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Issue: 123, Spring 2012

# THE SELBORNE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES.

"All nature is but art, unknown to thee;  
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see"

*Alexander Pope, 'Essay on Man'*

I have a photo taken one Open Day in the Wood, just where the path divides to take you on a journey of discovery. In my photo are two people - a father and his young son - going on a wander through the bluebells. A magical moment - the narrow path and the way bluebells stretch away under the trees. Sunlight glances across trunks and branches. The leaf litter is deep and full of life within the wood. Turn over any log and see woodlice, beetles, maybe a newt or two. No harm done as long as you replace as you find.

Wherever you wander, you can learn something of the plants, always remembering that flowers do not always appear at all times in the same place. Some blossom in one month, others earlier or later, so that more than one walk should be made over the same ground. The network of paths in our wood are a fascination for young and old alike with the added attraction of the open meadows and the more intimate habitat of the pond field - a warm

and sheltered spot. The high path near the mound gives wonderful views over the canal towards the heights of Horsenden Hill.

I hope all our members continue to enjoy those magical moments when nature gives up something to us that makes us realise that we want to continue to value places such as Perivale Wood. I look forward to meeting as many of you as can make it to our 2012 Open Day on the last Sunday in April.

*Tom Berry, Chairman*

We would like to draw your attention once again to the benefits to the Society and the planet that would be obtained if we could use fewer paper-based communications and more went by electronic means. To this end, the Society would like to modernise its membership list to include email addresses and it would be a great help to us if members would visit <http://tinyurl.com/ssmemberships> and fill in our form, so that we can update your membership information. It would be very much appreciated!

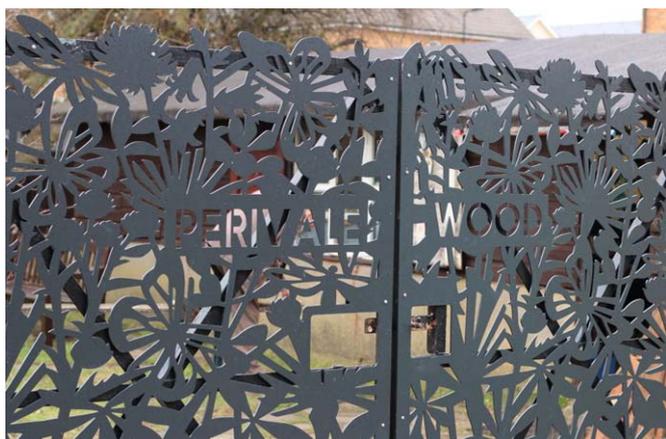
## WEATHER NEWS

Richard Dee has written with news of the PWN weather station. Looking back over 2011, he says:

"The coldest temperature was recorded on the morning of the 8th of March, -5.9C. The warmest was recorded in the early afternoon of the 27th of June, of 34.2C.

2012 so far, February has had the warmest and coldest days. -11.4C on the morning of the 11th for the coldest, followed by a balmy 14.2C on the 17th."

Thanks, Richard. Your efforts are appreciated.



# NOTES AND LETTERS

## RESERVE KEYS

Did you know that Society members may borrow a key to the gate of the Reserve from Perivale Library by leaving their membership card with its staff? You should note, however, that the Library has restricted opening hours (and days), as detailed on the Ealing Council [website](#), and that the Library Support Centre in the Sports Ground south of the Underground station no longer holds spare keys.

Security of access to the Reserve is very important, and we would ask you all, when visiting Perivale Wood, to lock the gates after entering, as well as when you leave. Borrowed keys should be returned promptly to the Library upon leaving the Reserve so that other members are not inconvenienced.

**Recently, there have been very regrettable instances where key holders have entered or exited from the Reserve via the Canal Gate without re-securing the padlock.** This potentially places all the good work of the Society and of its conservation volunteers in jeopardy. Please ensure that you have checked the padlocks immediately after entry or exit.

Finally, just a reminder that the area around the Reserve is a Controlled Parking Zone from Monday to Friday. To avoid a hefty fine, only park there during the allowed hours.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

Annual subscribers are reminded that your subscriptions were due on 2<sup>nd</sup> January. Rates remain unchanged:

Adult subscription	£4 (minimum)
Couple at same address	£6 ( <i>ditto</i> )
Juniors	£1

Make out cheques to “Selborne Society” and send them to the Membership Secretary at:

89 Daryngton Drive, Greenford, Middlesex UB6 8BH.

Please include a SAE if you would like your membership card to be sent to you directly. Otherwise, it will be enclosed with your copy of the next newsletter.

## COLOURING BOOK

**It's our latest publication. It's great. All profit from sales goes towards the Society's campaigning work in nature conservancy. Order yours today!**

Local artist, Judith Gordon, has produced a collection of sixteen pen and ink drawings of the Reserve. The book has been created with the aim of giving you high quality outline drawings which you can, if you wish, colour with pens or pencils. Each picture is printed on A4 premium quality bond paper and is an ideal size for framing. Display copies are available to view in the Hut.

The book is available for just £5 per copy, plus £3 post and packaging (NB: up to 3 copies can be despatched together for just the one P&P fee). You can obtain yours by sending a cheque to “The Selborne Society Ltd.” for £8 to:

The Editor, Selborne Society Newsletter,  
3 Lindfield Road, London W5 1QS

It will also be on sale at the Open Day in April.

### TOOL MAINTENANCE - CAN YOU HELP?

The Society has a wide variety of tools that are used in managing the Reserve. Unfortunately, they are often not in the best of condition! For instance, I recently replaced 2 saw blades, oiled and re-sharpened 7 loppers, re-bolted or re-tightened 5 loppers (3 had been out of service for at least two years), sharpened a very blunt slasher and a pair of hedging shears. I am no expert at tool maintenance but all of the above now work a lot better.

What we need is one or two more able members, willing and able to look after our tools (and discipline those who abuse them). If you feel that this may be something you can tackle, then contact me on 07771 546 166.

*Peter Edwards*

### OUR THANKS...

... go to Benchmark Scaffolding Ltd for their generous support of the Society's work.

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# HS2 AND PERIVALE WOOD

Members will have seen, in the press, announcements that a new, high-speed rail service is proposed, from London (Euston) to Birmingham, and eventually further north.

The proposed route is along the South boundary of the Perivale Wood Local Nature Reserve. The proposal predicts that there will be up to 14 trains per hour, running at, perhaps, 200 miles an hour.

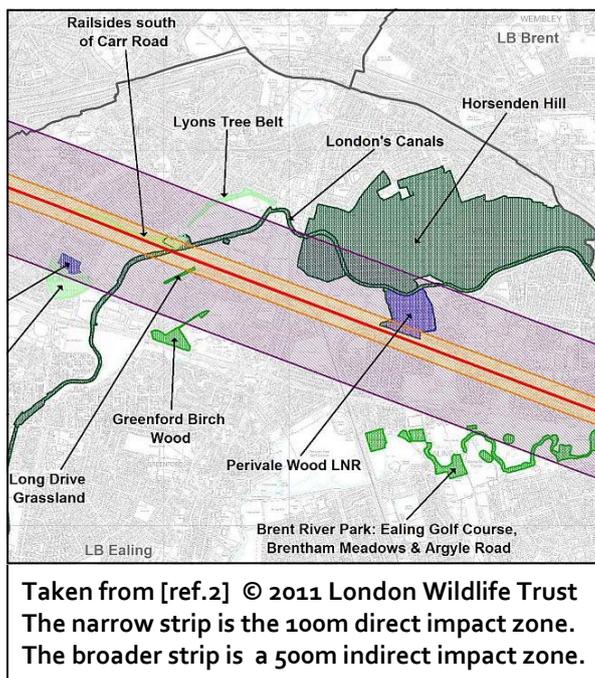
There are arguments for and against High Speed Rail and for and against this particular route.

The consultation exercise finished in July, and Nic Ferriday submitted a response<sup>1</sup> on behalf of the Society. The Society is not, per se, against High Speed Rail. We find ourselves in a difficult position since, as a conservation body, we recognise the benefits of rail transport against, for instance, air and car use, both of which have a larger carbon footprint. But there are many issues, including whether High Speed Rail is the best way forwards – it will be extremely expensive, the rolling stock is incompatible with existing track – so while it will enable fast travel to Birmingham, you are likely to need to change to complete your journey. Perhaps an alternative – less expensive, quicker to implement and giving many, but different, benefits – would be to upgrade existing routes and Services.

The detailed implications for the Reserve are unknown, although there was a consultation exercise at the Greenford Hall in May 2011. Noise simulations presented there suggested that, although the noise would not be much different from the existing tube and metropolitan line services, the frequency would be considerably greater. The proposals were far from fully developed and there were many unanswered questions. However, it is not likely that the overall impact on the Reserve will be positive. We will lose the “green corridor” in the form of the railway embankment, which at the moment is very overgrown, wild, unkempt and, to some extent, an extension of the Reserve itself. There will be noise and disturbance; there is the possibility of some “land grab” either during the construction phase, or longer term. The Little Elms Meadow, bordering the embankment, is “unimproved neutral grassland”,

delicate and irreplaceable. The London Wildlife Trust have done a review, “High Speed 2: Ecological Impact Review”<sup>2</sup> which looks at the environmental impacts both for Perivale Wood LNR and more widely.

Of course, the Reserve exists in suburbia and is surrounded by neighbours – housing to the South and East, the existing railway to the South, the Post Office Mail Centre to the West, and the Canal to the North. It is not an island, and can not expect to be set in aspic for ever and a day. It is a dynamic place that responds to the changes and challenges that go on – whether its climate, new species, or changes to infrastructure. But as a Local Nature Reserve it deserves and ought to be protected as far as possible, and it is likely that the damage and disturbance that will be done by HS2 will be very considerable, if it progresses as currently proposed. Along the route, a number of other ancient woodlands and other sites of importance will also be affected – their importance and the harm that will inevitably be done does not seem to have influenced the route at all.



We are told that there is still the prospect for changes to the route ... thanks to a vigorous campaign during the “consultation” phase, the route has been changed in Ruislip, where it will now be tunnelled. Residents in the Northolt, Greenford and Perivale areas are now campaigning either for the route to be changed or, at the very least, tunnelled through the area. A tunnel is likely to minimise any effect on the Reserve, although it would still need to be dug, so there may be noise and disturbance etc. whilst the work is in progress.

The national opposition campaign has a website, [StopHS2.org](http://StopHS2.org) and, locally, there's a vibrant [Twitter campaign](#). You can also find more information on the official [HS2 website](#).

The Society's position is that we will oppose the present route, at least until the environmental impacts are known, and we'd encourage members to take part in the campaign opposing it.

**Andy Pedley**

- References: 1. <http://tinyurl.com/sshs2cr>  
2. <http://tinyurl.com/sshs2lwt>

## A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

In August, an email arrived – it was from the Manager of the Ilfracombe Museum – and advised us that:

“we were left a box of printing blocks once used to produce the Selborne Magazine. They depict various events and scenes from Selborne as well as the church, and seem to date from the mid-20th century to the late 1970s. They are not relevant to our collection here so we wondered if your organisation might have a use for them?”

I believe we were given them via a Mr Bartlett who used to edit the Magazine and then retired to this area.”

The “Mr Bartlett” will have been Tom Bartlett, who was our magazine editor in the 1950s, and we are still in touch with his family. We requested the plates be sent, agreeing to pay the postage; the Museum kindly packed them up and sent them on.

In addition to about 50 “printers plates” was a copy of the “Selborne – A Gilbert White Centenary Booklet to illustrate the aims and work of the Selborne Society” - an A5 sized booklet printed on glossy paper, and full of monochrome illustrations.

Printers plates were used in the printing of images – and in the 1950s printing would have been a far more laborious, skilful, and messy occupation than it is today! With the help of friend and retired printer, Johnnie Johnson, I found out more ... the plates are variously of zinc or copper, and have reverse images etched into them.

Johnnie told me that to make the plates, a photo would be taken with a (film) camera. The selected photo would have been printed onto the copper plate, which was covered with a light sensitive emulsion; acid was then used to etch the copper, and form the plate.

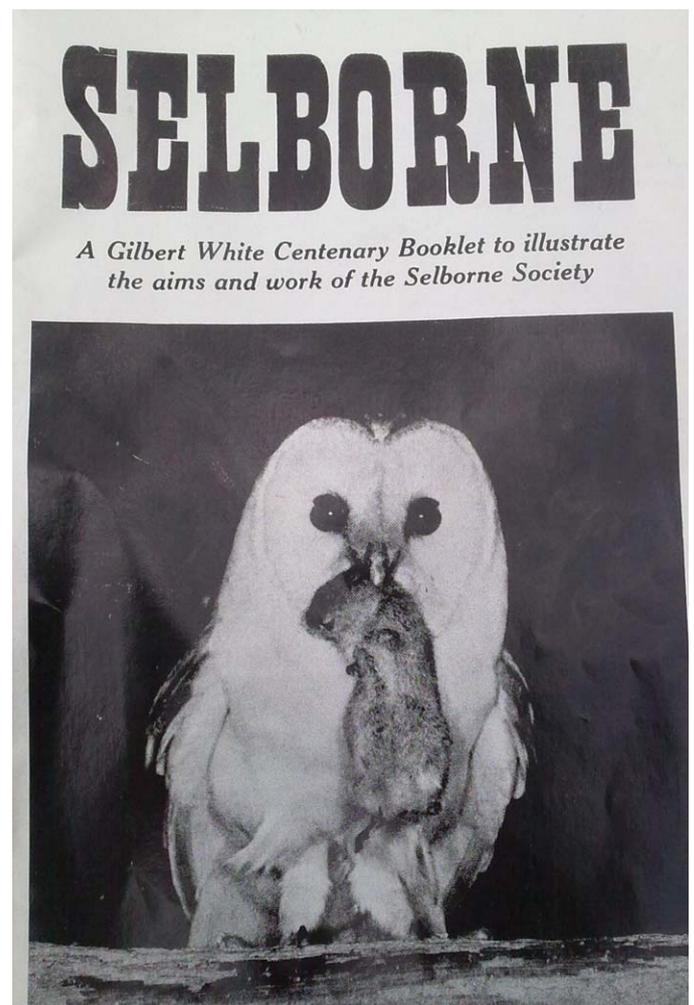
The plate would then be mounted very carefully in the press, taking great care that it was the same height as the adjoining type and other work. – these would have been carefully and skilfully mounted into the press, with individual letters of type, which were cast in “white metal” to form the text; this would have been done by hand, and the

text of course had to be done right to left, so when printed it came up the right way round.

The Magazine is 8 pages and, in all probability, all pages were set up side by side, and a single, large sheet of paper used to print all the pages at the same time; once they were all printed on one side, the reverse would have been set up and the backs would have been printed; great care would have been needed to ensure they were aligned correctly. The press would have had a system of rollers to apply, and even the ink. Once the large sheets had been printed on both sides, then the pages would have been cut, collated, stapled (stitched), folded, and finally guillotined to the finished size.

So the email led to a voyage of discovery – of the history of printing, and a little of the history of our Society. If you'd like to see the magazine, you can download a scanned copy of it, as a PDF from the Society's website.

Andy Pedley



# WINTER SUSTENANCE

## BIRDS NEED ACCURATE 24-HOUR PLANNING TO SURVIVE A WINTER DAY

I feel sure there are many members that take part in the excellent and important Garden Bird Watch week on week, year after year. This is organised and scientifically analysed by The British Trust for Ornithology, an excellent and very effective charity that carries out much long term bird research, largely utilising consistent recording by committed amateurs, 'citizen science at its best' as Chris Packham would put it.

There follows an extract \* from what I feel is a very interesting short article by Graham Appleton on bird migration, energy balance, and the value of sunflower seed.

Britain is a really interesting place to study migratory behaviour, as we provide both summer breeding sites and relatively frost-free wintering areas. In similar latitudes in Europe and North America, migration is largely a one-way process with birds arriving from the south each spring and departing in autumn. Here, there are birds on the move in every month of the year and there are probably as many birds moving east-west as there are moving north-south. It's a unique situation, providing us with an insight into the range of options that birds use to survive - whether they leave to find insects in Africa, move on as the ground freezes or adopt a variety of fattening and roosting behaviours, just to get through the winter.

One of the great things about working for the BTO is that I am always learning. A visiting physiologist opened my eyes when we were talking about new bird foods. He explained that, as a bird stops standing and starts flying, there is an almost instantaneous need to use eight times as much oxygen, just because flying is such an energetic process. With that fact in mind, the daily pattern for birds in the wintertime becomes easier to understand. Not only does each individual need to minimise the energy that is burned over-night, it also needs to conserve energy during the short winter day, especially by not flying more than is necessary. The House Sparrow, for instance, is one of the species least well adapted to migration and most sedentary; flocks feed in frenzied bursts and then fly short distances into the cover of bushes,

where food is digested and energy use is minimised.

Many BTO Garden Birdwatchers will have spotted that, at this time of year, feeders are busiest in the early morning and in the late afternoon, with a brief lunch-time rush too. These periods of activity give clues to the fact that surviving from one day to the next is very much something that needs 24 hour planning. As has been shown for Great tits †, birds cannot carry too much extra fat or they become more prone to predation. They are using time, temperature and food-availability clues to decide when to feed, with one of the key periods being just before they go off to roost, putting on enough fat to cope with a 10% or even 15% drop in weight overnight.

For humans, fat is a long-term reserve and it seems strange to us that birds can put on the equivalent of a stone or more each short, wintry day and then burn it off again before morning. Birds store fats as an energy source for over-night metabolism, with oil-rich food, such as sunflower seed, being more efficiently changed into these fats than carbohydrates, such as bread. In humans a lot of our fat synthesis takes place in the adipose tissue (a type of connective tissue) but in birds the liver is the principal site for this operation. Fats are created much more efficiently in the liver and a lot of fat is stored nearby and around other organs, making it readily available for conversion into the heat energy the bird needs overnight.

*Peter Edwards*

\*Material from Bird Table Issue 68 (Winter 2011), the magazine for Garden Bird Watchers. Members of The Selborne Society can request a free copy of the magazine from:

**GBW, The Nunnery, Thetford, Norfolk, IP24 2PU**

or by emailing [gbw@bto.org](mailto:gbw@bto.org)

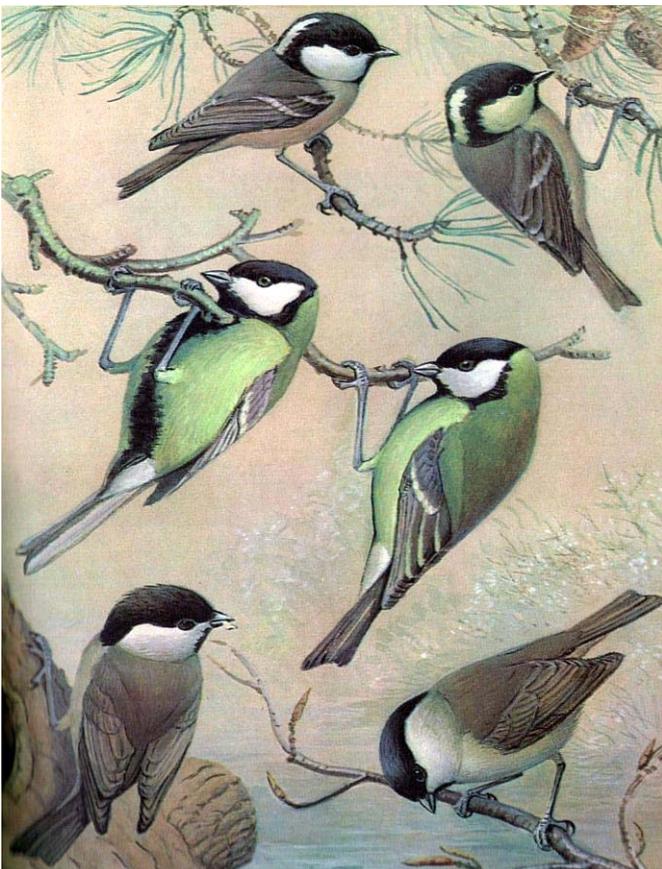
†Andrew Gosler, who was a junior member of The Selborne Society in the 60's, and a great researcher into local birds even then, did masses of Great tit research during his long (and continuing) employment at The Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology in Oxford. Look out his famous paperback, aptly named *The Great Tit*.

## A LONG AND VARIED STREAM

In Winter, most of us will have encountered many small birds of several species associating, seemingly co-operatively, in narrow bands working along hedgerows, scrub and through woodlands. On 16th December in the winter before this, Perivale Wood was cold, very breezy and very wet at 10:40. Heavy rain had just ceased.

As I walked up the Main Path, it seemed the Wood was devoid of animal life, but soon I was privileged to see a group of many small birds, moving slowly but urgently from West to East. Most of the calls were from goldcrests and long-tailed tits but, on stopping, I was able to observe in just five minutes the following birds moving through, at one to four metres up.

As ever, my field notebook and pencil were to hand and I was able to reckon up the following: blue tit 26, great tit 8, coal tit 2, long-tailed tit 14 and goldcrest 15. All appeared to be feeding on food items locally on the oak, hazel, hawthorn and holly twigs (and leaves of the latter).



Unfortunately, I had to leave this lively spectacle while small birds in this extended group continued

to cross the Main Path. If I had had the time, I would not have been surprised to find there were hundreds of individual birds.

Further on in the Wood, and over a period of thirty minutes, I encountered only two great tits and a single robin. It reminded me of a common experience in tropical rain forests where, sitting patiently and still, hours go by with only a few birds seen or heard, and then a foraging group of hundreds of birds of ten or more species move through within a few minutes.

*Peter Edwards*

## A NATURAL HISTORY EDUCATION

I recently stumbled upon the writings of a Victorian lady named Charlotte Mason who, from her home in Ambleside, built a worldwide reputation as an innovative thinker in the field of education. Her work can be found, amongst other places, on an American website for home educators called [AmblesideOnline](http://AmblesideOnline). I was fascinated to read her views on how parents should develop their children's interests in the natural world and I have reproduced some extracts below.

*"Field Flowers and the Life-History of Plants."*

Milkwort, eyebright, rest-harrow, lady's-bedstraw, willow-herb, every wild flower that grows in their neighbourhood, they should know quite well; should be able to describe the leaf--its shape, size, growing from the root or from the stem; the manner of flowering - a head of flowers, a single flower, a spike, etc. And, having made the acquaintance of a wild flower, so that they can never forget it or mistake it, they should examine the spot where they find it, so that they will know for the future in what sort of ground to look for such and such a flower. 'We should find wild thyme here!' 'Oh, this is the very spot for marsh marigolds; we must come here in the spring.'

*"Living Creatures"*

Then, there are the bees. Some of us may have heard the late Dean Farrar describe that lesson he was present at, on 'How doth the little busy bee' - the teacher bright, but the children not responsive; they took no interest at all in little busy bees. He



Charlotte Mason

suspected the reason, and questioning the class, found that not one of them had ever seen a bee. 'Had never seen a bee! Think for a moment,' said he, 'of how much that implies'; and then we were moved by an eloquent picture of the sad child-life from which bees and birds and flowers are all shut out. But how many children are there who do not live in the slums of London, and yet are unable to distinguish a bee from a wasp, or even a 'humble' from a honey-bee!

*“The Force of Public Opinion in the Home”*

Some children are born naturalists, with a bent inherited, perhaps, from an unknown ancestor; but every child has a natural interest in the living things about him which it is the business of his parents to encourage; for, but few children are equal to holding their own in the face of public opinion; and if they see that the things which interest them are indifferent or disgusting to you, their pleasure in them vanishes, and that chapter in the book of Nature is closed to them.

It is likely that *The Natural History of Selborne* would never have been written had it not been that the naturalist's father used to take his boys on daily foraging expeditions, when not a moving or growing thing, not a pebble nor a boulder within miles of Selborne, escaped their eager examination.

Charlotte Mason's works can be read online at:

<http://amblesideonline.org/CM/toc.html>

John Kane

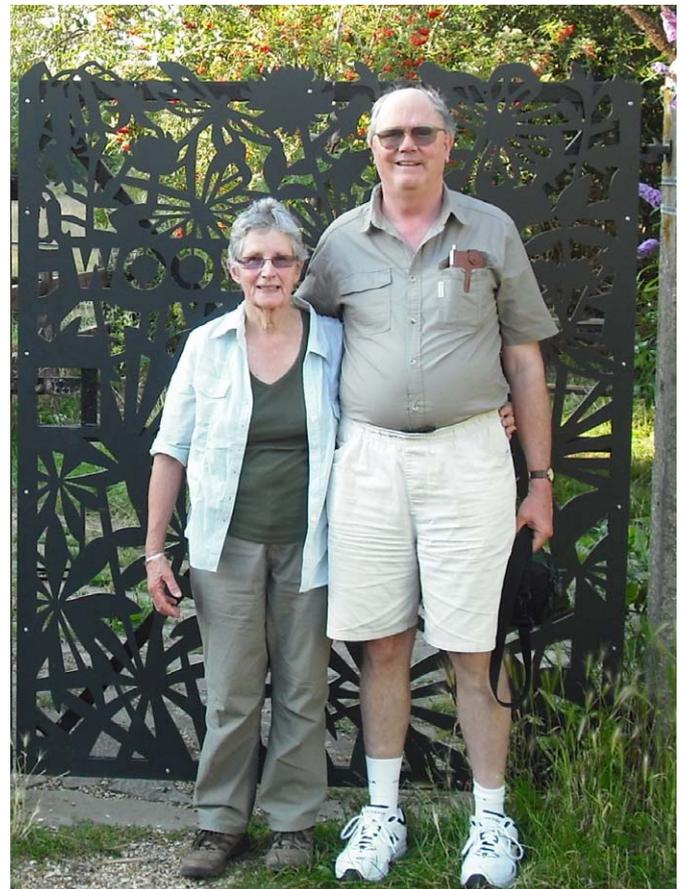
## VISITORS FROM NEW ZEALAND

During August, Perivale Wood was visited by Professor Vincent Neil of New Zealand's Massey University and his wife, artist Annabel Neil. They had travelled through Europe on a geological field trip and, before returning to New Zealand, made a detour to London just to see the reserve.

They spent an enjoyable summer's evening being escorted through the reserve by our resident New Zealander Charles Hurford. Professor Neil was very interested to see the bees' nest, the ant mounds in Little Elms Meadow and the geological feature of Horsenden Hill. They both enjoyed the spectacle of the crows and the wood pigeons coming into roost at dusk. They were very impressed with the quietness of the reserve and never expected to visit a place so close and accessible to the hustle and bustle of London.

After their visit, they were most enthusiastic to become members and are now the newest and most far flung supporters of the Selborne Society. A trip to the Reserve will definitely be on the list of things to do during their next visit to the UK.

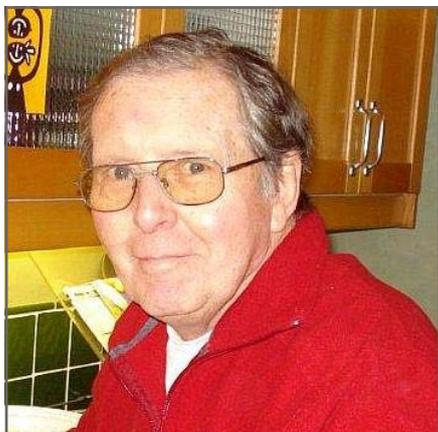
Charles Hurford



# HENRY HUBBLE

## AN APPRECIATION

After 35 years as a Council member of the Selborne Society, including spells as chairman and vice-chairman, Henry Hubble has now retired to Devon.



He joined the Society in 1975 and soon became a founder member of the Activities Committee. Originally, this arranged regular meetings and outings for the Junior Section.

Very soon, the committee was organising monthly field meetings for both adults and juniors, as well as evening slide talks and coach outings.

Henry and his wife, Peggy, organised the food and wine for the very popular Society Socials every January for about 10 years and Midsummer parties for many of those. The entertainments at these events were organised mainly by Roy Hall. Unfortunately, Peggy suffered a stroke in 1986 and, as no one was willing to take over her catering responsibilities, the socials ceased. Henry and Peggy continued to work on the Activities Committee, Peggy until her death in 2000 and Henry until he resigned last November.

Henry is a gifted artist and designed the posters for Open Days and for many of our indoor meetings. In 1985, our centenary year, he designed a special frank for the Post Office's first day cover of the insect stamps. He is also a talented photographer and has taken many excellent photographs of the Wood, and passed on his skills to other members at photographic field meetings. He is a good craftsman and used to create many novelties for sale on Open Days. His hobby these days is making model boats which he used to sail on the pond at Black Park. He was also a member of the Old Warden Model Flying Club and enjoyed flying model aircraft at their centre.

We would like to thank Henry for the many things he did for the Society and hope that he will be very happy in his new home. We will miss you, Henry!

*Rae Hall*

## EDITOR'S BIT

In the list of seasonal highlights at Perivale Wood, there are few more cheerful than the sight of the table in the Hut on Open Day, laden with the fruits of Autumn's industry in the shape of those pots of jam, honey and marmalade, which together help raise a sizeable percentage of our annual income.

As ever, thanks go to Rae Hall and her team of helpers and contributors. We look forward to the Sugar Rush that awaits us and for those of you who have difficulty with delayed gratification, here's a little foretaste of the delights that await you.



I hope to see many of you on Open Day and you can let me know if you have any thoughts on improving the Newsletter. Meanwhile, don't forget:

NEXT COPY DATE: Mid-May 2012 or sooner.

Best wishes,

*John Kane*

### **The Selborne Society Newsletter**

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