

Editorial

A. W. McDonald

Ten years on from the first volume of *Fritillary* we are delighted to bring out another edition to celebrate the Millennium.

The Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) continue to complement each other in their provisions for nature conservation. This journal forms part of the educational work of both organisations.

The content of this issue recognises the loss of wildlife as a result of widely publicised changes in land-use during the latter part of the 20th century. Following the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, however, attitudes have begun to change. In 1993 the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food set up the Upper Thames Tributaries Environmentally Sensitive Area. Schemes relating to nature conservation started to benefit from the National Lottery set up by John Major in 1995.

In this volume there are articles on rare and widespread plants, fish, birds and snails. Caroline Jackson-Houlston's extensive survey of the Oxford Ring Road highlights the importance of road verges as a semi-natural habitat colonised by a large number of plant species, as well as small mammals and invertebrates which have not yet been recorded. (Much work on verges has also been done by the Ashmolean Natural History Society's Road Verge Group and the County Ecologist, Craig Blackwell, has created many Road Verge Nature Reserves in Oxfordshire.) Jo Dunn discusses the conservation of wild grape hyacinth (*Muscari neglectum*) in Oxfordshire and Alison McDonald reports on the dandelion workshop and of finding new species and many new county records. It is not just the twentieth century that is important. Ann Cole reflects on the history of place-names derived from wild celery (*Apium graveolens*) and the rescue of the plant by the owner at the site of the former salt spring in an arable field in Marcham. An unexpected event, arising from unusual weather conditions, particularly early summer flooding near Oxford, is described by Darren Bedwell of the Environment Agency. He was called in to rescue fish trapped in residual floodwater on Port Meadow, Oxford. Two papers follow written as a direct response to the fate of wildlife on arable land. Phil Barnett describes changes in bird populations over the 20th century and describes the loss or extinction of several species as farming methods are intensified or the climate changes. Steve Gregory tells us where to find snails and describes their ecology in Oxfordshire. Finally, Susannah Kay concentrates on plants growing in arable fields on the Oxford Heights and demonstrates the importance of soil-type for the survival of many of these annual species.

It is our intention to publish *Fritillary* more frequently and regularly and we are asking for further papers and systematic lists to be submitted.

Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire Activities

A recent innovation, inspired by the ANHSO Rare Plants Group is a series of workshops:

- The first, in 1995, was significant in showing that creeping marshwort (*Apium repens*), growing only on Port Meadow, was not the hybrid that experts had once feared but a thriving species in its own right.

- The second was a Memorial Day held for George Claridge Druce on 18th May 1996. He was an active member of the ANHSO from 1881 to 1931, just a year before he died.
- In May 1999 dandelions (*Taraxacum* (sub)-species) were studied in meadows of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.
- In March 2000, in collaboration with the Nature Conservation Forum, a very successful Species Conservation and Recording Day was held in Wolfson College, Oxford, addressing many aspects of nature conservation. The contribution by Lindon Cornwallis was particularly useful in putting the farmers' perspective and so making a framework for the other contributions, including those of Susanna Kay and Phil Barnett (see this volume). Trevor Easterbrook's description of 25 years of recording by the Banbury Ornithological Society provoked much interest and admiration for the detailed work carried out by members.
- The ANHSO intends to hold a series of Lectures and Field outings in 2001, in collaboration with the University of Oxford's Department of Continuing Education, to celebrate the acquisition of the Ruskin Reserve at Cothill by Druce and his friends in 1901.

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust Activities

While nature reserves continue to play a major role in BBOWT's conservation work, they are now just one part in a much broader programme.

As its contribution to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, the Trust has launched over 20 individual species action projects. These range from 3-year full-time initiatives for water vole and otter, species re-introduction programmes for pasque flower, military and monkey orchids, and dormouse, to public surveys for song thrush, glow worm and stag beetle.

BBOWT's work to tackle the primary causes of wildlife declines is focused on lobbying and campaigning to influence local and county plans and policies. Working closely with its Wildlife Trust partners around the UK, it contributes to similar activity at regional and UK government levels. Through its Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project, and its influence with the similar and recently launched Buckinghamshire project, the Trust is able to make contact with and to encourage and help landowners to better conserve our remaining county wildlife sites.

Last, but by no means least, the Trust has an active a growing Community Conservation and Education programme aimed at raising public awareness and encouraging and supporting local community conservation activities.