



## Benson Nature Group

*Caring for Benson's green spaces*

### Nature Loves a Churchyard ..... and so do we!

Besides being places of solace and peace for people, churchyards, being relatively undisturbed and free from chemical inputs, are places where nature can also thrive.

After months of preparation and collaboration with other local groups Benson's Churchyard Festival took place on 8<sup>th</sup> June. Moths prefer warm, dry summer evenings, so on a cold morning following a rainy night, it was with some trepidation that we opened the moth trap at 8.30am. But we shouldn't have worried. To our relief and the children's delight, the first moth we discovered was the large and impressive Eyed Hawkmoth followed by 17 other species including the beautiful White Ermine, Light Emerald and the strangely named Turnip and Setaceous Hebrew Character moths.

As the morning went on, the weather improved and the other activities got underway. The children painted colourful and imaginative log slices to decorate the roof of the bug hotel and took part in a bug safari using a technique known as "bush bashing". Branches of overhanging trees were beaten a couple of times with a stick and the bugs that fell out were collected in a white sheet beneath and taken indoors to be identified. Bees were also collected in small jars. Amongst the 15 species identified were ladybirds, butterflies, woodlice, beetles, spiders and bumblebees. The records of the sightings will be sent to the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre to help build their database and so help our understanding of species present in our area.

While the children were occupied in these activities, the adults were able to undertake a self-guided walk through the churchyard where there were panels giving information about the folklore associated with various wildflowers and trees found in the churchyard. The BNG stand in the Canon's Room showcased the activities of BNG including its surveys, 2019 programme and publications, as well as a map of the current and proposed green spaces in the village. A list of mobile apps to help with identifying wildflowers, trees, birds, birdsong, moths and butterflies etc was also provided.

Prompted by photos of different churchyards with varying amounts of wildflowers, some interesting discussions took place on the sometimes uneasy relationship between heritage and nature conservation; the possibility of grass snakes and slow worms being found in the churchyard; the link between nature and our own physical and mental well-being as well as the People and Nature Strategy within the Benson's Neighbourhood Plan.

A big thankyou to Imogen Parker for the wildflower walk, to Tom, Pat and Helen Stevenson for the moth trapping and bug safari, assisted in the latter by Marian Shaw, to Jon Fowler and Edel McGurk for much behind the scenes activity in all areas, to the PCC for enabling our participation in this event and to the catering team whose bacon butties and delicious home-made cakes were enjoyed by all.

If you missed the moth trapping at the church festival (and even if you didn't!) there will be a second opportunity to marvel at these under-rated creatures when we hold another **Moth Breakfast at Millbrook Mead at 8.30am on 13<sup>th</sup> July**, facilitated by moth expert Dr. Marc Botham from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. We hope you will join us.

Val Siddiqui  
12<sup>th</sup> June 2019



Follow us on twitter - @BensonNature  
Find us on Facebook - <https://t2m.io/OXj6Tk>