



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

Stourbridge & Hagley Local Group

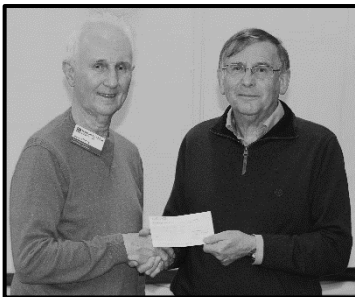
Newsletter August 2020



Welcome to your August newsletter. I hope everyone has stayed safe and well during this strange time. As I write it's mid-June and the newsletter has to be dispatched to HQ by the end of this week. By the time this reaches you we may know a little more about when we can meet again.

Before 'lockdown' we had two meetings. Our Open Evening in January was the usual mix of presentations by members of the group and a fun quiz enjoyed by everyone. Hayley Guest, Sue and Andy's daughter, came along to tell us about 'Wild about Stourbridge'. This is a new group she has set up with a couple of friends to get local groups and volunteers to work together and benefit our local wildlife.

In February we had a most entertaining and informative talk 'The secret life of garden birds' by Richard Cory. During the evening a cheque for £500 was presented to Richard, secretary of the Trust's Council, as our group donation to the Trust



for this year.

As we all know everything came to a halt in March with group meetings and walks cancelled. There will be no 'what's on' leaflet with your magazine, no one is sure when we will return to 'normal'. Look for updates on WWT's website and information about our group in emails from our secretary Sue.

Breakfast with Butterflies

June 1st should have been a Penorcard working party day. 'Lockdown' meant that there would be no volunteering for quite a while but as restrictions eased, I spread my wings a little and drove to Clent to revisit the Trust's most recent acquisition of fields, where we had begun work on improving access, preparing hedgerows and clearing encroaching bramble and scrub.

I arrived in the meadows bright and early to warm sunshine and perfect blue sky, and I immediately noticed a difference: some intrepid volunteers who lived nearer to the site had used

their prescribed exercise sessions to rake up into neat piles the previously flailed bramble and scrub. Already I could see that the delicate white heath bedstraw and cheerful yellow tormentil, the dominant flora of the field, were taking advantage of the cleared areas.

I sat on some conveniently placed logs to breakfast on raisin brioche, washed down with hot strong coffee, and soaked in the atmosphere. I soon noticed a small black chimney sweeper alight on the logs a short distance away, and as it got warmer still several more of these day-flying moths were joined by a large number of small heath butterflies and a sprinkling of meadow brown, my first of the year. A song thrush regaled me, repeating each phrase three times as if trying to teach me its song, and I could hear greenfinch, chaffinch, blackcap and chiffchaff in the hedgerow. A family of whitethroat were flitting in and out of a remaining area of bramble and a garden warbler provided a joyous backdrop.

Wandering through the grasses, I noticed that bird's-foot trefoil, red clover and knapweed were coming into flower and, amongst them, a sprinkling of pignut, the food plant of the chimney sweeper. I was pleased to see a large skipper, a couple of common blue and two attractively marked mother Shipton moths. A very new tortoiseshell rested on a remaining nettle patch. There seemed to be butterflies and moths everywhere! Looking more closely, I noticed numerous small insects and every so often a grasshopper leapt from under my feet. The bramble was coming into flower and was humming with a large number of bumblebees and solitary bees.

As I made my way over the stiles and back up the hill, I disturbed three grazing mistle thrushes, which flew off with irritated rattles at being disturbed ... and I realised that not once over the course of two hours, had I given a thought to the coronavirus!



Scorpion fly at Penorcard meadows

Wendy Wilkins

Penorcharde Meadows

20 years a NWT reserve

Penorcharde Meadows reserve on the north east slopes of the Clent Hills was purchased in 2000 with funding from what was then the Heritage Lottery Fund, Onyx Environmental Trust and English Nature. Most of the reserve is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and one of the largest areas of semi-natural grassland in Worcestershire.

The Worcestershire Wildlife News of April 2001 reports:

"The special interest of the meadows lies in the marvellous and now rare diversity of the grassland, characterised by crested dog's-tail, common knapweed, common birds'-foot trefoil, and common spotted orchid. Damp areas have species such as water mint, ragged-robin, jointed rush and lesser spearwort and other plants of interest include the evocatively named eyebright, dyer's greenweed, yellow rattle and yellow-wort."

Trust member and volunteer Roger Chambers was the first warden and fencing and other work was carried out by Halesowen Wildlife Group.

In 2009 our local group began monthly work days under the guidance of new volunteer warden John Sifford. Much was then achieved as we



First plant survey in 2009

repaired fences, cleared brambles and blackthorn and learned new skills such as hedge laying. Plant surveys were carried out to ensure that the correct management of

the reserve was in place.

When John retired as volunteer warden at the end of 2017 work parties carried on with guidance from Andy Harris, the Trust's officer for the site.

A recent rental agreement with South Staffs Water has added new fields to the reserve. It will be a huge task to restore these fields, which have not been managed for several years. Plenty of work for our volunteers in the future!

Some of the volunteers had hoped that a special project could be carried out during this year to mark the 20th anniversary but that was before 'lockdown', our last organised work party was on March 2nd.

Maybe we can have a 21st anniversary project next year!

Avril Williams

Lockdown garden

There have to be compensations for not being allowed a spring visit to Scotland and the Isle of Mull in particular. Last year's visit gave us glorious weather and wonderful wildlife. We saw sea eagle, golden eagle, otter, great northern diver, pine marten, osprey: the list goes on. How could I make up for all that during 'lockdown'?

There may not be such spectacular sightings in Wollaston but there is still plenty to delight our senses in the garden. The honey scent of the *Ceanothus* and the constant buzzing of bees around the *Cotoneaster*, the dawn chorus to begin the day and the last notes of birdsong at dusk just before the emergence of the pipistrelle bats over the neighbouring garden.

There are always new species to be found. In early June there were two new species I hadn't seen in the garden before, a bright green

cucumber spider and a yellow shell day-flying moth, both fairly common, but it was good to know that I have them here in my garden.



Cucumber spider

For a few years now the greenhouse seems to have been a favourite place for leaf-cutter bees to build their cigar like nest chambers in the flower pots. Seeing it is just a matter of being in the right place at the right time. The one I was lucky enough to see in early June was carrying a leaf into the pot containing a very spiny cactus, emerging and returning a couple of minutes later with the next leaf to continue the construction.

During 'lockdown' my trail camera, set up to record overnight, has produced images of foxes, hedgehogs and badgers on the lawn. Foxes have been seen quite regularly, hedgehogs and badgers less often.

Recording birds for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Garden Bird Watch weekly count has produced lists of the usual common garden birds, the most numerous being 24 starlings on the lawn. My 'lockdown' highlights are a grey heron on top of the plum tree and two sparrowhawks, one being a juvenile.

You see, there are compensations, but I still hope to visit Scotland when 'lockdown' restrictions are lifted.

Avril Williams