



BADCOG NEWS.

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PEANUTS ANYBODY?

We've enjoyed watching and feeding birds in our garden for over thirty years and of course a birdbath and birdfeeders are an essential part of that experience.

It has been interesting to follow the development of garden bird food from the 'old' days of a simple net of peanuts (maybe even still in their shells!) to today's multiple choice of foods. Our first change came when we added a feeder of mixed birdseed to the offering, then the addition of fat-balls followed a while after that. Whilst the fat-balls were immediately popular, the peanuts remained for several years to be the preferred food for blue tits but eventually even they migrated to the 'new' birdseed.

After a while the fat-balls were joined by fat-slabs which we placed in simple wire 'cages' which, if carefully suspended close to a strategic branch or strong twig, would allow larger birds such as the Blackbirds to peck from the convenience of the adjacent branch. The pecking was frequently vigorous so would produce considerable quantities of debris on the ground which ground-feeding birds such as the dunnocks and collared doves could then enjoy. The garden centres soon spotted an opportunity to widen their range of fat-slabs and one could buy slabs with insects, colourful slabs with berries and slabs with seeds - we've seen no discernible difference in the appeal of any of the varieties! Clearly there was a developing market for bird-food, and it wasn't too long before we were being offered Black Sunflower Seeds followed by Sunflower Hearts each of which added to the variety available to the birds.

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A side development was nyger Seed, a tiny black seed that required its own special feeder and which was aimed at attracting Goldfinches that had hitherto been rather absent from the feeders. Our experience has been that nyger Seed was initially popular with Goldfinches but their taste seems to have changed and they now favour the Mixed Birdseed.

Our latest addition has been a Mealworm Feeder which so far has been particularly popular with blue tits but this may be because the feeder is rather lightweight and tends to swing wildly if a heavier bird alights! It is a little early to judge the success of this new addition but from what we understand, Mealworms are going to be especially popular when fledglings come along.

Our feeders are well located in a mature *Viburnum bodnantense* which provides a moderately dense network of branches and, for most of the year, plenty of foliage both are features that are ideal for giving protection to the birds whilst feeding. A shallow pedestal birdbath also shares this sheltered location and is almost as important as the feeders in observing bird behaviour. The shrub and the bath also happen to be close to a large window which allows us to see all the comings and goings!

Over the years we have found that bird species visiting their feeders largely follow the RSPB's Garden Birdwatch statistics, lately the arrival of regular Goldfinches has offset the decline of Greenfinches – a fact that the Birdwatch Report has also noted. The gem of our recent visitors has been the regular presence of a nuthatch whose preferred diet is the black sunflower seeds, many of which he (she?) takes away for caching elsewhere in the garden at a location yet to be discovered! In all our thirty years we have never seen a Nuthatch in the garden so it would be nice to think that the arrival is due entirely to the feeders!

We are curious to know what the next new bird-food will be, we've come a long way from that old net of peanuts!

Peter Mackness

Little Ouse Headwaters Project

Lee Coby

BADCOG members assembled on Friday 8th November for another interesting presentation, this time by the Little Ouse Headwaters Project Conservation Manager, Ellie Beach.

The story of the LOHP as described by Ellie, who this year joined the team in the group's first paid role, was an encouraging tale for local conservation groups and their members. Located in an area slightly to the west of Diss - and adjoining the Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Redgrave and Lopham Fen - the LOHP comprises several small sites fitting together, jigsaw-like, to create an important area of wetland.

Beginning as a collaborative effort between two separate groups of volunteers the LOHP has now secured tenancy agreements and also purchased sites to create a wildlife corridor along the Little Ouse. The efforts of the group have resulted in significant ecological regeneration in an area that was canalised in the 18th century and over-deepened and drained for arable purposes in the 19th century.

The significance of these sites has been recognised with awards from various bodies including the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership and the RSPB. The presentation included excellent trail camera footage of some of the more inconspicuous of England's mammals, such as otter.

The idea of a BADCOG visit to the LOHP wetlands in 2020 was proposed by Ernest, which Ellie welcomed.

Talks and Meetings

Methodist Chapel, Chapel Road, Lingwood

Start time 7.30pm.

Refreshments available after talks.

10th January - The current work at NNNT - By Tony Leach.

14th February - The Guardian's Naturalist writer Patrick Barkham.

Patrick wrote the critically acclaimed book 'The Butterfly Isles', a quest to see all 59 species of British butterflies in a year.

13th March - TBN.

10th April - A talk by Garth Coupland.

New England in the Fall

Hans Watson

Most of us enjoy the colours of Autumn, and a walk on a sunny day in a beech wood can be grand. However, most of the trees in this country turn from green to various combinations browns and yellows. Some only turn to blackish green, and just a few, such as Field Maple, turn to vivid yellow. Only a few of our trees turn to various shades of red. There are, however, places in the world, where the native trees almost all turn to yellows, reds, and most predominantly, vivid orange. One of these places is New England in the United States, which we visited in October. Each year, the peak of autumn colour, which only lasts a few days, may occur at a different time. It therefore follows, that deciding when to go is a bit of a gamble. Luckily, the peak period starts in the north, in Canada, usually at the end of September or start of October, and gradually moves south over a period of two or three weeks or so. Our plan therefore, was to start in the south and travel north to meet the peak of colour.

On October the 8th, we flew to New York, and after a dull and drizzly day wandering round the city, we started on our northward journey. Thankfully as soon as we left New York State, the weather improved, and most days were sunny and fine. As we journeyed north through the states of Connecticut, and into Massachusetts, we began to see small patches of autumn colour on



roadside trees, and the frequency gradually increased the further north we travelled. By the time we reached the state of Vermont, the forests that we drove through were a mass of vivid orange, yellow and red, and this continued through the state of New Hampshire and into Maine.

The forests in these states are truly vast, and at the viewpoint on Hogback Mountain in Vermont, an information board claims a 100 mile view over the forested plain below. The predominant trees are Sugar, Red and Striped Maples, Northern Red Oak, Yellow, and White Birch, Tupelo, Pin Cherry, Large Toothed and Quaking Aspens, Basswood, American Beech, and Sumac.

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On one day, we took a break from 'Leaf Peeping', as the locals call viewing the autumn colours, and went on the Cog Railway that takes passengers to the top of Mount Washington. This little train takes about an hour to ascend the 6280ft to the top. It had been quite foggy on our ascent, but at the top the sun was breaking through the fog, and we were treated to one of nature's rare natural phenomena, a fogbow, or white rainbow. I had only once before seen one, and everyone we were with had never seen one before. Like rainbows, it only lasted for a few minutes, and was gone.



Dear Tree Planters,

This year's National Tree Week is fast approaching and with trees and climate change high on the political agenda, it's been very exciting to see people, organisations and communities seizing this celebration of the start of the winter tree planting season as an opportunity to make a real difference.

This year, we're working closely with the National Tree Champion Sir William Worsley, the Daily Mail newspaper, Tree Wardens and a range of other tree organisations to raise awareness and funds to help meet ambitious new tree planting targets. The Daily Mail are asking their 4 million readers to donate to a fund that will put 1,000 orchards in 1,000 schools and support tree and hedgerow planting projects around the UK. Find out more below.

It's very exciting to be out planting trees with the nation for National Tree Week - but you know better than most that tree planting really is only the start of a long, rewarding journey. Mature trees need time, care and the space to establish themselves, and if allowed to do so, many can grow for up to a noble century and beyond. We're incredibly grateful to know you will be out there again when National Tree Week is over for another year - giving essential aftercare, raising awareness in your communities and working to protect our precious mature and ancient trees - because every tree matters.

With thanks and warmest wishes, The Tree Council Team.

Hazel dormice numbers halved.

A report from the People's Trust for Endangered Species warns that Britain's population of hazel dormice has halved since 2000. Its State Of Britain's Dormice 2019 report highlights the importance of providing the right habitat through the way woodlands are managed to bring the species back from the brink.

A move from traditional woodland management such as coppicing and small scale tree felling has led to the loss of good quality habitat.

Common names: hazel dormouse, common dormouse

Scientific name: *Muscardinus avellanarius*

Dormouse Problems

The dormouse population seems to have been declining during the last 100 years. In the days when people spent many hours trimming hedges and clearing ditches by hand, or harvesting poles from coppiced trees, many a sleepy dormouse was discovered. Today these jobs are done by machines so dormice are less likely to be noticed.

Natural predators such as owls, weasels and stoats eat dormice but their decline is almost entirely due to the loss of woodland habitat and changes in woodland management practices; some large woods have been divided into much smaller woods and often these do not provide enough habitat for the dormouse's needs.

Coppicing, particularly of hazel, was once carried out in many areas. This traditional management provided a perfect habitat for dormice, with spreading branches which acted as pathways, lots of different shrub species and not too much shade from large trees overhead. In some areas, coppicing is once again being carried out, but to suit the dormice there must be a rotation of 15-20 years between coppicing to allow the hazel to bear nuts. Also, the cleared area must not be too large.

The Dormouse

The word dormouse comes from the French word 'dormir' - to sleep. The dormouse is one of the most attractive of Britain's small mammals.

It is a member of the rodent family which means it has prominent, strong and sharp front teeth (the incisors) for gnawing food.

Distribution: found mainly in southern counties from Cornwall to Kent northwards to Herefordshire and into Wales. They are occasionally recorded in the north but not found in Scotland.

Habitat: deciduous woodland with plenty of scrub and undergrowth resulting from coppicing (cutting trees and woody shrubs to ground level periodically to provide wood for various purposes).

Description: chubby build; bright golden-brown colour with creamy-white underparts. Large, prominent, shiny, black eyes and small, rounded ears. Fluffy tail.

Size: With a body length of just 6-9cm and a tail of similar length, these cute creatures are so small that chances of spotting them are very rare. They have soft golden-brown fur, big black eyes and a long, feathery tail. They weigh no more than 40g and are at their heaviest just before hibernation.

Life-span: up to 5 years in the wild; 6 years in captivity.

Food: flowers, pollen, fruit, nuts and insects. Hazel, honeysuckle, bramble and oak are particularly important as food sources.

Around 100 years ago, dormice were more widespread and often kept as pets in the countryside. Unfortunately, today they are a rare and endangered species and few people are lucky enough to see one in the wild.

Dormouse Habits

Daily Life

Dormice are nocturnal (active at night) and use their large eyes, long whiskers and excellent sense of smell to find their way about. They are much more agile than other mice, spending a lot of time climbing around bushes and trees, rarely coming down to the ground. Among the branches they search for flowers, pollen, fruit, nuts and insects. Early in the spring, hazel catkins and spring flowers provide a nutritious food and the dormouse's whiskers carry pollen from flower to flower which helps pollination. Fruits and nuts become available as summer progresses into autumn so the dormouse needs a habitat containing a good variety of plant species to ensure a continuous supply of food.

During the day, dormice sleep in a nest, often in a hollow tree branch or old bird's nest-box, several feet off the ground. A nest is domed in shape about 15cm (6in) across, and to build it the dormouse shreds honeysuckle bark, weaves it into a ball and may surround it with leaves. The dormouse usually forages no more than 70 metres from its nest.

Winter

An old English name for the dormouse is 'the sleeper'; it is the only British rodent which hibernates, and it does this from about mid-October until April or May. Before hibernation, a dormouse eats as much as it can in order to build up a fat store.

It makes a nest deep in a hedge or on the ground, lines it with grass, wool, leaves etc, and prepares a little store of food in case it wakes up during a warm spell. Then it curls up into a tight ball and goes to sleep.

The body temperature drops to that of its surroundings and its heart and breathing rate are often reduced by 90% or more - this saves energy and allows the dormouse to survive for about 6 months on its body fat. As the weather warms up, a hibernating dormouse's body temperature begins to rise and it takes about 20 minutes to become fully awake.

Looking for Dormice

Although dormice are very hard to find, it is possible to find out if they are living in a woodland by searching for hazel nut shells that the dormice have opened. They eat them when they are green and still on the tree, but the shells turn brown once they fall to the ground. Other animals eat hazel nuts too but you can usually tell what has opened the nut. Small rodents gnaw holes in the shell and leave characteristic marks around the edge.

Main Work Party Report

Oct 26 - Walsham Fen - Site boardwalks and surrounds, mown on Oct 08, raked and cleared to spoil heaps.

Nov 09 - Strumpshaw Stone Pit - Site area mown on Oct 30, raked and cleared to spoil heap. An owl box provided by a BADCOG member installed in an oak tree at the west of the site.

Nov 23 - Snowdrop Acre - Annual maintenance of site carried out. A large fallen branch cut up using chainsaw, large pieces to wood pile small items to spoil heaps. Nettles and saplings in main snowdrop area scythed, and a couple of old tree stumps

chain sawed to ground level. All cut vegetation raked and cleared to spoil heaps

Dec 07 - Jary's Meadow - The east meadow south boundary hedge trimmed on meadow side the bank trimmed using brush cutter and strimmer. The west meadow area by seat and the bracken area in south west corner mown. The south boundary hedge and bramble adjoining the bracken cut back using brush cutter. All cut vegetation raked and cleared to fire sites and spoil heap.

Additional Work Party Reports

Oct 30 - Strumpshaw Stone Pit - Conservation area mown.

Nov 01 - Limpenhoe Church - Conservation area mown on 22 Oct raked and cleared to spoil heap.

Nov 07 - Lingwood Pond - Reed and hedge previously mown and cut on 26 Sep, 02 and 05 Oct removed from site and taken by trailer to the village allotment site.

Work party dates.

11th January—Lingwood Pond

25th January—Hedge planting, Peters Wood, Lingwood.

8th February—Buckenham Woods

22 February—Jarys Meadow

7th March—Walsham Fen

21st March—Holly Lane Pond.

Work parties start at 10.30am and finish no later than 1pm.

Membership Renewal

Thank you to those of you who have renewed your membership so promptly. To those of you who wish to renew (**individual £5, family £10**) and have not done so, please forward any cheques made payable to BADCOG to:

Frances Milliken, 45 Heathway, Blofield Corner Road,

Norwich NR13 4RS, or

if preferred, pay cash at our next evening meeting.