



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



Mandarins Hans Watson

Introduced alien species and their impact on native wildlife, has been an interest of mine for as long as I can recall. I have always believed that such introductions are very unwise. This is only too obvious when one considers such introductions as Mink and Japanese Knotweed. However, other introductions have had a much less negative effect on our native wildlife, and are now accepted as part of our local nature. Rabbits are considered to have had a positive effect on some heathland species. There can also be few naturalists that do not welcome an encounter with a Little Owl, an introduced bird, now considered as British.



In April, I decided that it was high time that I tracked down another, more elusive introduction, the Mandarin duck (*Aix galericulata*). It is at least 2 years since I last saw a Mandarin in Norfolk, even though they are now resident and breeding. One would think that this small duck, with its strikingly colourful plumage, would be easy to see. This is certainly not the case, as Mandarins are quite secretive, and spend much of their time in shady areas, where overhanging branches give them cover. Unlike most other ducks, they are quite happy in mature woodland, and are very agile fliers, easily able to dodge through the branches of trees, and perching readily on branches, aided by well developed claws. Nesting sites, in tree cavities, can be some distance from water and are often 5 to 10 metres above ground level.

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They especially favour lakes and larger rivers with overhanging mature trees. Felbrigg and Santon Downham are two favoured locations. The population of breeding pairs in England is estimated to be 2300, which is at least twice as many as the estimated population of that other introduction, the Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*). I only wish I could see as many Mandarins as Egyptian Geese.

**Update on the solitary bees in my garden.
Judith Robertson.**

In the January edition of the newsletter, I described the small solitary bee hive on my house which had been colonized by mason bees and a few leaf cutter bees last year.

In April the smaller male bees hatched and these were followed by the larger females. A fresh hive was put up on the wall and I also dismantled the original one, cleaned out the mud partitions and debris left from the hatched chrysalises and put it back on the wall. Very quickly both hives were filled and the holes sealed with mud.

In July some leaf cutter bees colonized a few holes. They were cutting circles from fuchsia and rose leaves.

In August I noticed a much smaller bee (about 8mm x 2mm) entering the holes drilled into a wooden post section. These I understand to be large headed resin bees. Their nest holes are sealed with bits of grit and resin from trees. They are using the 8mm holes drilled for the larger bees, but am advised that they may prefer 4mm holes and have now drilled a further post section with smaller holes.

Right: Resin bee in center and hole below sealed with grit and tree resin.



An Alpine virtuous circle

Peter Mackness

When walking the many trails in the higher Alps, one enjoys not only magnificent mountain views but also many interesting experiences. The term “Alps” is usually understood to refer to the mountain range running across central Europe from France through Italy, Switzerland and Austria, but the term “alp” is also used for the open meadows found on the slopes between valley floor and mountain top.

These alpine meadows (or alps) offer rich pasture due to their altitude, their sunny aspects and the constant moisture from rain and frequent mountain mists. These advantages are of course offset by their inaccessibility, a relatively short growing season and difficulties in sustaining a farming business in rather uncomfortable conditions. Nonetheless, hardy farmers have operated successfully high in the mountains for centuries probably quite unaware that the principles used are seen today as virtuous and very sensitive to the environment.



Alpine cheesemaker

Whilst walking a high-altitude path very many years ago I encountered one such farmer and have been fortunate enough to have revisited several times since. In fact he was not only a farmer but a cheesemaker and spent four months of each year almost permanently isolated with his animals on an “alp” about three hours walk from his home village. In the winter his cattle lived in the village but in June, once the snows had receded, the villagers would lead the cattle to the high pasture and open up the wooden chalet on the pasture where the farmer would live and work for the next four months.



The cattle grazed on the rich grasses and flowers on the alp that had never seen any artificial fertilizer and twice a day they were milked for their rich milk. Continues over page.....

In the “working” part of the chalet a huge copper cauldron was suspended over a permanently lit fire of logs. The cauldron was suspended by a chain which could be raised and lowered thus controlling the level of heat in the milk. The milk would be gently warmed and Rennet then added to start the cheese-making process where the whey is separated from the curds.

The curds would be scooped into muslin and left to drain for several hours before being pressed into round moulds. After a few days, the rounds of cheese would be taken and stored in a small airy wooden cabin next to the chalet and once a week his family would make the journey up to the alp to collect the four dozen or so cheeses that were ready.



Cheese store

A considerable quantity of whey is created each day in the cheese making process. This is channelled from the cauldron through the rear wall of the chalet directly into a trough where several piglets which had also come up with the cattle would eagerly consume the whey!

The chalet was virtually “energy-neutral” as all the wood for the fire beneath the cauldron and for simple cooking was of course obtained from the surrounding mountain side. The cattle and the pigs constantly provided excellent nutrient for the pasture, so no additional fertilisers were needed there.

In late September the chalet would be closed for the season, the remaining cheese taken down to the village and the animals would make the slow journey down the mountain to their winter home. Even today this is an occasion for celebration, the cattle would have ribbons tied to their bells and the evening would be filled with music and dancing along with many grilled “wurst”, which may even have started out as one of those “whey piglets”!

Without doubt, making a living as an alpine farmer and cheesemaker has always been extremely hard work but from an environmental point of view it also seems to be a near-perfect virtuous circle!



Mountain cheeses

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 40 years later. And we are still going strong!

From Oct 1991: Mike Blackburn (RSPB) used Snowdrop Acre to give his trainee wardens chain saw experience, and felled a number of sycamores which has given the native trees we have planted more light to develop properly

From Dec. 1991: BADCOG is working to maintain the best diversity on the sites we manage: advice is accepted from those ‘in the know’, such as the NNT, but after we’ve rolled up our sleeves and done our stint for local conservation, we can have the pleasure of visiting any of our sites on a spring or summer day.

From June 1992: We will be making a start on our conservation mowing soon in local churchyards. Each has its acre of ancient grassland which has been managed through the centuries either by grazing or mowing for hay. This has maintained a marvellous heritage of native grasses, wild flowers and all the insect and wildlife that are part of it, and becoming increasingly rare in our arable county.

From Feb 1993: A large, sound oak was recently felled on the Blofield recreation ground alongside the footpath to the church. At the end of January, we planted three replacement oaks. The growth rings on the old tree were fairly easy to count, and came to a total of 130 years, ie. 1860 or thereabouts.

From July 1993: During the recent work party at Walsham Fen, down by the stream, I watched an alder fly lay eggs on the underside of an overhanging leaf of lesser pond sedge. The brown eggs, about 2mm long, were laid in neat rows with great precision and the whole mass resembled a perfect rectangle.

From Aug 1993: Twenty-two children joined in a wide range of activities in July at BADCOG’s Children’s Bird Day in Blofield Courthouse. Continues over page.....

There were over one hundred things to do - from identification of birds, bones, feathers; to using a microscope; making paper masks birds and 'planes and clay modelling and painting birds.

From Oct 1993: Southwood Churchyard is another success story. The hedge and shrubs we planted are flourishing and mowing and raking of the grassland is being done to plan. We have also, at long last, constructed and fitted a barn owl box in the tower, a job requiring mountaineering skills!

From April 1994; If you join us our tour of BADCOG sites you will probably see one of our lesser known Spring flowers. Moschatel is in a family all of its own - Adoxaceae (derived from the Greek word Adoxa, meaning lacking in glory). True it is inconspicuous, leading to the commonly held belief that it is a rarity. However, it is fairly widespread, although localised, usually growing in oak woods before the leaf canopy develops.

From Oct 1994; Railway Wood at Strumpshaw was donated to the NNT by British Rail, and it is a new site for us to manage. One foggy morning last winter we coppiced elder in the main primrose area and planted hazel, spindle, buckthorn, field maple, holly, yew and maple and a service tree.

Beryl Ogden



Some photos of work parties.

Top left: Blofield Church
Top right: Jary's Meadow
Left: Howe's Meadow

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

14th October—Dr Ian Bedford — An illustrated talk on wasps.
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.

BADCOG AGM
9th September 2022
Meeting starts at 7.30pm
STRUMPSHAW COMMUNITY HALL
Mill Road, Strumpshaw.

The AGM will be followed by a members evening.
Bring along anything relevant to natural history or about the
outdoors that you would like to share with other members of the
group.

BADCOG WORK PARTY DATES

3rd September—Howe's Meadow
17th September—Howe's Meadow
1st October—Buckenham Woods
11th October—Green Gym at Blofield Church
15th October—Strumpshaw Stone Pit
29th October—Walsham Fen

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

Work Party Reports

Jul 02 – Howes Meadow - The site path network and approx. 40% of Area B raked and cleared to fire site/spoil heap. 6 members + 2

Jul 16 – Blofield Church – Conservation areas NE NW & SW raked and cleared to spoil heap. SE area mown. 4 members +3

Jul 30 – Walsham Fen – Area G and path network raked and cleared to spoil heaps. 7 members +1

Aug 06 – Walsham Fen – Area I from left of hide to large tussock sedge - raked and cleared remaining vegetation not cleared on AWP 15th Jul.
7 members.

Aug 20 – Jary's Meadow – East Meadow, Grassy Hollow with exception of small area in centre, raked and cleared to fire sites. Also cleared an area in the main N section down to the fen and the path network. The overhanging vegetation in the Bridleway to the site entry was cut back using hedge trimmer. 6 members +1

Additional Work Carried Out

Jul 02 – Howes Meadow – Site path network and approx 40% of Area B raked and cleared to fire site/spoil heap

Jul 04 – Howes Meadow – Completed clearance of Area B.

Jul 05 – Blofield Church – Conservation areas NE, NW & SW mown.

Jul 25 – Walsham Fen – Area G most of Area I and wide cut either side of boardwalk in Area L mown.

Jul 25 – Jary's Meadow – Two BADCOG signs put up.

Jul 28 – Blofield Church – SE conservation area raked and cleared to spoil heap.

Aug 06 – Pedham Rd/Dyes Rd Blofield Heath – Oak trees planted
Jan 2022 watered.