

NATURAL HISTORY SECTION

The Natural History Section has completed another interesting programme of Field Visits and Lectures, the latter being well supported.

14 January: A large audience gathered to enjoy another of Christine & Victor Scott's superb talks – on Canada this time. In June, they visited the National Parks in the Rocky Mountains and the result was a collection of spectacular slides of snow-capped mountains reflected in the lakes, as well as of the unusual flora including the Sparrow's Egg and Yellow Lady's Slipper Orchids, and the exquisite Calypso Orchid. Close-ups of the many animals, including a Bear, added even further interest.

11 February: Bird Watch at College Lake led by Valerie Kempster. It was a day to stay at home and most members did. However, Mallard, Pochard and Teal were sighted but the wind, rain and cold deterred any further viewing.

11 March: Jean Hall gave us a competent and colourful talk on the Scillies, and particularly the famous gardens on 'tresco. Her slides were of a very high standard, and a sizeable audience had a most enjoyable and relaxing afternoon.

8 April: Annual General Meeting, followed by members's slides. Tony Elcoate concentrated on the Flora of Minorca, particularly the Orchids, and in the Salzburg area of Austria. This was followed by a 'quiz' based on flora and butterflies seen on Buckinghamshire Reserves, organized by Tony Colmer.

5 May: Badger Watch with Ralph Woodward on a Friday evening which was pleasantly warm and ideal for watching these wild and secretive animals at very close quarters. After a preliminary talk while the sun was setting, in the calm quiet of the countryside the final chatterings of birds and the cuckoo's last call were heard, and the crescent

moon rose. By 8.20 p.m. the first badgers appeared, a sow and four cubs. Ralph then showed us his superb photographs of badgers and gave another informal chat.

24 June: An evening walk on the BBONT Reserve at Grangelands led by Margaret and Ed. Kendrick proved a great success as members had the thrill of seeing at least five glow-worms. The strange greenish light comes from below the abdomen of the wingless female beetle to attract the males. It takes three years for the life-cycle to be completed and the female can glow only for about ten days until mating takes place. Members also saw five flowering Orchids: Common Spotted, Fragrant, Musk Pyramidal and Twayblade.

8 July: Marion Vere (BTCV) showed us the work of the Chiltern Woodland Management team in Gomm's Wood, off Cock Lane, High Wycombe, on another very hot afternoon. This is a Demonstration Wood run by the British Trust for Conservation Volunteer, Southern Electric, and Wycombe District Council. The Wood once stretched the entire length of Cock Lane but, by 1824, much had been felled, only the central area remaining with its typical ancient woodland plants. Today, there is a wide range of habitats from mature Beech, young mixed woodland, dense scrubland and species-rich chalk grassland. As well as felling to encourage natural regeneration, hedgerows have been rejuvenated and planted and a butterfly ride created.

2 September: Geology visit to Pickeridge Farm Quarry and Northmoor Hill Woods, Denham, led by Kate Hawkins and Dr. Peter Banham. The quarry consists of Eocene clay overlain by sands and gravels. We were told to look out for bivalves, snails and sharks' teeth. In Northmoor Hill Wood, the 50 million year old Reading Beds were viewed, and a swallowhole at the

junction of the chalk and clay. Welsh lava and quartzite were found in the dry stream bed. At the base of the Reading Beds were the typical large flint pebbles on the Cretaceous Tertiary boundary.

16 September: Combining with the Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group & The British Gall Society, members had a stimulating afternoon on Grangelands. This time Maurice Young was showing us plant galls on various host plants: Beech, Sycamore, Maple, Blackthorn, Buckthorn, Wild Rose, Dogwood, Wayfarer & Yew, Nettle, Lady's Bedstraw and Marjoram. The galls are caused by various midges and wasps, and it was particularly interesting to identify the three types of 'Artichoke' gall on *Taxus baccata* and the 'Spiked Pea' gall on the *Rosa canina*.

7 October: The annual Fungus Foray was at Apsley Heath, Bedfordshire, led by Victor Scott. In this area of pines and birches, the species count was not high but vast quantities of Sulphur Tuft (*Hypholoma fasciculare*) and *Mycena leucogala*, *galopus* and a variant *candida*, were particularly spectacular. An unusual sighting was of two members of the *Myxomycetes* group or 'Slime Moulds', one orange and the second lemon yellow (*Fuligo septica*). These strange protoplasm masses have fixed shape but creep slowly about on the surface of rotten wood until they convert into large numbers of spore cases. About 50 genera are found in Britain.

4 November: Mr. Moon from the Buckinghamshire Bird Club showed us fine slides of Birds and Icebergs seen on a cruise to the Falkland Islands and Antarctica in 1992. The seas round the Falklands are rich in fish and support a wide diversity of sea birds including 3 species of Albatross, Antarctic Petrel, Great Shearwater, Rock Shag, Falkland Island Steamer Duck, Antarctic Skua, Crested Duck, Dolphin Gull, 2 species of Goose, Blackish Oyster-catcher, Caracara, and delightful penguins: Magellanic and Rockhopper. We saw slides of Seals and Whales, before viewing some of the birds seen in Antarctica, including 4 types of Petrels, and more penguins: Adélie, Gentie & Chinstrap, all feeding from the krill-rich seas.

2 December: An illustrated talk on Singapore, by Victor Scott: Once again, Victor gave members a most interesting and enjoyable afternoon with his superb colour slides and stimulating introduction and commentary. This time we heard about the Equatorial and Tropical Plants, and some of the Birds, Animals and Insects found on the island of Singapore. The area of Rain Forest is a National Nature Reserve where one hectare contains more plant species than the whole of the British Isles. The first Governor of Singapore, Stanford Raffles, was a keen botanist and, today, the Botanic Gardens contain exotic plants from all over the world.