

NATURAL HISTORY SECTION

Another year of Lecturers and Field Visits successfully completed as follows:

- 6 *January*: Alpine Flora of the Bernese Oberland by Jean Hall. We were shown first-rate colour slides of the wonderful variety of wild flowers in this area of Switzerland, including the very rare Lady's Slipper Orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus*) and the Globe Flower (*Trollius europaeus*). Spectacular mountain scenery on Jungfrau and Eiger, and shots of salamanders and butterflies added interest to a most enjoyable afternoon.
- 3 *February*: Turkey – Archaeology and Wild Life, an illustrated talk by Beryl Hulbert. On a cold February afternoon, a large audience enjoyed a colourful and extremely interesting lecture illustrated with photographs of Turkish scenery and antiquities, flora, birds and insect life. Based at Kusadasi in S.W. Turkey, Beryl was able to show us slides of Ephesus, Priene, Selcuk, Miletus, the Lycian rock tombs and the ruins of Caunus at Dalyan, the strange white limestone cliffs like petrified waterfalls, and the pools of Pamukkale at Denizli, to record just some of her talk.
- 2 *March*: Geology as the basis of local landscape and history formed the title of a most interesting talk by Dr Peter H. Banham, M.B.E., particularly with its emphasis on Buckinghamshire. Studying Cary's Map of 1870, the earliest geological map of the County, canals as planned by William Smith were noted. This led to a discussion of the Wendover Arm of the Grand Union Canal. Maps published in the 18th century show Gault clay north of Wendover but, probably owing to a mistake on the part of the engineers the canal was cut into the chalk, a fact obliterated in more recent maps. This section of the canal system is notorious for leakage. Space does not permit description of more aspects of Dr Banham's lecture.
- 9 *March*: Tour behind the public galleries of the Walter Rothschild Zoological Museum at Tring, led by Mr. I. R. Bishop, Dr. Robert Prys-Jones, and 'Effie' Warr (Librarian). This visit was extremely popular and members enjoyed a wonderful afternoon with expert guidance through the most important collection of bird skins, skeletons, and specimens preserved in alcohol, in the world. The million bird skins are divided into three sections: historically important, extinct and endangered types. Under the first heading, we saw some of Charles Darwin's collection of Finches. An auk from Papa Westray, Orkney, and extinct birds from New Zealand, were examples of the second type. The third category comprises the original specimen from which a particular bird was described. In the "Deep freeze" we saw birds awaiting treatment while, in the skeleton preparation room, the bones were being cleaned by a species of sub-tropical beetle. All the rare ornithological books, including a complete set of John Gould, are housed in the original Rothschild Library, and a display of ship's logs had been put out in the modern library. Time was also spent looking at some of the Egg & Nest and the 100-year-old Cassiowary collections.
- 13 *April*: Our Annual General Meeting, after which Kate Hawkins, Keeper of Biology & Natural History, showed us round the refurbished County Museum, with an emphasis on the natural history exhibits. Modular displays focusing on objects from Buckinghamshire cover such themes as 'Woodland', 'Clay' & 'Farming', 'Fossils' etc. Kate's lively commentary certainly gave members an insight into all the careful and painstaking, work that had gone into their creation.
- 8 *June*: Alan Showler and Robert Haper (Warden) combined to give us a most enjoyable and informative afternoon visit to the BBONT Reserve at Millfield Wood, opposite

Hugheden Manor. The usual profusion of Orchids in bloom was not seen this year owing to the cold Spring, but several of the rarities were flowering and there were some interesting insects, particularly a Crab Spider with its prey. Our guides also gave an account of woodland management and 'coppicing'.

12 July: Following the success of a Bat Watch last year, Maurice Young took a party to the same venue at Bourne End. As well as enjoying an evening by the Thames, Pipistrelles and Daubenton's bats were identified with the aid of a bat detector.

11 September: Members visited a well-preserved chalk quarry at Redbournbury, Hertfordshire, in the company of David Curry of the Museum of St. Albans, who gave a vivid account of the internationally important geological features. Although denotified as a SSSI in 1987, the quarry remains one of the best places in Britain for stratigraphical interpretation of the Chalk Top Rock, which marks the junction between the Middle and Upper Chalk and is useful for correlating exposures of a similar age across England and into Europe. Traces of sponges and sea urchins were found in the flint weathering out of the quarry face, and there were impressive tabular flint features. This site is now classified as a Regionally Important Geological/Geomorphological Site (RIGS) and is used with the kind permission of the owners, Leigh Environmental, for earth science education. Down by the River Ver at Redbournbury Mill, large blocks of Hertfordshire Puddingstone could be seen, an Eocene deposit unique to this County and parts of the Buckinghamshire Chilterns. (summary of report from Kate Hawkins).

5 October: Our annual Fungus Foray led by Victor Scott, at Burnham Beeches this time. In

spite of the very dry conditions, some 24 species were found; including 9 not seen in previous years. The best examples were found on dead wood particularly on the fallen pollarded beeches. Numerous large Wood Ant nests and an Insect Collection trap set up by the British Museum Natural History Department to monitor insects with a view to safe-guarding the Woodland, added interest.

9 November: Jean Hall returned to give a large audience a most enjoyable afternoon with a talk on Crete: Minoan Ruins & Wild Flowers. She succeeded in bringing life into her slides of the famous sites by accompanying them with an imaginative description of an evening entertainment which might have taken place some two thousand years ago. Once again she showed her competence as a photographer with superb slides of the people and countryside, some of the birds and insects and, above all, the colourful flora including the spectacular Dragon Arum (*Dracunculus vulgaris*).

7 December: Natural History of the Costa Rican Rain Forest – an exciting title for another of Victor Scott's Travel Talks. Superb slides of the spectacular and bizarre flora found in the Rain and Cloud Forests of this region of South America accompanied by shots of some of the animals such as the Howler Monkey, Three-toed Sloth and venomous Costa Rican Frog, colourful birds like the Toucan, and beautifully patterned butterflies including the Owl Butterfly with its enormous 'eye' on the wing to deceive predators. All this, together with Victor's eloquent and amusing commentary gave members a wonderful afternoon of 'arm-chair' travel and escape from the dull December weather.

A.V.C.