

Now that the first glimmers of spring are appearing you may be contemplating shaking off the duvet and venturing into the great outdoors. Flowers are starting to bloom, trees are getting green again, and there is the distinctive buzz of bumblebees emerging from their own winter hibernations.

We are all excited to get out recording again, but while we're waiting for the beautiful sunshine to arrive, it's a good time to take a look at what your local natural history or conservation group has to offer. As well as online offerings, some groups may have field trips planned to interesting sites in your area.

Below are just some of the groups in the county. If you have an event planned in your area, we are happy to share on our website and in our newsletter:

- ⇒ Chesham Natural History Society
- ⇒ Milton Keynes Natural History Society
- ⇒ Prestwood Nature

And do remember, if you are out and about in Buckinghamshire or Milton Keynes, we want your records! You can submit them to BMERC directly or through iRecord.

To keep up with BMERC between issues, you can find us on Twitter: @BucksMKERC and we also update our website with relevant news and upcoming events: www.bucksmkerc.org.uk

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Annual Recorders' Seminar 2022: Connecting the Dots

Bookings for BMERC's Annual Recorders' Seminar is now open! The theme for this year is Connecting the Dots and it will be held online again this year using Zoom.

Click here to book your place now!

Booking will reserve your place at the seminar, with details of the meeting being sent closer to the date (if you don't receive a confirmation email from Zoom, please be sure to check your junk folder!)

The full programme will be circulated closer to the date, but we are delighted to confirm the following speakers and topics:

Tom Reed, Ancient Tree Inventory
Rob Ward, National Reptile Survey
Nick Marriner, Tracking the Impact
Martin Harvey, Recording Soldierflies
Michael Pocock, The DECIDE Tool
Kwesia, City Girl in Nature
Jim Rouquette, Mapping Nature
Jamie Robins, Important Invertebrate Areas
Holly Woo, Ancient Woodland Biodiversity

There will also be updates from local recording groups and from the BMERC team.

We will also be holding our photography competition, open to all local photographers! The theme is "Making Connections."

The entry deadline has been extended to Monday, 21st March and we are excited to see your beautiful photos. For full details, download the entry form from the BMERC website using the link below.

We will update the BMERC website with the full programme and other information:

www.bucksmkerc.org.uk/seminar

We had hoped to be able to return to holding this event in-person this year, as we really value the opportunity to meet and have conversations. We know that many of recorders feel the same way, so fingers crossed we can hold the seminar in-person next year.

If you would like further information about the seminar, please visit the website or contact us: erc@buckinghamshire.gov.uk 01296 382431

We look forward to seeing you there!

Moths: an under-recorded 10km square Martin Albertini & Dave Wilton

Like all other counties in the UK, Buckinghamshire is covered by a network of keen moth recorders who run light traps in their gardens regularly across the year, some of whom are relatively new to this fascinating hobby while others have been contributing for decades.

As well as going to BMERC, details of their sightings are passed on to the National Moth Recording Scheme which is managed by Butterfly Conservation. The NMRS currently contains some 32 million records and is one of the most valuable long-term collections of data on insect populations held anywhere in the world. It gives us advanced warning of which species are doing well and which ones may be struggling but more importantly provides

essential data to inform targeted conservation work for those already in trouble.

For the last few years here in Bucks we have been particularly short of recorders in SP82, a hectad (National Grid square of 10km x 10km) in the northern half of the county. Shown on the map below, this particular 10km square contains Mursley, Stoke Hammond, Wing and Whitchurch in its four corners with Stewkley in the middle.

Do you live within this area and do you think you might be interested in taking up moth recording? In fact even if you live elsewhere in the county and are interested in doing so, we would still very much like to hear from you.



Moth recording might seem a daunting prospect with around 1,600 species known from Bucks alone, but most people start with the larger ones ("macromoths"), which are far fewer in number, leaving the smaller ones ("micros") for when they've developed a bit of confidence and expertise. A lot of newcomers move into moth recording from the world of birding and seem to view the number of species as a challenge rather than an obstacle!

We may be able to help with equipment on loan to get you started and there are certainly ways in which we can assist with identification problems. Using iRecord is the best way to make sure your records get to where they need to go but there are other methods that can be used for data storage and transfer.

Very little effort is involved because running the light in your garden from dusk until dawn brings the moths to you. A small trap using an actinic bulb which gives off a fairly unobtrusive bluish light is very effective and won't swamp you with moths in

the way that the very bright 125w mercury vapour bulbs can sometimes do. Actinics are certainly the best way for a newcomer to start (battery or mains powered versions can be found) and you can move on to a larger trap with a brighter bulb when or if you feel so inclined.

You decide how regularly you can run the trap. Two or three times per week in the main moth season between April and October would be ideal but it can be more or less than that depending upon your own personal circumstances. There are moths flying all year round but very few species are active during the winter months. Starting out in March or April means that you would see fewer moths to begin with and can build up your confidence as the year progresses and the number of active species increases.

For more information, and particularly any offers of help in grid square SP82, please contact either: Martin Albertini: malbertini@onetel.com (County Moth Recorder for Buckinghamshire)

Dave Wilton: wilton@burnhamlodge.plus.com



Examples of different types of moth trap (left to right): 6w actinic and 15w actinic both battery-powered, twin-30w actinic and 125w mercury vapour both mains-powered. The very bright 125w bulb was still warming up when this photo was taken and wouldn't be recommended for gardens overlooked by neighbours! All are effective at catching moths.



Local Wildlife Sites—Surveys, panels and beyond...

Fiona Everingham & Matt Sharp, Local Wildlife Site Surveyors

After a Covid-induced hiatus of over 2 years we held a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) selection panel earlier this month, albeit still remotely via Teams.

The panel is made up of a group of wildlife experts, county recorders and representatives from various environmental organisations and statutory bodies including BBOWT, Natural England and the Chilterns Conservation Board. The group reviews a selection of reports presented by BMERC and decides whether the proposed sites are of sufficient quality to meet the rigorous LWS criteria.

Although only 6 sites were considered for LWS status at this panel, together they cover an impressive 322 ha and range from remnants of neutral grassland, to extensive farmland encompassing species-rich chalk grassland, brilliant butterflies, bountiful birds and amazing arable plants.

What exactly are Local Wildlife Sites?

They are some of our most valuable wildlife areas and are identified and selected at a county level based on important, distinctive and threatened habitats and species that have a national, regional and importantly, a local context.

From ancient woodlands and wildflower meadows to urban churchyards and previously developed brownfield land, there are thousands of quiet, often unnoticed places across England where wildlife still thrives. Collectively, they play a critical role in the conservation of the UK's natural heritage by providing essential wildlife refuges and corridors,

forming key components of wider ecological networks. Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes has a little over 460 LWS amounting to nearly 7,000 ha. Together they support some of the most important and distinctive species and habitats across the county.

How can you get involved?

The two LWS surveyors will continue to be busy this year visiting sites across Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes to find and survey the next tranche of LWS. If you know of an area that you think might merit LWS status, please let us know so we can add it to our survey list.

We need some key pieces of information:

- Who owns it?
- Where is it?
- Why is it important?

So what are you waiting for? Matt and Fiona would love to hear about interesting sites near you!

Contact: matthew.sharp@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
or fiona.everingham@buckinghamshire.gov.uk



Above: Field Madder (Sherardia arvensis).



I write this in my last week working at BMERC, my last day is the 24th February, so by the time you are reading this I have retired!

I have worked at BMERC now for just over eight years, initially on a casual contract to load some data. I then had some fixed-term contracts until now when I'm on a permanent contract with responsibility for BMERC's wildlife records database, GIS data, etc.

I have very mixed feelings about retirement, I enjoy both the work at BMERC and the BMERC team are a joy to work with. There are still so many things I would like to do here.

However, there are many things I want to do outside work and the time has come for me to take retirement and move on.

Julia asked me to pick a few highlights of my time at BMERC:

we do Data Searches, which was previously slow and took a significant amount of the team's time. In May 2017, I went to a meeting in Bedford at which I heard a presentation from Roy Tapping at Cofnod about their online system, and how they were looking to offer the service to other Records Centres. I expressed some cautious interest and to cut a very long story involving hundreds of hoops very short, in August 2019 the BMERC online data searches service went live. It has fundamentally changed the way BMERC operates, freeing up significant amounts of time for other work.

- BMERC receives large quantities of records and because of limited staff time, there had always been a large backlog of data to load. We have made significant inroads into this and particularly since the online service went live have cleared much of the backlog. When I started at BMERC our database had about 1.8 million records, it currently has 3.3 million. In the last 12 months, we have loaded over 400,000 records.
- Particularly pleasing was loading data from iRecord, something we have been hoping to do for some time. Over half of the records loaded this year came from iRecord.
- I was particularly pleased to make contact with two
 of our county recorders, Sean O'Leary (Bryophytes)
 and Paula Shipway (Lichens), with whom we had
 not had much contact traditionally, and to arrange
 some training sessions to introduce people to
 these groups.
- Finally, my background in commercial contracting has allowed me to update a number of BMERC's commercial agreements and associated business processes.

You will see elsewhere that Mark Rodgers has recently joined BMERC. Mark is taking over my responsibilities and has the title of Data Officer, which recognises the importance of this role. I am fortunate that I have had a few weeks to hand over things to Mark.

I hope to spend a lot more time outside recording both in Buckinghamshire and wider afield, and I hope to meet up with some of you as we resume the Buckinghamshire Invertebrate Group field trips this year.

Everyone at BMERC would like to thank Neil for his time with us.

We've all enjoyed working with him over the years and his dedication, knowledge, and attention to detail will be missed—if you spot any typos in this issue, blame it on the loss of our very excellent proofreader! Good luck to you in your retirement, Neil.

We look forward to receiving your records!

Introducing the new Data Officer

Mark Rodgers, BMERC

Hello! I'm Mark, and I would like to introduce myself as the new Environmental Records Centre Data Officer in the BMERC team. My first few weeks have been busy receiving a handover from Neil Fletcher who is retiring at the end of February, and the team have been great helping me to settle in. I've always been interested in ecology and the natural world, and I am enjoying combining this interest with the powers of databases, Microsoft Excel and GIS!

I am keen on many aspects of ecology and species so am always interested to hear about new discoveries to Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. The recording community and volunteers are so important to help with local conservation, so thank you and I look forward to working with you all.

I am currently studying for my master's degree in Conservation Ecology at Oxford Brookes University which is including a lot of getting out in the field and undertaking research projects. A couple of projects I am currently researching include investigating the decline of Juniper and looking into issues such as seed quality and regeneration challenges. Of course, we have some great local sites of Juniper which I am looking forward to getting to know better.



One of my favourite habitats is heathland and I am also a volunteer for the Wildlife Trust Ecology Group supporting heathland surveys in Bedfordshire. I will be undertaking field research in the summer on heathlands in Buckinghamshire and further afield, to investigate the biodiversity of pollinators on different species of heather and heath flora. The table below shows the different species of heather and heaths in Great Britain that I will be investigating, and which are recorded as present in Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.

Over the next few months, I'm also looking forward to familiarising myself with the intricacies of the BMERC database and getting involved in projects including work on Great Crested Newt surveys and supporting work creating maps of our ancient and veteran trees in Buckinghamshire.

Scientific Name	Vernacular Name	Bucks / MK Records	BSBI Red List Status (GB)	BSBI Red List Status (England)
Calluna vulgaris	Heather (Ling)	Yes	Low Concern	Near Threatened
Erica cinerea	Bell Heather	Yes	Low Concern	Near Threatened
Erica tetralix	Cross-Leaved Heath	Yes	Low Concern	Near Threatened
Erica ciliaris	Dorset Heath	No	[England Only]	Low Concern
Erica vagans	Cornish Heath	No	[England Only]	Near Threatened
Erica watsonii	Watson's Heath	No	[Natural Hybrid]	[Natural Hybrid]
Erica williamsii	William's Heath	No	[Natural Hybrid]	[Natural Hybrid]

It is hard to believe spring is just round the corner given the recent onslaught of Dudley, Eunice and Franklin!

But spring is in the air, and the birds at least believe it: keep an ear out for springtime songsters such as Skylark (*Aluada arvensis*) or the distinctive call of the Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*). You may also be fortunate enough to spot flocks of waders heading north to their summer breeding grounds.

Who will hear the first Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)? You can track their progress back to these shores on the BTO Cuckoo Tracking Project website. Will Ellis be the first to reach Britain?

On the subject of returning birds, we are very excited to report that the Aylesbury Peregrine Project is back and live streaming again! The female peregrine has prepared the ground for her nest so keep your eyes peeled for eggs and hopefully come April/May, the pair will have a chick to raise. Watch the live webcam here.

Now is a good time to see if you can spot the leaf rosettes of those orchids that are 'wintergreen'. One of the easiest to spot is the Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) which seems to pop up in the most unlikely places; road verges seem to be a particular favourite. Keep your eyes peeled when passing through Milton Keynes in June/July and you should be rewarded with their full-flower splendour.



Despite the sometimes wintry temperatures our cold-blooded friends will soon be appearing. If you are out driving on a slightly warmer, damp evening do take care and keep an eye out for toads crossing. And if you want to do something more proactive in protecting toads when they are moving to their breeding ponds, see if there is a toad crossing near you by looking on the Froglife website.

Cold, wet and windy is exactly what a bee doesn't want, but when the sun is shining, keep your ears open for the buzz of bumblebee queens. Several species will be emerging from hibernation around now, such as Early Bumblebee (*Bombus pratorum*), Hairy-Footed Flower Bee (*Anthophora plumipes*), as well as winter-active bees like Buff-tailed Bumblebee (*Bombus terrestris*).

Bats will also be starting to emerge and now is the time to get involved in the national volunteer bat survey, <u>Bats in Churches</u>. You can find more info on their website—or check out Sue's excellent article on her experiences surveying bats in <u>Issue 5 of our newsletter</u>.

Hedgehogs will also be emerging from hibernation and will appreciate you not going overboard with the garden spring clean! The recent publication of the State of Britain's Hedgehogs by People's Trust for Endangered Species and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society paints a mixed picture. Urban populations seem to be relatively stable with signs of recovery, highlighting the importance of urban gardens. In contrast the rural population is continuing to decline, particularly in the east of the country. Please keep recording your hedgehog sightings either to us directly or via iRecord, including any that you spot out in the countryside. Remember that even records of dead animals are valuable.

Left: The wintergreen leaves of a Bee Orchid.



Have you seen spawning yet this year?

Julia Carey, BMERC

As part of our work to better understand certain species and groups in Buckinghamshire, BMERC is keen to receive records of frog and toad spawn this spring.

Often it's the commoner species which we get least records for, even though these may be quite common in some places, nationally it's known both frogs and toads are under pressure and hence the move to improve knowledge of them.

As part of PondNet Spawn Survey 2022, the FreshWater Habitats Trust have an online form which you can access on their website.

If you are a regular iRecorder, please make sure you allow your <u>iRecord</u> records to be shared, so we can receive those records from you.

Or if you prefer, you can download general wildlife recording sheets from <u>BMERC's website</u> or contact us to receive a paper copy in the post.



Can you identify these species found in Bucks and/or Milton Keynes? Answers will be in the next issue!







Answers from last issue:









Olney Community Orchard plans come to fruition

Growing Minds in Olney

A new Community Orchard is set to be opened as part of the Amazing Grace 250-year commemorations throughout 2022 and 2023.

In December 2019, 'Growing Minds in Olney', a team of local horticultural experts; enthusiasts and volunteers, were granted permission by the Town Council to create a heritage community orchard now to be located at the lower southerly end of the Allotment Field.

Having gained valuable input via a recent resident survey and securing over £6K in funding, we can now go-ahead and plant the first trees next month. Over 50 local residents have sponsored the fruit trees, including apple, pear and cherry varieties. The trees will have historical links to Cowper and Newtons Museum garden and local Buckinghamshire heritage.

The orchard will be a calm and welcoming green space, open to anyone to come and enjoy. Residents will be able to help themselves to fresh fruit straight from the tree. Any surplus would be collected and shared with the community, in various forms including jams and juices, and who knows even cider or mead?

We hope the orchard will become a much-loved asset of Olney, with plans for it to be included in the Olney Circular Walk and Heritage Trail. We'll encourage local residents, especially children via our local and MK city schools, to explore the orchard; eat more fresh fruit and educate them in natural

food sources and biodiversity. BMERC have helped support this project, offering advice on biodiversity providing funding for information boards relating to the wildlife benefits of orchards. The orchard is being created adjacent to an area that the Town Council are already managing as a 'meadow' and over time these two complimentary areas will provide a haven for wildlife, particularly pollinators.

As well as additional habitat for wildlife, the orchard will also be place of local celebration for generations to come, connecting different groups in our community with events like apples days and wassailing ceremonies.

We need you! Would you like to help plant the first trees?

The first of the 25 sponsored trees and a natural boundary hedge (provided free by the Woodland Trust) will be planted on the weekend of 19th and 20th March 2022. Even if you can spare just a few hours in the morning or afternoon, this would be invaluable. No expertise needed and tools will be provided.

If you would like to attend either day, please contact growingmindsinolney@gmail.com or visit the Amazing Grace Community Orchard Facebook page and join one of the planting events.

A second planting weekend will take place later in the year where we also hope to introduce some artwork or sculptures, information boards, an organic outdoor seating circle and picnic benches.

After years of hibernation the Amphibian and Reptile Group is finally waking up from its torpor.

The aim is to create a space where individuals from all backgrounds can share their passion for Buckinghamshire's resident herpetofauna, with questions, answers, discussions and photos.

We already have some established small-scale local survey projects that we are hoping to expand. If you are interested in getting involved or in starting your own survey, please contact us.

For more information and to get involved:

ARG UK Website: https://groups.arguk.org/barg

Contact us: bucksrag@gmail.com

Send us records: BARGrecording@gmail.com

70 Trees for 70 Years

Do you have a favourite tree or woodland in Buckinghamshire? An ancient oak you always pass on your walks? An area of woodland where you love to sit and enjoy the sunshine? Or somewhere that evokes fond childhood memories?

As part of the celebrations for Her Majesty the Queen's Jubilee Year, Buckinghamshire Council is looking for the county's best-loved trees and woodlands. Residents are invited to nominate their favourite trees and share their stories of why trees are so important to them.

Sally Clark, Arboricultural Officer at Buckinghamshire Council, has shared the story of her favourite tree:

It may be surprising to hear that my favourite tree is not only dead, but that it became my favourite after it finally collapsed several years ago.

I have been periodically visiting this particular beech at Naphill Common for well over a decade, ever since I learnt it was home to Hericium erinaceus, a fungus that I had been keen to see in the wild.

Not once did I catch it fruiting while the tree was standing, but since it fell, this grand old tree has become alive with saprophytic fungi, molds and dead wood invertebrates, nature's recyclers.

It's a perfect reminder that there is more to trees than the green and brown bits we see poking out of



Photo: Sally Clark.

the ground. There is a whole subterranean realm, full of ancient, interconnected communities of which trees are a valuable part.

Visiting this fungi-garden has become something of a personal pilgrimage each time mushroom season rolls around. If you want to know its precise location, let me know and I might tell you (although I'd not so secretly like to keep this one for myself).

Nominations close at midnight on 1st May 2022.

More information about the project and how to nominate your favourite tree is available on the <u>Buckinghamshire Council website</u>.



What have we been up to?



Matt has been using the long winter evenings to play around with a new gadget, a sound recorder called the Song Meter Mini. It can be used to record birdsong and nocturnal bird migration, as well as frogs and grasshoppers. It is not the most high-definition system, but it does allow you to have a lie in and still listen to the dawn chorus.

Some of the team like winter days, the gap between the lackadaisical autumn days and the promise of spring is always very welcome. Julia's infrequent trips out have included slowly pondering the beauty of a few mosses and liverworts. And how stunning lichens are, in particular some of the cup and antler shaped genera such as the *Cladonias*, which get better as you get closer to them. The colours and



textures endlessly fascinate, especially when twinned with another area of interest – local geology.

Fiona has spent most of the winter pretending to be a dormouse. There has been the odd spurt of activity and Claudia even managed to trick her into some running! Plans to help her partner make a rustic Ash-topped table have suffered a certain amount of collateral damage... 'mind your fingers' should have included feet as well... oh and chin...



Rhiannon is getting ready for the spring launch of <u>Bucks</u> <u>Buzzing</u>—watch this space!



Mark is busy getting to grips with the BMERC database and its processes. In between he was fortunate enough to visit the Oxford University Museum of Natural History, where they house over 5 million specimens, and soaked up the atmosphere of the famous room where Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was originally debated – a building with quite some history!

This winter Claudia has managed to spend some lovely days in nature. She tried to refine her ID skills on mosses and lichens in Cornwall and had a great time admiring and photographing impressive trees at Savernake Forest. She is now emerging from the winter torpor and getting ready for the field work. With the team expanding she is very excited about the new survey season ahead.





Resources Round-Up

This is a round up of all of the links in this issue, plus ways to get involved and items of general interest:

Chesham & District Natural History Society e-voice.org.uk/cheshamnhs/

Milton Keynes Natural History Society mknhs.org.uk/programme/

Prestwood Nature prestwoodnature.org/wp/

BMERC Seminar www.bucksmkerc.org.uk/seminar

iRecord irecord.org.uk

BTO Cuckoo Tracking Project bto.org/our-science/projects/cuckoo-tracking-project

Aylesbury Peregrine Camera aylesburyperegrine.co.uk/?page id=57

Froglife Toad Crossing froglife.org/what-we-do/toads-on-roads/tormap/

Bats in Churches

batsinchurches.org.uk/volunteer-bat-survey/

State of Britain's Hedgehogs Report

<u>hedgehogstreet.org/about-our-hedgehog-street-</u>campaign/stateof/

PondNet Spawn Survey

<u>freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/projects/pondnet/</u> pondnet-spawn-survey-2022/

Amazing Grace Community Orchard

facebook.com/Amazing-Grace-Community-Orchard-100913732522820/

Buckinghamshire Amphibian & Reptile Group groups.arguk.org/barg

70 Trees for 70 Years

buckinghamshire.gov.uk/news/70-trees-for-70-years/

Bucks Buzzing bucksmknep.co.uk/bucks-buzzing/

Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust Events bbowt.org.uk/events



Our Final Thoughts

As we move towards the warmer months, we know that many of you are busy with local conservation and recording, so thank you for taking the time to read this issue.

Our next issue will be in June. If you have a project or recording scheme you would like to promote in this newsletter, please get in touch, we would love to include you. Our contact information is below. We hope that you will join us at our upcoming seminar next month. Until then, happy recording!

Best wishes from the BMERC Team, Claudia, Fiona, Julia, Mark, Matt & Rhiannon



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre

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