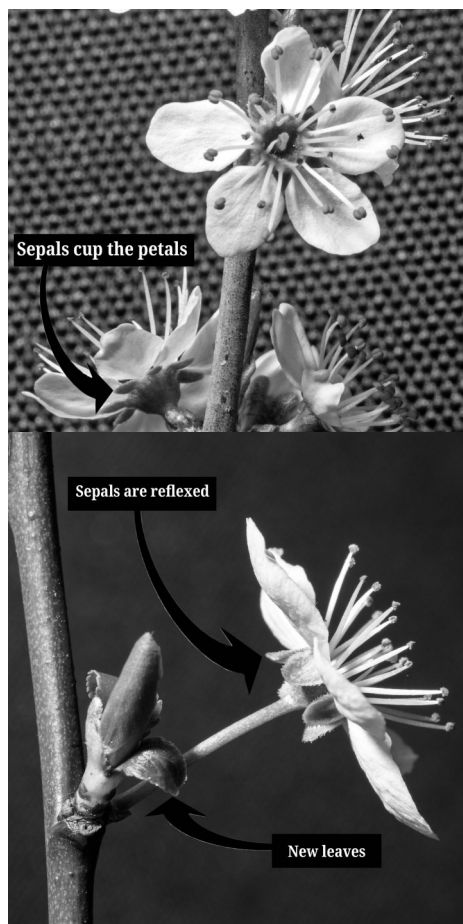


Spring 2024 News

Blossom

At the time of writing, the highways around Redditch are bursting into bloom as the cherry plum *Prunus cerasifera* blossoms. This shrub was a plant of choice for the team responsible for landscaping the 'new town' and we continue to benefit from their planting schemes.

Cherry plum, as with so many flowering plants, blooms earlier and earlier, showing its pure white petals very early in February this year. It is not native to the UK, originating from southeastern Europe and western Asia, but it is a common sight in many parts of England. Planted in hedgerows and roadsides, it's grown for its small fruits in small orchards or grows 'feral' in old orchards where it was used as a root-stock for plums *Prunus domestica*. Its mass of soft-white, mildly scented blooms are a very welcome sign that spring is on the way. It is also an important nectar source for pollinating insects including hoverflies and queen bumblebees waking up after hibernating through the winter.



It is often mistaken for the native blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, which flowers after the cherry plum has finished, usually in March. Both species produce a mass of white blossom but blackthorn is a spiny shrub flowering on dark, leafless twigs and branches, whereas cherry plum has few, softer spines and bares its blossom at the same time as its leaves start to appear. If you look closely you should see that the sepals on cherry plum are reflexed (they bend back away from the flower) whereas blackthorn sepals cup the flower.

These two harbingers of spring are followed by pears *Pyrus*, cherries *Prunus avium*, damsons *Prunus insititia*, plums and finally apples *Malus domestica* as our remaining orchards come to life. This is a sight that we shouldn't take for granted, however, as the recently published *Worcestershire's State of Nature Report* highlights that the county has lost 85% of its orchards since the 1950s.

So why not plant a fruit tree or two in your garden or get involved with a local orchard, such as the community orchard in Headless Cross, or support WWT's old orchards and help keep these special places alive for future generations to enjoy.

Gary Farmer

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Local Group meetings and activity

Our first season of meetings as a new group has been a great success. Our venue at Winyates Green Community Centre has been ideal and we have had a varied programme of talks. All of our meetings have been very well supported and we are putting together next season's programme.

We are a small committee and are still looking for more help to run the group so if you have a few evenings spare and would like to get involved please let us know. We are also looking for speakers and ideas for future talks so, again, if you have any ideas get in touch.

We've got one more talk left (see below) and we're hoping to hold a few evening walks through the summer so keep an eye on www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on for details

Apr 10th: Wildlife in Worcestershire in a time of change by Gary Farmer

Where: Winyates Green Community Centre, Furze Lane, Winyates Green, B98 0SE
<https://rubiconleisure.co.uk/winyates-green-community-centre/>

Mistletoe recording

Mistletoe is a parasitic plant often found growing in old orchards and hedgerow fruit trees but it also grows in other trees and shrubs, including hawthorns and limes. It is 'dioecious', which means that the male and female flowers are produced on separate plants, and its early flowering time means it is a welcome source of early nectar for pollinating insects.

Redditch is a little outside of its main county stronghold further south and west but the distribution of all sorts of things is changing so we want to know where it is growing. It would be good to record the location of mistletoe in the borough so please keep an eye open when you're out and about. If you spot it please take a photo (even if it's high up in a tree) and submit the record to Worcestershire's Wildlife Sightings project. With your help, we can put Redditch on the mistletoe map.

Upload your photo and location info www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/wildlife-sightings



Female



Male

Mistletoe *Viscum album*



Dioecious - male and female flowers are produced on separate plants.



February/March