Redditch
Local Group

Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust

THE wildlife TRUSTS

Newsletter Summer 2019

Heading into autumn

Although summer is still with us, we're already looking forward to meeting some of you at our autumn meetings. We've got a programme of interesting talks that we hope will inspire you to come along...

September 3rd
Work of the Vale Wildlife Hospital and Rehabilitation Centre by Martin Brookes

October 1st
The History and Natural History of Grafton Wood with JohnTilt.

November 5th
A Journey through Worcestershire's Wildlife with Wendy Carter

December 3rd
John Medlock Presents Borneo - the Land below the Wind

We meet at Webheath Village Hall, Heathfield Road, Webheath, Redditch B97 5SQ. Doors open at 7.15pm with talks starting at 7.45pm. It's just £2.50 per person but children and students are free.

Local wildlife sightings

Hedgehog News

The weather was warm on the evening of 3rd June and we were delighted to see a hedgehog walk across our Redditch garden about 8.45pm - along the back of the pond and out under the back fence. It looked healthy and was moving well and quite fast. We had not seen one for about 20 years in our own garden ...and then we had two hedgehogs, which woke us up with their snuffling!

Peregrine News

We noticed two Peregrines on the 70m mast behind our Redditch house in March. They appear to have built a twiggy nest on the uppermost platform.; early in June we saw two peregrines - one on the lower bars and one possibly sat on the twigs. The height makes it difficult to observe if they are rearing offspring but at the time of writing, it looked as though one bird was pulling apart pieces of food as we looked through our telescope.

Jackie Hardy

Ipsley Alders Marsh – your local nature reserve

Our happy volunteer team at Ipsley Alders Marsh are looking for extra pairs of hands to help with practical conservation tasks on this beautiful nature reserve.

Volunteers meet at Winyates Green Meeting Rooms, Furze lane at 10am on the first Sunday of each month. If you're interested in helping out or just want to know a bit more about what's involved, Margot Bish would love to hear from you on 01527 60004.

Hanbury Churchyard

Churchyards, especially country churchyards, are not only places of peace and quiet; if tended sensitively, they are havens for wildlife. Our churchyards provide acres of unofficial nature reserves, which are increasingly valuable when our wildlife is under threat from intensive agricultural practices, thoughtless walkers who drop litter and careless dog walkers who fail to control their pets or clean up after them.

Worcestershire has many rural churches with beautiful settings but none has a finer situation than St Mary's, Hanbury. This church, a medieval foundation on the site of an Iron Age fort, has a hilltop setting with a churchyard of two to three acres. To the north and west lie small private woods with mainly oak and ash as well as Wellingtonia and Corsican pine. To the east the land drops down to the Trust's Piper's Hill and Dodderhill Common nature reserve (Hanbury Woods) - accessible by a public footpath that also runs west to Hanbury Hall (National Trust). The greater part of the churchyard lies south of the church and provides splendid views across our county to Madams Hill, Bredon Hill and the Malverns.

Despite the proximity of magnificent trees, there is only one tree in the churchyard: a centuries-old golden yew, which releases clouds of yellow pollen in spring breezes. Previously cut twice a year, the grass is now cropped just once, usually in August, to protect the wildflowers, butterflies and other insects. There has been some criticism of its appearance in late summer but churchyards that resemble neat suburban gardens are not good for wildlife.

Gatekeeper

Throughout most of the year a wide range of flowers can be observed; the most spectacular display consists of snowdrops, which provide a white carpet on the north and west side of the church, usually in February. This is followed by wild daffodils that bloom in yellow clusters on the south side of the church and then bluebells whose blue and white varieties grow mainly on the north side. During the warmer months many other flowers can be observed: primroses, buttercups and daisies, ragwort, cowslips, yellow rattle, lady's bedstraw and meadow cranesbill. These are, of course, vital to the survival of insects, including   the following butterfly species that I have observed in there: commas, gatekeepers, meadow browns, red admirals, ringlets, speckled wood and various whites including my favourite, the marbled white. The latter shows itself only at the end of June and July.

Marbled white

Less spectacular, lichen grows on older gravestones. Where there are no natural rock outcrops, churchyards are important sanctuaries for lichens, which are a useful monitor of air pollution. Ragwort is favoured by various hoverflies, while honeybees and bumblebees frequent the wildflowers – all this on the sunny south side of the church. There is, of course, scope for a really detailed study of the insect life in the surrounding area.

Birds make up the final major link in the churchyard's ecosystem. Green woodpeckers feed on the anthills in the churchyard and the surrounding meadows. Buzzards, jackdaws and occasionally red kites fly over the area. The woods are home to a wide range of songbirds: blue, great and long-tailed tits, chiffchaffs and nuthatches as well as robins, dunnocks, blackbirds and song thrushes. These can be heard from the churchyard, though binoculars are needed to get a good view as the woods are private. To complete the aerial view, it is worth noting that bats live in the roof area of the church.

Hanbury churchyard is a tiny part of the Worcestershire landscape but though small, it is well worth appreciating and preserving; its preservation depends on all of us, not merely the church.

I should like to thank the following for their help with this article: Gary Farmer, Dr Sue Jenkins, Judith Burman and John Spencer.

Phil Ruler