

**Birmingham
Natural History
Society**

Founded 1858

Registered Charity No 500819

President: Ms Kat Clifford

Internet address: bnhsoc.org.uk

NEWSLETTER No 118 – January 2020

Lecture Programme reminder – Early 2020

Friends Meeting House, Selly Oak, starting at 7.30 pm

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| 17 January 2020 | Jack Perks – Shetland – Britain's northern edge |
| 21 February 2020 | Paul Wilkinson – The natural history of the Midlands canals – Part 2 |
| 20 March 2020 | Prof Peter Tyrer – The John Heslop-Harrison fraud – the really Rum affair |
| 17 April 2020 | AGM and Presidential lecture by Kat Clifford |

Further details are on our web site at <http://bnhsoc.org.uk/bnhsProg.htm>

Synopses of recent talks – Late 2019

Morgan Hughes - Habitats, wildlife and management in Florida

- (18 October 2019) Morgan lived in Florida from the age of nine until she was 21, and with family still living there she visits the state once or twice a year, armed with camera. She provided the meeting with wonderful images (and wonderful stories) about 'the incredible wildlife and habitats' of the state. She described the key habitats – pine flatwoods (open pine woodland with saw palmetto the characteristic understory), oak hammock (providing shady conditions typically with live oak covered with Spanish moss and other epiphytes), freshwater marsh, and mangrove (with wood ibis an indicator bird species, spoonbill, etc). Sinkholes provide a further distinctive habitat, their depth maintaining humid conditions and therefore plant life very different from their surroundings. Florida scrub supports saw palmetto, together with scrub oak, and sand pines depend on periodic fire for the seeds to germinate. The Kissimmee and other rivers have been canalised and subjected to eutrophication, with 90% of the bird life having left as a consequence. Florida contains 92 species of terrestrial reptiles, 22 turtle species and 64 amphibian species; over 500 species of native birds plus 159 vagrant and 14 introduced species; 77 species of terrestrial mammal, 21 aquatic mammal species and 14 bat species; and of the insect fauna, some 200 species are of butterflies. Photos of many of these species were shown, including American alligator and sandhill crane. Problems of introduced species were described, and extinctions noted. Florida is a biodiversity hotspot with a variety of pressures placed on habitats and species, for example 80,000 ha a year are being cleared for residential development, and even more for agriculture, but drainage programmes are the chief problem, with over half of the Everglades under sugar cane. Indeed 22% of the state as a whole is planted with this crop. Finally, a number of conservation and management options and schemes were outlined. (15 members and 4 visitors present.)

Peter Shirley - What should live where? An adventure in time and space

- (15 November 2019) Peter discussed species introductions, what impact they may have on native plants and animals, and how public and scientific attitudes to these organisms have changed. Terminology might implicitly reflect attitude, for example the words introduction, alien, exotic and non-native. Different attitudes may reflect how long an introduced species has been present (e.g. archaeophyte and neophyte plants), and the extent to which it has become naturalised. With geographical and climatic shifts over time, it is not always easy to identify a species' native range: where did it first live, where has it lived longest, where does it thrive best? Over half of the UK's 'wild' plants are non-native. A number of 'useful' species have been present in the farm landscape for millennia – stock animals such as sheep, and crops such as wheat. More recent introductions such as pheasant and buddleia have generally been welcomed. 'Villains' include Canada goose and grey squirrel. Outside the UK, the 'good' include jacaranda in South Africa, the 'bad' purple loosestrife in North America, and the 'ugly' cane toad in Australia. In Great Britain, other welcome species include white-clawed crayfish, little owl, brown hare and edible dormouse. 'Bad guys' include harlequin ladybird, sycamore and Himalayan balsam. Following changes effected through human activity, new and modified habitats and landscapes might be viewed as introductions. Hedgerows and heathland are 'introduced' habitats of great conservation value. Native species are not always 'well-behaved', for example bramble, ivy and bracken. 'Native' regions are often defined by political or administrative rather than 'natural' regions, e.g. national boundaries and vice-counties making 'introduced status' meaningless. Hybridisation between native and introduced species muddies the water, e.g. Spanish and native bluebell in Britain, the North American ruddy duck hybridising with white-headed duck in Europe, pool frog with marsh frog, and sika deer interbreeding with red deer. Benefits of species introduction include increased biodiversity, replacement of extinct taxa, and the evolution of new communities. As conservationists we should be looking forwards not backwards, accepting nature is dynamic not static, and that very few introduced species become problematic. (10 members and 1 visitor present.)

Further details are on our web site at <http://bnhsoc.org.uk/bnhsProg.htm>

MEMBERSHIP

We get an automatic record of those paying by standing order, and of course those paying by cheque or cash at one of our meetings (preferably the January meeting!) will be noted. For members sending a cheque through the post (note the address on the reminder form), please return this payment as soon as you can, with your details on the enclosed reminder and payment slip, and again you will be confirmed on our list.

If you do wish to discontinue membership you can always email me at peterjarvis668@gmail.com. **I'm afraid that anyone not paying for two years will be deemed to have let their membership lapse, but then at least we'll stop sending you unwanted newsletters!**

Peter Jarvis
Membership Secretary

More on Morgan

The Society is delighted to provide funding for all sorts of natural history projects, including travel, equipment and part-publishing costs. One example was to provide travel costs to Morgan Hughes last summer for her to take part in a survey of bats in a part of Ecuador. Her work has been written up for publication in the next *Proceedings*, to be published later this year, and she has also promised to give a talk to the Society on this expedition.

Morgan visited Florida again over Christmas, and as a photographic 'supplement' to last October's talk (see the synopsis above) members should look at her twitter pages at <https://twitter.com/thereremouse?lang=en> where (especially in the entries for 15–26 December) there are some new and rather wonderful photographs of Florida wildlife. Her tweets of course provide other photos of wildlife and plants in the West Midlands, with a focus on bats. ('Reremouse' is an archaic word for bat.)

And an interesting piece of information from an earlier tweet: 'Noctules are never released from the hand because they wouldn't get enough lift to take off. Instead, we take them to a tree so they can climb it and 'base jump' back into the wild.'

RSPB BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH: 25-27 JANUARY

Interested? Sign up for a free postal pack or register online at <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/packrequest/>

FROM BTO NEWS – AUTUMN 2019

Feed the birds?

In response to the criticism that feeding birds in gardens helps weaker birds to survive and interferes with the 'survival of the fittest' (sic):

Kate Plummer, Research Ecologist, BTO): 'Winter feeding can enable less fit birds to survive, but if those individuals are less fit as a consequence of human activities then perhaps feeding helps to redress the balance. Feeding can enhance breeding and survival, support species of conservation concern, and encourage people to care about the environment. However, feeding can be associated with disease, poor nutrition and increased aggression. Following good feeding practices can help. Done in the 'right' way, garden bird feeding has the potential to assist large-scale conservation and species management objectives.

FOOTBALL, HAWTHORN AND THRUSHES

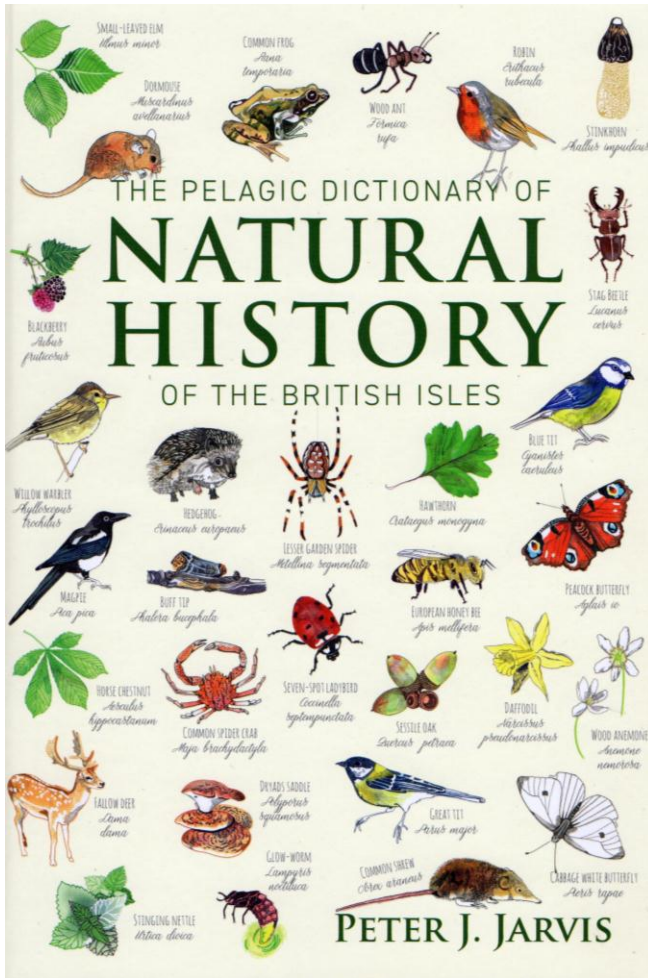
In its first 22 years West Bromwich Albion was based at five different grounds around West Bromwich before settling at The Hawthorns in 1900. The new ground brought with it the team nickname The Throstles, the Black Country word for thrush, commonly seen in the hawthorn bushes from which the area took its name.

An alternative suggestion is that the team adopt the thrush as a symbol owing to the fact that the team pub (in which the team used to change) kept a pet thrush at the time. As late as the 1930s, a caged throstle was placed beside the touchline during matches and it was said that it only used to sing if Albion were winning.

Formerly also known as Throstles, supporters are now associated with the nickname Baggies, reputedly given by their rivals at Aston Villa because of the large baggy trousers that many Albion fans wore at work to protect themselves from molten iron in the factories and foundries of the Black Country. Club historian Tony Matthews, however, suggests that it derives from the 'bagmen', who carried the club's matchday takings in big leather bags from the turnstiles to the cash office on the halfway line.



Please forgive a piece of self-promotion that might be of interest to members



A unique collection of concise but detailed information on 10,000 animals, plants, fungi and algae of the British Isles. Every species with an English common name is included.

The compendium is in two parts. The first, smaller part, looks at various terms that people interested in natural history may come across. The second provides information on individual species or species groups, with entries on those with English (common) names, as well as selected families, orders, classes, etc. In the case of marine organisms, entries are given for intertidal and subtidal invertebrate species, and generally speaking for fish species that might be observed inshore. Indication is often given on distribution as well as whether a species is common, scarce or something in between. For some species a note is made of population size and trends. Comments are made where appropriate on etymology, both of the English name and the binomial.

All British **vertebrates** are included – mammals (101 species), birds (590), herpeto-fauna (30), freshwater and estuarine fishes (56), together with some coastal fishes. There are around 2,800 entries for **invertebrates** – some two-thirds being for insects. Most invertebrates do not have common names, so for instance there are entries for only 84 of the over 250 species of bee found in the British Isles. All **vascular plants** are covered (2,950 species), as are all mosses (around 760), and **liverworts and hornworts** (288). About 1,000 of the 1,700 known **lichen** species are included, 1,410 of the 12,000 or so **fungi**, and some 50 **macroalgae** (i.e. seaweeds).

No other natural history dictionary or cognate publication relating to the British Isles is as comprehensive in taxonomic cover.

Pelagic Press ISBN 9781784271947

Written by the Society's Hon Secretary

Published on 6 January 2020 549 pages and over 600,000 words Price £35.00

'An amazing compendium of information about the natural world. It should be on the desk of every amateur naturalist and will extend the knowledge of every professional ecologist'

— Ian Trueman, Emeritus Professor of Plant Ecology, University of Wolverhampton

Order from Pelagic Press via <https://pelagicpublishing.com/products/the-pelagic-dictionary-of-natural-history-of-the-british-isles> or from your local bookseller

THE WEIGHT OF PHEASANTS

Around 2.2 million common or ring-necked pheasants are present in Great Britain during summer, though some 38 million birds are released each year for the shooting season (1 October–1 February). An adult male weighs 1.4 kg, a female 980 g. The total weight of pheasants in England during summer has been estimated to be greater than the total weight of all other birds in the wild in England.

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.