



Welcome to our spring newsletter

Margaret Vernon, acting leader

Spring is such a delight after the short, and at times dull, days of winter. We have been so pleased that our indoor meetings have continued to be well attended throughout this time and the pleasure of meeting others has been palpable. With excellent topics and speakers, we have enjoyed each other's company.

We are delighted to welcome Sue Benjamin onto the committee. She has taken on the job of planning future indoor meetings from September 2022 onwards.

Now, here is an urgent request: we **need** a couple more people to help the group to continue after May 2022 when I step down.

The vacant positions are:

1. Someone to co-ordinate and have an overview of the group's activities but not to organise them all as we have people actively in place:

Sue and John, indoor meetings

Neil, walks

Margaret, trips

Dave, treasurer

John, newsletter and charring committee meetings

Brian, conservation work parties and shows

Derek, website

Much is in place but a co-ordinator is necessary to take us forward and to be the link with the Trust team at Lower Smite Farm. Learning on the job will be the way forward and is perfectly acceptable. Advice and help will be readily given.

2. Someone to help with the setting up and clearing away of chairs and tables etc. before and after the indoor meetings (nine per year, Sept – May incl).

Please contact me or a member of the committee to discuss or for further information (contact opposite).

Providing a local group is important for us all, particularly as our Malvern group is so well supported by its members. Please consider helping it to continue if you can. It would be such a shame if the group is forced to close.

Meetings, Trips and Walks 2022

See our website for full details of all trips & walks

Indoor Meetings:

Indoor meetings are held at 7.30pm on the first Thursday of the month at the Lyttelton Rooms in Church Street, Great Malvern, WR14 2AY. Adults £2.50. Children free, non-members welcome.

Indoor meetings, what's coming up:

April 7th: Gerry Davies of the Malvern U3A Botany Group. '45 years of Botanising around the Malverns'

May 5th: Susanne Noble, Sally Webster & Anne Crane, members of the Verging on Wild team
'Verging on Wild – working for biodiversity on Herefordshire verges'

Trips:

For more information or booking of trips, phone **Margaret Vernon on 01684 565079**. It is always worth putting your name on the reserve list.

Saturday April 9th: *Great Bustard Project, Salisbury Plain; Hawk Conservancy Trust, Andover*. Depart Splash 07.15am. Full but reserve list operating.

Friday 13th May – Saturday 21st May: Isle of Mull.

Full but reserve list operating.

Monday 6th & Tuesday 7th June (two separate days): *Martin Down NNR, The Devenish (Wilts WT), Sarum Castle, Salisbury*. Cost: approx. £23. Depart from the Splash at 7am. Return mid-evening. Take packed lunch. Two places available on Tues 7th

Wednesday 6th & Thursday 7th July (two separate days): *Greenham and Crookham Commons, West Berkshire (BBOWT)*. Cost: approx. £22. Depart from the Splash 7.30am. Return mid-evening. Take packed lunch. One place available on Wed 6th and one on Thurs 7th.

Friday May 19th – Sunday May 28th, 2023 *The Burren (Co Clare) and Connemara (Galway coast)*. This two-centre holiday includes two nights at the Premier Inn, Dublin (one on each journey), one week in Ballyvaughan, Co Clare, visiting the Burren and Inishmore island and one week at Clifden, Co Galway, visiting the beautiful Connemara area, a mixture of rivers, lakes, woodlands, heathlands, bogs, rich meadowlands, rugged hills, dramatic mountains and the coast, plus Inishbofin island and Clare Island.

Walks:

For more information and to book your place, phone **Neil Edwards on 01684 564288**.

Wednesday 27th April: *Bird Calls at the Knapp & Papermill*, led by Steve Bloomfield. Meet at 7.30am

Tuesday 10th May: *Wildflower Walk around British Camp*, led by Gerry Davies. Meet at 10am

Wednesday 15th June: *Hill Court Farm Nature Reserve*, led by Tomos Holloway. Meet at 10am

Tuesday 5th July: *Butterflies at Old Hills*, led by Mel Mason. Meet at 10.30am

Other walks and trips may be arranged at short notice and advertised via the Malvern Group email list and website: www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk. To be on our mailing list, contact malverngroup@live.co.uk You can unsubscribe at any time.

There is a global vulture population crash ...why does it matter?

Dr Neil Homer - Forbes FRCVS spoke to us about the threatened extinction of vultures in Africa and Asia

Vultures are a vital part of our ecosystems. When 99.9% (40 million birds) of the Asian vulture population died (1985-2005), there was a drastic increase in feral dogs, resulting in an additional 600,000 human deaths from rabies over the next 10 years. In Asia, the deaths arose from the toxic effect of Diclofenac and other anti-inflammatory drugs, sold for human and veterinary use. Vultures died from kidney failure when they ate treated carcasses. Jemima Parry-Jones OBE (JPJ) of the Newent based International Centre for Birds of Prey (ICBP), the RSPB and others set up captive breeding centres and the situation is now on the mend.

The African vulture crisis (95% have died over a 60-year period) is more complex. 11 of the 16 species found in Africa are at real risk of extinction, eight being classified as Critically Endangered, with the first two species predicted to be extinct within six years. The causes of decline vary by region: poisoning 60%, power cables 34%, trade for use in black magic (traditional medicine) 25%. Vultures do not reach maturity until five to eight years, thereafter laying one egg a year and rearing one chick every other year. Vultures are vital, consuming 70% of fallen meat and neutralising and removing contagious pathogens such as anthrax, rabies, salmonella etc.



Neil talked of his work setting up the Vulture Alliance together with JPJ and other staff from ICBP. They have worked (see photo) primarily with Vulpro (Vulpro.com) in training local African vets and rangers plus rehabilitators of injured and poisoned birds to improve the chances of increasing the numbers of vultures. They have a breeding programme using birds in captivity that are unsuitable for release and are involved in researching populations and educating and publicising the population crisis.

Two one-day visits to Steart Marshes and Ham Wall, November 2021

Report from Maggie Embleton and Steve Atkins

Steart Marshes, the newest Wildfowl and Wetland Trust reserve, is one of many saltmarshes around Britain's coasts that serve an important role within our ecology in trapping carbon that would otherwise be dispersed into the atmosphere.

We saw an array of birds, shrubs and flora. In the car park, we were pleasantly surprised by blue chicory flowers, yellow dyer's chamomile (commonly known as golden marguerite) and a stalk of yellow toadflax. Vivid autumn

colours in the mixed hedges included red hawthorn berries, bright yellow leaves of field maple, dark purple leaves of dogwood and sloe bushes, their black berries contrasting beautifully with the pink and orange of the spindle, all of which reminded us how beneficial hedges are to wildlife.

Guided by Alan Baxter, we saw several species, including bearded tits for one group and a Cetti's warbler for the other. We had murmurations from golden plover, views of dunlin, shoveler, lapwing, curlew, redshank and little egret, goldcrests and peregrine falcon and for one group, a merlin posed for viewings for some considerable time!

Our visit to Ham Wall included sightings of ring-necked duck with its white band around its bill, water pipit, snipe and barn owl plus, of course, the starlings. They were not murmuring in the usual manner but flew in groups straight to roosting sites in the reeds. The noise of thousands of birds moving along the reeds and chattering was loud and constant. A different spectacle from usual murmurations but, all the same, an amazing experience.

Woodford's Meadow

Sue Benjamin

Woodford's Meadow is a 0.65km long stretch of land in Great Malvern, behind The Cube. It is bordered by the car park of Manor Park Tennis Club, the railway line and domestic gardens. The land slopes down towards the railway line. A substantial oak tree stands proud in the centre of the meadow and around the edge is a wide margin of mixed deciduous and evergreen trees, shrubs and bramble thicket. The meadow is managed by the Malvern Hills Trust and last year, such is the plant biodiversity, hay was taken to seed other areas.

A small group of U3A Natural History members are studying the meadow during 2022, principally to observe general habitat differences across the area and seasonal changes. Preliminary observations began in October mainly in the marginal areas. We already have over 100 species recorded on a database, developed by a group member, with identifying photographs. Dog walkers appear bemused seeing us intently examining the undersides of bramble leaves where we have found rusts, eggs, evidence of leaf miners and small invertebrates. Perhaps our most exciting finds to date have been the variety of fungal species, including the pink waxcap and beige coral, indicative of unimproved grassland.



*Pink waxcap, (Hygrocybe calyptriformis)
by Richard Newton*

Clear views of nuthatch and bullfinches with strident bursts of bird song greeted us in January. We are now looking forward to the growth of the meadow with the succession of blooms and consequential changes in the fauna.