

# PLUMPTON WILDLIFE & HABITAT GROUP



## Plumpton's wildlife habitats

### A survey

Edited by Jacqui Hutson

**Thanks to a grant from the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), we have been able to print our 2004 survey of wildlife habitats in Plumpton Parish. The booklets (see over page) are available from the station and village shop. They are free, but we would welcome donations towards our follow up survey.**

### A very busy 2011



Plumpton Wildlife & Habitat Group has had a very busy year in 2011. As not all our members could make it to this year's AGM and we wanted people in the village to know more about our work, we thought we'd publish a newsletter to keep everyone informed. None of the work reported here could have been achieved without the time

and commitment of our members. Do please join us - you'll learn a lot about the wildlife in the countryside around us and in your own back garden. See back page for contact details.

### Butterflies and rotting meat



Our 2011 Annual General Meeting was a huge success, thanks in no small part to our guest speaker, Michael Blencowe, community wildlife officer at the Sussex Wildlife Trust. Michael gave a fascinating talk about the many species of moth and butterfly to be found in and around Plumpton, including the elusive Purple

Emperor. The Purple Emperor hangs out at the top of oak trees. It has a strong liking for rotting meat - but, he reported, proved resistant to Michael's attempts to lure it to ground level.

# In the past year ...

we have undertaken several projects aimed at conserving and enhancing local wildlife habitats, led a number of walks and activities and monitored and surveyed local populations of bats, butterflies, trees and wildflower sites.

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## Plumpton's wildlife habitats

A major triumph this year was the publication of the wildlife habitat survey that the group carried out in 2004, prior to the formal launch of PW&HG. The fully illustrated booklet reports the findings of our fieldwork to survey the varied habitats of the parish and the kinds of flora likely to be found within its boundaries.

The booklet was funded with a grant from the newly formed South Downs National Park Authority. It has been very well received and is available, for a small voluntary donation (we suggest £1.00), from PW&HG and from the station and village shop.

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## Wildlife walks

We are lucky in Plumpton in that the increasingly rare nightingale frequents several spots in the parish. Our nightingale walk in May was blessed with four competing males singing within 50 metres of the group - to say nothing of a very dramatic thunderstorm and lightning.

We had a similarly successful trip to Chailey Common in search of nightjars and, again, were lucky to have several sightings from close quarters.

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## Wildflowers and butterflies

In April, Jacqui Hutson led a well-attended spring wildflower walk as part of the Week of Walks organised by the Plumpton VAP Footpaths Team to publicise its walks leaflets.

In the summer, several PW&HG members and non-members joined Jon Wood on three butterfly walks around the parish to provide survey data for the Butterfly Conservation's butterfly atlas of Sussex. The survey teams spotted almost all the expected species, which was encouraging, but not in the numbers we would have liked. It was also a chance to learn about butterfly habits and habitats.

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## Advice and information

Offering advice and information to local landowners on habitat conservation and management is an area where we have really expanded this year. We have carried out detailed botanical surveys for six landowners and given management advice to nearly a dozen. We are working on the restoration of another pond and, on the invitation of another local landowner, have taken on the management of 2.5 hectares of woodland for the benefit of wildlife. We have also carried out surveys and advised five local landowners on wildflower meadow enhancement and creation.

## Station partnership scheme

Last year we were just embarking on the challenging task of clearing the overgrowth on the station platform verges in preparation for sowing and planting wildflowers, as part of the award-winning Plumpton Station Partnership Scheme.

Despite the best efforts of the rabbits and the very dry spring, the wildflower seedlings made it through the year and in 2012 should produce a very colourful display. We also installed bat boxes and sparrow boxes on the station ticket office and waiting room. The reptile population is also flourishing, with several sightings of slow worms, adders, grass snakes and common lizards this summer.



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## Wildflower meadows

Following up on the verge survey and management plan produced by Jacqui Hutson and other PW&HG members last year, we have been negotiating with East Sussex County Council to formally 'adopt' the five richest flower verges in Plumpton and East Chilmington. We have already begun work to improve an orchid-rich verge in Novington Lane. We are also working with the Parish Council to create a wildflower meadow in an unused area of the Playing Fields, to mark the Jubilee celebrations in 2012.



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## Little owls

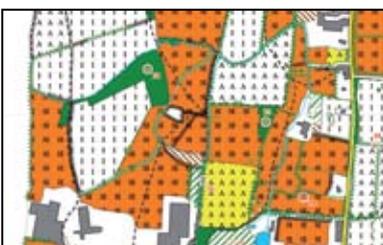
Britain's smallest owl is declining across Europe but nest box schemes have been shown to work in favourable habitats. There are only 70 monitored nests nationally, compared with nearly 500 Barn Owl sites. So any nest we can monitor will make a big difference. We have built and put up four Little Owl boxes and have a further five ready to install. Two of the boxes have been used by owls but none has nested yet.



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## Dormouse survey

Thanks to a grant from the Biological Record Centre and Plumpton residents' efforts in collecting TetraPak cartons, we were able to place nesting tubes in four sites between April and November to survey for dormice. We now have the first official record of dormice for Plumpton. A nest was found in the last batch of survey tubes that we retrieved for the winter. We will survey fresh sites in 2012 and, time permitting, include a hazel nut hunt (nibbled hazel nuts can indicate dormouse presence) element to the survey.



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## Housing development proposals

PW&HG provided a report to the Parish Council on the impact on wildlife and habitats of the proposed housing development in the areas identified in the Lewes District Council SHLAA survey and Core Development Strategy. We also submitted our report independently to Lewes District Council's consultation exercise, drawing attention to the conflict between its housing development plans and its stated aims to conserve and enhance natural habitats.

## Bats in the attic (and elsewhere)

We have historical records for eight species of bat in Plumpton and neighbouring parishes, stretching back nearly 30 years. This year Tony Hutson has been revisiting all the known Plumpton roost sites and so far has checked 32 of the 50 or so recorded.

He has found evidence of brown long-eared bat at 14 out of the 17 (out of 26) known sites checked to date. Three sites have been lost, one through renovation and two for unknown reasons, but this is a very good result. Small colonies of pipistrelle bats (both common and soprano) have been found in just three of the 13 (out of 18) known sites checked and one major colony subsequently moved before peak breeding season. Pipistrelles (see right) frequently change their roost sites so this isn't necessarily a cause for concern. Serotine bats were found in just one of the two (out of 10 recorded) sites checked so far. However they were also found at two new sites and reported from a further two regular autumn sites.



## Violet helleborines

While checking one of the dormouse survey sites, we discovered a previously unknown population of violet helleborines - a species of orchid that favours shady ancient woodland habitat. After expert confirmation and a thorough count, it turned out to be one of the largest new colonies recorded in East Sussex for many years.

Spurred on by this, we found a further two new sites for this orchid and new records for the broad-leaved helleborine as well.

## Ancient tree survey

This time last year, we had no ancient tree records for Plumpton and only a few for East Chiltington. After the launch of our ancient tree survey last winter, we now have 65 records from a wide range of species.

The oak tree in the photo is probably the biggest tree in the Parish; it measures an impressive 5.97 metres or 19 and half feet in girth. However, many trees that you have walked past hundreds of times without noticing do qualify as ancient - they may not look so impressive because they have been pollarded or coppiced, for example, and so have several trunks.

We will resume the survey this winter when the bare branches make surveying much easier, and hope to have added considerably to our tally by next AGM.



## Great British Elm experiment

One of our projects this year was to follow up a piece on the Radio 4 Today programme and secure for the parish one of what is hoped will be a new generation of disease-resistant Elm trees. The Conservation Foundation organised the collection of cuttings from the small number of elms that survived the devastation of Dutch Elm Disease. These were micro-propagated to produce hundreds of saplings, which have been planted all over England, including in Plumpton. So far, the sapling is thriving.

