



## Newsletter June 2010

### OPAL GRANT – YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!

I am very pleased to let you know that the Society has been awarded an OPAL grant in an open competition for the funds. The money is given to fund a project that promotes interest and knowledge of natural history to the general public. Although this is one of our Society's stated aims, until now we have generally concentrated on providing an interesting and lively series of lectures and walks for members. We now have an opportunity to reach out and extend our sphere of activities.

With the grant we will be able to purchase some equipment to be used on the project but can also be retained afterwards by the society for members' use and for any future public events/activities we may be involved in. We've suggested a moth trap, binoculars, lenses, a binocular microscope and identification charts.



A project has been developed to satisfy the OPAL grant conditions. It consists of a series of activities at Basildon House over 6 days from Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> August to Monday 30<sup>th</sup> August which is the August Bank Holiday. Basildon House was chosen as it has thousands of people visiting, the NT is very supportive of our project and also some members are NT volunteers. The list of activities is attached. The main theme is on butterflies and moths, but this also brings in the caterpillars, the plants the caterpillars eat, and the insects and birds that eat them.

At the moment, there is a small band of volunteers of necessity centred around the society members who are National Trust volunteers, as they are familiar with the house, grounds and have all the contacts in the NT. But we are looking for more members who can spare an hour, a day or more time who can help out with the activities. The "day" is the Basildon House opening hours of 11.00 to 17.00. The more members we have, the more activities during the day we can put on. We had a meeting to reconnoitre the grounds and facilities at Basildon House. I am not a regular visitor but it was quite a revelation how interesting and pleasant the grounds are. They are a veritable treasure trove of trees, plants, birds and insects with far reaching views thrown in. It is hard to think of a more pleasant way to spend a sunny day.



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I would like to think that the event will be so enjoyable and successful that it will be talked about for years to come as a very memorable occasion. It will only be successful with the support of the members, but all members will benefit from the equipment. If any member has any other ideas for activities or has something “interesting” hidden in the attic that they could bring along to inspire young minds, please let me know.

We need to put the project together, arrange access to Basildon House, arrange the publicity, obtain all the tables, chairs, notice boards, materials and ensure we have sufficient helpers to be able to man (woman?) the event on the day. We are now committed to have an “event” and I hope you will volunteer as this will be a showcase for the society. Don’t worry if you are not a member of the NT or a NT volunteer as all RDNHS volunteers will be given a free entry pass.

Many thanks to Susan for applying for the grant, Susan, Tricia and Fay for the brainstorming ideas and all the volunteers so far for the event. The activities mentioned in the tables below are in outline only. Full details of each activity are available from Susan Twitchett.

We are looking for 14 volunteers per day, but the more the merrier. Please let me or Susan know if you have some time to help over the project week or if you want more information.

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## Walks

We’ve had some really good walks this year. Michael Keith-Lucas took us around Quarry Wood and Winter Hill just north of Maidenhead. I always thought that Beech was the climax vegetation on chalk, but apparently the Beech has shallow roots and grows in the chalk depleted topsoil, sometimes on soil of pH 5. Look out for wrinkly bark on Beech as the woodsmen tend to take the good straight trees which leaves the second rate wood standing. Also, as the Lesser Celandine in my garden have round leaves, they are cultivars, not the natural species which have more pointed leaves, as on Winter Hill.

Roger Frankum took us around Hungerford Marsh. Besides being serenaded by the Blackcaps and warblers, there was the flash of a Kingfisher (twice!) and a startling view of a Water Vole just slowly swimming along on the other side of the canal

Martin Sell took us on a spectacular evening walk around the lakes at Woolhampton. Before we had gone 100 yards there was a Barn Owl quartering the fields in the full sunshine. Not only that but it dropped to

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the ground and caught a small mammal and almost immediately a Kestrel appeared and landed next to the owl. The Barn Owl then took off and was chased determinedly by the Kestrel who eventually stole the mammal. How often do you see that? The Swifts, Swallows and House Martins were swooping around in large numbers and walking across a field feeding were a pair of Yellow Wagtails, the male magnificently jumping in the air then puffing out his bright yellow chest on landing. As we were leaving, looking back over the lake we saw 3 Hobbies hawking for insects. What a night!

Thanks to all the walk leaders. If you couldn't make the walks so far, there's still plenty to go on, so come and join us.

And now for some eye relief! This is a photo of *Bombus hypnorum* on Cotoneaster taken in my front garden in Pamber Heath. It is a recent arrival in Britain (yes, a new to Britain species!) and worth looking out for on garden flowers. The bee is very distinctive and has brown hairs on top of the thorax and a white tail.



And finally, a reminder of our photographic competition categories. Prepare for the Christmas Party!

1. Against All Odds: wildlife in human-degraded habitats (building sites, roadsides, quarries, sewage farms, tips etc)
2. Small is Beautiful: something small.
3. Little and Large: two photos of the same or related subjects, one showing something small(er), the other showing something large(r).
4. Three of a Kind: three related photos
5. Nature in Action: something happening.
6. Driven to Abstraction: anything abstract
7. Colour Prejudice: anything bright coloured.
8. Pattern Perfect: pattern rather than colour is important here.

Graham Saunders

# READING AND DISTRICT NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## RDNHS OPAL Grant Family Activities at Basildon Park

**Wednesday August 25<sup>th</sup> - Monday August 30<sup>th</sup> 2010**

<b>A. Butterfly activities</b>	<b>B. Bug Hunting Activities</b>	<b>C. Mothing Activities</b>
1. Butterfly Hunter ( <i>these butterflies like me</i> )	1. Sweep nets on grassy sward. Collection and identification of catch	1. Several Moth traps to be set up on Saturday evening 28 <sup>th</sup> August and repeated on Sunday evening 29 <sup>th</sup> .
2. Laminated Butterfly identification sheet	2. Bush beating. Collection and identification of catch	2. Examination and identification of catch.
3. Child Butterfly Spotter sheet.		3. Demonstrate how to set up a moth trap
4. Word search sheet/ Crossword/		4. "Hand on" experience handling the moths
5. Colour a butterfly mask		5. Painted lady specimens
6. Talk on wild life gardening		6. Slow-worm specimens
7. Craft activity- make a bead dragonfly		7. Bug hotel from John Lerpiniere
8. "Butterfly" spotting in Basildon House		
9. Butterfly cake making/ icing butterfly biscuits		

<b>D. Tree &amp; Lichen Activities</b>	<b>E. Parkland walks</b>	<b>F. Prize</b>	<b>G. RDNHS membership</b>
1. Which is the highest tree using a clinometer	At 12.00 and 2.00pm each day	Competition for junior members.	1. Join the Society. Individual adult and Family membership
2. Which is the highest tree using a simple method.			
3. OPAL tree Lichen survey			
4. Veteran Tree identification			

### Number of RDNHS volunteers needed per day.

<b>Activity A- Butterflies</b>	<b>B- Insect experts</b>	<b>C- mothing experts</b>	<b>D- tree and lichen experts</b>	<b>E – walk leaders</b>	<b>F- Fishlock Prize</b>	<b>G- Join the Society</b>	<b>Total</b>
As many RDNHS craft volunteers as wish to help	Minimum of 2	Minimum of 2	Minimum of 2	2	1	1	Minimum of 14 each day

Note : Most visitors will attend at the weekend so Sat, Sun and Monday will have a large number of visitors and the Society will need at least 14 volunteers each day.