



Grass Snake Photo: Jill Griffin

# News of Gadespring



Photo: Mike Dunks



Photo: Peter Samson

## Lizards and Snakes...

The old brickworks site at Bovingdon was the site for a slow worm translocation recently, when a substantial number of these legless lizards were moved from a local allotment site destined for development. In total, 241 slow worms were moved – 46 adult males, 85 adult females and 110 sub adults/ juveniles. They were released into a hibernaculum, constructed using layers of wood and soil, to offer them some protection while they acclimatise to their surroundings. We very much hope that they will thrive in their new environment, which is deemed ideal habitat for them. The site will continue to be monitored for sightings.

Another native reptile that is seen from time to time at the brickworks site is the grass snake. This handsome specimen was spotted in September by Jill Griffin, who was quick enough to grab a shot.

As part of the ongoing management of Gadespring as a nature reserve, Trust staff have been busy creating another scrape to add to the marginal wetland areas for wildlife. This will further enhance the site and help to encourage water birds and mammals to visit and inhabit the area. Gadespring is already the haunt of little egrets, water rails, kingfishers and otters. In addition, our water vole reintroduction programme is showing positive signs so far, with voles being regularly spotted from the bird hide at

the existing scrape. Winter will prove to be a challenge for them, but we are thrilled to be able to confirm that juvenile voles are present and thriving on the site, as borne out by the wonderful photo above.

Open mornings on Thursdays between 10am and 12 noon. Our winter timetable for open Sundays is last Sunday of each month from 11am to 2pm – do bring your children for new discoveries.

# Winter Newsletter

## Dancing for Health and Wellbeing



Louise White (centre) and the 'Let's Dance' performers



Photos: Elaine Rushton

**The Box Moor Trust makes available annually a small grant fund for art events and projects within its area of benefit. One of last year's successful applicants for funding was Dacorum Community Dance, a fantastic local organisation that employs the medium of dance to improve life and inspire learning for people of all ages across the community.**

Their popular 'Let's Dance' project engages older people in dance, helping to maintain and improve their health and wellbeing, reduce loneliness and isolation, build confidence and provide a sense of belonging. A £500 grant from the Trust helped make possible the staging of a mini Christmas tour at three venues: the Heather Club, Christopher Court Sheltered Housing and Dudley House retirement home, culminating in participatory sessions with residents and performers. As you can see from our photos, those taking part had a great time and the value of this fantastic project is clear to see.

Trained dancer Louise White, the driving force behind Dacorum Community Dance, said, "It's been great to get out into our

community and share our passion for dance! It has given our dancers the opportunity to perform in a relaxed environment and our audiences to enjoy and join in with our workshops. Loneliness can have a serious effect on health and bringing people together to enjoy dance and music is a great way to spend an afternoon!"

With 2020 being the Hertfordshire Year of Culture, it is the ideal time to be planning an arts-based event. To qualify for a grant, organisations must be operating in the Box Moor Trust area of benefit, which broadly covers Hemel Hempstead and Bovingdon. These will be one-off grants and should be used for costs associated with staging an arts-based event (eg hire of rehearsal space, printing of programmes, etc). If you have an

event planned before 30th September 2020, you are still in time to apply as we have extended the closing date to 29th February. A separate application window will open between 1st April and 30th June 2020 for events taking place between 1st October 2020 and 30th September 2021. See our website for further details and to download an application form.





Photo: Elaine Rushton

## Autumn Festival proves a hit

Despite wet and miserable weather over our Autumn Festival weekend, the local community turned out to enjoy a fun couple of days in October. We had two large marquees this year, accommodating even more trade and charity stalls selling a wide range of fabulous produce, crafts, gifts and jewellery. Puddingstone Distillery of Tring launched their '1594: Spirit of Box Moor' gin, made using berries from the Trust's own junipers. This proved extremely popular with stock selling out very fast. With outside stallholders as well and live music on both days, the event had a busy and fun atmosphere which the rain could not dampen. There was plenty for youngsters, including craft activities, pottery and circus workshops. Archery have-a-go and a 'Mad Science' show also drew the crowds. The conker ring was the scene of some fierce combat – our photo shows friends Henry Drury and Aidan Keyes after their own friendly battle!

## Commons Exchange

Thank you to all those of you who took the time and trouble to make representations to the National Planning Inspectorate in response to our application for deregistration and exchange of common land. This followed our full consultation earlier in 2019. The majority of the feedback we have received has been broadly in support of our application and we have been given the opportunity to respond to individual queries and concerns. The consultation window has now closed and the application is with the Planning Inspectorate. We will keep you posted of developments.

# Trust volunteer saves one of our young barn owls



Liam Edwards

**We were delighted that our local barn owls bred twice this year with 4 youngsters surviving in all. Our land has the only known breeding records in Hemel Hempstead for 50 years and we hope our offspring will breed elsewhere locally.**

In October the dreadful weather conditions made it difficult for the parents to feed their fast maturing youngsters. Barn owls cannot fly well with wet wings. This young owl tried its maiden flight from the nest but it was weak from underfeeding and it fell to the ground. Liam Edwards, one of our many dedicated volunteers, spends long hours protecting and studying our owls and badgers. Luckily, Liam was watching the nest site when the fall occurred.

The owl had landed upside down on the grass and could not right itself. Liam, photographed here with the young owl, tried replacing it on a high branch but it was too weak to hold on.

The owl was clearly too immature to fend for itself. Even though the parents may have tried to feed it, the youngster would have inevitably been killed by a fox or a dog if left behind. It was a Sunday night and Liam kindly took the owl to Tiggywinkles wildlife hospital in Haddenham. The youngster recovered and was fed until ready to fly. It has now been released in the Ashridge area so it won't be far from its birthplace.

A big vote of thanks to Liam for saving this beautiful bird. The barn owl is protected by law and it is an offence to disturb a nest. The location cannot, therefore, be publicised.

## Christmas in Hay Wood

For those who went down to the woods on Saturday 7th December they certainly did have a big surprise as Santa was to be found in his woodland dell at the end of a forest trail. With Christmas crafts and outdoor activities and a small gift for each child, the morning proved very popular.



Photo: Caroline Evans

# Fun with cameras for Box Moor Rangers



Photo: Sheila Fox

**On Saturday 16th November, 23 members of our Box Moor Rangers group, aged between 8 and 15 spent an enjoyable morning of photography at Gadespring Cress Beds.**

The session was run by our Education team in conjunction with some of the Box Moor Trust volunteers with particular expertise in photography, and they were on hand to help out with the technical aspects of taking pictures as well as making available £30,000 worth of photographic equipment for the youngsters to use on the day. Some of the children were already keen photographers with their own cameras, so it was a great opportunity for them to put their skills into practice as well as for those new to photography to have a go.

Opportunities for great photos were all around, with Gadespring being a prime site for observing wildlife of all kinds: herons, little egrets, kingfishers, water voles, etc. The weather made for some challenging lighting conditions, but all the children ended up with a great selection of images as well as learning a great deal about the art of photography from the knowledgeable volunteers. At the end of the session, the children got their favourite photo of the day printed to take home with them courtesy

of volunteer Derrick, who operated the laptop and printer. Special thanks go to Nick Nomikos of The Two Wheel Centre in Harpenden for generously sponsoring the ink cartridges.

The Trust is most grateful to volunteers Mike and Derrick Dunks, Steve Rogers, Sarah McKeeman, Kate Steele, Iain Nibbsy and Sheila Fox for organising and running the session and for sharing their skills and knowledge of photography with the children.

*Box Moor Rangers is for children between the ages of 3 and 16 who are interested in nature and wildlife. The group meets on the third Saturday of every month with the aim of motivating and educating young people to enjoy wildlife and the countryside. There are three age groups: Mini Rangers for 3-7 year olds (which currently has a waiting list), Junior Rangers for 8-11 year olds and Youth Conservation Rangers for ages 11 and over. For further information please visit [www.boxmoortrust.org.uk/education/box-moor-rangers/](http://www.boxmoortrust.org.uk/education/box-moor-rangers/)*



Duncock  
Photo: Steve Rogers

## Family Birdwatch at Gadespring

As part of the RSPB Big Birdwatch, we will be having a Family Birdwatch on Sunday 27th January at the Gadespring Open Day, Old Fishery Lane, between 11am and 2pm. Come and join us for birdwatching and a guided tour of the cress beds. Donations welcome on the day. No need to book in advance.

## Hoping for an ID

This fascinating fungus was seen at Heath Park in September. Measuring over 15cm in height, it had emerged from the root of a large tree that fell down over the road and river last winter. Somehow it had escaped people's feet and had grown since the last mowing. Our best guess at an ID is Dryad Saddle (Polyporus Squamosis), but if anyone knows better please get in touch – we'd love to know!

