



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

South East Worcestershire
Local Group

Local News & Local Events August 2020

SPECIAL LOCKDOWN ISSUE

There will probably never be another SE Worcestershire local newsletter like this one ever again – we hope! Instead of the usual format and comment we are providing a four page issue with a little colour!

Many people have turned to wildlife watching in their gardens, local patches and on local walks during the Covid restrictions and a great many interesting things have been seen. It is surprising how good some gardens are for wildlife and what can be seen by lingering and looking, especially during the amazing sunny weather in May. It is also surprising how poor some places are especially those suffering from excessive tidiness, the over-use of the mower and hedge trimmer and the killer spray can! Overall there is far more wildlife in many gardens than in the cultivated countryside.

For this issue members of your local committee and others tell of some of their lockdown sightings. Also many readers will know that Worcestershire is important nationally for a very rare beetle – the noble chafer – and lockdown gave us an unexpected chance to closely observe a local population. The beetle is found in old orchards where its larvae eat their way through naturally decaying wood in the trunks and branches for a year or two before emerging as handsome beetles for a brief period of excitement in the June sunshine in search of a mate. The larvae produce frass (droppings) in the trees of characteristic size and shape and it provides most of the county records. Sightings of the adult beetle are rare. One important place for them is the Trust's old plum orchard near Tiddesley Wood where we have been monitoring and studying them for many years. In the last few years a lure that attracts them has been used here and elsewhere to help gather information on their ecology. **Harry Green**

A chafer tale from a newcomer

When I joined the Trust as a Reserves Officer I kept hearing mention of a rare, elusive beetle and this chap called Harry Green who was bordering on obsessed with them. The noble chafer was spoken of as though it were royalty so when I discovered that none of my reserves in the eastern side of the county, as far as we know, are chafer territory, I was a little disappointed! Luckily though Tiddesley Wood, famed for its noble chafer population, is within walking distance of my home and during lockdown became my daily exercise route...and keeper of sanity. Instead of spending this extra time baking soda bread or learning a new language I got to know the noble chafer. Harry and I hatched a plan to monitor the population using pheromone lures and the mark-recapture method. Traps are hung from a branch and the pheromone attracts the beetle into a funnel, similar to a lobster trap, only to be released by us within 24hrs with a tiny coloured dot on its back so it could be identified if seen again. This plan seemed overly confident as I'd not even seen any frass yet, let alone a beetle, and we didn't even know how long lockdown would last!

As the chafer is dependent on decaying timber, the core of the population are found in the old orchard although they have started to use the adjacent cider apple orchard owned by Vale Landscape

Heritage Trust. As lockdown eased Harry and I looked for chafer frass within the cavities of trees in both orchards - this is where his specially adapted long-length spoon comes in handy! Once I had seen concrete evidence of them being there it didn't seem like such a far-fetched idea that I would see one in the flesh. The adults emerge at the end of May and, if you're lucky, can be seen atop hogweed, feasting on the nectar. After a few days of empty traps and no sightings I began to wonder just how lucky you had to be to see one. Then one sunny evening I found one on hogweed near the car park – I may, just may, have squealed with delight. They are much chunkier than I thought and as gloriously shiny (and delectable looking) as Quality Street. Absolutely exquisite. Amazingly, we then went to check the two traps and found one in each - a hat-trick! As I write we have since seen six more but, curiously, only one male so far. The study continues until the beginning of July. If, perchance you happened to have seen a noble chafer whilst out and about in May, June and July please let us know. **Eleanor Reast.**



Noble chafer on hogweed. Eleanor Reast.



Noble chafer on decaying wood. Eleanor Reast.

INDOOR MEETINGS

Winter Programme 2020-2021

As this newsletter is being prepared in June 2020 we have no idea whether indoor meetings will take place because we cannot predict the course of the Covid19 pandemic and restrictions on movements and gatherings of people. The details below must be regarded as speculative. Please check our local or Trust web site or by phone (see below for into).

NORMALLY

All meetings are held at Wulstan Hall, Priest Lane, Pershore, commencing at 7.30 p.m. Entrance fee £2.50. Meetings are usually on Thursday evenings.

Thursday 15th October 2020. Tewkesbury Nature Reserve
An illustrated talk by Pat Barber - part-time Reserve Manager.
Tewkesbury Nature Reserve is a 40 hectare site of flood meadow and pasture including the confluence of the River Swilgate and the Tirlle Brook. See <http://tewkesburynaturereserve.org.uk/wordpress/>

Thursday 19th November 2020. Not Just Koalas! The Wildlife of South Australia
An illustrated talk by Alison Uren
An appreciation of the astonishing wildlife of south Australia including insects, reptiles, birds, flora and fauna. Alison Uren will also describe the conservation challenges of the country including habitat loss, the effects of introduced non-native species and the recent bushfires. She is a retired music teacher and examiner, and has been Chair of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Malvern Local Group for the last five years. She visits her son in south Australia regularly and, whilst there, pursues her hobby of wildlife photography and takes a great interest in conservation.

Thursday 17th December 2020. Wild Web Connections
An illustrated talk by Harry Green.
This talk is about linkages and connection between species throughout the natural world around us illustrated by some examples. It is a net of many meshes, strands and knots linking many plants and animals and the problem of the net having too many holes usually caused by human activities.

Details of meeting in the New Year to follow

WEBSITES

Please check www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on for the most up to date information about events. We are working with the Trust and other groups to plan a series of digital meetings to potentially replace some of our indoor meetings.

There is also, of course, our local website where you should check for last-minute changes www.tiddesley.org.uk

FIREWOOD LOGS AND WOOD-CHIP SALES

At the time of writing we cannot make exact plans for the log sales winter 2020-2021. The following are provisional dates and may be changed. Please check the websites or make enquiries.
2020: 26&27 September, 31 October & 1 November, 5&6 December.
2021: 2-3 January, 6-7 February, 6-7 March.

Home delivery of logs.

Volunteer John Holder will hopefully be able to make some local deliveries of logs. There will be a delivery charge. If you are interested please contact John on 07583 907636. We cannot promise to meet every request and whether or not a delivery can be made is entirely at his discretion or Trust policy at the time.

WILD EXPERIENCES UNDER LOCKDOWN

From an Eckington garden - Night mammals

For some time now we have had the pleasure of feeding up to three hedgehogs on a nightly basis in our garden. Foxes, who are holed up under our neighbours shed, also visit often and are caught on camera feeding alongside the hedgehogs. On the odd occasion we have had visitations from badgers, fallow and muntjac deer. **John & Pam Holder**



Orchard surprise

While monitoring noble chafer, many other insects drift into view. This mayfly drifted from Bow Brook into Stocken Orchard and into the trap. It is known to fishermen as the green drake *Ephemera danica*. **Harry Green**



LOCAL GROUP CONTACTS

Useful phone numbers and your local committee:

Harry Green 01386 710377 (Chairman, Tiddesley Wood, logs and chips, work parties, general information, etc). Liz Stone, Bob Gillmor 01386 556685 (Treasurer, Tiddesley Wood Open Day and general information). Miriam Tilt (Secretary), John Holder & Pam Holder (log deliveries), Sue Chandler (bird food and Christmas card sales), Janet Morris and Jayne Bache (organiser local indoor events). Newsletter edited and stuck together by Harry Green

From a Pershore Garden

Night moths

This spring has been rather frustrating for the Avon Meadows moth group. We usually have Friday night sessions from April to October but can't with the lockdown. I have been trapping at home but been further frustrated by clear, moonlit evenings with very little activity.

The first decent night produced a stunning personal first – lime hawk-moth! A couple of weeks later I had no less than four of them as well as three cockchafers crashing about in the trap.



Lime hawk-moth. Bob Gillmor

I then heard from John Boon in Evesham, one of the regular moth gang. He wrote *"I don't usually do this but I wanted to tell someone who would appreciate it. A couple of nights ago I had both netted pug and small ranunculus in the trap. I have long wanted to see netted pug but didn't think there was any chance. According to Oliver Wadsworth the last one for the area was in 2010."*



Netted pug moth. John Boon



Small ranunculus. John Boon

"I have never seen small ranunculus before and my admittedly old addition field guide has it down as Red Data but apparently it is turning up more frequently these days. I'm not sure about red data, but it was certainly red letter for me. The lesson is to get those traps out. You never know what's going to turn up".

A couple of walks looking for noble chafer with no success were enlivened by another favourite beetle – *Oedemera nobilis*, the thick-thighed flower beetle – and in late April hundreds of St. Mark's flies *Bibio marci* along hedgerows. (St. Mark's day is 25th April).

Bob Gillmor.

The natural world is not locked down.

There are many triumphs in the natural world around us. Blossoms and flourishes untrammelled by the imposing presence of man; the succession of beautiful spring flowers in the woodland; the unfurling of the frond of fern; the myriad of mosses among the tree roots emerging into a landscape alive with birdsong loud and clear in the balmy still air.

As the season advances there is the triumphal promise of beauty yet to come in the colonies of peacock caterpillars clustering over the nettles; a stage in a lifecycle oblivious of the human world halted by a virus in suspended fear. As we emerge from our chrysalis of lockdown isolation we shall be accompanied by a host of peacock butterflies taking flight – what a wonderful world. **Janet Morris**



Peacock caterpillar on nettle. Janet Morris

Observations and thoughts on lockdown .

Being restricted to town walks has been a challenge but the birds have been pleasantly more evident than usual. On a return route, 05.45hrs, May 20th, I heard my first 2020 male cuckoo, probably on a tree or fence just north of Davies Road, an Evesham residential area. Not heard again! On the subject of birds, blackbirds have become so street-savvy they ignore pedestrians. There has several times been a flock of 25-30 young starlings on a roadside verge.

The pigeons in my garden like to drink, bathe and then rest or doze IN the bird bath!

The lack of traffic has produced some strange behaviour in people. A dog-walker was seen to stop and press the button on a pelican crossing, then wait - what for? No sign of traffic for half a mile in either direction! Most annoying has been the persistent use of the pavement by cyclists, alongside empty roads.

Here's looking forward to walks further afield and with friends.

Liz Stone



Wood pigeon asleep in bird bath opened an eye for the camera! Liz Stone

Wild meanderings

As I only have a small town patio garden and not much to do at home. My memorable moments have been working alone or at a great distance from another in the old orchard at Tiddesley, amongst the beautiful blossom, buzzing with bees, clearing encroaching blackthorn scrub, cool in the shade of the trees in the early days when it was very hot; and rambles through the wood, mostly in the cool of the early morning before people were about, listening to the birds and looking out for wildflowers. I have spent much more time than ever before watching and examining insects, though the noble chafer still eludes me!

Otherwise, I can't say I've had one particular magic moment but, like so many others, I have really enjoyed "having time to stand and stare" and observe the world around me. The experience of finding ticks on various parts of my person, including one on an eyelid which necessitated visiting Malvern MIU for removal, was a highlight in one sense of the word, not enhanced by the comment "that's going to be a nightmare to get off" on first inspection by a nurse in hazard uniform! Not further helped by the next comment that she couldn't see because her specs were misting up under her mask! However, all done successfully and I was amazed at how tiny the beast was when she showed me. On the way home I realised I

had been looking at myself in a magnifying makeup mirror before I went for help! I have since been inspecting 'freckles' very carefully and trying not to become paranoid!

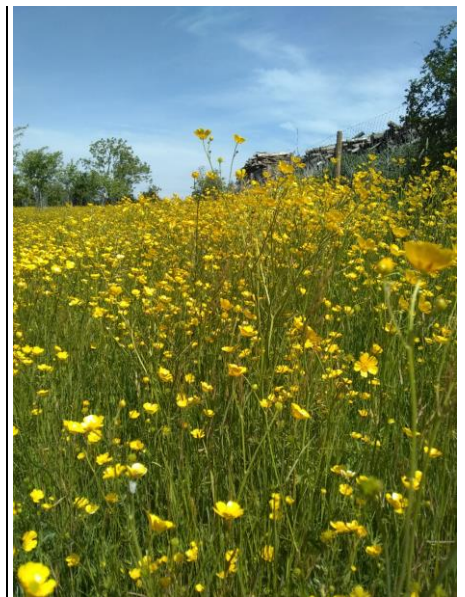
A better experience has been helping my 10 year old grandson add to his skull collection. Coming across a deceased mole on one of my rambles and, yesterday, a small mouse. I just have to be careful what I take out of the freezer for tea, as I am storing them until I see him next! It is really interesting for both of us to examine specimens closely! I have taken to filling my pockets with sandwich bags to take home my 'prizes' and am constantly on the lookout for anything interesting. I have also been requested to keep an eye out for roadkill, if not too squashed! **Sue Chandler**



Lockdown Sue



Tiddesley Wood - early purple orchid



Tiddesley field - buttercups in May.

Really small ladybird.

I love spending time in my garden looking for interesting wildlife and decided to try something different during lockdown: I've been staring at tree trunks! There's always something to find if you look hard enough. I spotted a tiny prickly-looking thing that turned out to be a 24-spot ladybird larva starting to pupate. The ladybirds are red with black spots, found in grassland and 3-4mm in length. The larvae are lovely spiky things and seeing one starting to make the change was a real treat, I shall watch its development with interest.

Jean Young

