

Newsletter Winter 2019

Peter Beckhelling, 1945-2019

Peter Beckhelling, chairman of the Redditch Group, had a stroke in May this year and died in September. He set a very high standard as chairman being accurate, conscientious and extremely thorough in dealing with all aspects of the role.

Peter travelled extensively abroad, in particular to the Arctic, Antarctica and Africa and gave several entertaining talks about his experiences to the Redditch Group. Although well-versed in many areas of natural history, Peter in his later years gave more attention to bird-watching and was rewarded with an impressive list of sightings including squacco heron, cream-coloured courser and collared pratincole. His favourite sighting, however, was probably watching a magnificent osprey fishing at a Staffordshire reservoir last year.



Peter did not neglect his local Worcestershire reserves, such as Grafton and Trench Woods, and organised visits for Trust members, particularly ensuring that those without transport were catered for. He was a regular visitor to Upton Warren, Bredon Hill, Wyre Forest and many other Worcestershire wildlife havens.

For his contribution to wildlife, Peter was presented with a Wild Service Award this year by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. Almost to the end, Peter was actively involved with his other interests including walking, astronomy and retired-teacher groups. He set a high standard with many accomplishments and will not be forgotten.

Steven Payne, Redditch Group Treasurer

Leaping forward into the 2020 Programme

January 2nd

A welcome return of John Page, this time with **Plants from the Caucasus to the Tien Shan**

Widely travelled in the mountain ranges of the world, Alpine plant expert John Page will transport you through the Tien Shan, a great mountain system of Central Asia. Its name is Chinese for 'Celestial Mountains' and, stretching about 1500 miles, it straddles the border between China and Kyrgyzstan. Many colourful and adapted botanical treasures are to be found amongst these high meadow flowers.

February 4th

Dr Stefan Bodnar, founder of People for Peregrines. A talk entitled **The peregrine falcon - ecology and protection.**

March 3rd

Life and Death on the underside of leaves with Jean Young.

An illustrated talk on her studies of invertebrates on the back of mainly ivy leaves.

April 7th

Terry Green on **Hedgehogs and how to help them.**

May 5th

Between the Tides with Rosemary Winnall.

Awarded an MBE for services to the natural environment. Rosemary is very well known for her knowledge on the Wyre Forest bringing her talks to life with very good photography and video clips.

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.

Ipsley Alders Marsh



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The longhorn cattle at Ipsley Alders Marsh play a really important role in the management of this beautiful nature reserve. They're on site for most of the year munching away on the coarser vegetation, which means that the more delicate wildflowers get a chance to grow! It's not just the cattle that help to manage this fantastic natural refuge in suburban Redditch, though; we also have an enthusiastic group of volunteers who meet there once a month. From opening up the ponds to make them more attractive for dragonflies to fixing stiles and woodland management, our volunteers put their hands to all sorts! This winter we'll be tackling the impressive spread of bramble that is encroaching on the meadow. Bramble is a great habitat but it's taking over the delicate wildflowers such as fen bedstraw and marsh stitchwort. Once our human volunteers have hit the bramble, our four-legged ones will hopefully keep nibbling off the young growth to keep on top of it. When we see new patches of wildflowers coming through in the spring we know the effort was worth it!

Winter is also the time of year to search for evidence of harvest mice. We know they're using the reserve because we've found their characteristic woven nests among the sedges and grasses. Last winter five breeding nests were found, which is great news!

The main pond, unfortunately, sometimes attracts illegal fishing. Sadly for the wildlife these people often leave litter and fishing tackle, which easily gets wrapped up in birds feet. We are trying to address this but if you see it happening and are able to, please let the Environment Agency know (0800 807060 - log as an illegal fishing incident at Ipsley Alders).

If you're interested in joining our volunteer team at Ipsley, they meet at Winyates Green Meeting Rooms, Furze lane at 10am on the first Sunday of each month. If you'd like to know a bit more about what's involved, Margot Bish would love to hear from you on 01527 60004.

Pollinator plants on Bredon Hill

Worcestershire is home to some beautiful places. On a recent walk up Bredon Hill in the south of our county, I noticed a mixed crop in the fields at the top. On closer inspection I recognised three main plants that were growing well and all can be used as fodder or green manure crops with benefits to wildlife.

Showing up were small pinkish and white flowers on very upright plants of buckwheat *Fagopyrum esculentum*. The upper stem leaves being quite distinctive smooth bright to mid-green in an arrow shape clasping the stem. The flowers once pollinated quickly produce triangular seeds that change from light green to red-brown in colour. These plants also mature quickly being an annual plant rich in nectar and serve as food for pollinators and other beneficial insects during the late summer period.

Another distinctive plant I have seen increasingly sown is *Phacelia tanacetifolia*. It has feathery foliage with divided leaves of green, which contrast well with the attractive blue mauve flowers that tend to curve backwards, the stamens protruding out of the flowers make it quite noticeable.

Annual flowers are attractive to bees, other insects and wild birds during July to September.

Lucerne *Medicago sativa* has narrow leaflets and is a member of the pea family, so the plants have bacteria at their roots that can fix nitrogen from the air to enrich the soil. It is perennial and flowers August to September in a compact head of attractive purple flowers. The flowers attract bees and many other insects.

The bird highlight of the day was seeing my first red kite in Worcestershire flying over these Bredon Hill fields.

Jackie Hardy



Buckwheat



Phacelia



Lucerne