



President: Evelyn Crispe Editor: Rosie Etheridge Newsletter No 83 Spring 2020

YOUR COMMITTEE

At the AGM on 11th November 2019 the following committee members were re-elected:

Chair and Secretary: Margaret Huitson

Treasurer: Charles Davies

Minutes Secretary: Marian Sartin

Newsletter Editor: Rosie Etheridge

Other members: Pamela Davies, John Hollingdale, Brian Hunter.

Afterwards Peter Elton showed us some of his excellent wild life photographs.

OUR GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

As you will all know by now, the society celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. We are commemorating this event in a number of ways. In particular we are organising:

- A GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY PARTY

This will take place on Monday 11th May at the Blackwell Hall. See your programme for details.

- AN EXHIBITION AT HEADSTONE MANOR

The exhibition is being held in conjunction with Harrow Museum. It will cover various aspects of natural history and nature conservation in Harrow, including:

- The life and work of Eliza Brightwen, a renowned Victorian Stanmore naturalist (see below)
- The history and work of the Harrow Natural History Society and the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum.

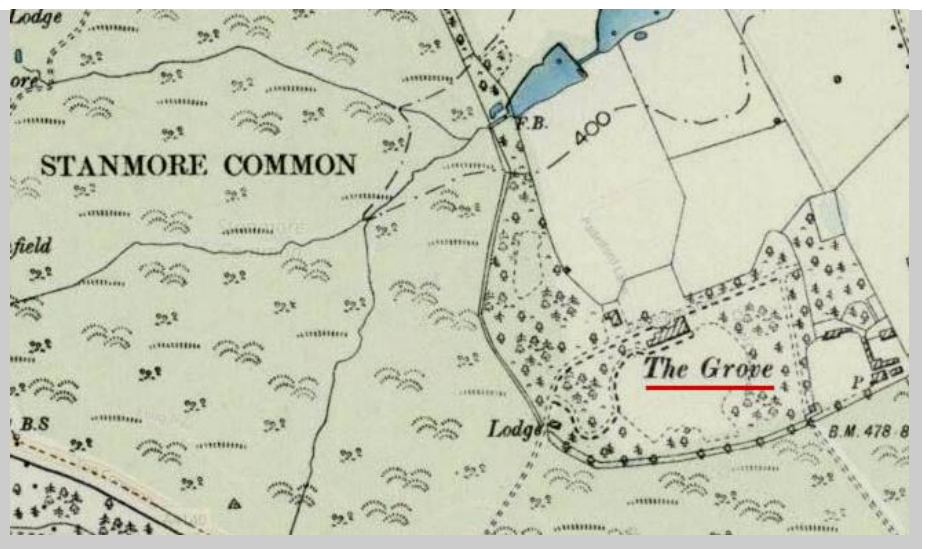
We will also be publishing a booklet covering similar topics to the exhibition, but in greater detail. Contributions from members would be very welcome.

ELIZA BRIGHTWEN (1830-1906)

Eliza Brighten lived at the Grove next to Stanmore Common, which at that time was covered with bracken and gorse. She wrote a number of popular natural history books.



Those of you who remember Roy Abbott may recall that he took a special interest in Eliza Brightwen. He collected her books, wrote articles and gave a number of talks about her.

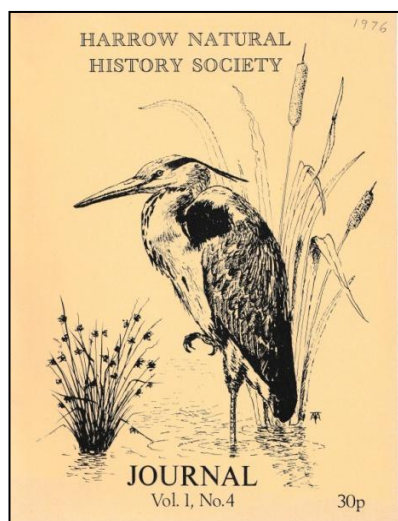


LOOKING BACK OVER FIFTY YEARS

The society was founded in 1970 by the head of Harrow Council's library reference services, Miss Pollard (Aurelia May, known as May). The inaugural meeting was held on 18th May 1970, when Miss Pollard was elected chairman. She had much experience of running a natural history society, having helped found the Ruislip society back in 1949. Subscriptions were set at 16 shillings (80p) per annum, 8 shillings (40p) for juniors.

The society was soon actively engaged in species recording at Grim's Dyke and at Summerhouse Lake and helped establish the latter site as a SSSI nature reserve in 1975. After this, the society used to hold monthly recording and conservation days at the reserve.

Inevitably after 50 years very few of the early members are still with us. An exception is Adam Witko. He as recorded as leading a walk back in 1972 and he still attend our evening meetings. Sometimes he brings along fungus specimens for our delight - or disgust - as the case may be! Another long-serving member is Elizabeth Stainthorpe. She joined the society in 1971, along with Alan Tinsey, Geoff Corney and Adam. Elizabeth, Alan and Geoff all served on the committee for many years in various roles. Elizabeth has devoted hours of her time to conservation work at the Bentley Priory reserve, together with Peter Peretti. She has also carried out much species recording, especially of birds and fungi. She and Geoff Corney attended courses on fungi and built up considerable expertise in this area. They both led many fungus forays, identifying the specimens and passing on their knowledge. When I went on my first foray I was amazed at the ease with which the English and scientific names tripped off Elizabeth's tongue. I must confess I wondered if she was making it all up!



From 1973 until 1977 the society produced an annual journal. Alan Tinsey was editor and he also used his artistic skills to design the front covers. The varied articles included an excellent series entitled "Know your Trees". We will be displaying copies of the journals at our Golden Anniversary party. From 1978 onwards the journals were replaced by twice-yearly newsletters.

Alan Tinsey became chairman when May Pollard retired in 1973. He was followed in this post by George Alexander in 1980, Geoff Corney in 1985 and Evelyn Crispe in 1998. Since 2018 Margaret Huitson has combined the roles of chair and secretary.

Eve introduced the very successful field study trips that took place annually from 2002 until 2017. She planned the trips with great care. Together with Elizabeth, and in later years with John and Margaret, Eve visited the area beforehand, checked the hotels and negotiated good rates for our members. These trips were always much enjoyed. We shall be displaying some photos at the Golden Anniversary Party. Please bring along any that you have.

Do you remember Ernest Venis, our mammal recorder? He sent many interesting articles on natural history to the Harrow Observer. Then there was Jack Phillips the botanist, who opened up his botany library to members and later donated the books to the society. And we must not forget Tony Lovegrove, now living in Dorset, who maintains our website for us. It is impossible to mention all the other members who have given their time, skills and enthusiasm to the society over the years. Well done everyone!

There will be a more comprehensive history of the society in the anniversary booklet.

The Inaugural Meeting of the HNHS

*From the Harrow Observer
May 1970*

Stanmore Common, Bentley Priory and Harrow Weald Common are to be recommended to the Nature Conservancy to be scheduled as sites of special scientific interest.

Speaking at the inaugural meeting of the Harrow Natural History Society on Monday, Mr. Paul Moxey said that the recommendations would be made by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Trust later this year.

Stanmore Common, he said, was particularly interesting for its insect population while the interesting feature of Harrow Weald Common is the birds that nest there.

Another talk concentrating on the work of a natural history society was given by Mr. Ian Johnson, for many years leader of the Ruislip Natural History Society.

OFFICERS

After the talks, the meeting decided to form a society in Harrow and officers were elected.

The Borough Librarian, Miss A. M. Pollard, was elected chairman, Miss Isobel MacDonald secretary, and Mr. Martin Hough assistant secretary. A committee was also elected.

Acting chairman for the evening was Ald. F. Arkins.

REPORTS ON OUTSIDE EVENTS

FRIDAY 23rd AUGUST 2019 – MOTH EVENING IN STANMORE COUNTRY PARK

There were five attendees at 6 acre field on a very warm night. My car thermometer was showing 20.5°C as I left.

This date was chosen as I wanted to see if the Oak Processionary moth had arrived at this reserve. Three weeks earlier, at Fryent Country Park, the white sheet was swarming with them despite the 'men from the ministry' attempting to get rid of them a few years earlier.

Three of the attendees were competent at recognising the larger moths so I sat on my camp seat and did the recording. Of the eighteen species of macro recorded, the following were the outstanding ones: Black Arches, Old Lady, Six-striped Rustic, White Point and Jersey Tiger, of which there were three. It seems to have been an outstanding year for Jersey Tigers as a lot of people in Harrow have reported them as well as the Painted Lady. However no Oak Processionary moths were seen.



The European hornet has brown legs

There were nine species of micro recorded (nothing outstanding) with two more on their way to Colin Plant as I couldn't identify them.

Other things seen and heard included a nonchalant fox that met me in the car park and just carried on looking for food as though I didn't exist. We heard two Muntjac deer having a long barking dual; one with a slightly higher pitch than the other. About a dozen Hornets were attracted to the light. I forgot to mention to the catchers to look out for yellow legs. Hopefully the Asian hornet hasn't got to Stanmore; yet!

John Hollingdale

SATURDAY 19th OCTOBER - FUNGI IN PEAR WOOD

This was one of our best ever fungus walks in Pear Wood. The weather was perfect, there was a good turnout of members and the fungi were plentiful. A long dry spell followed by much rain had brought them out in their dozens. Strangely there were no Russulas, and some other old favourites had failed to appear. However we spotted and identified as many as 35 different species.

A new find was Winter Bonnet (*Mycena hiemalis*), a tiny species that grows on mossy tree trunks. We also found Sulphur Knight (*Tricholoma sulphureum*). This has a terrible smell resembling coal gas. The highlight of the walk was a large patch of Hen of the Woods (*Grifola frondosa*) growing on the ground.

Rosie Etheridge



A beautiful view of Pear Lake taken by Marian during the walk



Winter Bonnet
Mycena hiemalis



Dryad's Saddle
Polyporus squamosus



Sulphur Knight
Tricholoma sulphureum



Hen of the Woods
Grifola frondosa

THURSDAY 7th NOVEMBER 2019 – TREES IN EDGEWAREBURY PARK



The Eucalyptus, photographed by Marian

I have long been interested in learning to identify conifers. So I decided to lead a walk in Edgwarebury Park, which has a small conifer plantation. Seven of us met in the park on a cold but fine day and Claire immediately pointed out a Maidenhair tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) and a Eucalyptus.

Before going to look at the trees we had a brief introduction to the various types of conifer. During the walk we saw examples of pines, spruces, cedars, redwoods, cypresses and yews.

We saw some Atlas Cedars and a fine specimen of Wellingtonia. Nearby was a Swamp Cypress, busy shedding its leaves. It is one of the few deciduous conifers. Next we looked at a large Monterey Pine, identified by its needles in groups of three and its asymmetric cones.



The Maidenhair Tree is easily recognized by its distinctive leaves.



Asymmetric Monterey Pine cone.



Monterey Pine
Pinus radiata

There were a couple of specimens of Brewer's Spruce, unmistakable with its weeping foliage. We confirmed that it was a spruce by noting that the needles grew on wooden pegs.

We later found another spruce and decided this one was probably a Serbian Spruce on the basis of its cones.



Brewer's Spruce
Picea brewerana

The most difficult species are the various cypresses. They all have scale-like leaves and look very similar. We were able to distinguish between the true cypresses (*Cupressus*) and the false cypresses (*Chamaecyparis*) by their cones, as shown below.



Cupressus cone



Chamaecyparis cones



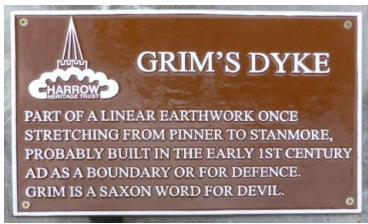
A pair of Italian Cypresses
Cupressus sempervirens

There are only three native British conifer species, the Scots Pine, the Common Juniper and the Yew, and the latter two are atypical in having berries rather than cones. Of the three, we only found Yew in the park. There was some Juniper but it was a non-native species.

At the end of the walk some members enjoyed warming up with a hot drink from the park café. Rosie Etheridge

MONDAY 30th DECEMBER 2019 - END OF YEAR WALK AT OLD REDDING

This walk was well publicised and a good crowd met for a post Christmas walk. The morning was misty but soon cleared to allow us to enjoy the winter sunshine.



A plaque recently installed next to the Dyke in Pear Wood

We made our way round the first loop of the Harrow Weald Common Nature Trail, round Gilbert's lake. The gravel diggings were very obvious, showing as pond areas following the very wet autumn. We skirted the gardens of the Grim's Dyke Hotel and looked at a part of the Dyke. Claire and Rosie explained that the dyke once stretched from Pinner to Pear Wood in Stanmore and may have been built in the early first century AD as a tribal boundary, or for defence.

We returned along the path showing the dense native cover of the beech, downy birch and oak on the common on one side, and the more exotic species of the Grim's Dyke gardens on the other. Several families with children were on the walk and found much to interest them, greatly aided by Simon Braidman. After this we retired to the *Case is Altered* pub for refreshments and the friendly attentions of the pub staff.

Margaret Huitson

THURSDAY 23rd JANUARY 2020 – STOCKERS LAKE FOR WINTER BIRDS AND WILDLIFE

On a cold grey morning a small group of members paid the annual visit to the Stockers Lake area to look for winter birds. At the start we were lucky enough to see a large flock of redwings and fieldfares on the sloping field just past the Water Board building. On the other side of the road in the flooded field there were many black-headed gulls and Canada geese together with a pair of Egyptian geese and a few moorhens.



Flooded field at Stockers Farm

At Stockers Farm there was the usual flock of house sparrows, a robin and, on a nearby feeder, some blue tits. In this area we also saw some starlings and a goldfinch and heard a song thrush singing. A red kite passed low overhead flapping its wings more than usual as there was no wind to give it lift.



An Egyptian Goose



Male House Sparrow



Female Hazel flower

As we passed round Stockers Lake we paused to view the artificial nesting bank which has recently been built for the kingfishers and which has been ignored by the birds so far! We also stopped to admire the hazel catkins and look for the tiny female flowers.

On the causeway between Stockers and Bury Lakes we saw a good collection of waterfowl including coot, mallard, shoveller, gadwall, pochard, tufted duck, swan, heron, cormorant and great crested grebe. However, the most interesting sighting was of a group of about ten red-crested pochards with their lovely fluffy orange heads looking as though they had just had a "hair-do"!

We then went back the same way and met up with some members who could not make the walk and had refreshments together in the Aquadrome café.

Brian Hunter

25th – 27th JANUARY 2020 – BIG GARDEN BIRD WATCH

Some of us took part in the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch and eight of us sent our lists to Brian Hunter. Here is his analysis of the results.

RESULTS FOR HARROW (8 LOCATIONS)

Many thanks to all those members who sent me their results from the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch. The tables show the combined results for the eight gardens involved. TABLE 1 lists the species that were found in more than one garden. TABLE 2 shows the total number of birds of each species recorded in the eight gardens.

Other species, not included in the tables as they appeared at only one location, were: Starling, Crow, Jackdaw, Wren, Green Woodpecker and Ring-necked Parakeet. This makes the total number of species seen in Harrow during the hour to be twenty.

TABLE 1 shows that the only species seen in all eight gardens were Robin and Blue Tit, which can therefore be called the most widespread birds in Harrow. Close behind were Great Tit, Woodpigeon and Magpie which were seen in all but one of the gardens.

However, TABLE 2 shows that when the numbers seen for each species are added up for all the gardens, the House Sparrow comes top with twenty-two appearances, despite being seen in only three gardens. This due to a large number being found in one particular garden.

TABLE 3 shows the Top Ten most numerous species in Harrow in comparison with the RSPB Top Ten for the country as a whole (for 2019). Note that the House Sparrow comes top in both lists. Although there is slight variation in position between the local and national lists, both lists contain nearly the same birds. It is surprising that Chaffinch and Collared Dove were not found locally during the hour.

The Blackcaps recorded in Harrow were probably ones from Siberia wintering here rather than our summer visitors remaining behind.

Brian Hunter

NUMBER OF GARDENS WHERE EACH SPECIES WAS SEEN	
Blue Tit	8
Robin	8
Woodpigeon	7
Great Tit	7
Magpie	7
Blackbird	5
Dunnock	5
Coal Tit	5
House Sparrow	3
Long-tailed tit	3
Goldfinch	2
Feral Pigeon	2
Nuthatch	2
Blackcap	2

TABLE 1

SPECIES	TOTAL SEEN	RANK
House Sparrow	22	1
Blue Tit	19	2
Woodpigeon	15	3
Great Tit	13	4
Magpie	11	5
Robin	10	6
Goldfinch	8	7
Blackbird	7	8
Feral Pigeon	7	8
Dunnock	6	10
Coal Tit	5	11
Long-tailed tit	4	12
Nuthatch	2	13
Blackcap	2	13

TABLE 2

THE TEN MOST COMMON BIRDS		
	HARROW 2020	UK 2019
1	House Sparrow	House Sparrow
2	Blue Tit	Starling
3	Woodpigeon	Blue Tit
4	Great Tit	Blackbird
5	Magpie	Woodpigeon
6	Robin	Goldfinch
7	Goldfinch	Great Tit
8	Blackbird	Robin
9	Feral Pigeon	Chaffinch
10	Dunnock	Magpie

TABLE 3



TUESDAY 18th FEBRUARY 2020 – SNOWDROPS IN PEAR WOOD ORCHARD

ONE OF OUR 50th ANNIVERSARY EVENTS

About 20 members and friends gathered for this event. It had been postponed from the previous Saturday because of Storm Dennis. Everyone admired the snowdrops that grow in the old garden. With the help of *The Conservation Volunteers* (TCV) we have been able to rescue many plants that had been engulfed by brambles and nettles. The results are spectacular.

Margaret had brought along a delicious banana cake, which we much enjoyed, while ignoring the few spots of rain.

Claire gave a very interesting account of the history and natural history of snowdrops. For example, she told us how snowdrops can be spread by ants who take the seed pods down into their nests. The full talk is available on our website.

Rosie Etheridge

Elaine, a member who has been joining us on our walks, has taken an interest in the poems in our newsletters and has provided us with the following poem:

BANISH THE WINTER BLUES – WITH WINTER COLOURS

By Elaine Joan Spencer

Let's banish the Winter blues:
Where's that hat, those walking shoes?

In the oak, a blue tit sings-
Blue tail, blue cap and blue wings;
Nuthatch wings with blue-grey hue;
Evergreen holly and yew.

Orange-pink chaffinches' cheeks;
Red and yellow moorhens' beaks;
Black, brown and white Canada goose;
Copper bark of Norway spruce.



Spinning brown field maple keys;
Purple-black ivy berries;
Scarlet rose hips, deep red haws,
Almond-scented yellow gorse.

In the forest and in the field,
Almost everywhere we tread,
Gnarled, scarred branches: broken, healed;
Twisting, point the way ahead.

This shows her observations and her love of the countryside, so thank you Elaine.

Marian Sartin

OUR WEBSITE!

You can find details of our current programme, and reports on our evening meetings, at the society's website:

<http://www.harrownaturalhistory.org.uk/>

Our sister organisation, the Harrow Nature Conservation Forum, also has a website where you can read about Harrow's nature reserves and find details of additional natural history events that are open to everyone.

<http://www.harrownconf.org/index.html>