



Our 15th AGM was held on 28th November at the Sports Pavilion. The evening began in the usual way – a catch up with all our members, old and new, over welcome drinks and nibbles.

James Otway summarised the Wildlife group's year:

*In February dear Tony Hutson, a founding member of the Wildlife Group, died and is greatly missed by us all. A day doesn't go by when I don't think of questions to ask him.*

*We started our yearly events with a winter downland walk looking for signs of harvest mice around Ashcombe Bottom. Later in the winter we helped the National Trust ranger clear scrub along the tracks on the NT Blackcap Reserve in order to encourage grazing of the downland sward by cattle. This, in turn, helps maintain the rich and varied chalk downland flora.*

*Our annual Toad Patrol got underway in early February and by the end of April had helped 221 toads safely across Plumpton Lane. Events continued throughout the Spring with a dawn chorus walk up to Blackcap, followed by breakfast; the annual Nightingale walk preceded by a sausage supper - thanks to Jean and Peter – and a fundraising chilli and quiz evening at the Plough – thanks to Jean and Nicole.*

*We set up our stall at the village Strawberry Fair, featuring various wildlife identification puzzles, jugs of churchyard wildflowers and a 'show and tell' corner was a great success and well attended.*

*We have a small but very active moth recording group. Chris and Carole regularly set up moth traps throughout the summer and into the winter. The previously rare Clifden Nonpareil or Blue Underwing moth was seen in several Plumpton and East Chiltington gardens. Have a look at our Facebook Group for more of Chris' findings. Thanks to David and Anna for organising a moth breakfast to share the unveiling of the moths from an overnight trap.*

*A Nightjar Walk on Red House and Chailey Common was well attended. We continue to advise on, and assist with, wildflower management projects at All Saints and East Chiltington churchyards. We continue to try and encourage Swifts back to All Saints church and hope to extend the project to East Chiltington Church. We continue to carry out surveys of Rook nests, badger setts, harvest mice and dormice, and offer advice on habitat and planting within the Parishes.*

*Finally, I would like to thank Heather Catchpole for a generous donation to Wildlife Group funds following surveys and advice on restoration of her meadow from Group members.*

With James Otway and Carole Nicholson continuing as chair and vice chair respectively there were only minor changes to the committee: Jean Stewart takes over as Secretary and Kate Gold as Treasurer. Simon Harding, Chris Chapman and David Phillips make up the rest of the committee. We have a healthy bank balance and were able to purchase a bee box for Plumpton Primary School and some free-standing display boards.

The results of the photography competition were announced, with Gary Smith's captivating Robin narrowly pipping Paul Nicholson's damselfly. Birgit Pettifor's winter landscape was third.

Then followed an entertaining and interesting talk on the Lost Woods of Sussex by Michael Blencowe of Action in Rural Sussex.

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Last month's column introduced our 2024 focus on recording local birds. Our first 'Year of the Bird' event takes place on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> Jan, with a bird watch at the Old Mill House, by kind invitation of Carole and Paul Nicholson. Refreshments will be available after the count. All welcome, especially children. Email [carolenicholson3@outlook.com](mailto:carolenicholson3@outlook.com) or [plumptonwildlife@gmail.com](mailto:plumptonwildlife@gmail.com) to let us know you're coming. This activity is part of the national Big Garden Bird Watch which runs from 26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> Jan 2024. If you carry out a birdwatch in your Plumpton or East Chiltington garden please let Chris Chapman ([chris.chapman@btinternet.com](mailto:chris.chapman@btinternet.com)) have a copy of your results so that we can continue to monitor our local birds.