

Invertebrate Conservation News



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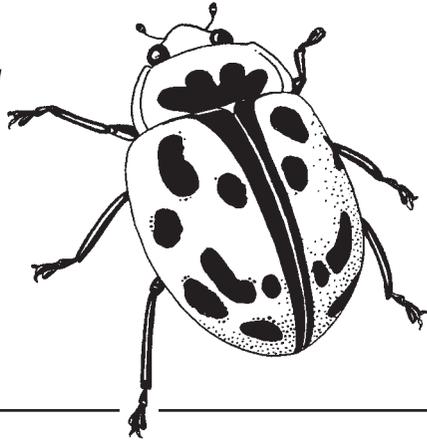
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INVERTEBRATE CONSERVATION NEWS



No. 52, February 2007

EDITORIAL

The Invertebrate Link 2006 conference (see “Past UK Meetings”, below) has launched a new initiative to nurture a new generation of invertebrate biologists and naturalists. One of the main challenges will be to encourage youngsters to overcome societal obstacles which smother their innate interest in “creepy crawlies”. In an environment dominated by television, video games and other artifices by which the “men in suits” make money out of youngsters and their parents, it can seem “uncool” to show any enthusiasm for things that crawl around under stones. There is also an increased parental fear of child abuse, which restricts children’s freedom and discourages adult mentors. Organised activities such as “mini-beast” hunts are nevertheless popular and can serve as an excellent starting point for encouraging youngsters to learn more about invertebrates.

Despite peer pressure and distractions, some youngsters are very keen on insects or other invertebrates. At the conference, guest speaker Nick Baker spoke of individual youngsters whose enthusiasm has been inspirational. He had to admit, however, to an unhappy occurrence when a young enthusiast reacted with horror to Nick’s instinctive act of swatting a mosquito which had landed on his arm. Seen in a positive light, such horror may reflect an admirable respect for all living things, which is a great advance on the prejudiced attitudes that many adults have towards “pests and creepy-crawlies”. On the other hand, the incident probably reflects misplaced messages from well-meaning teachers that it is simply wrong to collect specimens.

Promotion of a respect for all living things is excellent, if this means that the next generation will not collect specimens without good reason, but a total denigration of collecting is pernicious. It discourages



a new generation of dedicated naturalists and it also fosters a society in which hypocrisy reigns. In such a society, a supposedly right-minded majority of people can mentally distance themselves from “bad guys”, such as invertebrate collectors, while abusing the biosphere in many ways – even by slaughtering invertebrates in their thousands by driving their cars.

The Invertebrate Link conference prompted very little discussion about the concerns over the negative effects of anti-collecting sentiments and legislation, despite these concerns being aired in one of the presentations. Perhaps this was because most of the statutory restrictions on fieldwork in the UK apply only to a small proportion of invertebrate species, which responsible collectors would not wish to harm anyway. The situation is, however, very different in many other countries, where there are “blanket” restrictions or unjustifiably long lists of protected species. Even in the UK, there is considerable unease about grey areas of the law, which seem to make potential criminals out of basically law-abiding citizens. Examples include the possession or sale of specimens of species which are now scheduled as protected in the UK, but which were obtained legally overseas or prior to scheduling. Photography of scheduled species is another activity which can create unwitting criminals, since it is not illegal *per se*, but is considered illegal in practice (if unlicensed), since it is deemed to be a form of disturbance (which it could genuinely be in certain circumstances).

The recruitment of a new generation will be very much hampered if youngsters are brought up to believe that collecting is inherently wrong or that their aspirations to study invertebrates will be unacceptably hampered by restrictive, unjust or confusing laws. Unfortunately, however, bad laws can all too easily co-exist with democracy, as long as they suppress only minorities whose votes are insignificant (“the tyranny of the majority”). Such laws also offer a tempting prospect for any government which wants to be seen to be conserving biodiversity despite conniving in the destruction of habitats to make way for development and cutting support for research and for habitat management.





NEWS, VIEWS AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Bio-fuels and agricultural set-aside

Now that many leading politicians have been converted to the cause of tackling anthropogenic climate change, there is increasing debate about how to do so, rather than whether anything needs to be done. Those who, for several decades, have been urging the replacement of fossil fuels by other energy sources can only be pleased that the cause has been adopted by mainstream politicians. On the other hand, the development of new technology (e.g. the use of wind turbines for generating electricity) is a growing reality, which is provoking new concerns and conflicts.

One of the key questions requiring research and analysis is the amount of carbon which is released into the atmosphere by the development and use of non-fossil energy sources. This question applies, for example, to the cultivation, harvesting and processing of bio-fuels (Anon, 2006). When such crops are established on formerly cultivated land, there will usually be a nett reduction of carbon emissions, compared with the production and use of fossil fuels. This is probably not the case, however, if forests are being cleared and burned to make way for bio-fuel crops, as is happening especially in the tropics, quite apart from the direct effects of land-use change on biodiversity.

As far as invertebrate habitats are concerned, there is a need to study the effects of the increasing practice of establishing crops for bio-fuel production on land formerly occupied by other forms of vegetation, both wild and cultivated. Such fuels include biomass derived from plants such as the grass *Miscanthus* or from short-rotation coppice stands of woody plants such as willow, poplar or eucalyptus. Also, crops such as oilseed rape, sugar cane or oil palm, which produce readily processed carbohydrates or oils, are being increasingly used as a source of liquid bio-fuels. The use of such fuels in motor vehicles seems to provide the ever-powerful road lobby with a technological fix, which is much more palatable than any restrictions or increased taxation on private motor transport.

In the European Union, where a proportion of land is designated as “set-aside” for control of agricultural production, there are increasing moves towards converting set-aside to the production of non-agricultural crops, including fuel crops. Set-aside has clearly provided benefits for some forms of wildlife, especially amidst areas of intensive



arable production, simply because the biological productivity of the set-aside land is not being diverted into human mouths.

According to a UK government discussion paper, there is clear evidence that bird populations are increased by rotational set-aside. Far less effort has been devoted to the study of the main form of animal biodiversity, i.e., invertebrates, and so the only statement that can be made in the paper is that set-aside could be expected to help butterflies and bumblebees. The paper also refers to reports of the dramatic spread of the Brown Argus butterfly *Aricia agestis* and to anecdotal evidence of huge populations of butterflies on non-rotational set-aside land. Apart from these assumptions and anecdotes, there seems to be little attempt to assess the benefits of set-aside for invertebrates. It is therefore very difficult to predict whether such benefits are eroded or enhanced when set-aside land is converted to bio-fuel production.

If set-aside land is converted to short-rotation coppice willow or poplar (but not eucalyptus, outside its natural range) invertebrates could in principle fare quite well. If the land was previously used for intensive arable production, rather than for set-aside, the change to willow or poplar will be of undoubted benefit for invertebrates, but is economically unattractive without a substantial subsidy. Hope and Johnson (2003) refer to a study which showed that short-rotation willow can support large earthworm populations, since the ground is not disturbed by ploughing after establishment. They noted, however, that pesticide inputs need to be low so as to allow the crop to support large populations of other invertebrates, such as willow-feeding species and their predators.

In the tropics, tree planting in small-scale agro-forestry plots provides not only a source of fuel for cooking, but also shelters herbaceous crops and yields various products derived from fruit or nuts etc. Little if anything seems to be known about the effects of this small-scale use of trees on invertebrate populations, but it seems likely in principle that ecological diversity will be enhanced by the more complex vegetational structure, compared with a purely herbaceous cropping system.

The situation is clearly different if tropical forests are replaced with large-scale plantation crops such as oil palm, which is used not only for food and a range of household and industrial products, but also as a bio-fuel source. The big oil companies intend to move into liquid bio-fuel production so as to show commitment towards reducing the growth in fossil fuel use. They will argue that most of the bio-fuel crops



will be established on marginal agricultural land, rather than on primal forests. If this is the case, most politicians will probably be satisfied. It is, however, very important not to dismiss the biodiversity of marginal land as being insignificant. On such land, just as on all other categories of land which are being considered for bio-fuel cropping, there is a need for much research on the potential losses and gains to biodiversity.

References

- Anon (2006). *Newsletter of the Environment Centre*, Dec. 06-Jan. 07. www.environmentcentre.co.uk
- Hope, A.H & Johnson, B. (2003). *Discussion paper on biofuels*. English Nature, Peterborough, UK.
- Anon (2001). Centre for Rural Economics Research, Department of Land Economy, University of Cambridge, UK.

Wild Worms Project in Britain

The Natural History Museum, London, is facilitating the development of a new project to explore the identification and surveying of British earthworms by non-specialists. The project was due to start in October 2006, with a pilot phase due to commence in January 2007. Any members of organisations belonging to Invertebrate Link are invited to participate and should enquire via their Invertebrate Link representatives.



SITES AND SPECIES OF INTEREST

Thurrock Marshes, south-east England

Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust has been running a petition and campaign to save an outstanding brownfield habitat from development. Before industrialisation, West Thurrock Marshes in the county of Essex formed part of the floristically rich Thames Terrace grasslands. Then, several decades ago, lagoons were created for the dumping of fly ash, a waste material from power stations. As in many industrial areas, however, valuable areas of habitat persisted (or were created by disturbance), so that the marshes became a refuge for a wealth of species which were later largely wiped out in the surrounding countryside due to intensification of agriculture.

Among nearly 1,000 animal species so far recorded at the northern lagoon, there are 36 Red Data Book invertebrates. Some of these and



the Brown-banded carder bee *Bombus humilis*, the banded digger wasp *Cerceris quinquefasciata* and the Saltmarsh shortspur beetle *Anisodactylus poeciloides* are listed as priority species under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, which requires action for their conservation. Another species, the spider *Sitticus distinguendus*, is on the draft priority list, having been found only at two sites in the UK – both threatened brownfield sites. Among the other nationally threatened species is the Red-shanked bumblebee (*Bombus ruderarius*) which, like *Bombus humilis*, depends on the large areas of flower-rich grassland at the site, most of which are due to be destroyed by the development. Only one other site in the UK is known to hold more rare species.

Now, as an ex-industrial site, the marshes are classified as brownfield land, which the British planning system treats as a first choice for re-development, in preference to so-called greenfield areas which are often tantamount to being ecological deserts. On this basis, in November 2006, Thurrock Thames Gateway Development Corporation granted planning consent to Royal Mail for the construction of a huge warehouse. Together with a lorry park, this will cover more than half the site, destroying over two thirds of the flower-rich grassland. Colonial species within the development will certainly be obliterated, including the rare ant *Myrmica bessarabica*.

Buglife's assessment is that the development would lead to a significant, potentially devastating loss of the site's wildlife. Linked to the scheme are plans to re-flood the neighbouring southern lagoon, which will have a further damaging impact on invertebrates. This view is supported by the governmental advisory body Natural England (incorporating the former English Nature) which reportedly stated that "the effects (of the development) on the nationally significant invertebrate assemblage could be dramatic".

Planning consent was given despite widespread opposition from organisations including the local council and nature conservation bodies such as Buglife and the Essex Wildlife Trust. The Development Corporation, a non-elected body set up by John Prescott, decided that the nationally important wildlife interest of the site should not be allowed to stand in the way of its development.

London Olympics development

Thurrock, the subject of the previous item, lies to the east of London, within the so-called Thames Gateway, an area which is earmarked for massive development. Several miles further west, within the boundary



of Greater London, lies the lower Lea Valley, where the main centre for the 2012 London Olympics is being constructed. Before London won the bid to host the Olympics, the London Wildlife Trust expressed concern that the development would destroy or harm important brownfield and greenfield habitats (see *ICN* No. 46). Those responsible for the bid said that habitats would be protected, but it was not clear how this could be compatible with the large scale of the planned developments.

Recently, government sources revealed plans to build between 35 and 40,000 new homes around the Olympics area after the Games. This seems to confirm fears that the development will do so much damage to habitats that any plans for mitigation will amount to little more than window-dressing. Also, the cost of the development seems certain to swallow up a great deal of funding, some of which might otherwise have been available to conservation bodies. The prestige of hosting the Olympics and the various benefits that may accrue are of course another matter on which our readers may hold a variety of views.

A marine dragonfly in Hong Kong

Although dragonflies depend predominantly on freshwater habitats, there are a few coastal species which tolerate the full salinity of seawater. One of these is *Orthetrum poecilops* Ris, a marine dragonfly, which occurs in inter-tidal mudflats amongst *Kandelia* mangroves in north-east Hong Kong. Unlike several other blue-bodied “darter” dragonflies in Hong Kong, it is regarded as truly marine, since its colonies are all found below the high water mark. Parts of these sites have a reduced salinity during the rainy season, but they are fully covered by seawater at high tide and have a full marine salinity during the winter dry season.

According to an article by Keith D.P. Wilson (Wilson, 2005), the habitat of *O. poecilops* has been destroyed in many coastal areas between Hong Kong and Japan, where it probably occurred in the past. The main problem has been the well documented and continuing loss of mangrove habitat. The author notes that none of the recorded populations in Hong Kong lie within Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Country Parks, even though some lie within 250 metres of Park boundaries. He recommends that, in view of the global rarity and the unusual biology of *O. poecilops*, its conservation in Hong Kong should be considered a “high priority”.

The author adds that *O. poecilops* seems to have been overlooked when the IUCN was assessing dragonfly species for protective listing.



The IUCN has listed another species, *Mortonagrion hirosei*, as a Priority species because of its unusual requirement for brackish water. It seems that *O. poecilops* would have been considered just as eligible for Priority status if its marine requirements had been appreciated at the time. The species, or rather a subspecies known as *O. poecilops miyajimaensis*, is, however, already classified as endangered on the IUCN red list, principally due to concern over habitat loss in its native Japan.

Reference: Wilson, K. (2005). *Ortbetrum poecilops*. In: IUCN 2006. 2006 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. <www.iucnredlist.org>



PUBLICATION REVIEW

Atlas of the Water Beetles (Coleoptera) and Water Bugs (Hemiptera) of Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire, 1993-2005 by Robert Merritt (published as Sorby Records Special Issue Series No. 14 by the Sorby Natural History Society, Sheffield, May 2006), 160 pp., 24 colour plates. Soft cover, £6.00 (plus £1.50 postage & packing). payable to Sorby Natural History Society. Available from Austin Brackenbury, 76 Crawford Road, Sheffield S8 9BU.

This book contains the results of a very considerable systematic survey by the author. Before the survey there were few records of water beetles or water bugs in the survey area, whereas by the end of the survey there were more than 36,600 records, of which about 97% come from the author's own work at more than 2000 wetland sites.

The introductory sections include a very informative but concise account of the biology of the various families of water beetles and water bugs. There is also an interesting geological and hydrological summary of the survey area, which comprises several "natural areas", such as the Trent Valley, the Southern Magnesian Limestone, Sherwood, the Coal Measures and various portions of the Peak District.

Following a summary of the survey method and of the data collected, the main body of the book consists of a series of accounts of each of the species. For each species, there is a distribution map showing the 1 x 1 km squares where records have been made within the survey area. Each account also includes a description of individual localities or of the types of locality where the records were made.



After the species-accounts, there is a series of descriptions of twenty-four selected sites, each with a colour photograph of the site and a list of the beetles and bugs recorded there. This helps to enliven the book and to convey some idea of the diverse range of landscapes and habitats that lie within the survey area.

For those who may be inspired by the book to visit some of these sites, there is something of a challenge in a list of six species of water beetle and one water bug, which were recorded between 1900 and 1992 but not re-discovered in the survey. The most recent of these records go back as far as 1937 in the case of the whirligig beetle *Gyrinus aeratus* but another of the beetles, *Laccophilus poecilus*, was recorded as recently as a few years before the survey; in 1990. This is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species, not found anywhere in the UK since 2002, when Peter Hodge found it at a previously known site near Lewes, Sussex. Robert Merritt has therefore included a note about the previous records of its occurrence within the survey area. These were made between 1907 and 1987 in the Thorne Moors area of South Yorkshire.

The book finishes with some interesting compilations of data, including a species checklist, a table showing the number of records of each species and the number of 1 km squares where it has been recorded. Also, and of particular interest from a conservation standpoint, there are tables of 535 notable sites for water beetles and 194 for water bugs. For each site, the tables show the protected status if any, geographical information, the total number of species and the numbers of species in the various categories of conservation status (Rare, Scarce, Local A and Local B). Many of the “top” sites appear to be on brownfield land but some of these have some protection as nature reserves or as sites of special scientific interest.

This is a well laid-out and very usable book, based on a most impressive survey, and is a mine of information for anyone who is interested in the study or conservation of the aquatic invertebrates of this sizeable and densely populated area of England. It clearly also has wider interest for anyone with more specific interests in aquatic beetles and bugs. Its importance is reflected by the financial support which the Sorby History Society received from several major governmental and non-governmental conservation bodies. It is well worth its very reasonable price.





PAST UK MEETINGS

Coarse Woody Debris and its value and management for biodiversity

A very well attended meeting with the above title took place on 7th December 2006 at The Wolseley Centre, Cannock Chase, in the English north-west midland county of Staffordshire. The purpose of this workshop was to highlight the biodiversity value of coarse woody debris (CWD) in woodland streams and to promote beneficial habitat management amongst woodland and forest managers. This is very important, since CWD has traditionally been cleared away on the supposition that it will cause problems due to obstruction and flooding.

After an introduction from Ian Middlebrook (Action for Invertebrates), Andrew Godfrey, a consultant entomologist, set the scene by describing the habitat and its value. He explained that woody debris provides not only a direct habitat for various invertebrates such as specialised craneflies and beetles but also an anchorage for habitats in the surrounding water. He also showed how some of the dependent species have adaptations to variable water levels around the woody material; for example, there are specialised craneflies whose pupae breathe via horns, which are extended when the wood is immersed and then retracted when conditions become drier.

Stephen Hewitt (Tullie House Museum, Carlisle) followed with a more specific presentation on craneflies of the genus *Lipsothrix*, based on studies in Cumbria. The River Irving was of particular interest because of the dynamic development of habitats. Stephen's presentation, together with that of Andrew Godfrey, served as a helpful guide to identifying species of conservation concern, such as *L. ecucullata* and *L. errans*.

Nick Mott (Staffs Wildlife Trust) addressed the management issues, which include the need to reconcile conservation with a concept of tidiness which has prevailed in the past. There is a need not only to avoid removing CWD unnecessarily but also to manage river catchments so as to protect the aquatic environment. A scheme known as Catchment-Sensitive Farming has been developed with this in mind. A particularly interesting discovery has been that, contrary to previous opinion, the native British crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* does not necessarily require clear water. Studies have shown that the crayfish can thrive in muddy water, provided that there are clear spaces amongst twiggy debris or willow roots. Nick is the author of an excellent free booklet on CWD in rivers (Mott, 2006), a new edition of which has been sponsored by Natural England.



A local site visit to the Lower Sher Brook in Cannock Chase, introduced by Sue Sheppard of Staffordshire County Council and Nick Mott, helped to illustrate at first hand the themes of the morning session, and also provided several new invertebrate records for the area. Sue also explained that local management was being developed so as to take account both of the aquatic habitat and of habitats in the adjacent woodland.

Very productive discussions were chaired by Fred Currie of the Forestry Commission. These touched upon the establishment of Special Areas of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive and an interesting study of CWD, conducted by Forest Research in the Parrett catchment in Somerset, south-west England.

Of key importance was the need to spread the message that CWD is a valuable habitat, which should be allowed to develop, except in certain circumstances where it could genuinely be a problem with regard to obstruction and flooding. As explained in Nick Mott's booklet, such situations can be identified and appropriate measures taken. The Environment Agency, the relevant governmental body in England, is well aware of the need to conserve the habitat and it was encouraging that many of its employees were in the audience. It was, however, noted that there is a problem with an official booklet, which purports to advise riparian owners about their legal responsibilities but fails to address biodiversity issues. The booklet, entitled *Living on the Edge*, inappropriately refers to a need to remove all vegetation from rivers!

Reference: Mott, N. (2006). *Managing Woody Debris in Rivers, Streams and Floodplains*. Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, UK.

Invertebrate Link conference, London, November 2006

This conference, entitled *Who will watch the small things that run the world: recruiting the next generation of invertebrate specialists*, took place on 9th November 2006 in the Flett Theatre, Natural History Museum, London. The conference brought together invertebrate specialists and educationists, with a view to launching a new initiative so as to help overcome the evident decline in incentives for young invertebrate biologists and naturalists. The factors which have led to this decline were described in a stimulating presentation by Dr Roger Key of Natural England (*How I Became an Invertebrate Specialist: an overview of issues affecting recruiting of the next generation*). The presentation, a revised version of one which Roger had given at the Royal Entomological Society symposium at Brighton in 2005, forms the



basis of a written paper which he and the conference chairman, Dr. Oliver Cheesman, are publishing in the Brighton proceedings (Cheesman & Key, in press). The written version provides evidence that the educational decline is real rather than imagined.

Roger was followed by Nick Baker, writer and broadcaster, whose talk was entitled *Promoting the Study of "Bugs", including the role of the media and books for younger readers*. Although Nick is relatively young, he recognised signs of a deteriorating trend within his own lifetime. He was, however, positive about some of the things that could be done to provide more opportunity and encouragement for young people; perhaps in ways which would have to embrace, rather than disdain, present-day communication media.

Steve Tilling of the Field Studies Council (FSC) began the afternoon session, with practical examples of the work of the FSC amidst a decline of taxonomy and fieldwork in schools and universities. Although everyone present was probably aware of the FSC's work, many seemed pleasantly surprised to learn how much the FSC is already doing to help redress the decline.

Lynn Hughes of Oxford Brookes University then spoke about aids to identification, including hand-held IT devices, which could be used by schools or the organisers of events such as bug hunts. She was followed by Martin Sanford of the Suffolk Biological Records Centre, who outlined the rôle of local societies, museums and records centres in encouraging young people to develop their interests and to take part in recording schemes. Finally, Mark Boyd of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds spoke about the lessons that can be learned from larger societies and conservation charities, whose resources have already enabled them to undertake initiatives for encouraging public participation in their work, and in particular the encouragement of a new generation.

In line with the determination to make the conference a launch pad, rather than a mere one-day event, some resolutions for future action were agreed. These are as follows:

This Conference:

- Affirms the importance of ensuring future capacity for invertebrate study, recording and conservation in the UK, through appropriate professional posts and continuation of the amateur naturalist tradition
- Recommends that a national forum be convened to examine and promote current and future capacity for the study, recording and conservation of all plant and animal groups



- Recommends re-establishment of observational natural history as a component of formal education in biological and environmental sciences
- Recommends enhanced co-ordination and co-operation between those disparate sectors, bodies and individuals concerned with promoting interest in invertebrates and supporting aspiring natural historians, in particular through:
 - Promoting awareness of the importance of invertebrates, their essential ecological roles, and their value as indicators of environmental change.
 - Encouraging enjoyment and exploration of natural environments, particularly by children and young people.

In the follow-up to the conference, Oliver Cheesman is acting as a contact for the receipt and circulation of information relevant to environmental education in the UK. For example, the Lemur Project provides bursary placements, with Heritage Lottery Funding for the training of environmental professionals, including those who wish to lead educational events. Also, there is now a flow of information (e.g. from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), which should help people in the “invertebrate world” to tap into the educational framework.

Reference: Cheesman, O.D. & Key, R.S. (in press) The extinction of experience: a threat to insect conservation? In: Stewart, A.J.A., New, T.R. & Lewis, O.T. (eds.) *Insect Conservation Biology*. Proceedings of the 23rd Symposium of the Royal Entomological Society. CABI Publishing, Wallingford, Chapter 14, pp. XXX-YYY.

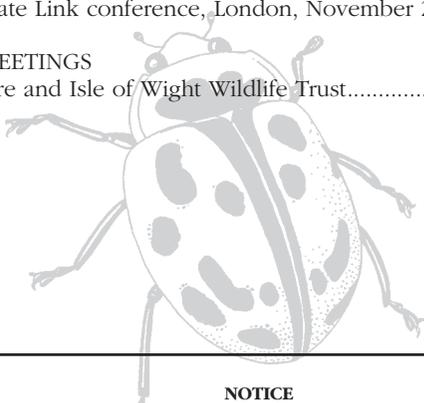
FUTURE UK MEETINGS

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (jointly with Alton Natural History Society)

Saturday 7th July, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Shortheath Common, Hampshire: Invertebrate observation and heathland conservation issues. Stephen Miles and Dr David Lonsdale, together with Ian Stoneman, the County Council warden, will lead a walk around this wet and dry heathland site. An aim is to discuss the conservation needs of heathland insects. MEETING POINT; SU770362, Oakhanger Village Hall. PARKING: outside or nearby the hall (without blocking entrances) or by the main road or in overflow car park at SU774368. ADMITTANCE: No fees but donations welcome; dogs cannot be admitted and any child must be accompanied by an adult. LUNCH: please bring sandwiches etc. Contact: Stephen Miles, tel. 01420 478845.

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NOTICE

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