



# The Wildlife Trust

## Huntingdonshire Local Group

NEWSLETTER ♣ NEWSLETTER ♣ NEWSLETTER

### “Wonderful Woodlands”

We had a great summer with our focus on Wonderful Woodlands. Nearly 150 people (excluding committee members and volunteer wardens) attended the guided walks through the spring and summer. Our thanks go to Richard Dowsett for leading the Hayley Wood walk in May; Graham and Barbara Moorby, Waresley & Gransden Wood in June; Vince Lea & Louise Bacon, Hardwick Wood in July and Peter Walker at Gamlingay Wood in August. Note that these volunteers have also agreed to contribute to a special evening meeting to highlight some of the facts and features for those of you who could not come on the walks (see page 4). Kevin Doidge gives us a detailed description of what we saw on pages 2 and 3.

“**BarBQ**” - We had nearly 100 people at the summer BarBQ at Ramsey Heights, which was another great success, although the weather curtailed stargazing and moth trapping. George puts a lot of work into this event. Along with the other helpers, especially those who led the guided walks around the Great Fen, we offer our considerable thanks. This was a joint effort with the Ely Local Group and our thanks go to all those who helped. We intend having a similar event next year, this time in August. Hope to see you there.

### Help Huntingdonshire’s Nature Reserves

The Wildlife Trust Huntingdonshire Local Group is launching a new appeal for much needed funds to support the ongoing maintenance and improvement work for our local reserves. We have 20 Wildlife Trust reserves in Huntingdonshire, fabulous woodlands such as Brampton Wood and Lady’s Wood and ancient meadows like Upwood and Houghton Meadows. They all need care by Trust Reserves staff and many volunteers. Without it, paths in woodlands become inaccessible and meadows revert to scrub. Not only will the plants and animals be lost but also, it will become difficult for the public to visit. The Trust can often get grants to purchase new reserves, such as the Great Fen and East Pit (a brilliant chalk pit near Cambridge). It is far more difficult to get grants for mundane work on existing reserves, as this generates a lot less publicity. The Huntingdonshire Local Group wants to raise £5,000 to support our local reserves. We would like to raise more, as there is so much that could be done if we had the funds. Examples of the things we could do with the money are:

- Welcome signs at the entrances to **Upwood Meadows** from Upwood village and **Lady’s Wood** from Woodwalton - £600 each;
- New stock-proof fencing at **Woodwalton Marsh** to safeguard grazing animals - £1,500;
- Bridging ditches and installing kissing gates to improve entrances at **Wistow Wood** - £600;
- **Houghton Meadows** needs much work to improve the site for cattle grazing, essential to control invasive species. Replacing the perimeter fence alone would cost £7,000.

We do hope you will support our appeal for Helping Huntingdonshire’s Reserves. Thanks to you, we now have a fabulous wildlife pond at Grafham Water, with thriving populations of Great Crested Newts, Dragonfly larvae, water beetles and a whole host of other pond life.

Please send your donations – cheques payable to the Wildlife Trust Hunts Local Group – to George Cottam, 2 Buckden Road, Brampton, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE28 4PS or go to [www.justgiving.com/George-Cottam](http://www.justgiving.com/George-Cottam).

## Highlights of the Wonderful Woodlands Season

The first walk of the year went off well, with a bumper crowd coming to Wistow and Warboys Woods, especially as it was a rare opportunity to see Warboys Wood which, being privately owned, is usually closed to the public. Both are ancient woodlands with a long history of traditional management. In Wistow Wood, numerous old ash stools with many stems indicate the past practice of coppicing, and the presence of King Alfred's cakes gave the opportunity to explain how these distinctive fungi got their name.

The woodland floor was full of dog's mercury, wood anemones and primroses. Unfortunately the bluebells weren't quite ready, but nonetheless the woods contained many interesting plants and animals.

The next walk was the annual and traditional bluebell walk at Brampton Wood, which is the second largest ancient woodland in Cambridgeshire and is at least 900 years old. This walk had the largest crowd and for good reason, the bluebells were out in full force. Other interesting species seen include pignut, yellow archangeal and wood anemone.



Parts of Brampton Wood were planted with conifers after World War Two, but they are being slowly removed so that natural

regeneration can occur and lead to the creation of broad-leaved woodland. Not all of the conifers will be removed as some areas provide habitat for rare moths, so these areas will be managed sympathetically.

The third walk was at Hayley Wood, which was the first wood to be purchased by the Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust. It is an ancient woodland which has been traditionally managed and is an important site for oxlips. Other flora of interest includes dog's mercury, lesser celandine and early purple orchid. Hayley Wood is also a key site in the development of landscape ecology and has been extensively studied by Cambridge University.

Next was Waresley and Gransden Woods, which was led by the Reserve Warden, Graham Moorby, and the walk showed the difference between the woodland found on the heavy clay of South Cambridgeshire and that found on the sandy soil above the greensand ridge with its tip in the south west of Cambridgeshire. Gransden and Waresley Woods are divided by a bank and ditch which not only divide the two woods, but the parishes of Gransden and Waresley and the old counties of Huntingdonshire and Cambridgeshire.

The relatively new addition of Browne's Piece showed the beginning of new woodland that will hopefully, in years to come, grow up to be as valuable a woodland as the adjacent woods. It is also an important step in the creation of a South Cambridgeshire Forest which will hopefully link Waresley and Gransden Woods with Hayley Wood and Gamlingay Wood.

The fifth walk at Hardwick Wood was led by Vince Lea, the Reserve Warden, and showed everyone what happens to the coppiced wood after it had been harvested. Craft work such as hurdle making and woodturning is carried out within the wood and this helps to ensure that coppicing continues to be a viable management technique and encourages volunteers to become more involved in conservation and woodland management.

Hardwick wood is also an important site for two rare plants, crested cow-wheat and narrow-leaved everlasting pea, both thrive on the clay soils of the area and need very sympathetic management of the land to flourish, especially as many of their previous sites have been destroyed. Both grow along the woodland edges and need a careful balance between the amount of shade and the amount of mowing. This has been achieved along Mere Way, which runs along the western boundary of the wood and this year, there appears to have been a good increase in the population.

Gamlingay Wood is one of the best recorded woodlands in the area and this was

evident from the last guided walk, led by Peter Walker, who is the Reserve Warden. Gamlingay Wood has had many owners and this was shown by the different names of different parts of the wood. For example, the area known as Mertonage was donated by Walter de Merton to Merton College, Oxford.



Crested cow-wheat

This site has been woodland for at least a thousand years, and has always been important to the local community as a valuable source of building materials and firewood. Traditional coppicing still goes on supplying thatching materials, stakes for hedge laying and even beanpoles. Like Brampton Wood it was planted with conifers after the last World War and the Wildlife Trust is gradually removing them.

Alongside Gamlingay Wood is an area now called Sugley 'Wood'. This former arable land, like Browne's Piece next to Waresley Wood, is part of the vision for a South Cambridgeshire Forest and in 200 years will eventually be part of a huge forested landscape.

We hope that those of you who made it to the walks enjoyed them, and we hope to see more of you at next year's season of wetland walks.

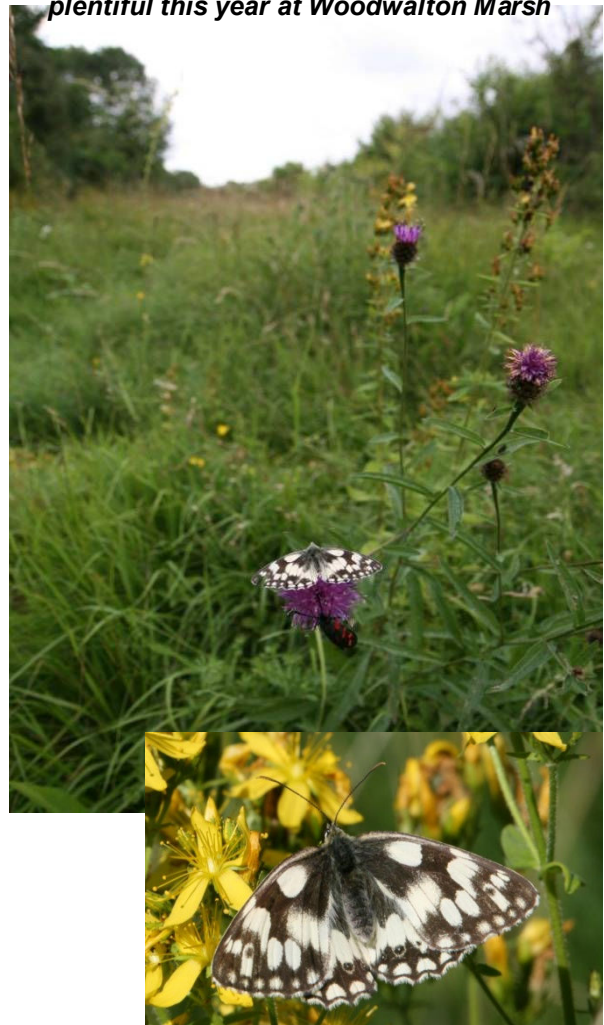
Kevin Doidge

## Woodwalton Marsh

Woodwalton Marsh (see pictures below) is one of the smallest Wildlife Trust reserves. Although small it is botanically very rich and a wonderful site for butterflies and common lizard. There is now a water source on site and so, it is once again being optimally managed by grazing. However, the existing fencing is only partly stock proof and limits the type of animals that can be used. This also presents a risk, as the site is adjacent to a road and the East coast railway line. A new fence inside the existing fence line would help improve site management. Creeping thistle and ragwort treatment are also required to prevent the competitive thistle from becoming dominant, excluding many other species of wild flowers. We also need to control and prevent the spread of ragwort, which can cause damage to the health of livestock if eaten in large quantities. We aim to raise up to £1700 to enable the Trust to carry out this work.

Pat Doody

*The Marbled white butterfly was especially plentiful this year at Woodwalton Marsh*



### *Winter Wonderland Talks*

The talks this year provide a range of topics from the woodlands of Cambridgeshire to the icy wastes of Spitzbergen and the depths of the ocean:

**Wednesday 9 September**, "Wonderful Woodlands in Huntingdonshire" illustrated talks by Trust volunteer wardens

**Wednesday 14 October**, "Living Landscapes: bigger, better and joined up" - Martin Baker, Wildlife Trust Conservation Officer.

**Wednesday 11 November**, "Huntingdon-on-Sea - That Sinking Feeling" - Illustrated talk by Pat Doody.

**Wednesday 9 December**, "Spitzbergen - Birds, Polar Bears and Arctic Dreams" - an illustrated talk by Ian Rowlands.

Note we will have mince pies, wine and a raffle at the December meeting.

**Wednesday 13 January 2010**, "Coral Reef or Coral Grief", illustrated talk by marine specialist Frances Dipper

**Wednesday 10 February 2010** "Bumblebees, their natural history and what we can do to encourage them in our gardens", illustrated talk by David Shepperd.

**Wednesday 10 March**, "Wetlands", illustrated talk by a local expert, TBA.

**Sunday 25 April 2010**, Brampton Wood  
10.30 am, Guided Walk to see the bluebells.  
Led by George Cottam.

Evening talks are held at Brampton Memorial Centre, Thrapston Road, Brampton, PE28 4TB at 7.30pm.

#### **Main contacts:**

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### *Green Gym Opportunities*

Second Sunday of each month - September to March - **BRAMPTON WOOD**. Meet at 10.00am. Call George Cottam on 01480 450809 or email [georgecottam@dsl.pipex.com](mailto:georgecottam@dsl.pipex.com) for more details. [Note the work party on the 8<sup>th</sup> November will take place on the 15<sup>th</sup> November.]

First Sunday of each month - September to March - **LADY'S WOOD** or other reserves close by (Upwood Meadows or Ravelly Wood). Meet at 10.00am. Call Martin on 01487 831994 for more details.



Our spring bluebell walk in Brampton Wood was a great success with over 80 people in attendance. We will repeat it next year.

### *Awards for All grant update*

Thanks to the Awards for All Lottery Fund, we have been able to upgrade our laptop computer and projector, buy a new PA system, buy new outdoor torches and a larger gazebo. This will allow us to run better indoor and outdoor events. The funding also enabled the group to produce the leaflet to promote this year's summer events, which focussed on our area's wonderful woodlands.



Philip Clark

[The views expressed here are solely those of the Wildlife Trust Huntingdonshire Local Group]

The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough, **The Manor House, Broad Street, Great Cambourne, Cambridge CB23 6DH.** <http://www.wildlifebcnp.org/> Charity no 1000412

The **Huntingdonshire Local Group** supports the work of the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough. See: <http://wildlifetrust-huntsareagroup.org.uk>