018

Lecture Programme 2018

Friends Meeting House, Selly Oak, starting at 7.30 pm

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 19 January 2018 | Dr Peter Jarvis – What's in a name? |
| 16 February 2018 | Paul Wilkinson – A natural history of the Midlands canals |
| 16 March 2018 | Rosemary Winnall – Nature in focus |
| 20 April 2016 | AGM and Presidential Lecture: Kat Clifford – Clever corvids |

The Society's Library and Meetings

The floor of the Piano Room has now been replaced, and meetings will return here following the recent use of the smaller room opposite.

Unfortunately the Society of Friends will no longer be able to house the book cases and the Society's library. The books therefore remain unavailable, having been put into storage during the Piano Room restoration, and Council is urgently looking for ways to retain the collection and make it available to members. One or two ideas look promising, but in case other plans might be needed any suggestions or offers of help from members would be appreciated.

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

Dr Peter Jarvis
23 Crosbie Road
Harborne
Birmingham B17 9BG

0121 427 1010 peterjarvis668@gmail.com

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.

Two meetings to be held at The Birmingham and Midland Institute – Lytleton Theatre

UK Moth Recorders' Meeting – 27th January 2018

Booking – butterfly-conservation.org/13194/uk-moth-recorders-meeting.html

- 10.00 am Main arrival and coffee
- 10.30 am Welcome – Julie Williams (CEO, Butterfly Conservation)
- 10.40 am National Moth Recording Scheme Update – Dr Zoë Randle (Butterfly Conservation)
- 11:05 am 50 years of moth conservation at Butterfly Conservation – Mark Parsons (Butterfly Conservation)
- 11:35 am Moth conservation on farmland: What works? – Jamie Alison (University of Liverpool)
- 12:05 pm Twenty years of moth monitoring in Finland – Dr Juha Pöyry (Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE))
- 12:35 pm Discussion session
- 12.45 pm Lunch
- 2.15 pm Insectinside: Life in the bushes of a small Peckham Park – Penny Metal, author, DJ and advocate for Warwick Gardens
- 2:45 pm Hibernating Heralds: a winter counting moths in dark places – Katty Baird North Berwick moth Recorder
- 3:15 pm Recording micro-moths: Enjoying the little things in life! – Dr Mark Young (County Moth Recorder, North Aberdeenshire)
- 3:45 pm Closing remarks and end of meeting

UK Butterfly Recorders' Meeting – 24th March 2018

Booking – butterfly-conservation.org/butterflymeeting

- 10.00 am Main arrival and coffee
- 10.30 am Welcome – Dr Jim Asher (Chairman, Butterfly Conservation)
- 10.40 am Butterflies for the New Millennium: Recording Scheme Update – Richard Fox (Butterfly Conservation)
- 11.00 am The UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme: News – Professor Tom Brereton (Butterfly Conservation)
- 11.20 am Changes in Surrey's Butterfly Fauna – Harry Clarke (County Butterfly Recorder for Surrey and SW London)
- 11.45 pm Butterfly Trends for 2017: Results from the UKBMS – Dr Marc Botham (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology)
- 12.10 pm Discussion
- 12.30 pm Buffet lunch (including 13.30 pm – BNM Local Co-ordinator/County Recorder Meeting)
- 2:00 pm Scientific Insights from 50 Years of Butterfly Recording and Monitoring – Dr Martin Warren OBE (Head of Development, Butterfly Conservation Europe)
- 2:40 pm The Heath Fritillary - Ecology and conservation of a restricted species at a landscape scale – Dr Caroline Bulman (Butterfly Conservation)
- 3.10 pm Rewilding - the Knepp Estate Project – Penny Green (Knepp Castle Estate, West Sussex)
- 3.40 pm What do the next 50 years hold for the UK's Lepidoptera? – Professor Chris Thomas (University of York)
- 4.20 pm Discussion and closing remarks – Dr Jim Asher (Chairman, Butterfly Conservation)

RSPB's BIG GARDEN WATCH

27–29 January

Got an hour to look out of your window to count the birds that are visiting? Take part in what the RSPB describes as the world's largest wildlife survey. Around 500,000 people took part in the last one.

How to do this, go to: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/>

Shrews shrink their heads during winter

Common shrews *Sorex araneus* can shrink their head size during winter in order to adapt when food is scarce, a study published in last October's *Current Biology* reports.

Researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology recorded this odd behaviour after capturing and tagging shrews across Germany.

Measuring shrew skull size and body mass over the winter revealed that, not only were their heads getting smaller, their spines got shorter, and several of their major organs shrank as well. Brain mass dropped between 20 and 30 percent in cold months, then regrew in spring.

These changes could provide a way to offset the shrew's fast metabolism. By reducing body mass in winter, they could raise their chances for survival in harsh conditions.

"We hypothesize that these seasonal changes could have adaptive value," said lead author Javier Lzaro. "Reducing brain size might save energy, as the brain is energetically so expensive."

Scientists also fitted twelve shrews with a microchip that allowed them to monitor the animals' bodily changes. This showed that shrew skulls shrink by about 15 percent from summer to winter, an effect probably caused by the resorption of tissue at the joints between skull bones. Though the bone regenerates in spring, it does not quite return to its original size.



© Animalia and Pulse Headlines, 2017

Unusual plants in Birmingham: Japanese-lantern

Also known as Chinese lantern and bladder cherry, *Physalis alkekengi* – a member of the Solanaceae – is perhaps more familiar as a garden or indoor ornamental. The flowers are white, with a five-lobed corolla 10–15 mm across, but its main distinguishing feature is the inflated basal calyx which matures into a papery orange fruit covering, some 4–5 cm in length and breadth – and the paper-like 'lantern' of this 40–60 cm tall perennial.

The *Flora of Birmingham and the Black Country*, however, reports on a few records in our region – mostly in east Birmingham – in grassy waste land, often former gardens or self-sown from such sites, and even in paving cracks.

Elsewhere, it has been invasive with a wide-spreading root system sending up new shoots some distance from the initial plant.

Despite the implication of its common name its natural distribution ranges from southern Europe to the Far East. *Physalis* comes from the Greek *physis*, meaning 'bladder'. The specific name comes from the Arabic *al + kakanj*, for 'winter cherry'.



© Uniprot and etsy 2017