



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust



Romsley Manor Farm Meadows

Stourbridge & Hagley Local Group

Newsletter Winter 2023

Welcome to the winter newsletter

Stourbridge & Hagley local group programme

November 2023 – April 2024

Talks

At St. Saviours Church Hall, Hagley.

24th November at 7.30pm.

Part 1. Biological recording and **Part 2. An introduction to beetles** talks by Gary Farmer.

26th January at 7.30pm.

Open Evening and AGM

23rd February at 7.30pm.

Chile and the Falklands a talk by Gerry Griffiths

22nd March at 7.30pm.

Creating a Wildlife Garden for Gardeners' World Live a talk by Helen Kelly and Rachel Wells (Hortulani).

26th April at 7.30pm.

TBC

For details of group events please visit the WWT website at www.worcestershirowildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on

Group events

Our walk on 10th July was at Penorchard Meadows nature reserve on the northeast slope of the Clent Hills. Ian Williams led the walk and had maps and photographs to show what the reserve was like in the past. Most of the group on the walk currently volunteer on the reserve but the more recent arrivals were amazed to find out how much has been achieved since we started work there in 2009. We walked round most of the fields looking at the wildflowers and butterflies and discussing the work we need to do to improve the reserve in the future.



The group in Close Field

A large group gathered at Ashwood Nurseries on 2nd August for 'A walk through time along the Smestow' with John Homer. We walked along Ashwood Lower Lane to Greensforge, headed north for about a mile and then southeast on footpaths through fields and woodland. Along the way we looked at the wildflower strips planted along the edges of the fields for pollinators. After a short break on Hinksford bridge we joined the canal towpath back to Ashwood. John treated us to a history lesson along the way from the Roman forts at Greensforge to the building of the

canal and the long-forgotten industries that flourished alongside it. On our return to Ashwood several of the group retired to the café there for lunch or a cuppa and cake before heading home. Many thanks to John for a most enjoyable walk.

Our September talk was given by Derek Crawley, a speaker who has visited our group several times. His talk about otters was comprehensive and very well received. He spoke of otter characteristics and habits, where to look for otters and how to spot their tracks and signs. He told the group the encouraging news that otters are now doing very well in every county. A very good start to our winter talks programme.



On Hinksford bridge

Romsley Manor Farm Meadows

When meadows in Romsley were put up for sale the Trust turned to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to purchase the land on its behalf and allow it time to raise the necessary funds. The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation purchased the meadows in 2019 on behalf of the Trust and in 2022 the meadows were purchased from the Foundation and became a new WWT reserve.

The reserve is approx. 14 hectares (35 acres) with nine fields, six being a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). There is a mix of neutral and acid grassland with meadow species that include knapweed and bird's-foot trefoil. The lower fields are marshy with rushes and many orchids. The meadows connect with other local wildlife sites, the Clent, Hills, Penorchard Meadows and nearby Romsley Hill SSSI and Ell Wood, creating a wildlife corridor.

Much work was needed to make the reserve ready for grazing. Contractors have repaired or replaced fences and gates and installed pipework and drinking troughs. The ongoing management will be carried out by volunteers and Andy Harris (WWT northern reserves officer) is hoping to recruit more people to help on the reserve. Work parties will be held on the third Monday of every month.



Volunteers at Romsley Manor Farm Meadows on 21st August

Come and join our friendly group at Romsley or Penorchard. If you are interested in giving volunteering a go contact Andy Harris on andyh@worcestershirowildlifetrust.org

Growing Up Green



In June of this year several members of our Local Group helped to organise activities in Stourbridge for an event called 'Growing up Green'. This is an annual children and family arts festival that celebrates action on climate change; in the Birmingham and Black Country region it took place from 10th to 18th June as part of the 'Great Big Green Week'. After several meetings, networking with many other like-minded organisations, a week-long event filled with wildlife and environmental themed activities was planned. Amongst these were included a wide range of arts and craft sessions, litter picks in public spaces, forest school activities and walks. On a very hot and humid day, some of our group joined Butterfly Conservation for a walk along the Roman Road looking at the fantastic results of the Scarlet Tiger Project. We also joined Wild about Stourbridge for our fifth visit of the year to Stourbridge Library. Here the theme of butterflies and moths continued, through delivering nature-themed educational craft activities. We had lots of opportunities to engage with local residents of all ages, encouraging them to make room for wildlife in their gardens and talking to them about the work of the Wildlife Trusts.

The next 'Growing Up Green' event is due to take place next year, so watch this space.

Sue Duffield

Moments of magic

The weather might have been variable this summer but nature never fails to provide memorable moments. Here are a few of mine, all but one shared with Maisie on our daily afternoon walks.

As we walked along the sandy path edging fields at the top of County Lane in Iverley, I counted up to eight larks singing in unison. Suddenly five larks rose from the stubble, swirled round our heads, landing in an argumentative flurry of wings on the path immediately in front of us, until one soared singing victoriously, while the others returned to the protection of the field. Amazing!

On a warm sunny day in Bunkers Hill I was enthralled to count 10 red admiral butterflies feasting on a sap run on the bole of an old oak tree. Beautiful!

I was also very excited one day when I found two white admiral butterflies in separate areas of Bunkers Hill. It was the first time I had seen them here. On submitting the record I was told this was only the second site in South Staffs where they had been recorded. I know we have them on Highgate common but I believe they are sometimes seen on Kinver Edge.

On two days in succession I have seen red kites, once over Bunkers Hill wood and then at the same time of day, not far away over Gibbet Lane. At first I thought they were buzzards until they came lower and I could see the lovely forked tails. There are more and more sightings of these magnificent birds. Rumour has it that they have begun to settle locally.

Recently my attention was caught by a mixed flock of birds in Bunkers Hill wood. When I looked more closely I realised that two birds kept separating from the others, flying out a short distance before returning to the same perch. I was looking at spotted flycatchers. My records show that I saw a family of this bird in exactly the same spot, but a week later, in 2014. Quite a coincidence.

Every year I forage a few blackberries, bringing back many happy memories of childhood. I have a favourite site

off Sugarloaf Lane and this year, while I was filling my red bowl and Maisie was eating a few low down fruits, a kestrel was soaring overhead, a green woodpecker was laughing and yellowhammer, linnets and whitethroat were calling from the hedgerow. Perfect.

Perhaps the most magical experience of all was in Bunkers Hill when I heard what I thought were woodpecker alarm calls and saw a large brown bird thread through the branches. Intrigued, we left the main path and made our way through silver birch and bramble, following the calls. My breath was taken away when the large bird reappeared and alighted on a branch a short distance away. It was an adult tawny owl and one of the owlets was on the branch waiting to be fed. I could clearly see those fluffed up feathers and large eyes. Judging by the calls I think there must have been one or two other owlets nearby. All this in broad daylight. What are the chances of that!

Wendy Wilkins

Christmas reading

If you enjoyed Derek Crawley's talk on otters or like to read books about natural history, these books are for you. Henry Williamson wrote *Tarka the Otter* in 1927. Written from the perspective of the otter and at a time when otter hunting was accepted, it traces the life of Tarka from birth to death. The setting is the rivers of Devon and their surroundings and is an intimate, sad but un sentimental story of the otter in its natural environment. The book is still in print but mine is a charity shop find.

I obtained Simon Cooper's 'The Otter's Tale' from Stourbridge Library. Cooper bought a water mill on a chalk stream in the South of England, where he found he was playing host to a family of otters. His book traces the life of Kuschta and her family. This is a beautiful book full of carefully observed details about the otter and its way of life and, as you read, you will be immersed in a different world.

Wendy Wilkins

Penorchar Meadows update

Recent work parties at Penorchar have mainly concentrated on routine maintenance tasks such as controlling bracken, creeping thistle, bramble and scrub regrowth. There have also been some repairs to fences and in October about 20 bird boxes were sited around the hedgerows with more to follow. Other significant events were a rather late but much needed hay cut on most of the original fields and continued autumn grazing of the South Staffs fields.



Malachite beetle at Penorchar

Thank you to everyone for all your hard work and for making Penorchar such a great place to volunteer.

Ian Williams

Volunteer days at Penorchar Meadows

Work parties are held on Mondays 10am – 3pm on
4th December 8th January 5th February
4th March 8th April 6th May

Current volunteers will get an email giving details of our meeting place for each work party.

New volunteers should contact Andy Harris on andyh@worcestershireswildlifetrust.org. Bring lunch and a drink for mid-morning and for lunchtime if you are staying all day.