



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

Malvern Group

Winter 2021

www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk
malverngroup@live.co.uk

Welcome to our Winter Newsletter

Margaret Vernon (Chairman)

We were delighted to welcome members and friends back to our indoor meetings this autumn. It has been so good to see people and enjoy time in each other's company. All our speakers have been excellent and many thanks go to all who have contributed (and continue to do so) and to those who have offered to help at these meetings, making us all feel comfortable and at ease. Plans are in place for the indoor meetings until May 2022 and walks and trips are organised for the whole year.

As you are aware, my role as acting chairman comes to an end in May 2022, so my replacement needs to be in place as soon as possible so that further planning can take place. Learning the ropes in any new position can be daunting but I and the rest of the committee will help, inform, advise and support a new incumbent. There is flexibility in the specific responsibilities that a new leader may take on but essential will be to chair the committee meetings (three or four per year) and oversee and coordinate the events that the group organises or is involved with, liaising with the Trust at Smite when appropriate. Please speak to me, our vice-chairman John Denham or any member of the committee for further information or to discuss your interest.

Sharing in discussions, offering opinions and helping to formulate ideas are always tremendously valuable and appreciated – have a word if you are interested in being involved in this way.

I'm looking forward to a successful future for our group.

A PIG Day out: 14 August 2021

by Andrew Cartlidge

PIG stands for the Plant Identification Group, which is a group of people who perform plant surveys for Worcestershire Wildlife Trust nature reserves. It started as an offshoot of the Malvern Local Group looking at local reserves some years ago but now seems to be countywide.

First thing, check the weather: it looks dry and the forecast is OK. Today we are surveying Ipsley Alders Marsh reserve, which is quite a big marshy area in the middle of Redditch although you would hardly know it is there.

I check to see who is coming out today. It is always good to have a mixture of people: those who know a lot about plant identification, those who know a reasonable amount and those who know little, as knowledge gets rapidly shared between all. When I get to the site, I seem to have struck lucky as the balance of people is just about right.

The Trust wants us to look for plants in two of the fields, although 'fields' is a bit of a misnomer; 'marshes' is more correct but, fortunately, the weather leading up to the survey has been dry.

We get to work and identify some of the commoner species: ragged robin, red campion and tufted vetch, but then things slow down a little when we get to the tufted forget-me-not and water figwort and slows down even more when we try to decide if we are looking at *Cyperus* or thin-spiked wood-sedge. One advantage of the PIG is that of sharing information and identification. If you were on your own, there would be a risk misidentification or - more likely - giving up.

By the end of the morning, we have identified 62 species in the first field. We move on to the next field after lunch and find another half dozen or so species. All in all, a good day's work.

This year we have also performed surveys at Dropping Well Farm, Brotheridge Green, Windmill Hill, Melrose Farm Meadows, Tiddesley Wood and Piddle Brook Meadows. Over the years, we have visited another 30 sites, many of them more than once. All of these are interesting sites but I would not have visited most of them without being involved with the PIG.

If you would like further information or to participate in future PIG session, contact Andrew at cartlia@yahoo.co.uk.

Moccas Park visit 26 September 2021

by Tim Lawrence

Moccas Park is a deer park in the Wye valley, between Hay-on-Wye and Hereford, that dates back to William the Conqueror.



© Alison Pickford

It is a National Nature Reserve, one of only 225 in England and one of the five most important areas of relict wood pasture in England.

Current management of the countryside means that veteran trees often do not survive in the landscape,

which is why Moccas Park is so important for wildlife. There are over 1000 species of fly and 200 species of lichen present at Moccas, many of them rare and found only at a very few sites in the country. The Moccas beetle (2mm long) is unique to Moccas and found only in the lower branches of veteran oaks where it feeds on wood boring insects and aphids. Recent research has found that the western wood-vase hoverfly (not seen in Britain for 40 years and rediscovered at Moccas in 2001) larvae, which live in water-filled hollows on trees, is associated with an equally rare lichen.

On 26th September, members of Malvern Local Group were able to visit the park in the company of Paul Rutter, an authority on the management and care of veteran trees and associated wildlife. There were stately oak, ash and chestnut trees of great girth with interesting branch shapes.

Some of the veteran trees had retrenched – a natural process where the crown of the tree dies back and the lower branches survive and grow with renewed vigour. We saw a magnificent ash, reputed to be one of the oldest in the country. Next was The Old Man, an oak with huge girth, which is thought to be about 700 years old. We saw no evidence of ash dieback; it is now thought that trees in a more open setting are less susceptible than those in woodland where the humidity is higher.

We saw how the current management of the park ensures that as the current veteran trees die, there are younger trees that will in time become veterans.

We also visited Moccas Hill Wood, adjacent to the Park, where a project to create ancient wood pasture by natural regeneration from local seed is underway.

Curlews nest on Longdon Marsh

by Simon Evans

I am walking across a large hayfield towards another hayfield in the area known as Longdon Marsh. Three months ago, it would indeed have been decidedly marshy here, if not underwater, and wigeon and teal would have been much in evidence. Only a few weeks previously a snipe had got up from under my feet hereabouts but as I walk I am listening for the nightingale I heard on my last visit.

It is early May and I am paying another visit to monitor this area - a known curlew breeding site. I am one of a few local volunteers who are part of the Worcester Curlew Group. We are linked to the Curlew Recovery Partnership, which is helping to conserve curlews in England, especially those that breed in lowland England and whose numbers are sadly declining due to habitat problems and predation threats.

In the two previous years, I have only heard the far-carrying plaintive call of the curlew at Longdon. It is quite late in the season for them to be breeding here this year. However, it has been a cold spring and we have pinpointed an area where they are regularly seen feeding, probing the soft ground for invertebrates with those improbably long bills.

As I walk, a curlew rises from the field in front of me and flies low over a hedge into the next field. I skirt around the hedgerows to observe it feeding and see a second bird with it. After a short while one bird flies back over the hedge. As I continue to watch the other bird feeding, I wonder if I may have just witnessed a changeover; curlews share incubation duties, the nest being back in the field where I first saw the curlew fly. After 20 minutes, it flies back over the hedge, returning to the next field. It feeds, wanders aimlessly, then walks purposefully into a clump of longer grass from which its mate emerges.



© Simon Evans

I have just seen a changeover at the nest!

Landing away from the nest and then the initial wandering is a tactic to draw attention away from the nest site. I took Mike Smart, a local project coordinator, back to the nest the next day and we marked the nest with a stake and photographed it.



Later a team from Slimbridge came up to erect an electric fence against ground predators. Sadly, a couple of weeks later we found the eggs broken, the nest deserted, probably predated by gulls.

This year we think curlews successfully nested at Shatterford, possibly Tibberton and along the River Avon. Next Spring, we will be monitoring those same fields at Longdon again.

Knepp visits

4 to 7 July and 10 to 14 July 2021

Keith Falconer, Maggie & Martin Reed

Forget migrating wildebeest and elephants, there are wildlife safaris right here in the UK. Two Malvern groups each spent four days in early July visiting reserves in Berkshire, Surrey and West Sussex. On our way south we visited Snelsmore and Chobham Common where heaths and mires on acidic soils, unusual in Worcestershire, support large areas of gorse and heather, various species of blue butterflies and small heath butterflies, hard to find in our own county. We saw common lizards and, on sandy scrapes, we watched sand wasps hunting for caterpillars. At Chobham some members had a fascinating walk focusing on the bug life there, with guidance from excellent spotters and photographers in the group.

Day two brought a much-anticipated trip to the 3,500 acre Knepp Estate, where Tamworth pigs, English longhorn cattle and Exmoor ponies roam freely over former arable and pasture land that is being allowed to go back to wild and unmanaged pasture-woodland, as described in Isabella Tree's book *"Wilding"*.

Most were lucky enough to spot purple emperors - even though they were late arriving this year and the weather not conducive to butterfly activity.

Knepp is the first site in the UK to see white storks breeding successfully in a wild habitat for 600 years. We saw juveniles' first attempts at



“branching’ and that ‘what do I do now?’ point as they found themselves 10 feet from the nest, high in the tree facing the ‘wrong’ way.

Other special moments included listening to young student researchers talking about a solitary bee project, seeing red and fallow deer, hobby, kestrel and many marbled white, small skipper and meadow brown butterflies.



Day three, at Ebernoe Common Reserve, we were rewarded with the sound of a turtle dove in the woods, the sight of a white admiral, several silver-washed fritillaries and wonderful wildflower meadows.

A Great Find in Furnace Meadow

by Sandra Young

Towards the end of a super day at Ebernoe Common, some of the group headed to Furnace Meadow for a last chance to see grassland butterflies. We also saw something a little different! Little insects constantly landing on stony ground, abdomens curled down, wings vibrating. What were they doing?

The mystery was solved by naturalist Harry Green. He identified them as downland villa *Villa cingulata*, a nationally scarce bee-fly.

These were females exhibiting typical bee-fly behaviour – dabbing their abdomens to coat their eggs with dust and sand, which provides protection and camouflage. It also adds weight to the eggs when they are ‘flicked out’ in the process of laying – the females are not very precise at choosing exactly where their eggs land!



2021 Walks Programme Review

Neil Edwards

Inevitably, our intended walks programme was greatly affected by unforeseen circumstances but we did manage three highly enjoyable walks.

For our first walk, on a very bright morning in late June, we gathered at the entrance to **Brotheridge Green** nature reserve to meet our guide, local botanist and plant identification group leader, Andrew Cartlidge. Andrew explained that the reserve is part of the old disused railway track and embankments that, over time, have been colonised by a wide diversity of plants and a few badger setts. With expert knowledge and guidance on hand to help, many plants were identified and many butterflies and woodland birds observed.

Our second walk was to the **Ravenshill Woodland Reserve** in late July. Our guide to this natural ancient woodland was Trevor Smart.

Throughout the walk he explained in detail points of interest and provided many anecdotes for us all to take away. Afterwards, the group gathered at the Visitor Centre to be introduced to the reserve's resident tawny owl, which Trevor explained had been badly injured but now seemed happy to remain as a pet. This was a private tour because the reserve is closed to the public for the foreseeable future due to ash dieback disease. We were shown some examples of this and sadly we were told the situation is likely to get much worse before it gets any better.

Our final event in late August was a guided walk around the **Wildgoose Rural Training Centre**, led by the Centre's Wildlife Reserve Manager, Roger Bates. The Centre comprises a seven acre small holding and a 36 acre nature reserve, currently undergoing the transformation of turning old sand/gravel quarry settlement beds into a 'green oasis'. The basic ethos of the Centre is to provide a therapeutic setting for people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health issues. We then moved to the nature reserve: a variety of habitats including woodlands, reedbeds and a lake. Current works there will reduce the extent of willows and increasing the reedbeds to provide a habitat for breeding warblers and wildfowl.

Full reports of these walks are available on our NEW website: www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk

Indoor Meetings 2022

All at 7:30 pm on the first Thursday of the month at the Lyttelton Rooms, Church Street, Great Malvern, WR14 2AY.

Adults £2.50 including refreshments. Children free. Non-members very welcome.

January 6th: A Quest for Emperors, Dragons and Fair Damsels. *Eden Tanner, member of Ledbury Naturalists*

February 3rd: Managing the Malvern Hills and Commons. *Duncan Bridges, CEO, Malvern Hills Trust*

March 3rd: A Bird in the Hand - how local ringing helps international studies. *Stuart Brown, BTO ringer and WWT member*

April 7th: 45 years of Botanising around the Malverns. *Gerry Davies, Leader Malvern U3A Botany Group*

Walks and Trips

Full details of all 2022 walks and trips can be found on the enclosed booking form and the website. Walks must be booked. Contact **Neil Edwards, 01684 564288**.

Day and overnight trips are organised by **Margaret Vernon, 01684 565079**. It is always worth putting your name on the reserve list, even if a walk or trip is full.

Saturday April 9th: Great Bustard Project, Salisbury Plain; Hawk Conservancy Trust, Andover. Full but reserve list operating. Estimated cost: £42 (includes entry of £27 covering both sites). Depart from Splash at 7:30am (return mid-eve)

Wednesday 27th April (2.5 hour walk) Bird Calls at The Knapp with Steve Bloomfield. Meet at 7:30am; limit 15.

Other walks are organised at short notice by email. If you are not on our list then please send your email address to malverngroup@live.co.uk to be kept informed. You can unsubscribe at any time.

Contributions

Any ideas or contributions for future Newsletters are welcomed. Please send to the editor at: john.denham50@gmail.com