

NATURAL HISTORY SECTION

LAST year's winter programme consisted of five indoor meetings:

15th November, 1969. An illustrated talk on "Looking at Weather from Space" given by Wing Commander E. S. Gates.

6th December. Mrs. E. H. Cunningham of the Hertfordshire Natural History Society gave a talk on badgers and foxes, illustrated by slides and stories of her own two pet badgers.

17th January 1970. Mr. A. Woodward showed another of his films taken locally during the year. This one was mainly about moths and butterflies.

21st February. An illustrated talk on "Orchids of Britain and Europe" was given by Mr. V. J. Scott.

21st March. Dr. M. C. C. Lobban spoke of her experiences on the Galapagos Islands when she was carrying out research work. Her talk was illustrated with photographs of the animals she had seen on the islands.

The summer programme consisted of six outings and a weekend course at Missenden Abbey:

18th April. A visit was made to Boarstall Duck Decoy, a conservation centre of the Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland. The Warden very kindly conducted the tour and explained the principle of how, during the winter, the duck are decoyed into the pipes so that they can be caught, ringed and then released. A few of the duck are kept for breeding. The Decoy is used entirely for research purposes.

10th May. It was a wet day for the walk through woodland slopes and the Icknield Way near Kingston Blount. The only plants seen were the Corn Buttercup (*Ranunculus arvensis*) now a scarce weed of cornfields, Cowslips (*Primula veris*), primroses (*Primula vulgaris*) and the fungus Morel (*Morchella esculenta*) which was growing plentifully. A particularly large badger set, obviously in use, was found in the woods.

6th June. The walk through Doddershall and Grendon Woods was on one of the hottest days of the summer. An interesting find was a pupa of the rare butterfly, the Black Hairstreak.

12th-14th June. The title of the weekend course at Missenden Abbey was "The Natural History of Ponds and Streams", and it proved a great attraction. Accommodation was booked up long before the date and day attendance was very good too. The course covered talks on "How to investigate the history of ponds", "The background to conditions in ponds and their influence on the life and distribution of the animals and plants", "Aquatic flora" and "The cause and effects of pollution in ponds and streams". Speakers were Mr. Oliver Rackman, Mr. John Clegg, Mr. Victor Scott and Mr. J. F. de L. G. Solbe. There was also a field outing to a local pond.

12th July. A joint outing, arranged by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists' Trust, was a canal cruise through the fields of Milton Keynes in one of the narrow boats. The journey was made from Three Locks, Soulbury to Great Linford, and took five and a half hours, which included an hour's stop for lunch at Fenny Stratford. Mr. Berrett, the Milton Keynes Corporation's executive architect, gave a commentary on how the new city will be developed and where open spaces will remain. Mr. Victor Scott gave a commentary on the plants to be seen on the canal banks and in the water. Among species noted were Arrowhead (*Sagittaria sagittifolia*) in great abundance and Flowering Rush (*Butomus umbellatus*).

16th August. Sladmore Farm was visited at the kind invitation of Mr. Horswell.

A member of the staff conducted the party round the large collection of live birds which consisted of birds of prey, flamingos, duck species, humming birds, etcetera. This was followed by a walk in Clappins Plantation at Northdean to look for Common Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*) and the Chiltern Gentian (*Gentianella germanica*) which was in bud.

26th September. The last outing of the year was a fungus foray in the woods around Longdown Hill. Although the weather had been dry twenty-eight species were found including the Death Cap (*Amanita phalloides*), Verdigris Agaric (*Stropharia aeruginosa*) and the Magpie (*Coprinus picaceus*).

Following his investigation of hedgerows Dr. Max Hooper, of Monks Wood Experimental Station at Abbots Ripton, has come forward with a tentative theory that the age of a hedge can be judged by the average number of species of trees and shrubs to be found in thirty yard sections of the hedge. In general a hedge one hundred years old has only one or two species in it, a hedge two hundred years old has two or three species and so on.

During the year a number of outings have been made by a small group of Committee members who, with the help of Mr. Arnold Baines, have been making a survey of boundary hedges in the Monks Risborough area.

From a Saxon Charter it is known that the Black Hedge from Risborough Cop to Parslow's Hillock is at least eleven hundred years old. The investigation of this hedge has shown there is approximately an average of twelve species in each thirty yard section which would confirm Dr. Max Hooper's theory. A detailed report of the investigation is in the course of preparation.

J.E.

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