



Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

*Malvern Local Group
Spring 2024*

www.malverngroupwwt.org.uk
malverngroup@live.co.uk

Welney Wetlands Centre - Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

Visit report by John Denham, 23 Oct 2023

We arrived to be greeted by lapwings flying overhead and scores of tree sparrows busying themselves in bramble bushes around the centre itself. An auspicious start! A short walk to several hides gave us excellent views of wigeon, scaup, greylags, knot, lapwings and both common and black-headed gulls. Of particular interest were numbers of black-tailed godwits. Our guide in the afternoon told us that this represented a great success for the Trust. A five-year programme has seen incubator-raised birds released at Welney and other sites. As a result, Welney has seen its breeding pairs increase from just three at the start of the project to over 50 now. Our guide also told us that exceptionally high-water levels were being recorded this year and that the raised path we were standing on would be under water in a few days. Welney, it seems, and the Ouse Washes generally, play an important role in relieving flooding further upstream by absorbing huge amounts of storm water.

Some of those standing on the high bank overlooking the marshes as the evening grew colder and darker were rewarded by a sighting of a black stork! All three species of swan were on the reserve. Large numbers of the rarer Bewick's return to Welney from northern Siberia every year.

Particular memories for me were egrets and perfect views of a marsh harrier quartering the marshes. As we watched the harrier, little egrets, three great white egrets and a cattle egret came into view. One of our number pointed out that one of the great whites had a completely yellow bill, indicating a juvenile bird or non-breeding plumage.

We ended the day with coffee, sitting by a viewing window where we were entertained by large numbers of nuthatches at the feeders.

Trips and Walks 2024

See our website for full details of trips & walks. Open to WWT members. Limited places, booking essential.

Walks

*For more information and to book, email Tim Lawrence at: tmbhf@gmail.com quoting in the subject line: **mlgamble**.*

Wednesday 8th May 10.00 am. Gerry Davis will lead a walk from British Camp to the Broad Down area of the Malvern Hills. Meet in British Camp car park.

Thursday 23rd May. Time/parking to be arranged. A walk across Hardwick Green Meadows led by Tomos Holloway. A WWT closed reserve. A rare opportunity.

Tuesday 11th June 10.00 am. Gary Farmer from Vale Landscape Heritage Trust will lead an orchid walk on Hipton Meadows. Meet at Hipton Hill Orchard car park. WR11 4UA.

Tuesday 2nd July 10.00 am. Butterfly walk on the Old Hills led by Mel Mason. Meet at south car park.

Friday 12th July 10.00 am. Steve Bloomfield will lead a walk around Lower Smite Farm, WWT headquarters. Meet in car park.

Trips

For more information or booking, phone Lyndon Knott on 01905 455222. Pick-ups are from the Malvern Splash car park unless otherwise indicated.

Friday 12 – Saturday 20 April 2024 Lundy

This holiday is fully booked. To be put on the reserve list, phone Lyndon on 01905 455222

Tuesday 21 May 2024 Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Reserves Depart 08.00 £19. Visiting four reserves in the Stratford/Leamington area.

Saturday 15 June 2024 Leicestershire Wildlife Trust Reserves Depart 07.00 £21. Visiting Cossington Meadows in the Soar Valley, north of Leicester, and three other reserves.

Wednesday 26 June 2024 Lower Moor Farm. Depart 08.00 £21. A Wiltshire Wildlife Trust site covering 500 acres: four contiguous reserves: orchids, butterflies, birds, dragonflies & water plants.

Wednesday 10 July 2024 The Doward Reserves Depart 08.00 £18. Herefordshire Wildlife Trust reserves: The Great Doward, King Arthur's Cave, Leeping Stocks, Lord's Wood, Miner's Rest, White Rocks and Woodside.

Sunday 18 – Tuesday 20 August 2024 Whale Watching in the Bay of Biscay. Details to be finalised!

Sailing from Plymouth on Brittany Ferries 'Pont Aven'. Two nights on board in single or twin cabins, with a brief stop-over in Santander.

New Decoy Farm & Holme Fen, Cambridgeshire

Visit report by Nigel Dunn, 23 Oct 2023

The day was grey but the group arrived at New Decoy Farm with high hopes for an interesting walk. We set off on the path around the scrubby grassland. A few skylarks and a stonechat were about but there were disappointingly few other birds. There were fungi in the wood and a pair of French partridges and a Chinese water deer in the cultivated fields on the other side of the wood. We saw great tits and goldcrests in a Scots pine and a kestrel hunting. Vanessa and I were at the rear of the group when Vanessa pointed out a man watching objects on short poles – we wondered if he was conducting a survey? We never did find out. Some goldfinches and blue tits in the hedge along the road entertained us on our walk back to the minibus.

Lyndon drove us to the car park by Holme Post in Holme Fen. The post is believed to be the lowest point in England and shows how much the land has sunk since 1851. Holme Fen offers many choices and we split up. The path through the woods around the lake revealed fly agaric and other fungi. There were several waterbirds on the pond including a flock of 29 noisy greylag geese. The wood on the south side of the road yielded fewer birds but a flock of long-tailed tits was pleasing. Other birds were spotted but numbers seem sadly down.

Cothill Fen SSSI near Abingdon, Oxon.

Visit report by Phillip Chambers, 13 Jul 2023

In the limestone grassland and wet, gloomy woods of Lashford Lane Fen, gatekeeper, ringlet and meadow brown, small and large skipper, marbled white and peacock are among the first butterflies of the day. The tall stems and yellow flowers of black mullein and agrimony, the pale lilac pin-cushion flowers of field scabious and the daisy-like flowers of ragwort, with florets like the rays of a symbolic sun, some of the first flora.

At Dry Sandford Pit the sun surprises and on or around the wild marjoram, more marbled white, red admirals in number, green-veined white, small and large skipper, holly blue and speckled wood, small copper and a silver Y moth. The hoverfly *Eristalis intricaria* mimics a furry bee, a ladybird climbs to the top of a stalk and the comma's scalloped wings are held in stillness as six-spot burnet moth, blue damselfly, brown argus and longhorn moth are all present in this splendid sunlit scenario. A pantaloan bee, a pale-green female brimstone, a kingfisher and a wren are also reported. Studying the strata of red-brown sand layers sandwiching the harder

limestone, hundreds of small holes catch our attention. These are the nest chambers of bees and wasps. Some considerably larger burrow systems further along the low cliff face are badger setts. As we depart this butterfly haven a large military aircraft flies over, leaving the empty sky to a pair of red kites and a flock of swifts.

Caper spurge, with its segmented clusters of green fruits, looking convincingly like capers, but, in fact, poisonous, is a memorable marker on the track into Parsonage Moor. Fen bedstraw is next and serves as an indicator of an open pool, adjacent to which is a common newt, camouflaged in olive green and with neat black spots suggestive of stripes, basking in the sun along with her tiny black offspring. Even at a distance the bright sulphur-yellow of a male brimstone cannot be missed as it flies over this 'Sweet especial rural scene.' This is also the scene of meadowsweet with its dense clusters of creamy-yellow blossom and the delicate pale pink flowers of parsley water-dropwort. In the shallow, slow-flowing stream at our feet, the rare southern damselfly.

Hitchcopse Pit is our last port of call. Speckled wood and purple hairstreak butterflies and an open wood of oak and alder with some sycamore and hazel take us towards our destination; brown argus close by and red kites in the further reaches. Viper's bugloss, magnificently ubiquitous in its pink buds and deep blue flowers, tells us we have come through. In this huge sandpit bee-wolves (solitary wasps that hunt bees) have dug tunnels in the ground for nesting. We rest, we watch, we listen. A large-flowered evening primrose, dense clusters of common centaury and greater spearwort are all to be seen as chiffchaffs sing their monotonous song and the fluttering wings of the metallic, banded demoiselles, male blue, female green, stir the summer air over a silent pool, and a broad-bodied chaser awaits his prey. Red soldier (or 'bonking') beetles, the pale and deep yellow toadflax, the tiny, purple and gold mint moth and the marsh helleborine, a pink-flowered, white-lipped orchid of the fens, among the most celebrated sightings of this memorable summer's day.

Indoor Meetings 2024

All at 7:30 pm on the first Thursday of the month at Lyttelton Rooms, Church Street, Malvern, WR14 2AY. Adults £2.50. Children free. Non-members welcome.

April 4th 2024. Creatures of the Twilight
Paul Wilkinson, herpetologist & ecologist for British Waterways

Vampires, dragons and flying mice!

May 2nd 2024. The Fascination of Plant Galls - Identification, Biology & Ecology.
Dave Taft U3A Natural History Group

What causes these strange and wonderful growths?