

# **Spiders? Ugh!**

***Susan Wooden***

Had you been at Wheatfen Nature Reserve on the first Saturday in September this year, you might have been surprised to see a group of people staring at the brick wall of the old outside privy while one of the group held a tuning fork against the wall. Brian, Lenny and I were part of this group and no, the vagaries of this year's summer weather hadn't finally taken its toll and caused us all to flip (well, not quite); we were on a spider course organised by David Nobbs, the Wheatfen warden.

The weather forecast had been truly dreadful, promising us strong winds and heavy rain, so David had arranged for the twelve of us to start the day at the village hall in Surlingham, just a short distance from the reserve. The course began at 10 am with a very welcome cup of coffee and then Peter Nicholson, our instructor for the day, gave us a short talk on these much maligned creatures, during which I was surprised to learn that there have been over 670 different species of spiders recorded in the UK. After this talk we were raring to go out and try and identify some spiders for ourselves. As the rain had held off we returned to the reserve and were soon collecting specimens in pots for Peter and his colleague, Pip, to identify.

I found some interesting tunnel webs in the old outside loo wall and as Peter had told us that there would most probably be a spider sitting in the base of each one, waiting to pounce on anything edible that might pass its front door, we called him over to see them. "I'll get my tuning fork", he said, rather surprising us all! He explained that one way to get the spider to emerge is to set the vibrating tuning fork at the entrance to its tunnel and usually it will appear and attack the fork. Unfortunately, the ruse didn't work that day; the webs might have been empty or perhaps the spiders were more sensible than us and didn't want to venture out into the horrible weather. The promised rain arrived at one o'clock, so we adjourned to the village hall where we ate our lunch while watching a couple of videos all about spiders.

After another talk by Peter and an introduction to some books on our subject of the day, the rain stopped, and we were once again able to return to Wheatfen. (Phyllis must have put in a good word for us!) This time, we all tried using some of the different methods of catching spiders that Peter had brought along for us to use. There was yet another odd sight for any passing observer, me beating a tree with a stick, while Brian held a sort of white upside down umbrella underneath to catch any spiders that might fall out.

Regretfully, we had to end our course at 4pm, and we returned to the village hall once again where David was waiting for us with a very welcome full teapot. It had been an excellent course, which we three enjoyed very much. This was the second course that Brian and I have attended at Wheatfen this year, the other one being about honeybees. There are a variety of these events held at Wheatfen and it is well worth checking out the programme.