

year the project imported eggs from Spain and hatched and reared them. Our guides were very knowledgeable and helpful and are obviously very committed to this project. We had a very good view of this large, handsome bird (20kg +, 1m tall, with a wingspan of 2.5m), which is the world's heaviest flying bird. Whilst we watched them grazing, three actually took off, which was a very impressive sight. An unexpected view of stone curlews was an exciting bonus!

We then went on to the Hawk Conservancy Trust at Weyhill in Hampshire. It is a registered charity that works to conserve birds of prey and their habitats, focusing on conservation, education, research and rehabilitation. It is well laid out in 22 acres of lovely grounds, and has very knowledgeable staff. There are over 150 birds on view from the tiny pigmy owl to the impressive Steller's sea eagle. We saw some spectacular flying demonstrations from owls, kites, hawks, falcons, vultures and eagles. There is also a National Bird of Prey Hospital which treats over 200 sick or injured birds each year. A very enjoyable day and really exciting to see the great bustards.

How Old Is That Tree?

Brian Dawkins

A few years ago I helped with a survey to record all the ancient trees in Worcestershire, initiated by John Tilt and Harry Green through the Worcestershire Recorders. The area south of Malvern is a particular hot spot for ancient trees, probably due to it being a royal hunting forest called Malvern Chase during the middle ages.

Over a period of about two years, I occasionally helped Cec and Simon Roberts to measure over 1500 ancient trees in the area. After identifying the tree and establishing whether it was a maiden or lapsed pollard, the girth, height and description were recorded, together with co-ordinates from a sat-nav, and a photograph taken of the tree next to a measuring stick, from which to calculate the height. All this information was then put onto a spread-sheet and sent to the Worcestershire Biological Records Centre who were hosting the Ancient Tree Project at the WWT.

The question everyone asks is "How old is it?" This is very difficult to answer with any confidence. Trees obviously grow at different rates depending on their location. A tree fighting for light, space and nutrition in the middle of a forest will grow at a different rate from a tree in parkland. Also it is very rare to come across any evidence of when the tree was planted. So when I was reading "Madresfield – The Real Brideshead" by Jane Mulvagh, a book first published in 2008, I was pleased to come across a definitive date for when the ancient oaks lining the main western entrance to Madresfield Court were planted.

Colonel William Lygon (1613-81) owned Madresfield Court and served in the Parliamentarian Army during the Civil War. When the Colonel's troops were routed by the Royalists stationed at Worcester in 1646, Madresfield was garrisoned for the king by a Captain Aston who, during the siege of Worcester, was charged to hold it for a month. At one point the Colonel was ordered to raze Madresfield to the ground as a punishment, an order he understandably failed to carry out! Eventually Worcester city surrendered to Cromwell's forces and the Colonel was reinstated in Madresfield. To celebrate the recovery of his family home, he planted the oak drives which approach the house from the south - west.

The surviving oaks were measured by Simon Roberts and some were over 7m in girth. So we have a yardstick that an oak tree planted in parkland and measuring 7m girth is approximately 367 years old. John Tilt also worked out the age of an ancient oak of 7m girth in parkland using the 'John White' formula, which was developed in Windsor Great Park from trees of known planting dates. This came out at 392 years old, which he thought was reasonably close to the Madresfield trees.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Indoor Meetings

Indoor meetings are held at 7.30 pm on the first Thursday of the month at the Lyttelton Rooms in Church Street, Great Malvern. Adults £2, children free, refreshments available. Non-members of the Trust are welcome.

Thurs 4th Sept: 'Insect Curiosities' by Harry Green – WWT volunteer and trustee.

Thurs 2nd Oct: 'Nature and Conservation': the Work of a Wildlife Group by Patrick Clement.

Thurs 6th Nov: 'UK Marine Wildlife' by Dr Peter Richardson, Biodiversity Manager, Marine Conservation Society.

Thurs 4th Dec: 'From Crested Screamers to Spoon-billed Sandpipers' by Bill Francis, volunteer at Slimbridge Wetland Centre.

Outdoor Meetings

If you are joining us for the first time – welcome! Always wear suitable clothing and footwear. Phone Brian Bradford (01684 565994) regarding coach trips and local visits. Phone Brian Dawkins (01684 573562) regarding walks.

Sun 5th – Wed 8th Oct: Gibraltar Point, a Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust reserve and centre. An important staging post for many thousands of birds, hence its credentials: LNR; NNR; SSSI; SPA; Ramsar Site. £220 including all meals (except lunch) and transport. Information and booking form available on website or from Margaret (01684 565079).

Sat 8th Nov: Fungus Foray with Diana Bateman (Leader of Worcestershire Fungi Group) at the Knapp and Papermill Reserve at 10.30am. £5/head, booking essential by cheque to Brian Dawkins made payable to WWT (Malvern Group). Limit 16.

Sat 13th Dec: 'Orchard and Mistletoe Walk' with Tim Dixon. Meet at Colwall Railway Station at 9.30 am.

Ambling/Study Group Outings

For a slower, closer look at local wildlife. Easy, short walks. Take binoculars, and reference books if you wish. No experience necessary, everyone is very welcome. Details including the meet point/location are sent out just beforehand to members on the Malvern Group e-mailing list, or contact Carol Bradley (01886 884372/07929 091814).

Tue 9th Sept, 10am; Wed 1st Oct, 2pm;
Thur 6th Nov, 10am; Fri 5th Dec, 10am;
Tue 6th Jan, 10am; Wed 4th Feb, 10am

Contributions

Please send ideas or contributions for future Newsletters to Brian Dawkins (01684 573562) email db.dawkins@hotmail.co.uk

Committee Contact

Margaret Vernon (01684 565079)



NEWS & VIEWS

From Margaret Vernon

Firstly, a 'thank you' or three:

- To everyone who helped at the Knapp Open Day, either beforehand making cakes, preparing the ground and setting up the site, or on the day. Over £1100 was raised. The weather was better than expected and, as usual, the atmosphere was warm and welcoming.
- By the time you read this, we will have had our Morrisons collection and, as I write, I see that many of the hourly slots are filled - so 'thank you' if you were involved in this.
- To Janis and John, who have been responsible for providing the refreshments at all our indoor meetings over the last few years. The interval is always a very relaxed time when people can catch up with each other and also make contact with newcomers. Several of you also help to serve on the evening, which is essential as it shares the job. Janis and John plan to move to pastures new, so we need someone (or a couple of people) to take charge of bringing the consumables etc. to each meeting (or arranging for someone else to do so) and then liaising with the volunteers on the evening. Please contact me if you are willing to help in this way. It is an essential element of the evening.

We are delighted that Alison Uren is now our vice-chairman. In addition to organising stock sales and writing reports for the Gazette following our indoor meetings, she is taking on the overall responsibility for the speakers at the indoor meetings. We shall continue to meet in the Main Hall at the Lyttelton Well for the foreseeable future, as the work at MEC is still to take place.

Looking forward to seeing you on September 4th after what we hope will have been a good summer!

Overview of Indoor Meetings

Alison Uren

The Malvern Group of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust organises indoor meetings on the first Thursday of every month between September and May. They cover a very wide range of subjects, and attract large, enthusiastic audiences – usually about 70 people, but sometimes more. Most of these are members of the Trust, but the meetings are open to non-members and it only costs £2.00 to get in. The meetings are held in the Lyttelton Rooms, near Malvern Priory.

Some speakers talk about matters of local interest; for example in February this year we had Rob Allen, the manager of the South Worcestershire

Reserves, talking knowledgeably about Tiddesley Wood, Hill Court Farm, and the new reserve at Hollybed Meadows, which WWT are in the process of purchasing. Others travel far and wide, notably Gary Prescott, who is known as the Biking Birder. He went on an incredible 8,500 mile journey around the UK on his bike, visiting every RSPB reserve in the country, photographing everything from wrens to eagles. Dr Michael Leach entertained us in December with the Natural History of Christmas, horrifying us with tales of what used to be put into mince pies! Most talks are 'Powerpoint' presentations, but Diana Bateman came in October with a fantastic display of mushrooms and toadstools which she had collected that morning: all colours, shapes and sizes, and she was very clear indeed about which ones were edible! In May the Conservation Officer of Malvern Hills Conservators, Jonathan Bills, talked to us about the problems of trying to balance the conflicting interests of all the different people who use and enjoy the Hills.

The aim is to cover as many aspects of wildlife interest as possible over the year, including talks on flora, mammals, birds, insects, marine life, conservation issues and reserve management. All talks are social events, with time to meet in the interval over coffee, and a chance to question the speaker at the end. There are also opportunities to join in walks and outings during the year, some of which are linked to the indoor meetings' topics. For further information phone Margaret Vernon (01684 565079) or Alison Uren (01684 567819).

The website lists all future events:

www.malverngroup.btck.co.uk

Great Bustard Project and Hawk Conservancy Trust

Jean Burnage

On a grey and chilly morning, 15 members of our local Malvern group set out for Wiltshire. Our first stop was the village hall at Enfold, where we were taken for a very rough ride by Land Rovers over MOD land to a hide to see the great bustards. They were formerly widespread and very much a part of British wildlife over the expansive chalk grassland of Wessex, in particular the Salisbury Plain. However, since the 18th century they have suffered a dramatic decline in numbers and have been extinct in Britain since the mid-1800s. The global population is estimated at 46,000, and consequently they are now on the IUCN Red List of threatened species. The Great Bustard Life+ Project was launched in 2010 to boost the small population already established on Salisbury Plain. Chicks had been imported from Russia and reared here. This