

BRANDIS CORNER WILDLIFE GROUP

Members' Newsletter No. 7
March - July 2011



Event Reports

UP THE CREEK

This lively illustrated talk by Holsworthy vet Rupert Kirkwood in March provided an unusual insight into the wildlife of the Devon and Cornish coasts. Rupert entertained all in the audience with highlights of his 821-mile paddle in a kayak, exploring creeks, rivers and coastal areas over a four year period.

He shared photographs taken on and under the water, with dramatic shots of dolphins, seals and sharks. He even had an encounter with a rare Leatherback Turtle, six feet long, and witnessed a badger swimming in salt water.



BIRDSONG WALK 11TH MAY



Barrie Lewis led 20 enthusiastic members around the 2 mile circular route at the Alpaca Park by kind permission of group members Lindsey and Tony Russell. The emphasis was on identifying birds from their songs, with the added assistance of his Bird Voice device, which plays pre-recorded songs from a list of British Birds.

We identified 34 species in a 2 hour period, which was good, with highlights being 4 different warblers, 2 woodpecker species, Reed Bunting and Tree Pipit.

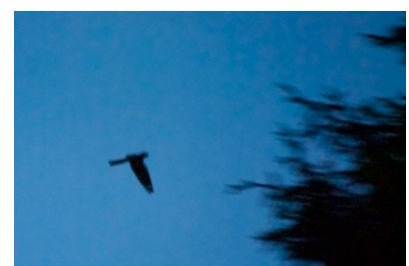
We also saw flowers in profusion, a small frog, a badger latrine and evidence of these creatures digging up Bluebell bulbs. Everyone enjoyed the refreshments afterwards, with special thanks going to Lindsey and her staff who worked hard to cope with so many of us at once.

NIGHTJARS



8.45 p.m. on a rather overcast June evening at Weekpark Plantation on the east side of Whiteleigh Meadow saw 18 members gather for a walk in the hope of seeing a Nightjar. This most unusual of birds, which is even moth like in its 'dancing' flight, can be elusive. However, good views of the birds were enjoyed and we heard 2 different males with their reeling songs. One even landed on a branch about 30 metres away but, upon seeing so many people, decided not to stay and sing to us.

Thanks to everyone for being quiet, thereby enabling us to experience this red listed bird at close quarters. We are lucky that Cookworthy Forest is such a stronghold for them. A bonus that night was hearing a Grasshopper Warbler, another first for many. *Report by Barrie Lewis.*



BRADFORD SCHOOL 'GOES WILD' FOR WILDLIFE



Brandis Corner Wildlife Group used some of the money received from the Waitrose Community Matters scheme when it spent Monday 4th July at Bradford Primary School. Pupils were in 6 mixed-aged teams, dressed as British mammals and took part in 6 themed activities. They assembled insect boxes, made butterfly feeders, designed and constructed a table-top display using a variety of materials and participated in a wildlife picture quiz. In addition to this, local bat specialist and BCWG member, Helen Sinnett, entertained and educated everyone with a variety of activities and games about bats and even had two rescued Pipistrelle bats for the children to observe. Possibly the highlight of the day for many was Nigel Palmer's 'Owls' R'Us' talk during which small groups had a close encounter with four species of owl and a buzzard. Nigel coped brilliantly with the barrage of questions fired at him.



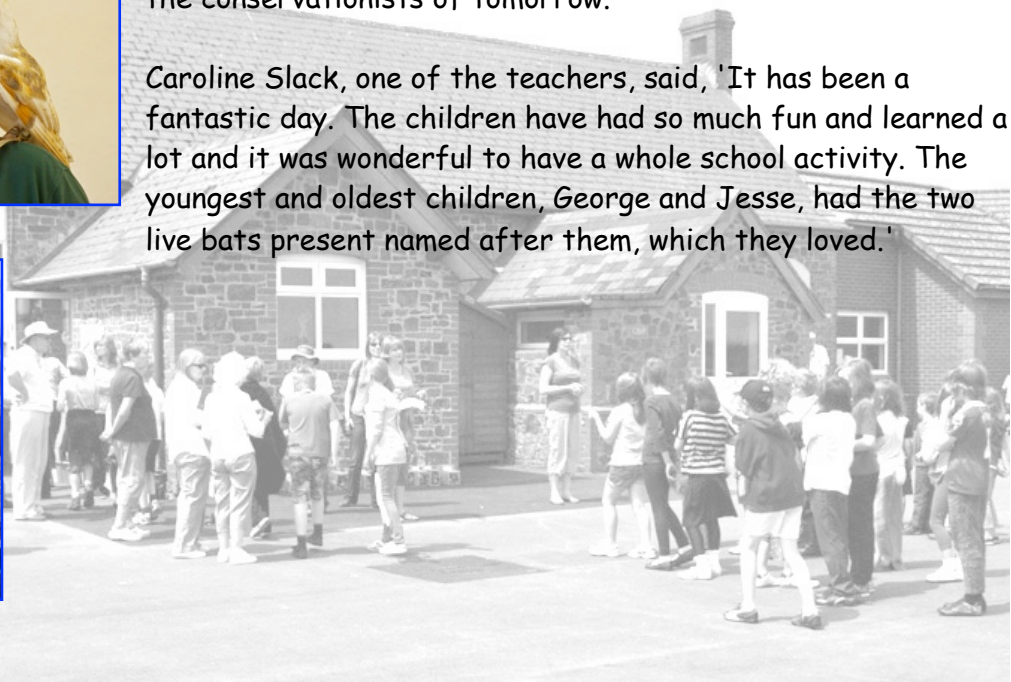
A photographic competition was organised too and first prize of a visit to the Alpaca Park for a family of four, kindly provided by the Park, was won by Zoe Pett with her innovative picture of a somewhat startled Grey Squirrel photographed from below through the mosquito net upon which it had just landed!



19 BCWG members, 4 members of staff and 3 Holsworthy College work experience pupils were involved in the event. The objective was to stimulate the children's interest in wildlife, thereby helping the Group meet one of its objectives of promoting public awareness of wildlife in the local area. The Group feels it is important to work with children as they are the conservationists of tomorrow.



Caroline Slack, one of the teachers, said, 'It has been a fantastic day. The children have had so much fun and learned a lot and it was wonderful to have a whole school activity. The youngest and oldest children, George and Jesse, had the two live bats present named after them, which they loved.'



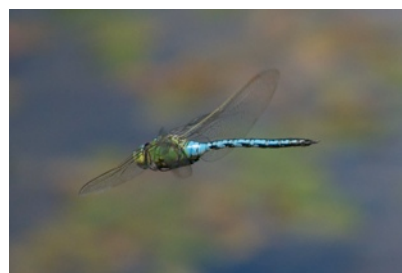
Pond Dipping



Saturday 9th July saw a successful and most enjoyable repeat of our pond-dipping activity at 'Oakfield', Brandis Corner. We identified 16 creatures in total and completed a survey which showed it to be a very healthy pond. However, unlike last year, no little frogs were found but there was an abundance of young newts and, to some people's dismay, leeches!

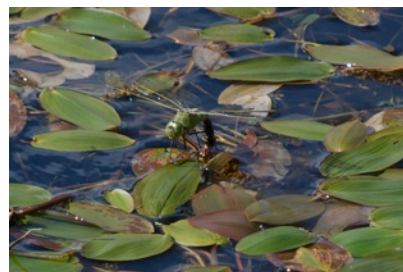


An Alderfly larva (pictured left) proved a first and the stunning dragonflies and damselflies entranced the dippers.



47 adults and children attended this event and 18 new members - 9 of whom were under 16 - joined the group. After working up an appetite a barbecue proved popular.

Many thanks to Cathy and Geoff Pitt for allowing us to invade their peaceful meadow yet again.



Cathy and Geoff also report 4 owlets ringed again this year by the Barn Owl Trust and they fledged recently. Let's hope they all survive into adulthood.

Cathy again fostered a young Barn Owl for 3 weeks. She was glad to see it collected by The Trust as it had become very feisty and scratched her twice - a good sign, of course, as it wanted to be free.

Bradford School contacted June when a House Martin's nest fell from the eaves of the school. Staff and pupils found 3 young which needed to be rescued. Sue Gear of 'Born To Be Wild' took delivery of them and we are pleased to report that they are all doing well.



June has been delighted by the appearance of two baby hedgehogs who visit her garden with a parent every evening to feed.

In April, we were invited to participate in a Ruby Country Event held at Cookworthy Forest Centre. The day was well attended and we signed up a number of new members.



And finally ...

... possible future events.

- * Alison Smith of OPAL (Open Air Laboratories - www.OPALexplorenature.org) would be delighted to present an afternoon of activities in September. Date and venue to be notified.
- * Another possibility is a visit by Joe from Reptobug who would introduce us to 7 species including snakes, spiders, scorpions, phasmids and giant snails. All non-venomous animals can be handled by the audience - under his guidance. Joe is fully qualified in Zoo Animal Management as well as having over 25 years experience in keeping exotic animals.
- * Fungi Walk (for members only) to be lead by Jan Mallik in October.
- * Discovering otters with Hilary Marshall.
- * A talk about wildlife rescue by an experienced volunteer.
- * Our AGM will be held in November and we are hoping to have a celebrity speaker!

Let us know what you think of these suggestions and feel free to contact us with other ideas.

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