

NATURAL HISTORY SECTION

The Natural History Section succeeded in maintaining a full programme of field visits and lectures during 1994:

15th January: Orchids & Ortolans on a Baltic Island by Robert Dickens. A most informative talk with fine slides of botanical and ornithological interest taken on Gotland, the largest of the Swedish islands. The Ortolan Bunting is distinguished from other buntings by pinkish-buff under-parts and yellow throat and eye-ring, olive head and breast.

12th February: Dr. Peter Skelton gave a most unusual and important geological lecture on Cretaceous Life in the Caribbean, concentrating on fossils known as 'Rudists' found in Cuba, the Cockpit Country of Jamaica, and over in the Middle East.

12th March: Members enjoyed an audiovisual afternoon with example of Environmental & Geological Film making by John Simmons, including spectacular scenes of volcanic eruptions under the sea, a Japanese earthquake, and a rare film from archives in Russia.

9th April: Annual General Meeting, followed by 'Birds at Sea' by Capt. Sir Thomas Barlow, with unusual ornithological slides as viewed from on board ship in various seas.

13th May: Fifteen members were taken by Ralph Woodward to watch a badger set. Earlier he had scattered a few titbits to keep the badgers close to home for a short time. By half-past-eight, badgers of every size were appearing, completely oblivious to the scufflings of badger watchers in uncomfortable positions. A beautiful sunset completed the perfect evening when at least seven badgers wandered off into the dusk.

11th June: Grangelands Reserve, managed by BBONT, was the site chosen for this afternoon's walk, led by Chris Damant, Bucks County Council Countryside Management Officer. He pointed out how the site was

being managed in order to allow for a variety of flora and habitats.

9th July: Naphill Common with Dr. Alan Showler for Rare Flora proved to be a particularly successful outing, including visits to Daisy Pond and Manning's pond looking at rare Starfruit (*Damasonium alisma*), and other water plants. We then moved on to Vincent's Field for butterflies and more flora.

6th August: A geology trip to a working farm quarry at Weston Underwood, led by Kate Hawkins, to view the Middle Jurassic limestones, particularly the blue-grey (in its unweathered state) Forest Marble which is exploited here as a traditional building stone. It shows cross-bedding, an indication of high current activity at the time of deposition, and intraclasts, probably originally lumps of mudstone 'captured' in the sediment which became the Forest Marble. These features suggest a high energy environment possibly punctuated by storms. B.A.S. members found a variety of specimens of associated fossils including the bivalves *Modiolus*, *Perna* and *Pholadomya*, and brachiopods such as *Epithyris*, *Kallirhynchia* and the characteristically corn-sack shaped *Digonella*. Marl beds (muddy limestone) at intervals in the sequence indicate quieter periods when finer sediment could be deposited, and many specimens of the fossil oyster *Liostrrea* were found here. In a more deeply excavated face near the road a thin layer of Blisworth Clay could just be seen at the bottom of the flooded section beneath the Forest marble. This represents a time of swampy conditions which were succeeded in the Olney area by a local return of the sea.

Fine weather, good fossil hunting and expert interpretation by Dr. Michael Oates made a most enjoyable visit. Especially appreciated was the hospitality offered by Mrs. Goss whose family has owned and worked the quarry for generations, and her

granddaughter Melanie, who showed us some of the fossils she and her grandparents have collected from the quarry.

24th *September*: A Nature reserve owned by BBONT, Finemere Wood is valued as a remnant of the medieval forest of Bernwood which once stretched westwards over the border into Oxfordshire and is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Under the guidance of Kate Hawkins, an area of recently cut coppice was explored first; sweeping foliage with a white linen net produced flying insects, weevils and spiders, while hand searching of the coppice stools at the base of the trees yielded litter animals like millipedes. Members were shown damage to the regrowing coppice shoots by browsing deer, which is a common problem in woodlands brought back into traditional management. Along the main ride, the deliberately managed 'layering' of the woodland vegetation was apparent. This variety of structure favours butterflies and other insects and is helped by 'scaloping' of the

ride edge to provide sheltered, sunny spots. From the top of the main ride, members could see the meadow area. This was a feature discovered in old documents and recently opened up again by BBONT in consultation with English Nature.

13th *October*: Victor Scott led us once again on our annual Fungus Foray, in Stockgrove Country Park near Heath and Reach this year. As on previous visits here, a wide variety of species was found.

19th *November*: Mr. & Mrs. Don Freeman brought many containers of reptiles and amphibians to this meeting, including several from Australia. Frogs, Toads, Lizards, skinks and snakes could be closely observed and some handled. Not all of the twenty members present took advantage of this privilege!

10th *December*: A botanical afternoon with an informative and interesting talk by Roy Maycock on Hedges and Hederows. He covered such topics as dating and conservation, accompanied by slides of flora found in this type of habitat.