

Editorial

We are delighted to bring out another volume of *Fritillary* following so soon after the Millennium volume, which was published at the end of 2001.

This new volume is again a joint venture between the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) and forms part of the educational work of both organisations.

This issue comprises papers which are based on presentations to the course held in June 2001 on the valley-head fens of Oxfordshire. Dr C. R Huxley-Lambrick discusses this course further in her introduction.

We are already thinking about the next volume of *Fritillary* and we are asking for further papers and systematic lists to be submitted.

Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire Activities

Since the publication of the last volume of *Fritillary* the Society has celebrated its centenary. In 1901, the Ashmolean Natural History Society of Oxfordshire was created by the amalgamation of the Ashmolean Society, founded in 1828, and the Oxfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club, founded in 1880 by George Claridge Druce and Professor Lawson (at that time the Sherardian professor of Botany in the University of Oxford). The objectives of the new society were to encourage an interest in natural history and to facilitate its study. Copies of the booklet produced by Serena Marner for the occasion are still available.

Like Druce, the Society felt that a celebration in Oxford's Town Hall would be appropriate and held "Wildlife on your Doorstep" on March 16th 2001 with its partners Oxford City Council, the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum and the Oxfordshire Education and Business Partnership. This provided a forum for local environmental groups to publicise themselves. The event was remarkable for the degree of synergetic interaction between those who ran displays, the excellent talks given throughout the day and the superb and profitable lunch provided by the Upper Thames region of the BBOWT.

Our second objective was met, apart from our usual walks and talks, in two ways. Firstly, the Society's first plant identification course was held successfully at Hill End Field Studies Centre near Oxford on six Saturdays throughout the season. It is hoped that this will become an annual feature and will be augmented by extra sessions on more difficult plant groups such as grasses. It was inspired by Dr Franklin Perring's challenge at the Society's Druce Dinner in June 2001. He posed the question, "Where is the next generation of field botanists?". The Botanical Society of the British Isles and the Linnean Society tried to answer this question at a meeting in the Linnean Society's rooms in London (which two of our members attended). A strong theme of this day was the difference between identification and recognition skills. These are both important but the former has not been given sufficient weight in the recent past. We accepted the challenge and having organised the course, were delighted by the response. It was 150% oversubscribed in 2001 and was well received by its students and also enjoyed by its tutors.

Secondly, also in 2002, a course was held at the Northmoor Trust on the application of the National Vegetation Classification to grasslands. Participants learnt how to survey an area of grassland in order to apply a classification, at two different grassland sites. They then returned to the classroom and used textbooks and the MATCH and MAVIS computer programs to process this information and derive a classification of the plant community sampled.

A major new venture is the web site www.ashmolean-nat-hist-soc-oxon.org.uk, compiled by Christopher Hoskin and Frances Watkins. Log in to read all about us and let us know your comments. New members are always welcome; our meetings are widely advertised, including in the Country Matters section of the Oxford Times.

Berkshire Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust Activities

The Trust's nature reserves continue to play a major role in BBOWT's conservation work. A three county wide baseline survey is currently being carried out on all the reserves in order to record the species found on these wildlife havens. With ninety reserves across the three counties and four hundred Local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species this is no mean feat!

As its contribution to the UK BAP, the Trust co-ordinates a Water Vole Recovery Project, which works towards halting and reversing the decline of Britain's most rapidly declining mammal through habitat restoration schemes. Land surrounding the Upper River Ray has been identified as a key area to create wildlife-rich wetland habitat and the Trust now owns 110 acres of land in this region.

BBOWT's work to tackle the primary causes of wildlife decline is focused on lobbying and campaigning to influence local and county plans and policies. Working closely with its 46 Wildlife Trust partners around the UK, it contributes to similar activities at regional and UK government levels. Through its Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project the Trust is able to make contact with and to encourage and help landowners to better conserve our remaining county wildlife sites. The Trust is also seeking ways to reinvigate a similar Wildlife Sites Project in Buckinghamshire.

The Trust has an active and growing People & Wildlife programme aimed at raising public awareness and encouraging and supporting local community conservation activities. Environmental Education Centres in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire host visits from over 10,000 local school children each year!

Frances Watkins
frances.watkins@anthriscus.co.uk