

Worcester Group News

August to November 2021



Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust

Who's nesting in my bird box?

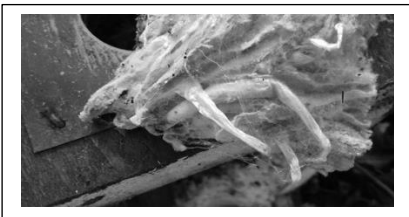
In 2020 one of our nest boxes was not used by tits, instead it was used by tree bumblebees. When they had left I went to clean the box. The lid was firmly stuck down and could only be lifted by applying considerable force. I then found the unique structure attached to the lid and sides, which I carefully removed.

With no idea what had built it a quick call to Wendy Carter at WWT revealed that it was a cocoon mass made by bee moth larvae. They feed on the wax left by the bees and when ready to pupate they build this incredibly tough structure to overwinter within, emerging as moths from April. I kept the cocoons in a flowerpot in the greenhouse and the last moths emerged towards the end of May.

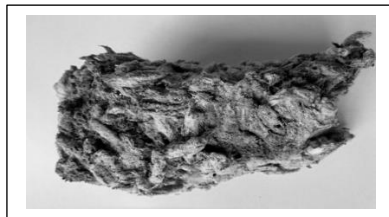
Our bee hotel has also been successful, with all of the red mason bees having emerged and most holes have already been filled and sealed with mud. There are just a few leafcutter bees remaining.

Altogether, an unusual and successful year.

Patrick Linturn



Bee moth larvae
© Andrew Forecast



Bee moth cocoon
© Patrick Linturn



Bee moth adult
© Wendy Carter

Buttercups galore

We have seen numerous buttercups this year whilst out walking. There are four common varieties, see if you can spot them next time you are out and about? These yellow flowering plants are:-

Meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris* height up to 1m, has five shiny petals, the leaves are divided into normally five lobes. The stalks beneath the flowers are smooth and rounded, hollow and not ribbed. Flowers between April and September.

Creeping buttercup *Ranunculus reptans* height up to 50cm, spreads via runners and its hairy leaves are divided into normally three lobes with frayed edges. The sepals are turned up around the flower head. Flowers between May and September.

Bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus* similar to the creeping buttercup but the leaves are smaller and narrower. The basal leaves and sepals curl downwards. This buttercup grows from the bulbous roots that form hairy stems. Flowers between May and July.

Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria* the leaves are glossy and heart shaped. The plant grows close to the ground to form a dense rosette. The flowers are star shaped, not cupped. Flowers between March and May.

White squirrels just over the border!

Whilst leading a 10 mile walk in the Cotswolds, on returning to Winchcombe I heard squeaks and rustles in the hedgerow. Suddenly out popped a grey squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis* being frantically chased, by three others, along overhanging branches to the other side of the lane. Unusual in itself but more so because two of the four squirrels were completely white. On returning home I reported the sighting to the Gloucestershire Environmental Records Office. There two types of genetic aberrations resulting in such rare specimens. Albinism, which is caused by a lack of melanin that also results in the eyes being a pinky red, and leucism that turns the skin and hair white (or patches of white) but with the eyes remaining dark. This pair were definitely albinos (see photo). Wildlife experts estimate there are just 50 in the UK, with the odds of seeing one of about 1 in 100,000. So I was exceptionally lucky to see two.

Lyndon Bracewell



© Gloucestershire Environmental Records Office

Toad Patrol

It was late March. The phone rang, it was Marilyn McCarthy - a fellow wildlife member - saying that toads had been reported getting trapped in the cascade between the two lakes in the County Hall grounds. Could we help? A hastily arranged rendezvous on Spetchley Road was arranged with toad rescuer extraordinaire - Sandra Young. Armed with Sandra's expert toad handling knowledge, wellies, a bucket and fishing net (that Caryl managed to fashion from a coat hanger, stick, a piece of fine mesh and gaffer tape) the next week saw us heading off to 'Toad Hall' at dusk on Toad Patrol. With help from a couple of other local volunteers we managed to rescue over 400 toads and frogs before the mating season abruptly finished. Thankfully Rob, the Worcester Woods Site Supervisor, has promised to install ramps in time for the next mating season...but if that doesn't work, 'Who Ya Gonna Call?' Toad Busters!

Lyndon Bracewell



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