

Short-haired Bumblebee



Our AGM guest speaker, Dr Nikki Gammans from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BCT), began by explaining that bumblebees and solitary bees are more important pollinators of crop plants and wild flowers than their better-known cousin, the honey bee. 24 different bumblebee species are found in the UK, 18 of them are social species that build nests, collect pollen and have workers, males and a queen. The other six are 'cuckoo' bumblebees that take over the nests of other bumblebee species, and don't have workers.

The Short-haired bumblebee used to be widespread in southern England but went extinct in the late 1980s, due to the loss of species-rich grassland habitat. BCT is working to re-introduce the species. Queen bumblebees were collected in southern Sweden, where there are large, healthy populations of the Short-haired bumblebee, and released in the Dungeness area. Short-haired bumblebees are now being monitored in the hope that a self-sustaining population will be established. Any re-introduction project needs to address the reasons why a species went extinct in the first place, so BCT is also working with landowners, farmers and volunteers to create, and improve the management of, wildflower-rich grassland habitat in the release area.

<https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/>

Chairman's report

Our Chair, Jacqui Hutson, presented a summary of PECWG activities in 2017:

Several residents participated in the RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch at the end of January and shared their lists. Compared with national averages, our top ten birds included Jackdaw and Collared Dove rather than Great Tit and Starling. The nightingale walk on 28th April was well attended and treated us to a spectacular concert. We continued our badger surveys in the spring and are gradually building up a map of setts in the two parishes. Monitoring tubes for dormice were set up at two sites in East Chiltonton but so far there have been no signs of any dormice. Several residents carried out surveys of house martin nests for the British Trust for Ornithology. It seems clear that most nests had at least two broods this year and some observers recorded a very high level of activity around the nests shortly before the main departure in the first half of September.

We set up moth traps in May, July and September at three different sites in the two parishes. Records have been sent to the Sussex Moth Group. Responding to a suggestion from one of our members we arranged a foraging trip on 27 May, in the course of which many leaves were tasted, not all of which were liked. Several members and friends came to a bird-ringing demonstration at Whitbread Hollow on the downs west of Eastbourne followed by a coastal walk.

The National Plant Monitoring Scheme, coordinated by a number of national organizations, allocated us a 1-km square centred on the Plumpton College Estate. We selected 5 permanent plots within the square, choosing two hedgerows, a roadside verge, a woodland plot and a chalk grassland plot, and recorded the presence and abundance of plant species, once in late Spring/early summer and again in late summer. The most interesting proved to be the downland plot, which had orchids, harebells and other nice plants. College staff and a student helped with recording.

Following the botanical survey of the three churchyards in 2016 we are producing a poster illustrating the wild flowers and explaining the importance of maintaining these important fragments of meadows. We actively manage the churchyard in East Chiltington to increase its biodiversity. We also continue to survey other local churchyards for the Sussex Botanical Recording Society's project and have contributed to *The Flora of Sussex*, which is due to be published in February 2018.

The wildflower verges at the station looked good but need regular management and we have to rely on Southern Rail to cut at appropriate times. This doesn't always fit in with the weather or their contractors' schedules, so sometimes the cut is later than we would wish. We are grateful for the help of volunteers who come and help rake up the cuttings and pile them on the compost heap.

PECWG liaised with Plumpton Parish Council and had input into the environmental sections of the Neighbourhood Plan. We formed links with Plumpton College and are represented on its new Environmental Steering Committee. We were also represented at the Tree Council's South East Tree Wardens Regional Forum.

As well as these monthly contributions to the parish magazine, we also maintain a group website <https://plumptonwildlifegroup.weebly.com/> and Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1982455645313896/>.

Election of officers and committee members

Jacqui Hutson, Simon Harding, Kate Gold and Lynn Baxter were re-elected as Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer respectively. Denise Hall, Tony Hutson, Ben Drummond, and James Otway were re-elected to the committee, and will be joined by David Phillips. Jacqui thanked Catherine Jackson, who has stepped down after many years service.

The Big Garden Birdwatch, 2018

The Big Garden Birdwatch takes place between Friday 26th – Sunday 28th January. Spend an hour watching the birds in your garden and report to the RSPB the maximum number of each species that you see at any one time. Please also send your records to Tony Hutson (01273 890341, hutson.t@btinternet.com) so that we can continue to build up a picture of our local garden birds.

www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/