



## BADCOG NEWS.

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**President: Richard Hobbs**

**Chairman: Ernest Hoyos**, Sunny Cottage,  
Buckenham Woods, Lingwood  
Norwich NR13 4HG.

Tel 01603 712913

[www.badcog.co.uk](http://www.badcog.co.uk)

### Romania Matthew McKie

During late June I was lucky enough to visit Romania for a week to sample the country's wide variety of wildlife, focusing mainly on butterflies. During the week I recorded 85 species of butterfly and 142 species of bird. The trip started in the Carpathian Mountains, within the district of Transylvania. Habitats here included meadow filled valleys at the lower altitudes, mountain wet meadows and bogs, high altitude grassland and vast expanses of unspoilt woodland that stretched for what seemed like forever. The wet mountain meadows provided unusual butterfly species, including large colonies of Woodland Ringlets, Mountain Green-veined Whites and the odd Clouded Apollo. We visited the alpine grasslands at the tops of the mountains. At over 8,000ft in elevation, the area was shrouded in cloud and the temperature was surprisingly cool, with snow still settled in some areas. Despite this, some very interesting species were recorded. Butterflies included the Shepherds Fritillary and Dewy Ringlet, and birds included the Ringed Ouzel, Wallcreeper and Alpine Accentor.



*Woodland Ringlet*

At lower elevations, the woodland rides and meadows were filled with both Purple and Lesser Purple Emperors as well as numerous copper and blue species. A single Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell was photographed by myself, which caused quite a stir within the Romanian Lepidopterist community, as this species is very scarce and at the very western limits of its range.

The highlight of the Transylvanian part of the trip was the bear watching. We arrived at a hide seemingly hours away from civilization and were greeted by a man, who at first glance, could be mistaken for a member of the soviet era special forces! He drove his pickup truck into a small woodland clearing in front of the hide and dumped bags of biscuits on the ground. I was expecting to have to wait hours for a bear to arrive as we had made so much noise, but to everyone's shock, it took less than 20 seconds for the first juvenile bear to descend from the forest and start devouring the biscuits! During the hour we were there, we had about 7 Brown Bears in total come down to feed less than 50 meters in front of us, an amazing sight.

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The second part of the trip was spent in the far south-eastern part of the country next to the Ukrainian border. Habitats here are very diverse. The Babadag region next to the Black Sea contains Balkanic and Mediterranean forests. Further inland, the Macin Mountains contain exposed rocky ridges and meadows, along with dense, hot woodlands. These two areas provided very interesting species of butterflies. Within the Macin Mountains, we discovered a colony of Eastern Wood Whites along a small, wet gully. Amazingly, this was the first time this species had ever been recorded in Romania, which goes to show that many of these eastern European countries are still relatively under-explored by naturalists. By far the highlight of the Macin Mountains was a seemingly uninteresting area of dark, dense woodland beside a small shepherd's settlement. Within this small wood, the trees were twisted, mis-shaped and many were weeping sap. This sap had attracted in a nightmarish selection of insects and beetles. The trees were covered with huge Stag Beetles, Greater Capricorn Beetles and Hornets, all of which were fighting each other! Another species within the woodland was the Gypsy Moth. There were thousands of these amazing moths sat at the base of the trees. They were mostly the females, which are flightless and had just laid their eggs within a protective, hairy covering. These moths are regarded as a huge pest to broadleaf woodland, and if recorded in the UK, the moth must be destroyed.



*Marbled fritillary*

Our final day was spent on the incredible Danube Delta. We took a boat trip from the town of Tulcea out into the vast expanse of the delta. The habitats on the delta include enormous areas of reedbed, willow-lined channels and lakes. You could, for a moment, believe you were sailing through the Norfolk Broads, until a flock of over 50 Great White Pelicans soars over the boat! Thousands of Squacco Herons, Pygmy Cormorants, Glossy Ibis and Whiskered Terns can be seen flying around, along with more familiar species such as Marsh Harriers. My main target for the entire trip was the incredibly rare butterfly, the Freyer's Purple Emperor. It is only found in Europe in the Willow-dominated areas of the Danube Delta. We were lucky enough to see in excess of 40 of these magnificent butterflies. Even though we spent an entire day on the delta, we only covered a tiny fraction of the 4,100km<sup>2</sup> that the delta covers. I would highly recommend visiting Romania if you haven't, especially the Danube Delta. I will certainly be returning there in the future. The scenery and wildlife are spectacular, the history is very interesting and the people are lovely. (I won't mention the food though!).

## Sparrowhawks

Hans Watson

About a third of my garden consists of a shrubbery, that has gradually been created over the last 40 years, expressly for birds and other wildlife. Species of birds that regularly nest in the shrubbery include Dunnock, Robin, Wren, Blackbird, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Collared Dove and Wood Pigeon, with Blue and Great Tits in the boxes that have been provided. Occasionally we have Song Thrush, Goldfinch, Long-tailed Tit and Goldcrest nest. My records show that 17 species have used the shrubbery for nesting over the years.



It is inevitable that a garden that attracts birds, will also attract predators of birds, and Sparrowhawks from the woods close-by make their visits several times each week. Fortunately for the resident birds, the Sparrowhawks do not always make a kill, but the panic and hush that their visit causes is amazing. The most frequent victims are Collared Doves, but it does not seem to have any effect on Collared Dove numbers in the garden. In fact, all the other species seem to be doing well, and Greenfinches are definitely increasing.

I am a great admirer of the flying skills of Sparrowhawks, but they do sometimes make mistakes, and over the last 20 years, 3 have been killed when they flew



into my conservatory windows. They always seem very single minded when in pursuit of prey, and whilst I was working on my vegetable garden recently, I heard the familiar sound of panicking wings, and a Blackbird shot past me, closely followed by a Sparrowhawk. The Blackbird flew

straight into the greenhouse, via the open door, where the Sparrowhawk caught it. All was quiet for about half a minute, and just as I was wondering if the Sparrowhawk was plucking its prey and making a mess in the greenhouse, it casually flew out with the Blackbird in its talons. If they are surprised whilst plucking prey, they sometimes fly off, leaving the prey. However, I have several times quickly erected one of my hides, and been able to photograph them when they returned for it. This has usually been within about 20 minutes of their leaving the prey.

**Note:** Lee Coby wrote a very interesting article on the impact of Donald Trump's golf course in Scotland, the final part of which is in this issue of the News Letter. Lee had also written an article titled 'Concerning Bird of Prey Populations and some Contemporary Threats'. This article is now available to read via our website on the News Letter page.

## **Donald Trump's Golf Course, the Beautiful Scottish Coast and a Case of Ministerial Impropriety**

**By Lee Coby**

**The following is the final part of Lee's article.**

There are no legal consequences resulting from breaking the Ministerial Code. It does serve as a device with which to weigh up the conduct of any given minister and, in respect of the constitution, is important in setting the rules by which a minister should act. There are, therefore, no options for redress in the courts when considering the behaviour of, for example, Alex Salmond. It is the case that the behaviour of the Minister can be measured and can be learnt from going forward. In the 2008 Report the committee goes on to say that they have, 'serious concerns about the course of events involved in the Scottish Government's decision making process from the time of the refusal of planning permission by Aberdeenshire Council on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2007 until the Ministerial call in of the application on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2007 [...] These concerns surround (a) the intervention of the First Minister; (b) the Chief Planner's meeting with the Applicants (c) the decision making process of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and (d) the disparity between the ostensible grounds for the call in and the actual reasons'.

Despite their insistence to the contrary we cannot know whether TIGLS would have appealed or re-applied for planning permission had the Council's decision stood. The R&A, who govern the sport of golf worldwide, state on their website that one of the marks of a good golf course is that it 'sits inclusively within the local environment and adds to the landscape of the vicinity'. TIGLS is built on the graveyard of a SSSI and does not achieve this marker and so it is not a good golf course. Two keen golfers unlikely to acknowledge this had a very public fallout in the years that followed the development of TIGLS: Donald Trump and Alex Salmond have been quoted in various news stories insulting one another personally, particularly following Trump's unsuccessful appeal in the Supreme Court against a decision granting permission for the development of an offshore windfarm within sight of Menie.

Ensuring habitat protection laws are enforced successfully requires available checks and balances throughout the procedures governing development, just as can be expected with any statutory decision maker. These checks are not meant to curtail important investments, they curtail the potential for corruption or ineptitude of a decision-maker. For instance, in judicial review a decision maker can be challenged if there is a doubt that the processes that govern their decision making have not been adhered to. A judicial review is not a review of an outcome but a review into the lawfulness of the way in which a decision was taken. Judicial review was not available in this case. Continues next page.....

.Had the planning authority taken the decision themselves then s47 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 would have allowed TIGLS to appeal. However, S46(7) reads, 'The decision of the Secretary of State on any application referred to him under this section shall be final'. A statutory appeal option which would function in a very similar way to judicial review would mean that the powers granted by statute to the secretary of state would have been significantly more accountable. This accountability may be made available at the expense of cost-effectivity and timeliness (though not necessarily), however the democratic principle is perhaps the single most admirable principle a government process can aim to achieve and the availability of a statutory appeal would underscore this aim. Should one of the parties interested from the outset (such as SNH or the RSPB) have had the option, as well the legal standing, to bring about a statutory appeal it would have been intriguing to see how the case might have developed differently given the ministerial impropriety.

The isolated events at Menie are a testimony to the laws protecting our habitats. The events are also useful for demonstrating that the stance which takes nature and development and pitches them as dichotomous interests does not serve to protect our rarest and most treasured habitat. Pitch one against the other and the potential that the conservation effort loses out entirely thanks to the fallibility of a human-led process is very likely. Trump used this stance to his own gain but he also used his unusual sums of money to manipulate the situation. Property rights are an exceptionally strong social construct and big money plans need to be met with compromise to achieve outcomes favourable to the conservation cause (the question of what these are and why are questions worth asking but best explored in detail elsewhere). The destroyed dunes at Menie will undoubtedly haunt conservationists. These butchered dunes are subject of conversation in Scotland about how the government dealt with the development. The subject was divisive; if viewed reasonably it could yet unite. Knowing that a golf course cannot be world class when it fails to care for the part of the world on which it is built is a fantastic example of how consideration for our environment can be incorporated into all aspects of life. Choosing decision-makers who know and think like this is a privilege of democracy. If our legal processes are honest about the fallibility of man there is hope that the destruction of Menie remains as rare as the dunes themselves.

### **Return of the Emperor**

The Purple Emperor butterfly, declared extinct in Norfolk in the early 1970s, has returned says 'Butterfly Conservation'. Loss of habitat contributed to their decline but now, with changes in management of woodlands over recent years, their presence has been recorded near the north Norfolk coast at places like Sheringham Park, Beeston Common and Holt Country Park, most often found near oak and willow. Their wings appear black with white bands but, in the sunlight, the male's wings show a purple sheen.

## Wicken Fen

**120 years in Trust Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire, the National Trust's oldest nature reserve and England's most famous fen, is celebrating its 120th anniversary.**

This is a unique remnant of un-drained fenland which once covered the vast lowlands of East Anglia. It is home to more species of plants and wildlife than anywhere else in the UK and is one of Europe's most important wetlands. It is home to over 9000 recorded species including many rare species of plants, birds and dragonflies.

In 1899 it was a two acre patch of fenland but it has grown to 2,000 acres and is now home to 9,300 species. About 25 species were discovered as UK firsts with seven declared to be totally new to science. The latest of these is *Ilyanus recticollis* a flat bark beetle.

Other species including cranes, Norfolk hawkers and otters have returned after an absence of several decades.

In 2019 a common crane chick hatched here. It is believed to be the first chick born at the site for more than 500 years and is seen as a reflection on the conservation work carried out in the last 20 years.

188 endangered species are found here including the cuckoo, great crested newt, soprano pipistrelle bat, milk parsley and fen violet.

Wicken Fen is a 254.5 hectare biological Site of Special Scientific Interest west of Wicken in Cambridgeshire. It is also a National Nature Reserve, and a Nature Conservation Review site protected by international designations as a Ramsar wetland site of international importance, and part of the Fenland Special Area of Conservation under the Habitats Directive.

A large part of it is owned and managed by the National Trust. It is one of Britain's oldest nature reserves, and was the first reserve to be cared for by the National Trust, starting in 1899. The first parcel of land for the reserve was donated to the Trust by Charles Rothschild in 1901. The reserve includes fenland, farmland, marsh, and reed beds.

Wicken Fen is one of only four wild fens which still survive in the enormous Great Fen Basin area of East Anglia, where 99.9% of the former fens have now been replaced by arable cultivation.

Areas of this national nature reserve contain original peat fen with communities of carr and sedge. These support rare and uncommon fenland plants such as marsh pea, Cambridge milk parsley, fen violet and marsh fern.

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Swallowtail butterflies once abounded at Wicken Fen however their demise was brought about by the draining of the fens for agriculture in the 1950s and the consequential decline in its food plant, milk parsley. As management allowed this plant to recover reintroduction of the swallowtail butterfly was attempted but this failed because of the drought of 1976. It is perhaps debatable as to whether such an isolated colony would have been sustainable. The sedge plant, *Cladium mariscus*, is harvested every year and sold for thatching roofs. The earliest recorded sedge harvest at Wicken was in 1414, and ever since then, sedge has been regularly cut. The sedge-cutting has allowed an array of plants and animals to colonize the area that depend on regular clearance of the sedge in order to survive. (Many plants and animals are dependent upon regular management of vegetation in this way to keep their habitats intact.) As part of the management plan for Wicken Fen, Konik ponies and Highland cattle have been introduced to some areas in order to prevent scrub from re-growing. Barbara Pilch

### **A Helping Hand for Curlews.**

Eggs have been rescued from nests on military bases in Norfolk and transported to Slimbridge Wetland Centre. There staff hand reared the chicks which will eventually join wild populations and hopefully return to the Severn Vale in future years. This species in lowland England needs protection. A priority species it could be lost forever in as little as 15 years without similar intervention.

Much of the chicks' vulnerability is in their instinct to freeze when in danger thus placing them at risk from farm machinery and predation.

### **WORK PARTY DATES**

ALL START AT 10.30 UNLESS STATED

**7th September—Town Pit Pond, Blofield Heath (1st Work party)**

**14th September—Town Pit Pond (2nd Work party)**

**28th September—Buckenham Woods.**

**12th October—Walsham Fen**

**26th October—Howes Meadow**

**9th November—Strumpshaw Stone-pit**

**23rd November—Snowdrop acre**

**7th December—Jary's Meadow**

**28th December—Railway Wood**

### **Main work party reports.**

**Jun 29 - Hemblington Church** - Conservation area mown on 22 Jun raked and cleared to spoil heap.

**Jul 13 - Blofield Church** - Conservation areas NE and NW of church mown on 06 Jul raked and cleared to spoil heaps. A pile was left near the gate for collection by someone for their horses.

**Jul 20 - Howes Meadow** - A section of meadow mown on 15 Jul raked and cleared to spoil heap and fire site.

**Aug 03 - Walsham Fen** - Areas D/E mown on 27 Jul raked and cleared to spoil heaps. Sallow by main entry gate cut down, branches taken to W fire site. Encroaching bramble either side of bridleway access to site cut back.

**Jary's Meadow** - East Meadow - Bramble growth either side of N path cut back using hedge trimmer. Cut vegetation raked and cleared to fire site and spoil heap.

**Aug 17 - Jary's Meadow** - Areas mown on 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> Aug raked and cleared to fire sites. East Meadow path to Walsham Fen gate, E to bramble area - Grassy Hollow - and approx 80% of path network. Burning carried out at E meadow fire sites.

### **Additional Work Party Reports**

**Jun 22 - Hemblington Church** - Conservation area mown. Scythed round gravestones.

**Jul 01 - Southwood Church** - Conservation areas mown. Clearance to be carried out by the Bure Valley Conservation Volunteers.

**Jul 06 - Blofield Church** - All 4 conservation areas mown. Scythed round gravestones.

**Jul 09 - Walsham Fen** - Areas mown in preparation for clearance by BVCV and in Jary's Meadow an area by gate mown for BVCV car parking.

**Jul 11 - Walsham Fen** - Further areas mown and brush cut in preparation for clearance by BVCV.

**Jul 15 - Howes Meadow** - a 30metre section of Area A and the path network mown.

**Jul 16 - Blofield Church** - Conservation areas SE & SW of church raked and cleared to spoil heaps by the Great Yarmouth Green Gym.

**Jul 17 - Walsham Fen** - Areas of reed mown on Jul 09/10 raked and cleared to spoil heaps by BVCV.

**Jul 27 - Walsham Fen** - Areas D/E mown.

**Aug 12 - Jary's Meadow** - East Meadow Grassy Hollow mown.

**Aug 13 - Jary's Meadow** - East Meadow section from E of path to Walsham Fen gate to bramble area and path network mown.

**Aug 15 - Lingwood Peters Wood Permissive Path/Footpath FP3** - Scythed round newly planted oaks and the hornbeam.

### **Talks and Meetings**

**Methodist Chapel, Chapel Road, Lingwood**

**Start time 7.30pm.**

**Refreshments available after talks.**

13th September - AGM followed by members evening.

11th October - Horsey Mill, its history & restoration.

8th November - Ellie Beach, a talk by the conservation manager of the Little Ouse Headwaters Project.

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

14th February - TBN.

13th March - TBN.

10th April - A talk by Garth Coupland