



BADCOG NEWS.

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Chairman's report AGM 2022

The last year has, thankfully, been pretty well unaffected by Covid so our usual activities have carried on as they have long term.

We've undertaken our regular management of all our wildlife sites whether churchyards, dry grassland, wet fen meadows, pond work, woodland work or tree and hedge planting and aftercare.

It may sound as though we do much the same as the years go by but continuity is the best, if not the only, way of maintaining and enhancing the value of our sites.

Although we only have a work party programmed every fortnight, behind the scenes we rely on a small band of volunteers to carry out mowing beforehand and, sometimes, final clearing of any remaining vegetation. All we need is tools on the site and dry weather. We've certainly had that this year which has been the cause of a noticeable lack of growth at, for instance, Howes Meadow and has meant watering young trees planted last winter to keep them alive.

After many years we no longer have our winter talks at the Lingwood Methodist Chapel because of its closure. We've collected our awards which were displayed on the wall and we've given our sincere thanks to Peter Draper for his welcome and attentiveness. We now meet at the new Strumpshaw Community Hall.

Last December Hans led us around the new Broadland Country Park accessed via the Haveringland Road at Horsford. Hans is involved with monitoring and planning the management of this important 140 acre site.

In contrast at the height of the spring in May we enjoyed a lovely walk through Tyrrells Wood in South Norfolk and the surrounding footpaths, ancient commons and greens.

In March BADCOG received a £500 grant from the Norfolk Wildlife Trust for tools which was welcome and we had no difficulty in spending it on essentials. Finally I should mention the newsletter which is always a good read and seems to go from strength to strength.

Hummingbird Hawkmoths

The year 2022 has been a particularly good year for sightings of Hummingbird Hawkmoths, (*Macroglossum stellatarum*), with some authorities claiming that it has been the best year on record. I have been fortunate to have had several of these lovely little visitors in my garden this year, and have had considerable pleasure watching and photographing them, and although I have been watching them for quite a few years, I have learned new facts. One of these facts is, just how long their proboscis is when extended. Like everything else that these moths do, coiling and un-coiling their proboscis, is very fast, and only the fast shutter of a camera enables such movement to be appreciated, and the length of the proboscis to be seen. I can only marvel at the degree of precision and co-ordination, that enables these moths to insert their proboscis into tiny nectar tubes of flowers, at high speed, and even occasionally in windy conditions.



As our climate warms, and our winters become milder, I am sure that we will see more and more of these moths. In fact there is growing evidence that they are already overwintering successfully, and becoming a resident species. Hummingbird Hawkmoths are not the only day-flying Hawkmoths, but can always be identified from the two species of Bee Hawkmoths by the orange coloured hindwings, which show well in flight. I

always think that Hummingbird Hawkmoths look much more like tiny hummingbirds than their Bee Hawkmoth relatives, and seem nimbler and faster in flight. Eggs are laid on several species of Galium, rather like another new fabulous resident, the Bedstraw Hawkmoth.



WINTER WALK

Saturday 3rd December

Start time 10.30am from the Shoulder Of Mutton PH

A local walk via Strumpshaw and Buckenham

(Weather dependant).

Please let me know if you intend to come along via my email

(a.mckie57@btinternet.com) or home phone number (01603 714255)

An exceptional breeding season for breeding redshanks.

Orford Ness is a remote and fragile habitat on a shingle spit with brackish lagoons and reed and grazing marshes. Between April and July this year 51 pairs of redshanks were logged there, the highest number since records began in 2005.

Redshanks are "amber listed" over conservation concerns. Surveys show it was the second-best year for lapwings (on the red list of birds most endangered in the UK) and for amber listed avocets.

The MOD helping to save the curlew

In a project lead by Natural England curlew eggs on runways have been saved from being destroyed.

At Pensthorpe Natural Park curlew eggs rescued from nests on military airfields in Norfolk have been incubated this summer. Once hatched the young birds are set free at various suitable locations including Sandringham estate.

As ground nesters curlews are easy prey for foxes, badgers, stoats and rats. On airfields the noise of jets frightens off potential predators but those nesting close to runways pose a danger to air safety and need to be removed.



BADCOG WINTER TALKS: STRUMPSHAW COMMUNITY HALL, Mill Road, Strumpshaw.

11th November—Mark Collins — A talk about Norfolk's northern rivers.

BADCOG Winter program of talks are held every 2nd Friday of the month from September to March (except December) starting at 7.30pm.

Vine House Farm

Where there's a will there's a way. At Vine House Farm, in Deeping Saint Nicholas, Lincolnshire, farmer Nicholas Watts works with local Wildlife Trusts to help reverse the decline of wildlife and enhance the diversity of species of the UK. Through the conservation work that they have undertaken, Vine House Farm is observing increases in bird populations compared to national populations which are either static or declining.



How the work began. It was spotting a brambling in the garden that first sparked Nicholas' love of birds. By the age of four he was already wandering along hedgerows, searching for nests. So it was natural that after he inherited the farm he should start conducting bird surveys. His first species counts were in 1982. Ten years later he'd noticed a shocking trend: skylark numbers down by 60%, and corn buntings by 90%. "I could see wildlife was in trouble," Nicholas says. "But I was just lucky that I was interested in birds and I could do something to help." He began using the annual surveys to inform his farm management choices. His first step? To replicate the pockets of habitat where wildlife was still thriving.

Planting for wildlife. What Nicholas had noticed was the result of crop specialisation: a reduction in the variety of plants and insects the land supports, and therefore a reduction in birds. He cites one example: "In late June there is very little available food for birds in a modern wheat crop. But winter barley matures three weeks before wheat. So by planting two ounces of winter barley per tonne of wheat, the birds on the farm have an uninterrupted food source. It tides them through this difficult period, without affecting the commercial value of the wheat crop."

Another innovation: planting a double line of eight native hedgerow species (Nicholas laughingly calls it, "Instant 500 year-old hedgerow") between fields, separated by a wildflower meadow strip. The hedge provides year-round food and shelter, and in summer the whole area is alive with the flutter of butterflies and the buzz of bees.

The 110 nest boxes between these hedges are perfect for tree sparrows. "This spring, 105 boxes were occupied. Since then over 900 young have fledged. We had about 1000 tree sparrows on site in August. We clean out the boxes in September. By Christmas the birds have already begun filling them with nest material."

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The biggest difference for wildlife was turning a large section of the farm organic. The inspections are a burden, but the benefits outweigh the costs. Not only do the organic crops benefit insects and birds, they are also financially viable. Before the move to organic, herbicides drastically reduced the number and diversity of insects. "Now that we know it's wrong," muses Nicholas, "we should try to put it right."

Water is another key factor: 12 acres are kept as water sources, including six large ponds. These offer breeding space for insects, and nest sites for redshanks, lapwings and terns. "Without water there is no life," says Nicholas.

The fenland landscape is shaped by drainage and irrigation, which led Nicholas to campaign for a seat on the drainage board. He managed to change the way dyke margins are cut, increasing the population of a reed warbler colony from four birds to 70. However, in recent years the birds are again at risk. He relates the decline to the drainage board keeping water levels high in summer and low in winter, the opposite of the natural order: "We've been draining the Fens for 200 years, and we've taken too much. We're sucking the wildlife out of the countryside."

Where there's a will there's a way. Nicholas believes farming's biggest problem is a simple question of motivation. He is sure the steps he has taken on his farm could be replicated elsewhere, but with a proviso: "Where there's a will there's a way. But where there isn't a will, there often isn't a way."

Price pressure from supermarkets and globalised competition make it increasingly difficult to make a living through agriculture. Nicholas is still determined to balance a productive farm business with the evidence provided by his farm wildlife surveys: "People ask me about my plans for the future. I will go where my surveys take me." Nicholas passionately believes in thinking for future generations as well as his own. His butterfly corridors and ponds are still a work in progress. But Vine House Farm proves that supporting wildlife doesn't need to come at the expense of a profitable business. As he puts it: "You just have to be interested."

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Once that interest has been sparked Nicholas' advice for fellow farmers is simple: "Dig ponds, plant diverse hedges, feed birds. Ultimately, just leave a few places for wildlife." Who knows what the impact would be if every farm, garden and workplace followed his example?

As a result of Nicholas' work, populations of a number of species have increased on the farm, including whitethroat, tree sparrow, barn owl and lapwing. In some cases Nicholas has managed to buck wider trends of species decline by increasing populations at Vine house Farm. This is a fantastic demonstration of what is possible and the difference that farmers can make for wildlife.

A bird seed business began back when Nicholas decided to plant crops on set aside land for the birds to harvest. So many birds were feeding there that Nicholas opened up the land to the public, who all asked where they could buy the seed he was feeding them.

Eclectic Reflections from musing through past BADCOG newsletters – continued.

1983- a group got together to restore Holly Lane Pond. This group became BADCOG.

2023 – will be 40yrs later. And we are still going!

From Oct 1995: Just under a year ago the County Council funded the seeding of the area on Strumpshaw Tip which lies adjacent to the Stone Pit we look after. The grass mix was chosen by ourselves and is slowly establishing itself now. Rabbits are cropping it at the moment. On another part of the tip, we counted 56 bee orchids this summer.

We've had some new plastic logo signs made which we are positioning at a selection of our sites. Also afoot are plans for a members' handbook.

From Aug 1996: Now that we are well into our summer mowing season, we have had time to try our long-awaited brand new mower. Thanks to the Countryside Department of Norfolk County Council for supplying it to BADCOG. This machine will help us in our task to improve the nature conservation value of small pockets of land for our whole community.

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From Oct 1996: Even if our work year by year follows a similar pattern the seasons definitely vary. Last winter and spring were cold and dry, month after month. Only 13mm of rain fell in the first 6 months of the year. Ponds were drying up and the water stopped running over our dam in Howes Meadow.

From Oct 1997: We've used the new mower now for over a year and it has proved an invaluable machine, although there is always extra work behind the scenes maintaining it.

Back in February, members of Broadland District Council and other interested parties had an informative meeting in Snowdrop Acre where our president, Richard Hobbs, detailed the intricacies of the numerous varieties of snowdrops growing there.

From Feb 1998: This winter we began the implementation of a five-year conservation management-plan for Lingwood Pond where, with the approval of the Parish Council, the aim is to enhance its wildlife value. The management and subsequent wildlife enhancement will certainly be a challenge as it is a shallow 'village' pond with a large population of semi-tame mallards which are to a large extent responsible for the turbid, poor-quality water and lack of aquatic vegetation.

From April 1998: Sixty-one oaks, locally grown from Buckenham Woods acorns, were planted on old hedge banks at South Burlingham; hopefully maintaining the characteristic landscape of this area.

A hundred native shrubs were planted along the field edge of the Long Lane RNR which is situated on the Brundall to Strumpshaw Road.

From Feb 1999: The hedge at Lingwood Pond is cut annually with a tractor and flail on the outside and top, but the inside is not reachable. This was remedied by several members who hand cut the inner branches that were encroaching out over the pond. They did this by standing in the murky, cold water (not for the faint hearted in January). So it was that our new BADCOG waders were christened!

From Oct 1999: We carried out a successful tree planting scheme alongside Lackford Run using 6 Black Poplars which are cuttings from E. Norfolk trees, 20 Alder grown from local seeds at Briston and 14 Braydeston Willow cuttings

From Oct 2000: An exciting development this year is that BADCOG is now the legal owners of Railway Wood, Strumpshaw, which we've acquired from Norfolk Wildlife Trust.to be continued.

Work Party Reports

Sep 03 – Howes Meadow – Both sides of stream cleared. Area C – 50% of area raked into rows, and a 1/3rd raked and cleared to spoil heap. Burning carried out at both fire sites. EH returning later in day to check fires. 6 members

Sep 17 – Howes Meadow – Area C – all remaining cut vegetation raked and cleared to spoil heap. 5 members + 1

Oct 01 – Buckenham Woods – Steps area and area around new seats mown raked and cleared. Cleared nettles bramble and sycamore saplings from around newly planted trees. Causeway – side growth cut back. All cut vegetation raked and cleared to fire site and spoil heaps. 6 members

Oct 15 – Strumpshaw Stone Pit – Pit area raked and cleared. Bank area scythed and shrubs and bramble cleared. All cut vegetation to spoil heap 8 members

Additional Work Carried Out

Aug 23 – Lingwood Pond – W compartment – area of reed/vegetation by west boundary wall mown.

Aug 27 – Howes Meadow – Area C mown, also a 3m strip either side of stream and the N boundary path. Scythed around the new oaks in N boundary hedge and the tree trunk seat.

Aug 30 – Lingwood Pond – W compartment – Cut vegetation raked and cleared to pile in SW corner for future clearance.

Oct 03 – Blofield Church – SE conservation area – small long areas mown before mower broke down

Oct 09/10 – Lingwood Pond – W compartment – S boundary hedge – pond side of hedge trimmed back and cuttings raked and cleared to pile in SW corner.

Oct 10 – Strumpshaw Stone Pit – main pit area mown.

Oct 11 – Blofield Church – SE conservation area – some clearance of cut vegetation.

Oct 17 – Blofield Church – SE conservation area – continued clearance.

Oct 19 – Blofield Church – SE conservation area – clearance of area to spoil heap completed. Some strimming carried out around graves at SW edge.

Oct 22 – Walsham Fen – Mowed areas D/E and either side of the boardwalks

BADCOG WORK PARTY DATES

12th November—Snowdrop Acre

26th November—Jary's Meadow

10th December—Railway Wood

7th January—Lingwood Village Pond

Work parties start at 10.30am and finish at about 1pm.

All welcome!