

Save the toads



Toads are very particular about their breeding sites, returning to ancestral breeding ponds each year from hibernation areas. They will follow the same migratory route, often moving as an entire colony, which will inevitably lead to having to cross roads. They move on damp mild nights from February to April and hundreds of toads can be killed over the period of a few nights. Some national surveys indicate that 10 per cent of the adult population of toads is lost each year from road casualties.

Last year PW&HG notified East Sussex County Council of the mass mortality of toads crossing roads at some places in Plumpton. In response, the Highways Agency placed toad warning signs at peak crossing sites in Hundred Acre Lane, South Road and Plumpton Lane. The signs are supposed to be closed outside the migration season and it is our responsibility to open them when appropriate (you may have noticed that one of them, in Plumpton Lane, is damaged and we cannot close it). We will make sure that the signs are open as soon as the weather is suitable for toads to move. Please take special care when driving on mild damp nights during these periods, to help reduce the mortality as much as possible and ensure that toads don't disappear completely from our parish.

Woodland surveys

We are seeking to continue to update the surveys on 19 Plumpton woodlands carried out for Natural England in 1986. So far we have surveyed five of them so there is still plenty of work to be done. If you are interested in joining us (absolute beginners welcome) please contact us (see below).

Hare sightings

The land that now forms Plumpton Racecourse was used for hare coursing meetings between 1876 and 1883 – it was the idea of Thomas Case, who farmed the land at the time. He fenced three fields and introduced stocks of hares to be chased by greyhounds. It was a much more formal set-up than that followed by hundreds of other coursing clubs around the country. The reputation of Thomas Case and his enclosed coursing experiment spread far and wide. As a result there is a Plumpton in Maryland, USA, and another in the suburbs of Sydney, Australia. Although hare coursing is now illegal, the Sussex Police say that it does still go on in this area and should be reported.

While coursing must have resulted in massive reductions in hare numbers, changes in farming practice and land management have made the English landscape much less favourable for hares in many places and numbers continue to decline. In Plumpton, however, there are still places suitable for hares – including large areas of pasture that provide daytime cover and night-time grazing. We would like to discover more about Plumpton's hares. If you see any (and you are more likely to do this near dawn or dusk), please let Tony Hutson know (hutson.t@btinternet.com), giving the number of animals, time of day, date and location.

House martin survey

A national house martin survey this year is being organised by the British Trust for Ornithology and will involve volunteers checking a sample of one kilometre squares for the nests. We may not fit into this survey but we thought it would be a good opportunity to reassess the status of house martin in Plumpton. We'll say more about this later in the spring when the birds start arriving. The national survey will be followed up next year by volunteers submitting simple observations from individual nest sites.

Dormice

We will be continuing our dormouse survey this year, placing the nest tubes at two or three sites, which may include sites just over the parish boundaries in Streat and East Chiltington.

Forthcoming events

If you want to join in any of these activities, please let us know via the contact button on our website: plumptonwildlifegroup.weebly.com. The group is also organising other events this spring and summer, including: a 'dawn chorus and sausage-sizzle', floral rambles and our ever-popular (if not always successful) nightingale walk. Keep checking the website and parish noticeboards for details.

Jacqui and Tony Hutson