



BRITISH NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION

The National Body for Naturalists

FIELD MEETING AT GILBERT WHITE'S HOUSE AND GARDENS

11th & 12th July 2026

(Photos and text Andy Young)



We were delighted to hear that a second visit would be made to Gilbert White's House and Gardens, having missed out on the previous Field Meeting held by the BNA on 3rd August 2024. There is an excellent write up of the previous visit in the Archive Events section of the BNA website and I would encourage anyone who has not yet seen it to have a look – it also includes a lot of historical information about Gilbert White and details of the house, gardens and museum at Selborne which I will not repeat here. This report will focus more on activities the BNA members got up to on the 11th and 12th July.

The field meeting started at 2pm on Saturday with us all meeting in the Field Studies Centre, located in a large converted barn on the eastern edge of the meadow. We were joined by some of the volunteers that contribute in the gardens and grounds and we were all welcomed by Steph Holt and Steve Rutherford.



The Barn

This was the second weekend of unseasonably high temperatures of around 30C and it was good to have the shade of the barn and an endless supply of cold water to keep us going throughout the day.

This weekend was chosen to align with an initiative from the Gilbert White House organisers in an effort to encourage more visitors to record wildlife sightings, and to help with that, to encourage the use of iNaturalist as a way to make it easier for those learning about wildlife to be more confident in submitting records. As part of this initiative, Steph, as a Trustee at Gilbert White's, was down to lead some groups of visitors to the house around guided tours of the gardens and to encourage them to submit sightings records.

For our part, we were all asked to download and set up the iNaturalist app so that we could submit records directly from our walks around the grounds and gardens. It was something new to me, having been more familiar with iRecord previously and it was interesting to see how straightforward and intuitive iNaturalist was to use. Talking with other members it was apparent that there are slight differences in the use of the app depending on which make and model of smart phone you are using, but generally everyone seemed to get the hang of it, sometimes with a little help from Steph.

It is amazing to even me that our phones have now become such an essential part of a naturalist's inventory when going out to observe the environment and our wildlife. From Merlin to identify bird sounds, ObsIdentify to suggest an identity, iRecord and iNaturalist to submit records and get them verified, and even with small adaptors to identify bats flying around at night. I'm sure there are, or will be others to amaze us, but can you imagine what Gilbert White would have thought of all this? I'd have thought he would have seen it as some strange magic emanating from our tiny devices that we all hold so dear!

The Saturday afternoon saw Steph lead an introductory walk around the gardens and us familiarising ourselves with where everything was, in between taking a breather in the sweltering heat. Steve then led an interesting walk to indicate the level of diversity seen on some trees, where the tree itself is a record, then recording things such as galls and other species on the tree gives additional records and an idea of how they all rely on each other.



Steph Holt giving a tour of the gardens

A further walk around the grounds late afternoon then saw us ready for our evening meal, which was held at the Selborne Arms, just a few yards away from the Gilbert White House car park. We were all ready for some cool drinks and the meal before getting ready for the evening activities. Some of us took a quick stroll across to St Mary's church to pay our respects at Gilbert White's grave before returning to the field study centre. As it was still too light for bats to put in an appearance, we used the time to prepare and set 10 small mammal traps, whilst four moth traps were set up at strategic points around the meadow.

Armed with a selection of bat detectors, we immediately found plenty of grasshoppers and crickets, and decided to wander through the gardens as the light faded and the first of the bats started to emerge looking for food. It wasn't long before we had the distinctive "chip-chop" sound from the detectors of some noctules over the meadow, followed by pipistrelles foraging in and around some of the trees. It still being very warm and with some people having a distance to travel for the night, we all retired ready to get going again in the morning.



Sunday started off nice and fresh, but it soon quickly warmed up again. The mammal traps had one customer, a wood mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus*, that was emptied into a plastic bag for examination before being released on its way. Pauline and Chris, one of the volunteers had been working on moth traps, and it was a bumper haul, I had never seen so many hawk moths together! A total of 95 moth species were recorded, ones that stood out for me were the Leopard moth, *Zeuzera pyrina*, Jersey Tiger, *Euplagia quadripunctaria* and the Poplar, Privet and Elephant Hawk-moths *Laothoe populi*, *Sphinx ligustri* and *Deilepila elpenor* respectively.



Wood mouse released safely unharmed



Leopard and Jersey Tiger moths



Poplar, Privet and Elephant Hawk moths



Rosy Footman, Ruby Tiger, Dusky Thorn

Next on the agenda was concentrating on using iNaturalist to record common species around the gardens and meadow. Naturalists are great at recording the unusual and rare observations, but for good scientific knowledge we also need to record the everyday and common species too, they may not be so common in the future. It was interesting to spot members wandering round getting used to the app, waving phones about rather than sweep nets and note books.



Recording species in the meadow

After a short break for lunch around the hottest part of the day, we reconvened by a pool in the gardens for some pond-dipping. This pond is host to all 3 British newt species, and provided the specimen from which the full genome sequence was derived for the Great Crested Newt, *Triturus cristatus* for the Darwin Tree of Life project. Despite a restricted access to the pond, there was no “big splash”, and we managed to fill a few trays with dragonfly larvae, efts (juvenile newts), mayflies and a host of other freshwater inverts.



Pond dipping

Following an essential “ice cream break”, some of us took a look around the museum at Gilbert White’s house in welcome shade to see many of the artefacts and displays reported in the 2024 visit, and to also view the Oates Collection. The Oates Collection included displays of African exploration in Victorian times with Frank Oates, and of later polar exploration with Lawrence Oates (of the famous Scott’s Antarctic Expedition of 1910-13).

Late afternoon saw members saying their goodbyes to friends and starting journeys home after a wonderful weekend of discovering and learning about wildlife with the BNA.

Many thanks are due to Steph Holt and Steve Rutherford for organising another excellent field meeting for BNA members and thanks also to the local volunteers that joined us during the weekend to help out.

More information on the Gilbert White House and Museum can be found here:
<https://gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk/>