

Halfway through the year already! We thought it would be a good idea to summarise some of the activities that the Wild Cookham Committee and Volunteers had been doing since last year.

WildCookham Logistics

Yes, I did say Logistics! Our project work has expanded so much we have recently restructured the committee and introduced liaison leads who oversee several habitat and species projects. Mike Copland is now chair of the WildCookham Trustees and Lars Ahlgren chairs the monthly operational committee meetings. Angela Alexander has taken on the Secretary role, helping with the overall admin work, and we are delighted to be joined by new treasurer Geoff Elton, taking over from Andy Blair who is leaving the area – with our sincere thanks to him for his support in recent years.

Habitat, habitat, habitat

Healthy habitats are crucial to healthy biodiversity. To get the best focus on this WildCookham has appointed some of our committee members to oversee the local Cookham habitats and work with the project leaders working on our many projects. This will also tie in with our increasing work on the Borough's Biodiversity Action Plan. Angela Alexander takes on farmland, grassland and woodland; Lynne Peperell looks after our 'urban' areas; and Malcolm Stork has our wetlands. In addition, Brian Clews works with Ann Greenwood looking after our species-specific projects. Do get in touch with us if you are interested in helping with any of these habitats and species.

Glow Worms

Readers may recall that last year we undertook a survey of areas thought to be suitable for these fascinating creatures but from where no recent reports had been forthcoming, and to our delight several 'new' groups were located (as shown). So, encouraged with this success, we are earmarking some other locations for this year's survey programme. Under the guidance of team leader Jacqui Edwards, we are drawing up a list and seeking volunteers, so if you would like to join in, please use the WildCookham email address WildCookham@gmail.com to register your interest.



It is normally the flightless glowing females we go looking for but this year we will be employing some ingenious kit that might help us understand how many of the illusive flying males are around too! (map Mark Gibbon)

Toads



(picture Mike Slade)

Sadly, our local Toad Patrol was not over-worked this season. There were very few toads found, and many evenings when none were seen at all. Mike Slade called his valiant team together on January 30th in readiness for anticipated peak crossings throughout February. In the end, just ones and twos were encountered on a handful of evenings that month. March proved no better with many an evening too cold for movements. The team decided to continue well into April hoping there might yet be a surge to come, but those hopes proved unfounded. The nearby crossing at Deerswood also had a poor season, although other Patrols in our region had a particularly good season. Several of the groups have agreed to get together later this year to compare experiences.

House Martins

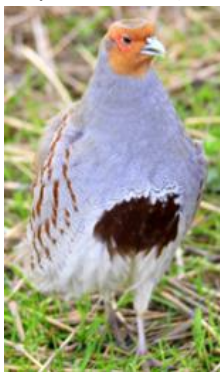
Yet another species which is under threat in UK these days is the House Martin. This dainty sky-scyther returns each spring from its African quarters, but in greatly reducing numbers in recent years. Whereas there used to be hundreds of their under-eave nests each year (for example on practically every house in the Broomhill estate), there are now only a handful of sites regularly used. These include under the Ferry Bridge (which it shares with a few Swallows, a species we are also monitoring), The Odney Club, and Holy Trinity School.



WildCookham hit on the idea of putting up some artificial nests on the houses in between these two locations in the hope of encouraging them to spread out a little, and to increase the number of locations for subsequent generations of birds. Barry Weare took on this task and we now have some 15 nests erected, and a special sounder is in use, which emulates their calls, to urge them to come and take a look at their new potential des-res accommodation. (picture Wiki Commons)

Grey Partridge

Many will remember the Grey Partridge as an icon of our countryside where any corner of farmland or grassland might resound to its wheezing call and sudden, frantic flight to another hiding place not too far away. But these sights and sounds have been but a distant memory for most as our modern countryside management has had to change, depriving this sly gamebird of many of its haunts. But in fact, around the Cookhams, and beyond, there remain patches which would still suit its meagre requirements (which do not include pear trees!) and Ed Donald is hopeful we might find a way of



restoring the future of '*Perdix perdix*'. A team of 14 birdwatchers has been scouring the northern parts of the Royal Borough, and the opposite side of the Thames, to establish where the few remnants are located and based upon this information the project team will be negotiating with landowners to look to the opportunities for releasing parties of partridges into suitable locations. A visit is also planned to the Englefield estate in west Berkshire where a conservation project for the species has been underway for some time, and meetings have been held with RBWM, as initiatives of this sort fall within the newly announced Biodiversity Action Plan.

So, although it is early days, the hope remains that we will once again be able to catch glimpses of this grey-brown denizen of hedge and field in our locale. (picture David Galavan)

Water Voles

"Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wild World," said the Water Rat. "And that's something that doesn't matter, either to you or to me. I've never been there, and I'm never going, nor you either, if you've got any sense at all."

Well, those unfortunate souls who have suffered the uncertainties of foreign travel of late might sympathise with Ratty on that one, but of course this delightful creature has not been around Kenneth Grahame's Cookhams for a long, long time. However, our Water Vole project team, led by Marianne Young, is coming up to an exciting part of our plan to see Ratty once again established in



our local waterways. Last summer, a number of these endearing creatures were released in our area, and we have had to wait until this spring to see if any of them had remained with us rather than wander off to who-knows-where. With great excitement, and thanks to a team of voluntary surveyors organised by Ann Greenwood, we have been seeing the evidence needed to confirm that they are still around. Following a training programme run by BBOWT, miles of banks have been scoured for field signs

left by the voles, and several have been found. Even more exciting has been trail camera footage of voles out foraging in the area. (picture Ray Beale)

And so, it has been agreed that we can proceed to our planned second phase of releases this summer, which hopefully will establish sufficient numbers of voles, able to take up historic territories all around us. Then Ratty might say to us, as he did to his busy friends, *"It's a splendid day. Come for a row, or a stroll along the hedges, or a picnic in the woods, or something."* – a message WildCookham would offer to all our members!

Schools

Our Schools Team, led by Joelle Hewson, has been busy interfacing with the four head teachers and their Eco teams to explore ways in which WildCookham can help realise their natural history aspirations. This has included special arrangements for nature walks at the Odney Club and other curriculum-led ideas being developed. Each school was given a Trail Camera to enable otherwise unknown wildlife activity to be monitored on the school's grounds, or pupils home gardens, and work is progressing to have camera-mounted nest boxes to be installed to hopefully capture breeding activity within them in the years to come. Our thanks to Cookham Bridge Rotary Club and the Royal Borough for their financial support for this project.

Rewilding the commons

At the 2022 Chelsea Flower Show the best show garden was judged to be the *Rewilding* entry. This left Monty Don somewhat perplexed as to whether it was a garden, but it did highlight the importance of making space for wildlife, something that WildCookham has been doing for years. Ok, we may not be thinking of reintroducing beavers, but we already have a very successful project in conjunction with the National Trust to Rewild the Commons, led by John Southgate. You can see some of the success in this Facebook video

<https://www.facebook.com/100002350155546/videos/386416243442367/>

Our thanks again to the Royal Borough for their support for the latest phase of this project – reseeded an area on Cookham Moor. We can already see the results there with a healthy section of yellow rattle this summer which should provide a more welcoming habitat for wildflowers in future years.

If you are a landowner, of even just a small area, contact us on WildCookham@gmail.com to see if we could extend the project to your land. Or if you would like to volunteer, we will be having seasonal opportunities to help develop new rewilded areas. This could include thickening up hedges, harvesting wildflower seed or preparing areas for rewilding.

Wild About Gardens Award (WAGA)

Wild Cookham started promoting the awards in 2018. They are designed to engage local people in making their gardens a welcoming home for wildlife, through working with up to 24 features including planting nectar rich flowers and avoiding pesticides. Just over 100 gardens are registered for Cookham, with Wild Maidenhead following our pilot project and other local 'Wild' groups now joining, and the awards are included in RBWM's Biodiversity Action Plan. In 2022 we have encouraged families with small gardens to enter for the awards.

Harris Woodbridge Nature Reserve



This hidden gem, a small garden/woodland area off Dean Lane is owned by the Parish Council but managed by WildCookham. Mike Day leads on this much-loved project and with the help of volunteers has seen newts return to the pond and newly seeded wildflowers blossoming. Fund raising plant and seed sales held here during the year help to spread the word and share ideas.

Alfred Major

Adrian Doble has successfully introduced nectar rich flowers and a stumpery (to encourage insects such as stag beetles) into an area of the recreation ground near the allotments, with the support of Cookham Parish Council. The photo shows our poster illustrating the wildlife which may now be seen. The poster has been framed and permanently installed by Andrew Padmore (right).



Our events

Have you had a chance to join our talks and walks this year? We continue to run events at least once a month which include outdoor activities such as guided butterfly walks and wildlife observation at the Odney club. Sign up to Meetup <https://www.meetup.com/WildCookham/> if you would like to be informed of the next event.

Our Facebook Pages

Thank you to all who have posted information on our Facebook pages over recent months, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/wildcookham> especially to those who are posting amazing photographs of creatures of garden and wider countryside. We are sure many are gaining increased knowledge and understanding from the messages exchanged around these images, and we hope

more and more will join in with this educational facet of our activities. We continue to glean the pages for sightings that can be added to our various databases, and we urge members to consider recording sightings for themselves on suitable platforms such as iRecord <https://irecord.org.uk/> . Recent storylines have ranged between fascinating insights to the nesting habits of Treecreepers, the planting of the Queens Platinum Jubilee tree on Cookham Dean Common, to a strange bird that apparently sings 'Viva Espania' in a member's back garden! Do keep it coming.

The Power of Volunteers

All this activity has only been possible with the help of a growing army of volunteers – and, essentially, a number of individuals who have taken responsibility for each of the projects we undertake. A massive thank you to them and to all who have helped in so many ways. We need even more of you this year. Please contact WildCookham at WildCookham@gmail.com if you can offer any of your valuable time. Our Secretary, Angela Alexander, monitors the emails and can put you in touch with the local project lead.

WildCookham Charitable Incorporated Organisation, charity number 1193867