

NATURAL HISTORY SECTION

The Natural History Section is most grateful for the time and effort given by the various leaders and lecturers to provide a stimulating programme of Lectures and Field Visits during 1992:

18th January: 'Mountainous Places' was the title of a beautifully illustrated lecture by Christine Scott, with slides of flora and fine scenery.

8th February: Illustrated talk on the Galapagos Islands by Geoff and Alison Beck: these volcanic islands, part of Ecuador, lie in the Pacific and are the home of an extraordinary range of wild life including tortoises, sea lions, iguanas, fur seals, crabs, and many species of birds: Lava Gulls, 3 species of the Booby, Frigate Birds and Darwin's Finch etc. Charles Darwin visited the Galapagos in 1835.

14th March: Don Freeman gave a most interesting and informative talk covering the twelve British Reptiles and Amphibians, illustrated with clear slides, giving us an insight into his wealth of knowledge on this subject.

11th April: Annual General Meeting followed by Members' slides: Tony Colmer: Flora of Guernsey; Tony Elcoate: Orchids of Minorca; Angela Colmer: Flora and Wild Life of the Scillies; Sir Thomas Barlow: Antarctica.

23rd May: A really lovely and successful whole day visit to the College Lake Wildlife Centre, a joint project between BBONT and Castle Cement Ltd. Several more flora were added to the current count of some 94 species. A 28-acre lake and islands provided interest for the bird watchers, and sightings of moths and butterflies, dragonflies, and freshwater life, confirmed the richness of this reserve. Rare breeds of sheep added interest: Hebridean, Manx, Shetland and Jacob.

20th June: Long Herdon and Grange Meadows, near Bicester, with Roy Maycock. The water meadows of Long Herdon, seasonally flooded by the River Ray

and traditionally managed through the centuries for hay, are wonderful examples of a wild flower habitat that is all but lost from the English countryside. In 1976 Long Herdon was recognised as an SSSI, and has been preserved as a haven for wildlife thanks to Timotei Shampoo and Plantlife, managed by BBONT. Grange Meadows have also been acquired and a special farming scheme along the banks of the Ray helps to preserve these lush meadows brimming with grasses, sedges and meadow flora.

11th July: Extremely well-supported coach outing to the famous Wicken Fen, a wildlife oasis in the flat agricultural landscape of Cambridgeshire. 600 acres of wetland reserve, an undrained remnant of East Anglia's Great Fens, are particularly rich in plant and insect life, and contain a wide variety of habitats for birds. In the afternoon, the society visited Wimpole Hall, and Wimpole Home Farm, built in 1794 as a model farm, now with a collection of farm machinery and rare breeds of animals which graze in the 350 acre parkland.

25th July: Becky Woodell provided a most interesting afternoon in the BBONT Reserve at Whitecross Green Wood on the Oxfordshire/Buckinghamshire county boundary. Originally part of Studley Priory Estate and known as Prior's Wood, it then became Lady Gore Wood. An enormous amount of work is required to clear away the Forestry Commission's Scots Pines and open up the rides and glades etc. Twelve species from the rich collection of butterflies were sighted.

22nd August: Visit to Buttler's Hangings Reserve at West Wycombe with Maurice Young. In spite of atrocious weather, the expedition proved very interesting, with the emphasis on Galls.

4th September: A Friday evening spent watching Bats at Bourne End with Angus Idle: A most successful and unusual visit made all the more memorable with the sun setting over the River Thames. With the aid of a high frequency detector,

Daubenton's bats were sighted. Flocks of Canada Geese flying overhead to roost added to the interest.

17th October: Our annual Fungus Foray with Victor Scott, this time on Chorleywood Common. In spite of two nights of very early frosts destroying many specimens and causing colour alteration, some 27 species were found.

7th November: 'Ringing Birds and Migration' by John Woollet: An excellent beginning to the Winter season of lectures. Following an explanation of the work and purposes of some 2,000 ringers in this country, slides of species of birds which had been ringed preceded an account of the work in Sénégal during the Winter migrations.

5th December: 'Natural History of Israel' by Victor Scott, The slides of the flora and birds were Victor's usual superb standard with a visual background of sites famous in the archaeological world.

Geological Field Trips

6th June: Buckingham area: 1, Thornborough Quarry: disused pit showing fossiliferous Blisworth Limestone. 2, Foscott Farm Quarry: recently discovered by the British Geological Survey as 'a new record of the Upper Cornbrash between Oxford and Bedford', This latter site is fossil-rich particularly in marine bivalves.

19th September: Denham and Pitchcott Hills and Waddesdon Manor Park: led by Mike Henty of the Open University: A really interesting and stimulating afternoon. This is an area of Jurassic rocks dated between 180 – 135 million years, and has also the most northerly outcrop of Portland Stone in the country. Surface finds of fossils included brachiopods and lamellibranchs (Bivalves). Of Botanical interest was a large clump of Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*) and Large Butcher's Broom (*Ruscus hypoglossum*) – the latter growing at Waddesdon Manor, where the large imported limestone features were of interest, as well as fossils such as crinoids and sponges seen in the statue plinths.