



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust *Malvern Group*

Summer 2020

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Welcome to our Summer Newsletter

I hope very much that you all enjoyed our first ever **online newsletter**, which came out at the end of May. It was sent to everybody on our email list but if you're not on that list, it is easy to access on our **Malvern Group website** and it is well worth reading. 38 members contributed to it and there is a lovely mixture of serious articles and fun items, all about our local wildlife and our appreciation of it during lockdown. There are also many excellent photographs.

Because we had so many interesting contributions, we took the one-off decision to produce a double-size printed version of our newsletter for the summer. In this bumper edition, you'll find a selection from the material in the online version as well as new articles and updates that you haven't seen before.

At the time of writing (June) it is not possible to say whether any normal activities will resume in September. Members on the email list will receive regular updates and there will be information on both the Trust and our own websites. Keep an eye open and let's hope something can be arranged.

If you are not on our email list and would like to be, write to me or to malverngroup@live.co.uk

Alison Uren (Chairman)



The biggest early purple orchid I have ever seen and a greater butterfly orchid in Blackhouse Wood nature reserve

A Cuckoo Encounter

Paul Chappell

(May 17th) I've just witnessed one of the most remarkable things I've ever seen in a lifetime of watching wildlife. I was in Chat Valley on the eastern side of North Hill watching stonechats, when a larger grey-backed bird with a long tail glided very low over the gorse and then dropped down into the bushes. The stonechats became very agitated and I thought it might be a sparrowhawk. I watched carefully where it had disappeared into the bushes and then after a couple of minutes, a cuckoo flew up into a dead gorse bush holding one of the stonechat's eggs, which it then ate in full view before flying off. It probably laid an egg in the nest before removing the one that it ate. The cuckoo was



completely silent for the whole time so all the walkers on Lady Howard de Walden Drive were unaware that it was there. I was fortunate enough to have my camera with me so was able to photograph the whole event.

I've never seen a cuckoo high on the northern hills before. I did see one in the trees behind our house in West Malvern once but that would have been over 25 years ago. In recent years I've only seen one once near Colwall but I have heard them in other places like Castlemorton Common and Midsummer Hill.

More cuckoo pictures in the Online Newsletter, and an article by Barry Tuck on other bird species on the Malverns.

Lower Pertwood Organic Farm near Salisbury

Sue Benjamin

This is a report of a trip made on March 12th, just before lockdown forced postponement of all other trips and walks.

The farm, organic for over 30 years, comprises 2600 acres managed as a sustainable economic business whilst encouraging wildlife. Our five-mile walking tour, on a cold blustery day, was led by David Scales of the farm team, Tim Ridgers-Steer of the farm's bird ringing group and Alison Rymell of the Deverill Raptor and Owl Group.

The expansive Wiltshire landscape of greens and browns rolled out before us; to the left an ancient Celtic field system grazed by red ruby cattle; to our right, a field being prepared for sowing, the thin soil scattered with chalks and flints and its fertility maintained by the addition of digestate. We noted an active badger sett and in a belt of trees, an old ash trunk that had housed one of the farm's wild bees' nests. We inspected an extensive area of gorse thicket, unusual in the locality, which provides an important habitat for many nesting birds and passing migrants.

As we walked along the track, we were treated to the songs of skylark and views of hare, pheasant and deer. Corn buntings, yellowhammers and meadow pipits in large numbers were attracted by scattered grain. A red kite soared low overhead, twisting and turning, its markings clearly displayed. Stonechats, ravens, buzzards, lapwings and a merlin were amongst the other species spotted.

Fourteen barn owlets and four kestrel young were successfully reared on the farm last year. Perhaps the most unusual sight of the day was barn owl boxes sharing an open barn with a military tank that had seen active service in Angola!

A Sad Tale

Garth Lowe

(Garth lives next to The Knapp and Papermill nature reserve near Alfrick)

This is the story of a pied flycatcher, which is a migrant bird from North Africa. For many years this species has nested at the southern end of the Malverns but none were recorded there last year. In 2019 there was great excitement when a pair turned up and successfully used a box in our garden at the end of our log pile. All the birds were ringed as I have a licence to do so from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). Pied flycatchers are now quite

uncommon in the county so it was wonderful to have this taking place in our garden.

Normally the male pied flycatcher arrives first and sings to attract a mate, who arrives about a week later. This year (on exactly the same date in April that the male turned up in 2019), a female arrived on her own. She stayed around and in just two days built a nest in the same box, still with no signs of a male! The first egg was found on April 31st and by May 6th, six eggs had been laid and a few days later she was incubating them.

I strongly suspected that this was the same female as last year, as it seemed very unlikely that another one would just happen to find a desirable box in an area where the species is uncommon. It was difficult to establish if she was ringed as they are quite small and active. There were still no signs of a mate but there was a slight chance she had strayed and found one to fertilise her eggs. Males can be bigamous so this was a definite possibility.

We lived with suspense and fingers crossed for the next two weeks. By Sunday May 23rd it looked very doubtful that hatching would take place so the bird was carefully lifted and checked. Sure enough, she was ringed and it was the same bird as last year. She was placed back again and continued to sit until May 29th but seemed to be spending more time off the eggs. She was last seen on the evening of the 31st inside the box, but by early morning she had slipped away as quietly away as she had arrived.

See our online newsletter for more about spring at The Knapp and Papermill by Garth Lowe



Summer Visitors

Sadie and Tim Densham sent these photos of martins nesting on their house and swallows in their stables. They had problems with marauding woodpeckers and a sparrowhawk but the nests were largely successful.



For the full story and more pictures, see the online newsletter.

In search of Stoats and Weasels

Hilary Macmillan, Vincent Wildlife Trust

I am at the edge of a small woodland with colleague Lizzie Croose from Vincent Wildlife Trust and we are experimenting with a 'Mostela'. This is a small wooden box with a plastic drainpipe tunnel running through it and a trail camera inside.

"The Mostela is based on the idea that stoats and weasels are curious and they like to investigate tunnels and holes – because that is where they find their prey," Lizzie tells me.

We position the Mostela at the edge of the wood. Stoats and weasels tend to follow linear features in the landscape, such as hedgerows, so animals are less likely to be recorded in the middle of a wood. Inside the box, we place a tiny container of rabbit scent to act as a lure. Outside, we lay some branches either side of the tunnel entrances to try to funnel in these inquisitive animals. Finally, we camouflage the box using some nearby brash. We will check the box in a couple of weeks and, in the meantime, keep our fingers crossed in the hope that a stoat or weasel has indeed passed by.

Even if no stoats and weasels appear, the Mostela will give information on other small mammals present. A variety of non-target species has been recorded by Vincent Wildlife Trust staff, including grass snake and adder, rabbit, American mink and various small birds.

You can find out how to make your own Mostela and read the full version of this article in the Online Newsletter. Further information at: www.vwt.org.uk/blog/in-search-of-stoats-and-weasels/



Weasel filmed in a Mostela

Several members have written about how their appreciation of nature helped them to survive lockdown and, indeed, in some cases they positively enjoyed it:

Here is a message from Christina Indge:

As I am "shielded" I haven't been out of Alfrick but I have appreciated the peace and quiet of lockdown. I can hear the blackbirds singing, the robin comes visiting when I am gardening and the wildflowers are beautiful. The dog roses on the bushes by the side of the road going up towards Blackhouse Wood are numerous. Unfortunately, I think the blue tits in my nestbox didn't make it. The parents were certainly busy in and out at the beginning, then nothing. There was a great tit investigating the box and there has certainly been a squirrel around. The end of my lockdown at the end of the third week of July will mean I will be able to get further afield but I will miss the sound of silence.

Another one from Margaret Vernon:

For me, the unexpected time that I have had at home has meant some of the many jobs on my extensive 'to do' list have been done/started/planned. Several of the outdoor ones have been accomplished or are 'in progress', usually in the company of the singing robins, blackbirds and woodpigeons with the blue tits nest building and subsequent feeding of young very apparent, plus the increasing number of house martins overhead and the wonderful sound of the swifts arriving.

The vegetable patch has been resurrected. As I was due to be away a lot over the spring and summer, I had decided that was not conducive to growing vegetables but as it is.....

Living in Upper Welland has meant not using the car to go for walks, so several new footpaths have been discovered and the gradual emergence of wildflowers and tree cover has been a welcome and positive learning curve; the peace of the countryside providing therapy and an ever reminder that wildlife continues whatever – and often for the better without human interference.

There are just a few benefits to this lockdown but I have no wish to experience another one!

Contributions

Please send any ideas or contributions for future Newsletters to the editor alison.uren@gmail.com or phone 01684 567819

In A Malvern Locked Down Garden

By Liz Lloyd

(sung to the traditional tune "In an English Country Garden")

How many kinds of butterflies go by
In a Malvern locked down garden?
We'll tell you now of some you can spy
Those we miss you'll surely pardon
Holly blue, brimstone, peacock,
Orange Tip on lady's smock
Brimstone in spring
Speckled wood on the wing
Small and large white as well
and the pretty tortoiseshell
In a Malvern locked down garden.



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How many kinds of bees buzz on by
In a Malvern locked down garden
We'll tell you now of some you can spy
Those we miss you'll surely pardon
Hairy-footed flower bee
Flying round your cherry tree
Box-headed blood
And the common mourning bee
Carder and furrow too
Mining, mason - join the queue
In a Malvern locked down garden.



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How many sorts of moth flutter by
In a Malvern locked down garden
We'll tell you now of some you can spy
Those we miss you'll surely pardon
Angle shades and herald moth
Beautiful, and don't eat cloth
Muslin and mint
Silver Y also glint
And the grand emperor
Drawn in by a scented lure
In a Malvern locked down garden.



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Please send your monthly garden
butterflies sightings on a form available from
mbg.records@btinternet.com

A selection of insect photographs from the online newsletter



Comma butterfly – Dave Cook



Buff-tip moth – Rhys Leonard



Bee-fly – Richard Newton

Photos by Ruaridh Macdonald

Ruaridh noticed that many flowers on the Hills were in bloom earlier than usual this year. For a list of these and more photos, see the website under "Wildlife Watching".

Shining crane's-bill



Bittersweet

