



Milford Conservation Volunteers

www.milfordconservation.org



SPRING/SUMMER 2022 NEWSLETTER

The 10th Annual General Meeting successfully took place on Sat 19th March at the Milford Community Centre in front of a small but appreciative audience.

The evening began with a poignant reference to the passing of our ex-chairman and founder member Tony Locke. A series of photographs were displayed illustrating Tony's hard work and enthusiasm for the many projects undertaken by the MCV over the years.

The meeting was declared quorate for the subsequent formal proceedings.

The Chairman summarised the activities of the past year and described how the group had gradually overcome the restrictions of covid-19 and more recently returned to near normal operations. It was also confirmed that, somewhat unexpectedly, an invite to a Buckingham Palace Garden party associated with QAVS award had been received for May 2022. ***Finally, an appeal was made for members to consider putting themselves forward to fill vacant positions on the Committee.***

The Treasurer confirmed that the groups finances were currently healthy with sufficient monies available for all identified future projects and contingencies. It was also confirmed, with some satisfaction, that after much time and effort a new internet accessible account had recently been opened which will make future transactions more straight forward and secure together with significant savings on current bank charges.

The membership fee for 2023 was agreed to be maintained at £7.50.

Various changes to the MCV's constitution were agreed and will be found shortly on the new MCV website.

The Conservation officer's report comprised a slide show of the wildlife highlights of the areas under our management and also included a brief summary of the Hurst Spit to Lymington Strategy.

Existing committee members were re-elected together with Lorraine Mabbett. Keith Metcalf and Mary Macmillan, who had both decided to stand down, were formally thanked as an acknowledgement of the invaluable contribution they had made over many years.

The Mervyn Couzens Volunteer of the Year award for 2020 was made posthumously to Tony Locke with the replica trophy presented by Liz Couzens to his family members present in the audience. The award for 2021 was made to Martin Gretton who unfortunately was unable to attend.

The guest speaker Pete Durnell, reserve manager for HCC Countryside Service then gave a fascinating presentation of the Lymington Keyhaven Nature Reserve. This covered the detailed history of the salt industry as well as the specific wildlife found there. It was particularly interesting to hear about current status of various birds that attempt to breed on the off shore salt marsh islands with variable success.

CREEKS & SALTMARSH TRIPS

All trips for this winter 2021/22 have now taken place. The December trip was led by Keith Metcalf and David Horne. The skipper was Jack. It was a very calm morning, and 21 species of birds were recorded. We had some very good views of Great Crested Grebe, Red Breasted Mergansers and Ringed Plover.



Great Crested Grebe



Ringed Plover



Red Breasted Merganser



Grey Plover

During the trip around the saltmarsh an estimated 1,000 Dunlin and 800 Brent Geese were seen. The Solent is a very important wintering area for many birds, some of them having travelled several thousand miles to get here.

The January Creeks and Saltmarsh boat trip took place on Monday 10th. It was led by Keith Metcalf with thanks to Mary Macmillan for recording bird numbers. An enthusiastic Isaac Hobby was our skipper for this trip. Again, it was a very calm morning with 29 species of birds being recorded. We had a good start with the sighting of a Marsh Harrier flying over the marsh. There were large numbers of Dark-bellied Brent Goose (c. 900) and Dunlin (c. 800). Three Kingfishers were seen. Some of the birds seen are shown below.



Dark-bellied Brent Goose



Dunlin



One of the three Kingfishers seen



Oystercatcher.

The February and March Creeks and Saltmarsh Boat Trips

The skipper was Isaac Hobby. Keith Metcalf was the main bird spotter and recorder assisted by Chris Barrass. It was quite a warm day for this time of the year. There were a good number of Brent Geese, Curlew and Oystercatcher. Dunlin numbers are down as they have started go to their breeding grounds.



Cormorant



Red Breasted Merganser

Two Grey Seals were seen



SURPRISE VISITOR TO AVON WATER

At about 16.45 on Thursday 13th January, I received a call from Keith Metcalf who was down at the Bird Observatory letting me know that there was a Grey Seal thrashing away in Avon Water (a great first for the site). As luck would have it, I was already on my way to Keyhaven.

Common seal

- Dots (in this case) or rings
- Proportionally smaller head
- Concave forehead
- Shorter snout
- Cat like
- Round face profile head on

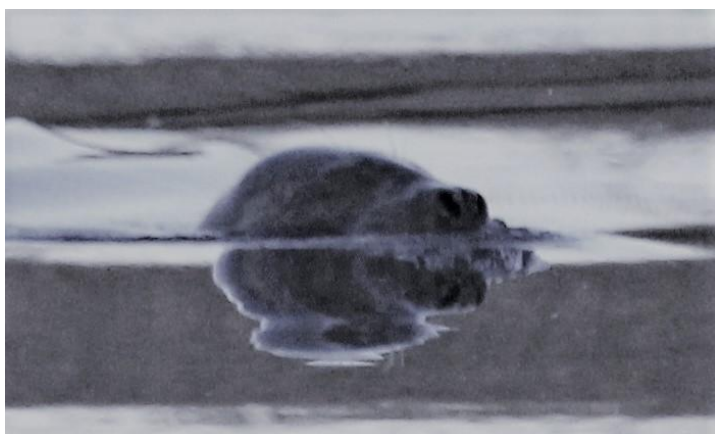
Grey seal

- Blotches of pattern
- Proportionally larger head
- Flatter nose profile
- Longer snout
- Labrador like
- Vertically oval face profile head on



I arrived there within a few minutes and I met Keith on the decking of the Observatory. At first there was no sight of the seal but after a while we started to see movement in the water with a small wave moving around the middle of Avon Water. Luckily it wasn't long before it surfaced allowing a few photos to be taken. Other people standing at the Sluice Gate said that the young seal was entering and exiting through the open gate into Keyhaven Harbour. It had apparently been seen in the area the day before. We occasionally see seals on our Creeks & Saltmarsh birding trips around Keyhaven River, but this was the first time we had seen one in Avon Water. Marc Moody, an avid collector of bird and wildlife records, saw two Grey Seals in Mount Lake in March 2005 and another there in September 2014.





The Grey Seal on Avon Water – photos courtesy of Chris Barrass

Birding for Beginners 2022.

Birding for Beginners Sessions take place every month throughout the year, with the 1st Saturday of the month session taking place at the Observatory in Keyhaven and the 3rd Saturday of the month session taking place at Sturt Pond. The sessions run between 10.00 and 12.00

It's FREE and everyone is welcome.

January

*Our first session of 2022 was on Saturday 1st January at the Observatory. It was run by David Horne, Keith Metcalf and Chris Barrass. 40 species of birds were recorded including a **Marsh Harrier, Sparrowhawk, Golden Plover, Brent Goose** and **Lapwing**. A small number of people visited the Observatory during the session.*

*The next Birding for Beginners session took place on Saturday the 15th January. (Third Saturday of the month) at the Bird Hide at Sturt Pond. Keith Metcalf and Chris Barrass ran the session. Thirty different species of birds were seen and recorded. Two families visited the Bird hide with the children showing a lot of interest in the birds seen through the scopes. The highest number of birds recorded was **Brent Goose** (with over 300 birds present). Other birds seen were **Redshank, Kingfisher, Goldfinch, Rock Pipit, Herring Gull and Mediterranean Gull**.*



Two Brent Geese heading to the scrape at Sturt Pond.

The February session took place on Saturday 5th of February (the first Saturday of the month) at the Observatory in Keyhaven and was run by David Horne and Chris Barrass. 40 species of birds were recorded, including ***Water Rail, 2 Marsh Harriers, Kingfisher, Gadwall, Teal and Pintail.***



Water rail.

The Sturt Pond Birding for Beginners session took place on the Saturday 19th February (3rd Saturday of the month) and was the day after storm Eunice. It was a bit blustery. Birds recorded included ***Stonechat and Mediterranean Gull.***



Stonechat(female).



Mediterranean Gull.

March

The first March session took place at the Observatory on Saturday 5th which was an incredibly cold morning. It was run by David Horne, Keith Metcalf and Chris Barrass. We had several visitors including a group from Romsey U3A. 42 species of birds were recorded. Luckily the ***Shoveler, Gadwall, Teal and Pintail*** were coming quite close to the Observatory, so visitors were able to get a good view of them. ***Buzzard, Kestrel and Marsh Harrier*** were also seen.



Pintail



Marsh Harrier

Sturt Pond birding for Beginners took place on Saturday 19th March. (The third Saturday of the month). It was run by Chris Barrass. A cold and very windy day. 24 bird species were recorded. Despite the cold weather there were several visitors. ***The highlights were a Red Kite, female Black***

Redstart and a Wheatear. Other birds recorded were *Kestrel, Stonechat, Pied Wagtail and 20 Mute swans*.



Kestrel at Sturt Pond.

LOGGING and LOGGERS

Hello, well some of you reading this will be a member of our logging team and without you we would not be able to operate so thank you for volunteering and giving us some of your valuable time. Many others of you would have seen us in the Pleasure Gardens or Studland Common turning felled trees into roundels. Roundels were once described as manageable pieces of tree trunks or branches but believe me after carrying them for a few hours manageable is a debatable description! We then split the roundels in to what I would describe as manageable pieces of wood and sell them to local people to burn on their log fires or burners.

Four of our members are now trained in the use of the chainsaw, we also have an electric log splitting machine and hand axes and have a couple of members who assist with the deliveries. Some of the work is heavy but not all, there are plenty of lighter tasks like cutting back brambles and using the log splitting machine which makes light work of the wood splitting. Delivering the logs needs someone with a tow bar and a couple of hours free.

All the money from the sale of the wood is then spent on MCV projects that benefit the village and community. In the past couple of years we have donated money to supporting projects with Milford-on-Sea Primary School, They have bought bird and bat boxes, trees and hedgehog homes. MCV also provides an

annual bursary award to a youngster who has a real interest in nature, conservation of the environment. For two-years MCV sponsored young Daisy Scott to commence being taught how to become a ‘trainee bird-ringer’ and also purchased a pair of binoculars for two young lads who had had their pair stolen.



Taking moisture meter readings

Back to logging and loggers: Every year trees are surveyed to check whether they are either; dead, dying or dangerous and they are felled by professional tree specialists appointed by the Parish Council. It is these trees that MCV has been given permission to cut up and remove from the Pleasure Grounds and Studland Common. Some of this wood we take out to sell, some we stack up in the woodlands or common as valuable invertebrate homes which add to the overall health of the wildlife using these areas. It is important that any woodland, scrub area, common or meadow is managed to maintain its long-term health and to promote its future well-being.

We hold logging sessions at least once a month, on different days of the week to help our members who volunteer with other community groups or have other commitments on certain days of the week. The sessions are not all about work. Mostly, they are about having fun and a good way to meet people, catch up with friends and to have a good old chin wag, we are very good at putting the world to rights.

Next time you see us working when you are walking in the nature reserves around the village please stop and say hello and even better, let us know if you have some free time come and join us.

Lorraine Mabbett – MCV Woodland Administrator

SENSIBLE PLANNING LAWS IN OTHER PLANNING AUTHORITIES, WHY NOT HERE AT NFDC & NFNPA?

New Planning laws in Brighton and Hove now require developers to install bricks for bees and swifts into every new building taller than 5m.

Swift bricks are designed to be barely noticeable to homeowners but provide safe nesting areas for our declining and ‘brief’ summer visitors. Adult birds return each year to the same nesting spots, but to encourage them to take up residence in new areas you need to play their screaming calls to attract their attention.

Swifts actually spend 3-4 months visiting our shores, arriving just in time to breed before heading back to Africa.

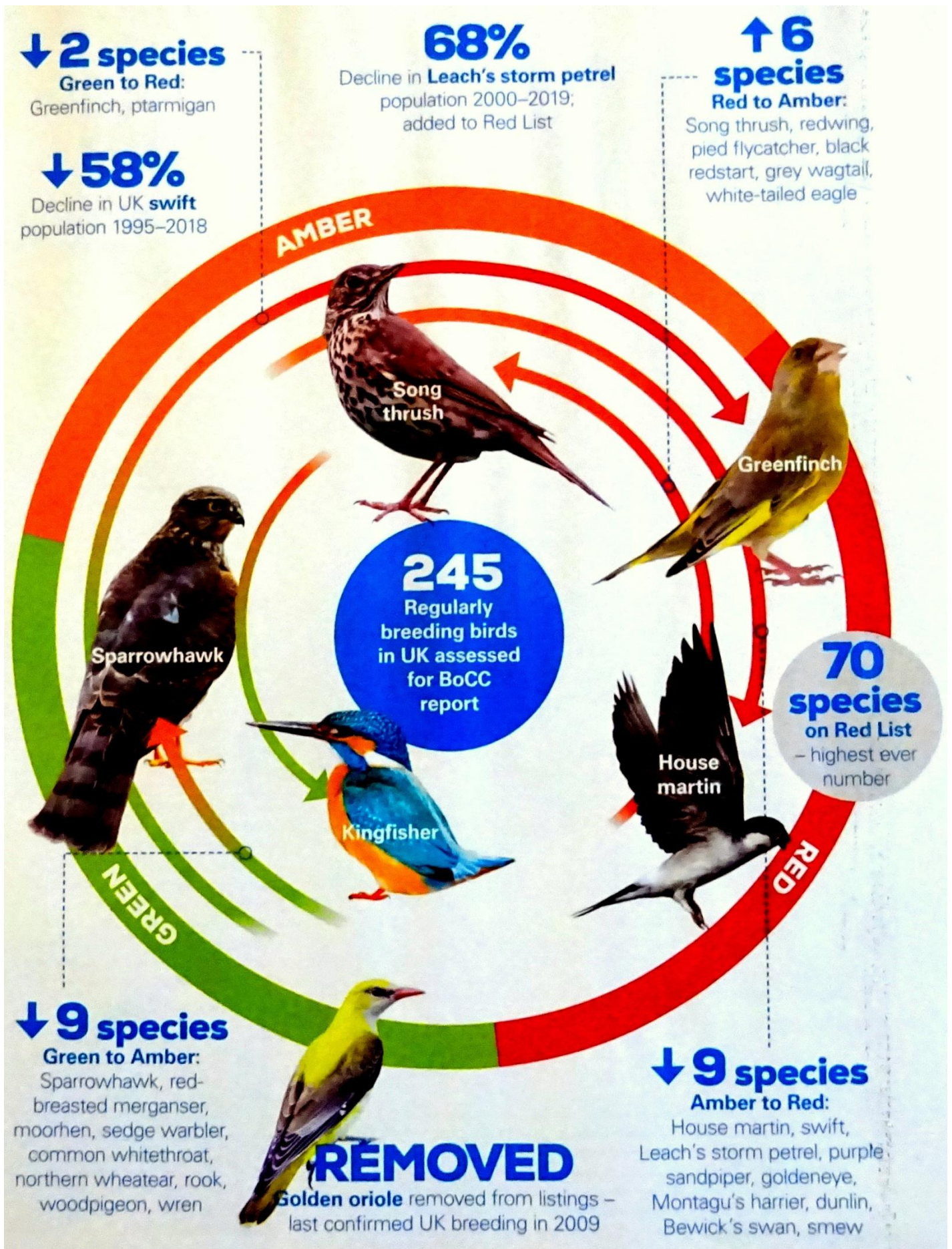
Their numbers have plummeted by 59% in the last 23 years (1995 to 2018) when the last data was collected.

When juvenile swifts leave the nest, they spend up to 3 years on the wing without ever resting and even sleep on the wing, which they are able to do because they are able to shut down one side of their brain. They even mate on the wing as this remarkable photograph below shows. (*Credit Paul Leach*)





BIRDS OF CONSERVATION CONCERN - 2022



At the end of last year (Nov 2021) BOURC issued its 5th report on the status of bird populations; 'Birds of Conservation Concern'. The world population of many birds continues to decline. In the UK 245 regular breeding birds are assessed and categorised into Red, Amber and Green listed species. Red indicates that these species are of the greatest concern, whilst Amber gives cause for concern and those classified in the Green category could easily move into the Amber or Red lists as several have now done. A summary of the status of some of these birds is shown on the previous page.

Worryingly, there are now 70 species on the Red list, the highest number recorded since these reports were first published. Two species have jumped from Green straight into the Red list – Greenfinch and Ptarmigan and 9 other species have moved from Amber into the Red list, while the Golden Oriole has been removed completely as a UK breeding species as it was last confirmed breeding way back in 2009.

Keith Metcalf – A New Wildlife Adventure with '*Wings*'

After serving on various committees and working with our local conservation groups; Milford Environment Group (MEG), the Wildlife Recording Group (WRG) and the MCV, Keith is embarking on some new wildlife adventures of his own. To enable him to do so he found it necessary to step down from his roles as Conservation Officer and Publicity Officer at the recent AGM so that he could devote time to other projects that are also close to his heart.

These changes coincided with a recent house move from Swallow Drive where he lived for the past 34 years moving to Solent Grange alongside Sturt Pond where he is enjoying observing the birds at even closer quarters. He is continuing to write about local natural history and his second book; *The Historic Birdlife of Milford-on-Sea* is to be published shortly.

Keith has also formed a new 'birding group' called '*Wings*' aimed at encouraging youngsters (and the not so young) to take an active interest in local birds and wildlife. As a first step, he has engaged the voluntary services of several local young and talented ladies to become the '*children's wildlife storytellers*'. They will read short stories to nursery and pre-school youngsters as they watch pictures from the books unfold on a big screen about British birds and wildlife. Parents and grandparents will also be welcome and encouraged to join

the children. He has also found a video technician who will help promote the nature story-telling on film and online. Keith will also be looking to take the older children (with their parents/grandparents) on some 'seafaring birding trips and local nature trek adventures' with a difference? Look for further details in the Milford Music Festival programme due out shortly.



Watch this space!!

Other interests that are now taking up much of Keith's time include the ***Hurst Spit to Lymington 'Strategy' (coastal protection scheme)***. This project is looking at how our coastline, nature reserves and properties will be affected over the next 80 to 100 years. Sea levels are predicted to rise over that period by at least one metre. This will cause a number of problems along our coastline unless remedial actions are taken to protect our nationally and internationally important habitats. Keith will continue to represent MCV and new group Wings at the Environment Agency, HCC and Natural England Stakeholders group meetings along with Ben Collins who is representing Keyhaven Forum and looking after the interests of local residents and properties.

Keith is currently working on a series of mitigation measures and proposals in case we lose some of our most treasured wildlife habitats. Losses may include saline lagoons, saltmarsh and seabird breeding grounds. The Environment Agency 'buzzwords' seems to be '***Work with Nature***' not against it. Mitigation

measures could include the creation of *managed retreat areas* (i.e. allowing seawater wave action to dissipate over a wider area), *saltmarsh restoration*, the *creation of a seabird island breeding sanctuary*, *extending wetlands and muddy feeding areas* (for wildfowl and waders), *amenity observation hides*, *more Solent coastal bird-watching trips*, *static viewing nature-watching platforms* and a *heritage centre/local life centre*. In other words, wherever practical, enhancing habitats for birds and wildlife whilst protecting properties and improving amenity facilities for locals and visitors to explore and enjoy our beautiful coastline.

Keith said; “*MCV has a fantastically hard-working committee and volunteers and it has been a pleasure to work with so many dedicated conservationists over these years. I have enjoyed writing MCVs Newsletters and conservation reports over several decades. I am pleased to say that with immediate effect Chris Barrass has kindly taken over producing the MCV newsletters. I feel I have left that role and the running of our group in most capable hands and shall continue to support MCV aspirations and help whenever I can contribute to their ongoing success*”.

If you wish to talk about any of these matters you can contact him direct at: keithmetcalf@btinternet.com or telephone or text me on 07771 918449 or phone (01590) 619533.

Upgrading of the MCVs Website.

Julie Hallows (a committee member) is working very hard to upgrade MCVs Website. Here is some of the topics that she is working on.

BAP News

For those who are unaware, MCV produced a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) in 2015. This was a tremendous task by those involved and you can find the final report on the MCV website here: [Biodiversity - Milford Conservation Volunteers](#). I found it a very interesting read, even finding out about sites in the parish I didn't know existed.

Recently a working group began a review of the document and concluded that, as much of the plan is still relevant and ongoing today, we would focus on updating the Actions specified in Chapter 15, rather than rewriting it. Some of the listed actions have been completed, some ongoing and some yet to start. There are also new actions to be added. If you have any ideas to add to the plan, then please let us know, particularly if you have the expertise to lead or guide a project.

One activity that is just beginning is the investigation of bats in Milford. We contacted Hampshire bat group [Hampshire Bat Group - Home](#) and found they have very few records from our neck of the woods and so, with the help of local bat expert Lisa Malter, we have identified potential roosts and will soon be out with bat meters to see what we have.

I would like to highlight the message from Jenny Spenser who chaired the original BAP group (Chapter 15 page 62) *“if you would like to participate in one or more of the actions [in the plan] please contact us.”* You can do so through the contact form on the website or email info@milfordconservation.org.
Julie Hallows (Committee Member).

BREAKING NEWS.

We are planning to commence our bat surveys in May when hopefully the evenings will be significantly warmer. Prior to our first session we would like to organise an introductory meeting at which the habits of bats will be discussed, together with the techniques used to identify individual species and record their presence and abundance.

We are looking for the assistance of about ten people for this survey work. If you have an interest in bats or wish to learn a bit more about them then why not come and join us and find out what it's all about?

Please email chairman@milfordconservation.org or call Julie Hallows 0771 7762595 for further details

MCV will have a pitch at this year's Plant Fair on Village Green on 21st May.

If anyone has any spare insect friendly seeds, cuttings or plants that we could sell at this event please bring them on the morning, or let me know and I can collect them during the previous week.

Highly scented plants such as honeysuckle and night scented stock are loved by bats. Vipers Bugloss and foxgloves are bee favourites, and of course buddleia is the butterfly favourite amongst many others.

Contact Julie Hallows 0771 776 2595