

MARCHAM SOCIETY LECTURE REPORT

Our speaker this month was Catherine Shellswell on the subject of Water Vole Conservation. Catherine started her talk by reminding us that the water vole is the original for ‘Ratty’ a character in the children’s novel *The Wind in The Willows*.



To differentiate the water vole from the brown rat, with which it is often confused, we were given simple signs to look for. The water vole is plump with a hairy tail, and swims on top of the water, as its fur is very water resistant. The brown rat however swims much lower in the water only showing its head, is much slimmer and has no hair on its tail.

The average life span of a water vole in the wild is only about 7 months. The female is solitary, burrowing holes into river banks making some for nurseries and more at different levels to hide from predators. She can have 2-5 litters a year, each containing 5-8 young. Water voles are vegetarian and need a variety of plants to eat; in winter they even strip bark from willows. They need fairly tall and thick vegetation to hide them from predators like mink and birds such as owls and kestrels.

Various surveys made since 1989 have shown a decline in their populations over the country as a whole. This is thought to be partly due to the intensification of farming in the post war years with destruction of habitat and breaking down of river banks by cattle so there is no steep bank for them to burrow in.

Local recovery projects involving local wild-life trusts involve the management of habitat, and in the case of potential building developments near recognised colonies, informing the local authorities so that appropriate action can be taken. The control and elimination of any mink in the area is also important, as mink can attack voles and as they are small enough to enter the vole’s burrows, they have nowhere to hide.

Other projects involve the re-profiling of river banks so they are steeper and even creating special ditches and ponds and replanting appropriate plants on the banks. Much of this work is accomplished with the efforts of volunteers who are made very welcome by the trusts. There are several colonies in and around this area but they fluctuate from year to year.

ROSEMARY STONE

MARCHAM SOCIETY WALK

Midweek Walk on Thursday 9th February

We will meet at the Jolly Boatman at Thrupp (Map Ref SP480155) for lunch at 12.30. The walk is between 3 and 4 miles and is likely to be rather muddy from first observations. As always, new walkers are very welcome. Members free, non-members £1. Please let Malvin Drakley on 01235 529624 know who will be coming. Please could people arrange their own transport this month. Hopefully, normal service will resume next month!

MARCHAM PLAYERS PRESENTS...

their Annual General Meeting in the Church on Friday 17th February at 7.30pm. Refreshments provided. *If you would like to join Marcham Players please ring Joey Maclean 391242* The Marcham Players web-site is now available online



www.marchamplayers.co.uk

MARCHAM CRICKET CLUB

In preparation for forthcoming fixtures, Nets will be held every Friday evening (6.30 to 8.30) in the Sports Hall at John Mason School. For further details relating to the Club, particularly information regarding Nets or playing for Marcham, please contact Terry Whittaker (391317) or Graham Hill (391415).



Also, please let Terry or Graham know if you are interested in umpiring on behalf of Marcham CC.; umpires receive a fee for each O.C.A. match at which they officiate and are provided with refreshments.

The Club’s A.G.M. this year is set to be held on 17th February in the Pavilion (8.30pm).

CLIVE BENNETT

ON THE BUSES

Getting home by bus from Oxford in the evenings can involve a long wait. We use the public car park in Northcourt Road next to Abingdon United’s ground and get Oxford Bus X3 from Boundary House. Every ten minutes (twenty after 1900) it goes to the City Centre and Rail Station and the last one back is 2358 from St Aldates (2318 on Sunday). Nice buses too - Oxford Bus uses mercedes Citaros on the X3.



BUS SPOTTER

NATURE WATCH


It’s good to hear the birds singing energetically on the warmer January days. Already pairing up, especially blackbirds. There have been the usual fisticuffs (or footicuffs) between starlings who descend within seconds despite none being in sight when scraps are put out.



More delightful to watch, a pair of long-tailed tits on the home-made fat balls (recipe in December MADNews) and a great-spotted woodpecker on a neighbour’s bird table.

No sign of our friendly pheasant or replacement heron. But pair of buzzards seen several times at junction of A415, Barrow Road to airfield perched on telephone wires.

What was it? Last autumn, up in the willows, a very cross chuntering sound rather similar to a muted version of a mallard duck alarm call. Some feet below, a handsome tabby watched transfixed. *Answer on page 15.*

 <p>The Marcham Society</p>	<p>Elizabeth Whitehouse will be revealing the history of The Morlands of old Berkshire.</p>
<p>All Saints’ Church Tuesday 14th February 2006, 7.45pm</p>	<p>Non-members £1 www.marchamsociety.org.uk Further details: Janey Cumber (391327) or Judith Fontaine (391275)</p>