

The Amateur Entomologists' Society

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Media Information

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The Amateur Entomologists' Society (AES) at a glance:

- The AES is a gateway to entomology (the study of insects), especially for amateurs and the younger generation.
- The AES was founded in 1935 and is one of the UK's leading organisations for people interested in insects. The society has a combined membership of almost 2,000 people.
- Conservation features prominently on the AES agenda and we contribute actively to public policy documents through our affiliation with most of the important conservation organisations.
- The AES has four publications for members; The Bulletin, The Entomologist's Record and Journal of Variation, Invertebrate Conservation News and the Bug Club Magazine.
- The AES is the only UK-based entomological society with a separate junior section (called the Bug Club) featuring its own magazine.
- The AES publishes the UK's only periodical devoted solely to invertebrate conservation issues.
- The AES organises the two largest entomological exhibitions in the UK.
- The AES supports entomological and conservation activities through a grant scheme.
- The AES also publishes more than thirty different books, leaflets and pamphlets aimed at fostering an interest in insects and supporting the role of the amateur.
- The AES runs insect identification services and online forums for both members and non-members of the society.

Society history

The Society was founded in 1935 for the purpose of providing a forum through which amateur and young entomologists could exchange information, equipment and other such items.

The Brimstone butterfly first appeared as the emblem of the Society in 1939. This butterfly is still our emblem today. Our first ever Annual Exhibition was also held in 1939, and is now held annually.

Our present journal first appeared as The Bulletin in 1939, and it was also during this year that our first non-periodical publication, a leaflet entitled "Coleoptera Collecting", was produced. Producing low cost entomological publications remain one of our main activities today.

The Society has advised on invertebrate conservation issues for over 40 years, and has been consulted over legislation such as the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*, and subsequent reviews of the Act.

In 1989, The Bulletin became a bi-monthly journal instead of quarterly, and now has a colour section alternating with Invertebrate Conservation News.



From early times in the life of the society there was a section for young entomologists. However, during 1997 the AES merged with the Bug Club to form the AES Bug Club which is the junior section of the society today. The Bug Club has a separate bi-monthly journal, The Bug Club Magazine.

In 2005, the Amateur Entomologists Society became affiliated with the Royal Entomological Society (RES). The benefits of this include access to one of the finest entomological libraries in the world and discount on RES publications.

The society ran the first Northern Exhibition in April 2006. The exhibition was jointly organised with the Royal Entomological Society.

In 2008, the AES acquired the Entomologist's Record and Journal of Variation - a peer-reviewed journal that had been published without break since 1892. From the 2009 membership year, AES Members were able to include the Entomologist's Record among their membership options, in the same way as they currently choose to receive the Bulletin or the Bug Club Magazine.

Why are insects important?

Insects are one of the most numerous groups of animal on the planet, in fact, they represent almost 80% of the world's species yet they are also arguably the least studied.

Insects are very important as pollinators. Bees are perhaps the best example of this. Honey Bees (*Apis mellifera*) aren't bred in captivity just for the honey they produce - they are vital to pollinate crops. Without them, many crops would fail, as pollination is needed before many crops and fruits that we eat can be formed

It is estimated that the pollination services provided by bees in North America is worth approximately \$14 billion. In the UK it was estimated that the value of the pollination services provided by honey bees and bumble bees was around £170 million for outdoor crops (fruit, oil seed rape etc.) and £30 million for greenhouse crops (tomatoes, peppers etc).

Not to mention that tiny midge that pollinates the cocoa plant. Without it, there would be no chocolate!

Other examples of useful insects are the Silkworm Moth, *Bombyx mori*, from which silk is obtained. This species has been reared by humans for such a long time that it has become domesticated - it would be unlikely to survive in the wild if released today.

Insects are also useful as models in scientific research. The Fruit Fly *Drosophila melanogaster* is a good example. It breeds rapidly, and can produce very many generations per year in the laboratory, so it is ideal for the study of genetics and evolution. In fact, many genetic discoveries of great importance to medicine have been made using this little fruit fly.

Insects can be useful to the gardener too - ladybirds, for example, are the gardener's friend because they eat aphids. Hoverflies and wasps also prey on other insects in the garden. These species are called predators. Others that are natural enemies to garden pests include parasitoids, which lay eggs in the host insect so as to provide food for its developing young.

Many kinds of insects are also food for songbirds and other birds and animals. When there aren't enough insects around, the result is fewer birds and mammals.

And insects can also be eaten by man! This is called entomophagia.

Why are entomologists important?

It has been estimated that there are seven mammalogists for every known species of mammal. However, there is only one entomologist for every 425 described species of insect. Entomologists have so far described one million species of insect but conservative estimates suggest that there could be another four to six million species waiting to be described.

With this much work still to do the importance of the amateur entomologist cannot be underestimated!

What is the role of the amateur?

Entomology (the study of insects) is the ultimate hobby. Insects are everywhere, and amateur entomologists can interact with them to whatever extent they choose.

Amateurs range from young children beginning to notice the fascination of the natural world; professional scientists following their own interests in their spare time; or ever-young octogenarians, fascinated by the patterns of leaf mines on trees in their gardens and wanting to find out about the insects that made them.

As an entomologist, you might decide to perform careful scientific observations and experiments. Your hobby could then take you to university libraries, learned societies and to the four corners of the globe.

Or you might decide to simply 'chill out' and enjoy nature; watch the creatures in the undergrowth in your garden, or the local park. And if you don't have a garden - flowerpots! Or simply choose to stay in your favourite armchair and read about insects.

Whatever route you choose, be warned - entomology can be addictive! Many people who have dabbled as children have ended up hopelessly addicted to this all-absorbing subject for their entire lives!

Notable amateur entomologists

A little known passion of Sir Winston Churchill's was his concern for the diminishing numbers of British butterflies. In 1946 he planned a butterfly garden to increase the numbers of common species around his house at Chartwell, Kent. About 1,500 chrysalids were hatched each year in a summer house. Churchill would spend hours waiting for the moment when the butterflies emerged. Once on the wing he set them free.

Many famous scientists across a range of disciplines started off with an interest in insects: for example, Charles Darwin, whose interest was beetles; the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman; and many important physicians, such as Sir Cyril Clarke, whose amateur interest in the genetics of butterflies enabled him to reduce the numbers of infant deaths caused by Rhesus factor incompatibility.

Why is insect conservation important?

There are many reasons why we need to conserve the wealth of species that share the planet with us:

- Our own survival and our economies depend on many of the species that share the planet with us.
- We get pleasure and a sense of fascination from wildlife.
- We recognise a moral responsibility to act as stewards, showing care and respect for other life forms.

Insects make up about four fifths of all the animal biodiversity on Earth. Many birds and mammals depend on insects for their survival. Insects are important to man, for example as pollinators of our crops. Insects are nature's agents for the disposal and recycling of animal dung and the dead remains of plants and animals. Life as we know it could not exist without such recycling processes!

We depend on insects for products such as honey and we benefit greatly from the results of medical and other scientific research involving insects. Also, some insect species are bred for release as biological control agents, protecting our crops alongside naturally occurring enemies of pests.

Many insects have awesome life histories and can teach us a lot. We must leave some space to allow insects in all their variety to share this planet with us. With the strength of its membership, which includes leading conservation experts, the AES is an effective voice, speaking on behalf of conservation to site managers, politicians and other people with influence.