



# Beds BioNews

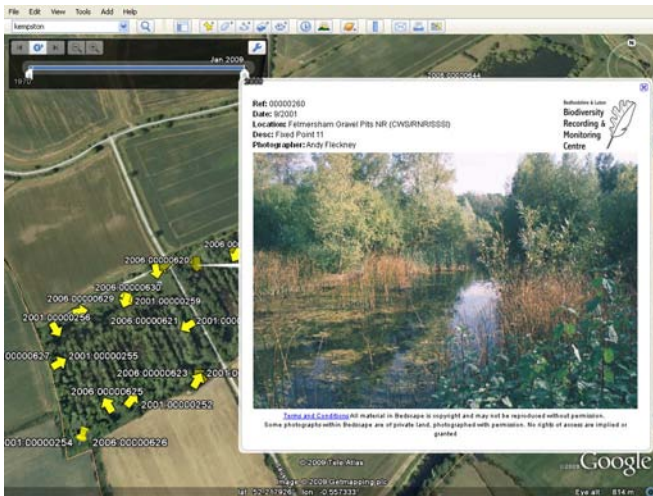


**BedsLife**  
Bedfordshire & Luton Biodiversity Partnership



## Bedscape needs your photos

by Keith Balmer



A peek at the amazing Bedscape website - do have a look yourself!

Do you have old photographs of rural Bedfordshire? Very likely. Most of us have, gathering dust in boxes and albums, unseen, unappreciated and fading away.

A comparison of photographs even a decade or two apart can reveal a great deal about how our countryside has changed, such as scrub encroachment; loss of trees; maturing of hedgerows and copses; farming practises; management of water courses; development of nature reserves; and so on.

Realising that old photographs are a largely-untapped resource of great

value to conservationists and historians, and of general interest to all, we set about creating an on-line archive, Bedscape, into which they can be loaded, catalogued and accessed. And its not just old photographs that have value, as those taken now will have historic value in decades to come.

Photographs in Bedscape are located in time and space; linked to a location; show the direction the camera was pointing; and can be searched and viewed on the website, or used as an overlay on Google Earth, using date controls to select photos from a chosen era.

The BRMC has now taken over running the website, having initially been developed by me at home in my own time, and populated with nearly 1000 images by David Kay, a long-term volunteer at the BRMC. Many of these pictures are fixed-point photographs of Wildlife Trust nature reserves going back more than a decade taken by Andy Fleckney, showing that we weren't the first to appreciate the value of historic photographs!

There were many technological challenges to overcome in getting the archive to this stage, such as how to handle tens of thousands of photos, and how to keep out hackers, but these are hopefully resolved and the website is now up and running. Please bear with us however if any final wrinkles remain to be smoothed out.

We are now inviting everyone to contribute photos of any vintage of rural Bedfordshire to Bedscape. There is an upload demo on the website so that you can discover just how easy it is to supply photos, so please have a play with this, and then register for your username and password. We look forward to creating a valuable resource together.

So what's the web address I hear you asking? Its [www.bedscape.org.uk](http://www.bedscape.org.uk)





## Last of the BioNews!

Exciting changes are afoot, meaning that this will be the last issue of Beds BioNews as you currently know it. In the New Year BioNews will merge with the Muntjac, the newsletter of the Bedfordshire Natural History Society. This will bring you more natural history information – who knows, maybe some of you will join the BNHS yourselves! Our mailing lists will merge too, so BNHS members will now learn more about BedsLife and what we're up to. 2010 is the International Year of Biological Diversity, and we think the new newsletter will be a great way to launch this very special year!

The merged publication will be called the Muntjac but will include content from both BedsLife and the BNHS. It will still include a list of events, new publications and the latest biodiversity news. Added to that will be great articles written by Bedfordshire's excellent naturalists.

## Introducing iSpot: a wildlife website looking for new naturalists

by Rob Coleman, *iSpot Biodiversity Mentor for the East of England*

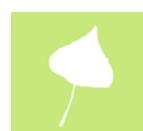
iSpot is a new website that brings together people with an interest in nature. Billed as 'your place to share nature', iSpot draws inspiration from the success of 'social networking' websites like Facebook to provide a forum for people of all ages to share observations and experiences.



Created by the Open University and funded by OPAL (Open Air Laboratories) iSpot was originally conceived as an educational resource to help with biological identification. Users can post observations, pictures or descriptions of things they've seen. Others can then respond: suggesting identifications or adding information. Albums of observations can be created, tagged and searched and sightings are linked with locations provided by Google Maps. The website is simple to use but has some powerful features that can be expanded as the project develops.

Whilst many organisms cannot be readily identified to species level without a specimen, it is hoped that iSpot will become a useful biological recording tool. Links with the NBN (National Biodiversity Network) species dictionaries and distribution maps will help to identify unusual records worthy of further investigation. Information from iSpot can be exported to other organisations for recording or survey purposes. This will also be linked with the OU's 'Bayesian Keys' project which applies computing power to traditional identification keys so they can be accessed rapidly in the field via handheld devices.

The success or otherwise of iSpot will ultimately be decided by whether or not it can deliver useful information to its users, be it help with a novice's observation or an interesting new record for a county recorder. To this end iSpot is appealing for new users, whatever their background or experience, to become involved with the new community. So log on to [www.ispot.org.uk](http://www.ispot.org.uk) and have a go!





## Once again, gardens prove important for wildlife

Over 62,000 people across Britain took part in the RSPB's 'Make Your Nature Count' survey in June, and the results are in! The average British garden was found to have 10 bird species. The most frequently seen bird was the blackbird, found in 94% of gardens. Some animals like foxes and hedgehogs are more likely to be found in urban gardens than out in the countryside.

Detailed results show that you're more likely to see buzzards, coal tits, herring gulls, jays, nuthatches, hedgehogs and toads in Bedfordshire's gardens than in the rest of England. But you're likely to see more cats, too. On the other hand, our gardens see fewer barn owls, cuckoos, corn buntings, linnets, green woodpeckers, redpolls, spotted flycatchers, foxes and grey squirrels. Our four most common birds were blackbird, woodpigeon, house sparrow and collared dove. Our four least common were garden warbler, grey partridge, tawny owl and turtle dove.



The nuthatch *Sitta europaea* is one of the species we're more likely to see here in Bedfordshire's gardens. Photo by Roger Butterfield

Surveys like Make Your Nature Count show just how valuable our urban gardens are for wildlife. And it's not just birds, mammals and reptiles that benefit. Over 170 moth species have been found this year in a single Ampthill garden, and eight bee species regularly visit another in Cranfield. One Luton garden alone is known to be home to 20% of Britain's spider species! Who knows what else crawls, flies, slithers and creeps in our little patches of England?

## Comings and goings

We're pleased to announce some great additions and changes to the BedsLife team. After many years as Chair John Comont has stepped aside, and Sally Chapman has taken the reins. Welcome to the Hot Seat, Sally, and many thanks John for so ably guiding this motley bunch!

We'd like to welcome four new members to the Biodiversity Forum: Pippa Caswell (Environment Agency), Amanda Crack (RSPB), Colin Carpenter (Community Tree Trust) and Ellen Dempster (National Trust). So glad you could join us!

Also welcome to John O'Gaunt Golf Course, which has joined the BedsLife partnership as a corporate member. You might have seen Greenskeeper Steve Thompson profiled on Look East this summer, for his work and dedication to the habitats and critters living on the course. What an amazing model for others! If you would like to invite into BedsLife a community group or local business working for our county's wildlife, please contact Heather at [heather.webb@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:heather.webb@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk).

Finally, congratulations to Justin Tilley on the arrival of beautiful baby Mary!





## Nature nuggets

The Wildlife Trust has been seeing **increased numbers of wasp spiders** on their local nature reserves. A small population is known to have existed for several years in Blunham, and there have been isolated sightings around the county. This year's records include Blunham and Biggleswade. Wildlife Trust recorders have also found a developing population over the border at Cambourne, with six females!

The field work for **this year's hedgerow survey** is almost complete. Many thanks to the volunteers who trudged around Pegsdon and Hexton's fields in the interests of science! The survey continues last year's efforts on the chalk hills in southern Bedfordshire. Results will be out early in the New Year.

Defra has just released the results of its 2009 **Survey of Public Attitudes and Behaviours Towards the Environment**. The survey gives a representative picture of what people in England think, and how they behave, across a range of issues relating to the environment. The 2009 survey follows from previous surveys run every few years since 1986. The report is available on the [Defra website](#).

The Beds & Luton Environmental Education Working Group has recently completed a **survey of environmental education provision** in the county. The report is available on the BedsLife website at [www.bedslife.org.uk/publications](http://www.bedslife.org.uk/publications). The survey has led to a few new projects, details of which will follow as they develop.

## Upcoming events

Oct 15-16: The Coppice Association North West is hosting **21st Century Coppice, the First Cut**, a conference in Kendal, Cumbria. This event will be of interest to anyone with practical involvement with coppice, greenwood and related matters, and their future. A detailed programme and booking form are available from the [Small Woods Association website](#).

Oct 17: An exciting **Apple Day** gala will take place at Luton Hoo Walled Garden at Luton Hoo Estate. Come for a great day celebrating the pumpkin and the apple. Stallholders will offer an array of pumpkins and apple related goods. Visitors will be able to watch local country craftsmen, beekeepers, basket makers and wood turners. Children's activities include story telling, apple printing and pumpkin decorating. For information contact [events@lhwg.org.uk](mailto:events@lhwg.org.uk) or 01582 721443.

Oct 18: Bedford's **Apple Day** celebrations will take place at Bromham Mill. Join the annual celebration of the brilliant British Apple! Taste, eat, drink, try and buy local apple varieties. Activities include apple pressing, bobbing and peeling, apple identification, ferret racing, sheep dog demonstrations and the always-popular hog roast. Details are available at [bromham.mill@bedford.gov.uk](mailto:bromham.mill@bedford.gov.uk) or 01234 824330.

Nov 10-12: **Protected Areas: Past, Present and Prospects** is a 3-day conference that will examine why we need protected areas, what functions they serve and how we can retain areas of high nature conservation value. The event will take place at Center Parcs, Elveden Forest, Brandon, Suffolk; a draft version of the programme is available on the [IEEM website](#).

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