

**LEDBURY
NATURALISTS**

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2017

50th Anniversary

50 Years of Ledbury Naturalists

In late September 1966, a meeting took place that quickly led to the first gathering of what was initially *Ledbury Naturalist & Field Club* on 23 February 1967. The first President was Major Hervey Bathurst from Eastnor and the inaugural chairman was James Murray, a local vet. The meeting had been the brainchild of founder member and Honorary Secretary Dudley Brook and his walking friend Bill Richards, another wildlife lover. Their vision was for a group of like-minded enthusiasts for the natural environment to meet, but they must have been astonished when 100 people turned up and 60 joined the nascent club at 12s 6d a head. What a triumph!

The inaugural meeting, held in the Royal Oak Ledbury, screened two films loaned by Herefordshire Ornithological Club with commentary by David Attenborough. The promise was only four meetings a year with additional walks around the local woodlands led by Dudley Brook. An annual bulletin was published from 1967 listing the clubs activities in a formal style. This changed to the annual newsletter in 1981 and documented news and observations of wildlife, much as the newsletter does today. From 2017 the newsletter will be electronic and in colour.

Before long, the now familiar year-round activities had begun and the name of the club had morphed into the *Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club* otherwise affectionately known to members as Led Nats. There was a junior section with regular activities for youngsters and campaigning went on regarding local wildlife issues (see press cuttings). Winter talks and summer walks were accompanied by conservation work on local habitats led by another energetic founder member, and local GP, Michael Harper.



Old press cuttings

Conservation work parties continued and eventually became focused on Queenswood, Dymock where coppicing continues during the winter months. Work parties are now organised by Kate Wollen, a Forestry Commission Ecology Officer and member of the club. Many areas in the woods have been coppiced to improve them for wildlife, and until recently Michael Harper regularly monitored the moths and found a rich fauna. The areas cleared by the group have been named the *Michael Harper Reserves* in recognition of his work.

In 1999, Peter Garnett, the Hon. Secretary and founder member, who had been recording local wildlife for many years, proposed that the club focus on a particular area each year to record what wildlife was present. This began in 1999, with the then newly established Town Trail and Riverside Walk and has continued ever since. Janet Parry, loyally supported by a band of enthusiasts from the club, picked up the challenge after Peter's untimely death in 2006. The survey group has completed 16 surveys that have contributed greatly to local knowledge of the plant and animal life of numerous locations around Ledbury and added to the formal county biological records.

What is remarkable about Led Nats is the constancy and loyalty of its members. We have only had four chairmen in the 50 years of our existence and two Presidents. Eden Tanner has recently become chairman after Brian Willder retired after many years of dedicated service. For over 20 years Alan Starkey has kept our finances and membership list in order. We are proud that our President Michael Harper, and founding father Dudley Brook still attend winter meetings and Michael has been seen looking for moths on some recent Summer walks.

We do not rest on our laurels though and our new Hon. Secretary, Alan Pike, has recently established a website and initiated an annual public lecture as well as piloting a children's summer walk. Our membership is growing, with numerous younger members joining, but inevitably we are losing older members through infirmity.

Our vision for the future is to uphold that of our predecessors, even to become more active in campaigning as we did in the early days. Today we compete for members' time so we must engage with young people before a disconnect with the environment and their lives reaches worrying levels.

We are in good heart and remain optimistic for the future. If you are reading this as a non-member we urge you to consider joining us, you will not regret it. Led

Nats members are friendly souls who love nothing more than to encourage others to venture into the natural world and discover what is there. Enjoying nature is free.

Visit our website at www.ledburynaturalists.co.uk for an application form and contact details.



Michael Harper



Dudley Brooke

Two of 'The Originals'

Current Club Officers

- President: Michael Harper
Chairman: Eden Tanner
Hon Secretary: Alan Pike
Hon Treasurer: Alan Starkey
Survey Secretary: Janet Parry

If you have any ideas for speakers for the winter program or places to visit during the summer please contact one of the committee members or e-mail

admin@ledburynaturalists.co.uk

Ten members assembled at the centre on a beautiful sunny morning, led by Cherry Greenway, to find spring birds and flowers. The car park quickly provided about ten species of birds readily identified by their songs and calls.

It seemed that the predominant bird of the day would be Cetti's Warbler because we could hear it everywhere. This bird was making its presence known with loud bursts of song. This species has recently colonised the UK having first bred here in 1973.

Among the other birds noted, usually by their song, were; Wren, Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat, Chiff Chaff, Blackcap, Skylark, Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting, most of them heard within the reed beds and scrub.

On the water we identified; Little Grebe, Coot, Moorhen, Mallard, Pochard, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Shelduck, Canada Goose and Mute Swan.



A flight of Tufted Duck

In the scrub on the edge of the estuary a pair of Stonechats were spotted – probably new arrivals!

At the visitor centre Blue Tits, House Sparrows, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Dunnock and Chaffinch were all attracted by the food on offer and on the pond, visible from the restaurant, we added Grey Heron and Swallow to the list.

We were unfortunate that we did not hear the Grasshopper Warbler or the Cuckoo which had both been reported as being on the reserve today and we failed to find any Bearded Tits which are resident there all the year round.

In all we noted 40 species of birds.

Butterflies were on the wing in the lovely sunshine and we spotted Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Large White and Orange tip. We found a hairy Drinker Moth caterpillar but unfortunately it had been trodden on.

Flowering plants were scarce today but we did find Ladies Smock, Colt's foot, Wayfaring Tree, Blackthorn and Gorse in flower and noted the beautiful delicate shades of green displayed among the newly emerging leaves of the Field Maple, Oak and Alders.

Brian Willder

Past Activities



Hunting for reptiles on Bircher Common on a wet August afternoon in 2010.

Leader, Nigel Hand, had no trouble in showing us wild adders, grass snakes and great-crested newts.

Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club and Worcestershire Naturalists' Club Joint Meeting 4th June 2016

The meeting was held at The Old Country Mathon, home of Ella Quincy who, with her son Will and Cherry Greenway, led the walk. The weather was ideal for the event and 22 members were present.



Goldfinch

While assembling for the walk a number of birds were quickly identified by their song. These included song thrush, blackbird, blackcap, goldfinch and house sparrow. A spotted flycatcher was seen collecting food.

The first part of the walk was through a traditional orchard where a redstart was nesting in a nest box close to the path. We did not spend long there for fear of disturbance and moving quickly on we saw a tree creeper. Some of those in the lead observed a newly fledged blackcap attended by its parent. Among the birds singing were chaffinch, wren, common whitethroat, great spotted woodpecker and green woodpecker. The only butterfly of the day, a male orange tip, was noted feeding on ladies smock, it's larval food plant.

We next entered the wooded area surrounding the old sand pit workings. In the shade of the wood, among the dog's mercury and herb bennet, we found moschatel, also known as townhall clock because of the grouping of its four tiny flowers grouped at right angles to each other and the fifth positioned over the top imitating a clock tower! Other plants of note were harts-tongue fern, broad leaved helleborine and goldilocks buttercup. Also found was an old St. George's mushroom. Through a gap in the hedge we were able to view some open water and noted coot, mallard, mute swan and a pair of grey herons. A pair of stock doves and a raven flew over.



Southern Marsh Orchid

Our walk led us next through a traditional hay meadow and as there was an enthusiastic young botanist present more notice was taken of the grass species found. Among the species identified on site were crested dog's tail, meadow foxtail, sweet vernal, annual meadow grass, cocksfoot, perennial ryegrass and timothy. A number of other specimens were collected for identification later. Other plants noted were pig nut, yellow rattle, knapweed, ribwort plantain, common birdsfoot trefoil, meadow buttercup, southern marsh orchid, sorrel, black medick, goats beard and crimson clover.

After the hay meadow we walked through a field grazed by sheep where the only items of note were a pair of buzzards and a profusion of guelder rose. It should be noted that everywhere the hedges were laden with may blossom that was just turning pink as the flowers were reaching maturity.

The short walk up the road back to the house yielded more items of interest. Here, in the dampness of the ditch we found angelica, meadow sweet and common bistort. A chiffchaff was singing loudly and a wren was busy in the hedge, probably keeping its family together.

After lunch, which was generously supplemented with tea and cake by Ella, some of us went back to observe the redstart from a distance. We had good views of both parents bringing food to the nest and added red kite, coal tit, swallow and goldcrest to the day's list.

Although we did not see them we were reliably told that both male and female cuckoo had been recorded during the previous week and that lesser spotted woodpecker was breeding in the area.

Brian Willder

Ledbury Naturalist's visit to Wessington Park

22nd October 2016



On a lovely autumnal afternoon 23 members gathered at Wessington Park, Woolhope, and were taken for walk by Mark O'Brian and Liz Vice who explained the management of the park and the cattle.

Longhorn cattle are an ancient breed, they thrive in conditions of damp, rough vegetation and exposure that is not tolerated by modern breeds of cattle. They grow more slowly but cost much less to keep and the purpose of keeping them here is to help create a natural pasture in which a wide range flora and fauna flourish.

The park was created in early 19th century as a feature to enhance Wessington Court, the grand house, which overlooks the area.

The park is now noted for Green Winged Orchid and although dry, due to the lack of rain this autumn, the ponds provide habitat for Great Crested Newts, Mandarin Duck and a wide range of aquatic species. The veteran trees provide habitat for bat species and Barn Owl while the rough pasture provides, in their

season, habitat for Redstart, Wheatear and Stonechat. Slow worms also thrive here.

As we walked we noted a mixed flock of Fieldfares and Redwings. A Sparrow Hawk, being mobbed by Carrion Crows, was seen and during the course of the walk we noted Buzzard, Ravens, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Robin, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Magpie and a flock of Wood Pigeons.

The conditions were too dry for many fungi to be fruiting but we found Carrot Wax cap and Slender Parasol.

After we had walked the Park we looked, briefly, in Siege Wood before being provided with a welcome mug of tea and cake.

Both the park and Siege Wood are extremely rich in species it was agreed that we should make a visit again next year.



Brian Willder

Report of meeting 17/02/17

Denise Foster – The Herefordshire Bat Project

Denise is the Chairman of the Herefordshire Mammal Group and Bat Coordinator. As such, she was well placed to give the club an excellent talk about the work of the group and its operations in the county. The group, starting in 2007, evolved from the previous Herefordshire Action for Mammals (HAM) group which was sometimes mistaken for an animal rights campaign, hence the name change. It now has sub groups interested in all other mammal groups such as Dormice, Hares and Deer.

Denise concentrates on Bats and set out the extent of the recording and methods used. She explained the difficulty of getting accurate records.

It started with looking for bats in churches then a project to set up bat boxes in woodlands and now radio tagging is yielding more interesting information. Echo location is used as a standard method and many species can be identified by their specific sound frequency though others are less reliable.

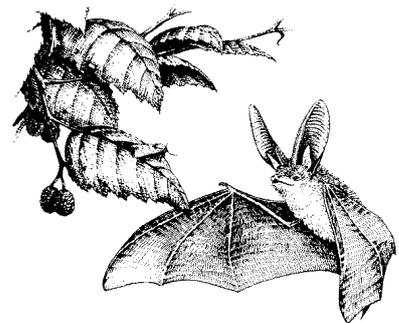
There are 9 box sites around the county, from Titley Pool in the west to Frith Wood, Old Country at Mathon and Ast Wood near Ledbury. Boxes if taken up, allow the opportunity to handle and confirm definitive facts about the bats though they do not always correspond to echo location results in the area. A star find was 40 Bechstein's bats, which is the rarest species, in a maternity brood at Old Country in 2014 though this had dropped in subsequent years. Frith Wood has proved to be a bat hotspot with 10 species located.

Factors affecting populations tend to be the weather, with cold springs and wet spells very bad news, and loss of habitat as more old buildings are converted to houses or demolished. Many of the roosts discovered were in old woodpecker holes in trees.

Overall the group has found 15 of the 17 British species of bat in the county and made interesting discoveries as to their range by using the radio tagging.

Denise finished the talk by showing two short films of Brown Long Eared bats emerging from roosts, one in an old pear tree near Alford Mill. It was fascinating to see 14 tiny bats fly out from a small hole at eye level as dusk fell.

The talk generated many further questions as there was a great deal of detail about the life of the county's bats and it was good to hear about how they are being monitored so authorities are in a position to advise about their conservation.



Janet Parry

A New Pair of Boots

My faithful pair of Brasher walking boots were finally showing their age and in need of replacement. Wendy swears by her Brasher 'lightweights' but these sadly disappeared off the market several years ago when the company was taken over by Berghaus. Visits to several shops failed to reveal a suitable replacement pair but we were on the Cotswolds one day and found a shop with a new version of the 'lightweights!' Hopes were high but they proved misplaced as the new boots proved too much too narrow for my aging feet.

However the very knowledgeable shop assistant showed us what she called the proper way to lace up your walking boots.

Pull the laces as tight as required as far up as you instep, usually at the end of the normal eyes before the Speed hooks start. Then put **three** throws on the laces and pull comfortably tight before finally completing the job using the speed hooks as normal.



Wendy and I were both a little sceptical but we tried it and it really makes a difference! Your feet are much more stable within the boots and we found it certainly did feel more comfortable. Try it for yourself.

Eden Tanner

BIRD BOX DIARY 2016

After a very mild winter, with plant and animal life being as confused as myself about the seasons, no interest was shown in our nest box until early March, which seemed late to me. A bird landed on the box on 3rd March, and again twice on 7th March. On 12th March actually looked inside, but did not stay.

17th March After no apparent interest over recent days a blue tit flew straight into the box about 7.50am, checked all around and flew out, returning quickly, seemingly in communication with a partner outside. It then began to remove all old material, moving round in circles in the box. The next visit the second bird came in briefly, but left after more cheeping. By 10.30am the bird was pushing new material into corners, and again at 11.30, fluttering into corners and removing bits.

It then turned cold, about 8 deg.C, with a cold east wind and the birds seemed to lose interest.

27th March 8.45am Two birds came in, one left but the other brought in more material and wing fluttered into corners, over several visits. Weather was wet and windy, with Storm Katie approaching. More visits at 10am, but there seemed to be three birds, with some conflict, or competition. One bird seems dominant and always does the fluttering dance.

2nd April Weather cool and wet and I have not seen birds, but there seems more material in the box – not much enthusiasm so far!

3rd April First looked about 9.30am and soon bird came in, beak full of grassy bits. Usual fluttering into corners, followed by many more visits in quick succession. Bird very busy. Oak buds are ready to burst, so hope this is a good sign for food supply.

4th April Same pattern as yesterday. Two birds briefly, but one leaves when second goes in. The second bird is the flutterer, and took out some coarser material, as in previous years.

6th April Pattern repeated daily, today my granddaughter, age 5, watched and was inspired to make a nest for the birds in a coconut shell in the garden!

7th April Both birds about, one very busily arranging material during frequent visits. Coarser material removed, and softer bits – probably moss coming in. Bottom of box now well covered. Cool wet weather no deterrent.

10th April Nest material coming in daily, but now a distinct hollow in one corner, with softer more fluffy material, including some feathers. I assume this is the female, concentrating on the hollow, making it a good round shape.

14th April Two birds briefly yesterday evening, and much activity this morning, one bird bringing in fluff and feathers, cheeping, then taking out what it brought in. I feel this is the male, not sure what to do! The other bird does similar, bringing in a feather, placing it carefully, then taking out another, bringing it straight back in. This has been happening for about half an hour and I cannot see a good reason for it. Each feather has been in and out several times, but always ends up in the nest. Both birds are about as there is occasional communication and continuous visits into the box. Much activity, apart from the few thunderstorms and hail we have had. Tonight, about midnight, my last check, I was thrilled to see a bird asleep in the box.

15th April No sign of bird all day, last check 10.30pm. Rain all day and colder forecast, with snow passing overnight.

16th April Sunny but cold. Malverns looked beautiful, glistening with a snow cover. Bird in and out all day, and asleep in box by 9.15pm. Snow had gone by then.



17th April Fluff rearranged during day, bird in box at night. Sunny day, 13 deg C.

18th April Bird in box at night.

19th April Checked at 7.15am, bird in box, fidgeting, then settled. She then looked out of the hole and I saw what looked like four eggs. Some white feathers in the nest can look like eggs, so causes confusion! She went out for most of the day, but was back at night.

23rd April Bird has been out of the nest mainly for few days but today two more eggs at 8.15am. Bird in nest 6.50pm and male outside. Female settled, but kept rearranging bits of fluff and fidgeting. Half an hour later she briefly left nest and I could clearly see five eggs.

26th April Eight eggs this morning – maybe nine or ten, or fluff! She is still absent, so I hope earlier eggs are still viable. I think she has finished laying and hope she will start to incubate soon.

27th April Bird on eggs 7.30am, but she did not stay. She came in with more fluff, went out and returned rapidly with more, followed by the male, who seemed to feed her as she sat on the eggs, then left, followed by female, both stayed out. Brief visits during day, and she was back in at night.

28th April Definitely 9 eggs, but bird absent all day, apart from a couple of visits with fluff. Back on eggs by 5.45pm and she stayed.

29th April Bird absent 7.30am, but was on eggs 1.30pm and 6.15pm, possibly had stayed all afternoon. She went out briefly at 6.50pm, returned and settled, followed by male, who fed her.

30th April Bird left at 9am, back after 5 minutes, followed by male.

4th May The bird has been dutifully sitting on her 9 eggs and the male has brought her food at regular intervals for the last four days. She goes out briefly, but is busy on her return, rearranging fluff around the eggs. It has been warming up daily and today was 18deg C. We have four Australian relatives staying, who are fascinated by this nest box!

10th May It has been a busy time for us, but our blue tits have been good parents, and today two eggs have hatched, much to the excitement of us and our visitors!

11th May Two more hatched before 6.30am and both parents feeding and communicating. The male brought in food regularly, came in three times when female was absent and began tweeting in an agitated manner, but fed the chicks each time. At 4.30pm I could see only 4 eggs, but could not count the chicks, just a pink wriggling mass! I have definitely seen four.

12th May Saw three eggs first thing, but by 8am only two visible. Impossible to count chicks, but both parents busy gathering food.

14th May Chicks growing, gapes obvious, but I still cannot count them. I have got as far as seven and I think there is one egg unhatched. Both birds feeding well and male brings food in, often passing it to the female, who feeds the young. On some visits both birds feed young.

16th May Definitely counted six, but could be more. Chicks are now looking dark as their feathers grow. Both parents very busy feeding.

18th May I'm sure I saw 7 gapes this morning. All looking healthy and growing fast, looking like birds now. I think two of the first four eggs have not hatched, or two chicks died early and were removed. The first eggs were there for 11 days before incubation began. However, 7 is a reasonable number to feed successfully to fledging, so all looks well at present. Plenty of food available, in spite of wet cooler weather today.

24th May For days there has been a regular busy routine of feeding, removing faecal sacks and more feeding, by both parents. The chicks have developed fluff and feathers and loud voices! By the end of today a complete transformation seems evident, as tonight the mother was trying to organise and clean the nest and the chicks were complaining loudly, hardly fitting in the hollow. They look like proper miniature blue tits and are stretching wings and trying to climb around the nest. The whole scene looks like a battle! Eventually all settled down.

25th May Chicks out of nest hole and flapping wings a bit. They are blue tit colours now and about half the size of parents. Unfortunately there is a cobweb across the top of the box, over the camera. It has attracted fluff and dust with all the activity and is obscuring the view, which has hampered the counting of chicks, but I hope as they get more active they will break it up. This evening the mother had to sleep beside the chicks, rather than on top of them, as they are too big.

26th May Chicks feeding frequently and noisily. They are now out of the nest hole and lining up under the entrance hole, but not yet trying to see out. Last check 10.30pm saw chicks settled in nest but fidgety and mother absent. At that time, I assumed she would not return, having found lack of space last night!

27th May Feeding resumed before 7.30am, and all seemed well.

I was shocked when checking at about 5.30pm, as only 4 birds seemed to be moving. A fly was in the box and had broken up the cobweb, so I could see better. Mother came in to feed and checked one chick, which looked dead to me. I had been gardening outside and had noticed less visits than I had expected with food. As I watched, it seemed as if there could be three dead chicks. Later at 6.30pm. many flies, dead ones it looked like on nest material and still 4 chicks being fed. This looks like another disaster unfolding.

28th May After a stormy night it seems that 3 chicks are still being fed. Heavy rain must have reduced food available. At 10.15am there are 2 chicks,

but no more bodies, so I am certain one fledged within the previous half hour. Optimistically I am guessing the fourth fledged earlier in the morning, before I checked at about 7.45am. As I watch, one of the two almost left the nest, so not such a disaster as I thought yesterday. I can definitely see two bodies, but the flies seem to have gone –presumably eaten during the night.

12.15pm All Gone! Parents have been vigilant all afternoon, watching and feeding. Most chicks are in the lilac tree, but one in our coal store, so I carefully moved it into the flowerbed under the lilac tree, but it hopped out into the drive. It wandered across the drive into another flowerbed, but a parent found it, and was watching. I hope it had gained some height by nightfall, as all was quiet then, and the parents had been very watchful.

I now believe that five fledged over two days, two died and two never hatched, so not a bad outcome overall. It has been interesting watching the hectic feeding of the last few days, seeing the parents outside the box filling their beaks with aphids from the roses beneath, genuine ‘fast food’ for the chicks! They were almost colliding with each other going in and out of the box at such speed. I think they had resorted to aphids as the heavy rain had probably washed all the caterpillars off the oak trees in recent days and lack of nutritious enough food may have been the cause of the two deaths. They would need a lot more aphids than caterpillars.

Carolyn Evans



Field Survey 2016

Broadmoor Common

Background



Broadmoor Common covers an area of 14 hectares on the eastern edge of Haugh Wood. It is on the central high part of the Woolhope Dome which is an inlier of mainly calcareous rocks. What makes the Common particularly interesting is that due to its complex geology and topography, it has a mosaic of different habitats enabling it to support a wide range of vegetation communities with corresponding flora and fauna. The proximity of Haugh Wood, itself a rich source of wildlife, means that mobile species can easily migrate to the common and add to its diversity.

The Common has been a site of great biodiversity supporting species of local and national importance for many years and has had a chequered history of management. When domestic use by commoners dwindled the environment began to change. A comprehensive survey of the area with a proposed management plan was carried out in 1983 showing its wildlife value and in 1987 it was designated a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) by Hereford and Worcester County Council who took on the maintenance. The Club's President, Dr. Michael Harper, was instrumental in persuading the council to designate the common a LNR with his extensive studies of butterflies and moths in the area. In 2014 Natural England commissioned a survey to map the vegetation, but the intended new management plan fell foul of Herefordshire council's budget cut backs. In 2015 the Council closed its Parks and Countryside Service and resolved to dispose of Council properties the service had managed. It agreed to transfer freehold title of its land at Broadmoor Common to Woolhope Parish Council.

Some arbitrary management in recent years had highlighted the need to better the situation for the site's ecology and amenity value. Local residents and

Parish Councillors decided to take on the responsibility to keep it in good heart for the future, as they value the common greatly and appreciate its wildlife potential.

Consequently, grant funding was obtained for the preparation of new management plan and initial work programme by consultants Swift Ecology and Footprint Ecology. There will be an opportunity for public input into the process. The Ledbury Naturalists' Field Club was asked to conduct their annual field survey on the common in 2016 and add their data to the information being gathered by the consultants. The club was very happy to comply as it was a useful exercise in a delightful place and follows on from Dr. Harper's initial involvement.

The Club's survey team paid eight visits to the site between March and October in 2016 to carry out the survey, and some members ran moth traps in the evenings in August and September. Dormice tubes were fixed in the woodland and a geological survey conducted.

Discussion

Overall 162 herbaceous plant species were recorded along with 51 species of grasses, sedges and rushes and 7 types of fern. As the common has a range of vegetation zones, the plants found are distributed differentially according to their requirements. The main areas of neutral grassland to the south of the Woolhope Road and by the car park are fairly sandy and well drained and very rich in herbaceous plants. These include a variety of indicator species such as Meadow Vetchling, Common Knapweed, Ox-eye Daisy and Bird's Foot Trefoil as well as good populations of Orchids (Common Spotted, Heath Spotted and Southern Marsh), with rare occurrences of Adder's-tongue and Grass Vetchling. The most prominent grasses were Red Fescue, Sweet Vernal Grass and Common Bent. In damper sections of this area there are sedge lawns of Glaucous Sedge and Carnation Sedge.

Some of the grassland mainly north of the road, is of less botanical interest being dominated by False Oat Grass indicating lack of management. On the western side of the common a small area has in the past been semi-improved and has a high frequency of Rye Grass.

There are a few areas of calcareous grassland mainly along the roadside near the car park, with such typical species as Common Rock Rose, Salad Burnet and Wild Basil.

Damp grassland habitats in the poorly drained areas feature plants such as Pepper Saxifrage, Wild Angelica, Lesser Spearwort, Lousewort and Devil's Bit Scabious. Tawny Sedge and Spiny Restharrow, which are rare in Herefordshire, were recorded from the area south of the road.



Areas of fen meadow on base rich flushes are characterised by Fleabane, Jointed Rush, Hard Rush, Greater Bird's Foot Trefoil and various sedges. The common was a rich source of sedges, seven different species being recorded.

In areas of moderately acidic, poorly drained land, rush pasture is found with plants such as Soft Rush, Devil's Bit Scabious, Sneezewort, Lesser Spearwort, Tufted Hair Grass and Velvet Bent.

The two remaining ponds were very disappointing as they are overgrown and silted up and the one at the west end may well have runoff from the adjoining field. Newt eggs and Frogs were seen and Caddisfly, Diving Beetle and Marsh Beetle larva were found in the water as well as a few other invertebrates. Water plants were Water Starwort, Marsh-marigold, Yellow Iris, Water Mint and Bulrush but nothing in great abundance the water being well shaded and overgrown.

In the woodland areas, 40 species of trees and shrubs were recorded. There was nothing of great note, the dominant species being Oak, Ash and Silver Birch some of which have reached a good size since stock grazing ceased in the 70s. A large stand of Aspen is an attractive feature to be encouraged. There is a great deal of scrub, mainly Hawthorn and Willow, encroaching on the grassland in many places which needs sensitive management. Complete removal would not be desirable as it is a good habitat for birds and insects, especially along the hedge fringes. The main woodland section has an impoverished ground flora due to grazing pressure from Muntjac and Fallow deer who seem to frequent it constantly and were often sighted. Plants such as Wild Daffodil, Bluebell, Wood Anemone, & Scaly Male Fern were recorded but at low frequency.

Not a great many fungi were recorded, but 32 species were noted. They were mainly typical woodland species such as Blushing Bracket, 3 Brittlegills and Scaly Earthball. An attractive group of Fly Agarics were found at the northern edge of the wood. The main woodland was not very productive as it was rather dry and trampled by deer. There were some grassland species along the edges of the open areas.

The afternoon meetings were not the best time to spot birds, however, 49 species were recorded. These included 4 species of tit, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Barn and Tawny Owls and Swift, Swallow and House Martin. Many, such as Stock Dove, Woodcock and Cuckoo, have conservation status. A comparison of historic records from the late 1970's to early 1980's was carried out by Hilary Ward. This shows that many of the birds historically seen are still on the common and 19 now have some level of conservation status. This emphasises the need to maintain the common as a good habitat for dwindling threatened bird populations for which it has great potential.

The invertebrate list was much longer as 257 species were recorded, the bulk being moths caught in the traps run on two nights in the summer. The most interesting one was the Brussels Lace Moth which is a lichen feeder and which was considered extinct in the county and has now turned up. Several species are classed as endangered or vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.



Painted Lady

This is just a snapshot of the total population demonstrating a rich population on Broadmoor which would probably yield more nationally and regionally scarce species if recorded all year. There were also butterflies found in the day such as Small Tortoiseshell, Orange tip, Brimstone, Small Copper, Large Skipper, Speckled

Wood. Large, Green-veined and Marbled Whites, Comma, Common Blue, Gatekeeper, Large, Small and Essex Skipper, Painted lady and Red Admiral.

There was a range of other invertebrates recorded including 3 Bumble Bees, a Honey Bee, 5 gall wasps and a Hornet though no common wasps. These seemed to be rare everywhere this year. This big range of insects emphasises the value of the common for birds which are insect feeders.

The proximity of Haugh Wood is reflected in the range of mammals recorded. Several Dormice were found in the tubes set up in the spring and 2 species of Pipistrelle Bat, Common and Soprano, were recorded on the common. These species are protected by various conservation laws.

There were also many Fallow Deer which are having an impact on the woodland in particular and Muntjac prints were found regularly. There were also Moles and Rabbits and no doubt many other small mammals which were not tracked down.

Conclusion

The club's survey showed that Broadmoor Common continues to host a wide range of wildlife across many taxa. The varying vegetation zones in the grassland areas are particularly rich in flowering plants, grasses, sedges and rushes with some local rarities, and need to be maintained with an appropriate mowing regime. Scrub is encroaching in various areas and, though having its own value for insects and birds, needs to be checked appropriately. The woodland supports a different range of wildlife but suffers from the impact of deer, an increasing issue in the Woolhope Dome. Insect life is prolific reflecting the wide range of habitats and providing food for birds. The remains of the old ponds do not currently contribute much to the biodiversity of the common and have potential to be much improved and be a valuable wildlife habitat.

It was good to see that many things recorded historically are still to be found on the common though some species are now endangered. The new management plan, when implemented, should ensure that this delightful and valuable area is maintained and not allowed to degrade and will be a continuing source of interest and enjoyment for parishioners of Woolhope and the general public far into the future.

The full illustrated report with all the appendices can be found on our website at www.ledburynaturalists.co.uk (activities-survey group)

Thanks go to all the team who turned out regularly whatever the weather and gave their time and expertise. They were:

Ann Bowker, Michael Bradley, Anne Crane, Heather Davies, John Davies, Richard Davies, Caroline and David Evans, Peter Garner, Cherry Greenway, Paul Hadley, Robin and Chris Hemming, Moira Jenkins, Mark July, Phyl & Richard King, Janet Parry, Alan Pike, David Taft, Eden and Wendy Tanner, Hilary Ward, Sally Webster, Kate Woollen

Janet Parry



Heath-spotted Orchids

Field Survey 2017 - Janet Parry

This year we are heading East to the other side of the Malverns to Dales Hall at the top of Castlemorton Common. We had a most interesting field trip there in 2015 at the invitation of Tim and Rosemary Cameron who organize their land on wildlife friendly principles. Since then Tim has had a bad accident and is now partly paralyzed but has got organized to drive a car and even a tractor so he can get about. They would be delighted for us to do our survey on their land this year and very interested in what we find. Peter Garner has also requested our help with a book about the wildlife of the Malverns he is writing this year and needs as much data as he can get from the east side. So it seems we can be helpful on two counts as well as enjoying ourselves in another lovely spot. The farm is all on the lower slopes of the Malverns so there are some steep sections though plenty less challenging. It is very diverse and has a big flowery meadow, woodland, new coppices an old orchard and heath land so there should be plenty for everyone.

We are going to try moving the day for our surveys to the **2nd Thursday in the month** as this seemed most preferred. Hence the dates for this year will be

**March 16, April 13, May 11, June 8, July 13, August 10,
September 14, October 12.**

Put them in your diaries now! I will continue to send out reminders a few days before each date.

We will meet at **2 pm** as this seems to suit most people and will treat the first meeting in March as a general walk round to see the scope of the area and decide how to tackle it. The Camerons are happy for any member to come anytime they are free. Dogs are welcome though there can be some livestock in places.

The farm is on OS Explorer map 190 at SO 768 390, Sat Nav WR13 6LQ. Access is via a 1 km un-metalled track going north from the main road across Castlemorton between the Gullet quarry and the Gloucester road. The turning (left from Ledbury, right from Malvern) is opposite the junction with well surfaced New Road, and the track has a green sign on a low stone wall saying "Access for residents only". Drive carefully to the end of the track, forking right at the top of a woodland. Parking is either by the garden wall or in the more extensive yard which is through a gate just past the garden gate.

Thank you to all who turned out last year and I hope you will be able to join in

again this year. We still need spider and lichen experts if anybody knows any. We are keen to have new recruits and you don't have to be an expert to join in. We need lots of pairs of eyes and ears to help. Anyone who enjoys finding things and learning more is welcome.

Anyone wanting to come, please let me know on 01531 640640 or email janet@jobeys.plus.com

Janet Parry

Ten minutes on the Farm that I will never forget!



Early one morning last March as I was going off to start ploughing I noticed a Red Kite flying.

It was the first Red Kite I had seen on the farm so I stopped to watch. It flew down fairly nearby and, having a high vantage point, I could see it feeding on the carcass of one of the neighbour's sheep that must have died in the night. It fed undisturbed for at least ten minutes and then flew off, hopefully feeling full and satisfied on our Herefordshire mutton!

Rich Ball, Llangaron

Ledbury Naturalists Garden Survey 2016

In 2016 11 households took part in the Garden Survey, many thanks to all.

Some of the highlights from the gardens were dormice on a garden feeder most months of the summer in Mathon.

3 californian quail escaped in 2015 and still survive today being seen in the Wellington Heath area during 2016.

150 jackdaws going to roost near the Malvern Hills.

15 coal tits in one visit in one garden in December in Colwall

Badgers and cubs in Colwall, one of which collided with the householder one evening when playing!

Red kite being seen over gardens in Ledbury and Wellington Heath regularly.

Muntjac were seen in two gardens and roe in one.

Other more welcome mammals were scarce with polecat, weasel and stoat from only one garden and hedgehogs only from three.

Other species seen in just one or two gardens were slow-worms, grass snakes and mandarin duck.

First dates for our visiting birds were chiffchaff 11th April; cuckoo 9th April; swift 4th May and swallow 18th April, not a great deal different to 2015.



Marbled white and silver-washed fritillary butterflies were seen in two gardens. The first brimstone was seen on the 25th March in Colwall. Many commented on how few butterflies were seen last year, so let us hope that this year our wildlife thrives!

Kate Wollen

OCHRE HILL DIARY 2016

We celebrated the New Year in Prague, where it snowed for half an hour from just before midnight - magical!

3.1.16 On our return home it rained for several days and was 10 degrees C. I was able to pick a bunch of flowers from my garden from all seasons at once. Apples I have thrown out are being eaten by about 20 blackbirds, pheasants and a squirrel. He tries to run up our large cherry tree carrying an apple, to avoid being attacked by blackbirds, but it is too heavy. Two rock doves, a great-spotted woodpecker, robins, dunnocks, chaffinches, goldfinches, blue and great tits all busily feeding.

7.1.16 Rain caused floods in many places and the barriers are up around Tewkesbury. It is colder here, -6C in the day, but quite sunny. Fieldfares now coming to eat apples close to the house and two nuthatches on feeders. Four hen pheasants regular visitors now and one very handsome young male, with a slight limp today.

15.1.16 Weather milder. I have seen and heard blue tits in nest boxes and many pairs flying about. One box has broken, so we will replace it for next year.

22.2.16 Frogspawn in top small pond, could have been there a day or two as it had sunk and looked mossy. It had been a warm damp weekend 14C, but only 7C today. Someone already has blue tits nesting in a box.

26.2.16 Bitterly cold east wind and I had to protect frogspawn with bubblewrap. I checked this and it was full of snails, which I returned to the pond. In the middle of the frogspawn was a newt's tail up in the air and another beside it. Several empty spawn cases already, so after the newts had escaped I lifted the remaining frogspawn and put it in a large bucket of pond water, which I covered. Several tawny owls heard in the oak trees in the garden and many buzzards about. Siskins still visiting and a flock of redwings in the lower oak tree today.

9.3.16 March cold so far, snow falling over most of UK, but not deep or lingering. Good display of 'Northern Lights' quite far south. We have had sleet showers passing and frosty nights. Today sunny and about 6pm we took our tea to the summerhouse, from where I could see a nest box. As I watched, a little face appeared from inside. It was brown, so not a blue or great tit, although there was a blue tit in a nest box downhill from this one. Just then a wren

climbed up the tree and into the box. Obviously there was already one in there, maybe more. As we watched another seven went in. I have heard of this before, but not seen it. We still have flocks of finches and siskins regularly and a marsh or willow tit. A muntjac came near the house and began eating apples I had put out for the birds.

14.3.16 I watched as four wrens went into the nest box.

17.3.16 A pair of blue tits has been busy in our camera nest box today, the first I have seen this year.

30.3.16 I saw a yellow brimstone butterfly a few days ago, but storm Katie has been causing havoc recently and it has been cold and gloomy. At least the clocks have changed, so lighter evenings. I have been watching for wrens and have regularly seen four, or



more, but only two yesterday and one tonight. Hopefully they have gone off to nest, but it is getting too late for any blue or great tits to nest in this box now. Blue tits still showing interest in the camera box, but slow to progress. Today I heard a bird I did not know, so discreetly moved near the call in a holly bush. It was beautiful, and a game bird I did not know, so after some research discovered it to be a californian quail. I had no idea where it was from. I also watched a crow collecting sheep's wool from a wire fence, which was entertaining. It seemed to get very tangled in the wire at times, but to no harm and eventually flew off when it's beak was full.

3.4.16 Warmer now, with some rain. Birds very active in camera box. A pair of pied wagtails daily on the roof and a pair of nuthatches noisily flying through orchard trees. Blue tits in oak tree nest box in and out a lot, presumably eggs now hatched. I watched three magpies attacking a crow in the cherry tree, for no apparent reason. When the third magpie arrived the crow flew off. A squirrel was up the cherry tree later with a large apple in its mouth! All frogspawn now hatched.

4.4.16 Californian quail by Cider House today, so I took photos. It has been quite happy around the drive and flowerbeds here for a few days now. It is a male.

9.4.16 A green woodpecker was calling and digging up ants in the grass. The pied wagtails still with us and reports of house martins and swallows about, but I have not seen any yet. The californian quail is very noisy, calling from tops of hedges all around, and has made itself known to most neighbours now! We have new lights in our pond, so this evening we saw a wonderful display of newts of all types. There were a lot. There is still one wren in the nest box, seemingly without a mate, but all other nest boxes now have blue or great tits nesting. There are several pairs of noisy mistle thrushes in the lower trees. First cuckoo heard today.

16.4.16 Another cold turn brought snow overnight, settling on the Malvern Hills but not in our garden. No sign of blue tits in camera box all day. A pair of red legged partridges feeding for a while under kitchen window, but the quail absent all day, after waking me at 5am calling persistently.

17.4.16 Whilst in the orchard trying to locate a bird whose call I did not know, I saw two fritillaries in flower, one white, and one snakeshead. I had one white elsewhere last year, but rabbits had dug all over where it was. To see two in new places was a thrill but I never found the bird!

18.4.16 The quail is back – noisily! It followed me around the garden and went from hedge to hedge. I then heard the other bird again and it was a nuthatch – we have two pairs in the garden now. I saw my first swallow fly

20.4.16 One wren still in nest box. A raven pursued a buzzard away from where it is nesting in tall fir trees next door.

21.4.16 A male blackcap in front flowerbed today. As we sat by the pond later, a great crested newt came up and proceeded to lay an egg on a plant just in front of us. This took over five minutes, it disappeared briefly, returned and repeated the process – fascinating to watch as it folded the leaf tip over the egg to protect it.

30.4.16 Warmer, 13C., after more sleet and snow. About 20 house martins overhead now and several swallows. The quail back after short absence, waking me at 5am again. A jay is pulling at grass all over looking for acorns he buried last year I am guessing! The pair of partridges visit daily and rabbits are digging long tunnels in flowerbeds, which I keep filling up. Something (I

cannot blame rabbits) is eating the tips of my water iris as soon as it grows above water, but I do not know what.

31.5.16 May has been hectic – family staying from Australia. Birds have been very busy. We now have nuthatches nesting in our shed roof and young on peanut feeders. A pied wagtail is carrying nesting material in its beak but I cannot find where the nest is. We have four swallows in the garage nesting.

4.6.16 Five blue tits fledged from camera box – best result for four years. Not as many young birds about as I would expect from the nests I have seen, but I have seen nine swifts now – they usually nest in the Church and fly over us each evening. Bats are very active, several skimming the pond at night. A few damselflies are about. I saw a holly blue and a brimstone but generally very few butterflies about. Leaving the grass to grow for a few weeks and cutting paths through it now for a few years, we now have 38 common spotted orchids, varying shades of pink and white.

14.6.16. Not many birds on feeders, except for nuthatches. A blackcap was happily eating cherries today.

15.6.16 Squirrels very entertaining trying to get past cones on bird feeder poles. So far they have not succeeded. A great spotted woodpecker was feeding today with a young one on top of the feeder, watching and learning! At the same time a field vole ran across the path near it collecting seed and retreating to the pile of old logs where it lives. Rain and thunder for days now, with some flash flooding.

20.6.16 A muntjac was walking around the grass paths, coming close to the house but it bolted when a door slammed. The grass is full of wild flowers, but hardly any butterflies. There are a lot of different bumble bees though.

23.6.16 I saw two peacock butterflies today. Slugs and snails plentiful this year, but not many frogs or toads. I did see hedgehog droppings on the grass paths, but no hedgehogs – also rare these days. Swallows in garage noticeable by their absence, so my son climbed into to the roof space and found three dead chicks in one nest, feathers and droppings about. I hope the rest had fledged. There had been a lot of noise the day before which would suggest preparation for fledging. There are a lot of swallows flying around now, so hope some are ours.

27.6.16 I was pleased to see near our village hall a family of californian quails! Several chicks and two adults – not ours, who is still single.

Apparently someone had lost three a year or two ago, but it seems they had survived and bred wild, as there have been several sightings all over the village!

30.6.16 Saw a few honeybees near pond – first I have seen.

19.7.16 After a holiday we came home to a heatwave – 33C. Garden overgrown and young birds all around. Robins still feeding young, so could be second brood, dunnocks also. I saw two white and grey birds, a bit like buzzards, circling high on thermals, but could not be sure what they were. Butterflies still scarce – I see one peacock, one small tortoiseshell, one comma, one painted lady at any time. Others say the same. A swarm of bees flew over a day or so ago. We have many hornets and several wasp's nests. Not many foxes or badgers evident this year, but plenty of muntjacs. There are less bats than usual. No toads so far, occasional frogs and plenty of newts. A few damselflies but so far no dragonflies.

23.7.16 Hot and humid. Busy replacing hedge round vegetable garden. I sat down for a rest and was aware of a lot of blackbird noise in the orchard, which went on for over an hour, so I went to investigate. I walked slowly towards the noise and saw in a low fork of an apple tree a tawny owl, about 10 feet from me. It seemed to be asleep. I climbed uphill to find my camera indoors and crept back to the tree where it allowed me to take two photos before flying into the hedge. Later I heard two more owls close by and saw two red admiral and one gatekeeper butterflies.



24.7.16 Heard noisy blackbirds again, early evening, so crept downhill again, to see a male muntjac eating newly cut grass in orchard. He seemed unaware of me and grazed for several minutes then wandered slowly away.

31.7.16 I saw a slow worm today. Whilst gardening I was aware of a lot of large white butterflies and several gatekeepers. Sadly I found a young female blackcap dead after hitting a window. I do have stickers on the window to deter this, but it was no use this time. We have a family of kestrels in trees at the bottom of the orchard – I saw two on power lines.

1.8.16 This morning I watched three hen pheasants feeding. A male appeared, running up the garden. He stopped and a male muntjac appeared and ran at the pheasant, who moved uphill and stopped again, to be charged at by the muntjac. This continued all the way across the garden as the three hens watched, until out of sight! I have no idea why this happened but it was very entertaining. Later I found a bird in the net cage around our blueberries, which I released. It was another young female blackcap, possibly of the same brood as the other day. The garden is now very dry after a hot dry spell and plants are suffering. Several shrubs and a tree have died. Surprising after so much rain earlier, although locally we have not had so much. Vegetables are not growing as expected, except for onions and marrow family - many people are saying the same. We have blight in the greenhouse, but never have before. A plague of moths are nearby attacking brassicas, but not ours yet!

8.8.16 We saw two toads today in the orchard when grass cutting and I saw two slow worms and a shrew, a rarity lately. A few more butterflies around with the warm weather, mainly large and small white, but a lot of gatekeepers, a few peacocks and red admirals on buddleias. A few small brownish ones seen at a distance could be skippers. More bats at dusk. Our white mulberry as usual attracts many birds when in fruit and I have watched blackbirds, robins, blue tits, several blackcaps and garden warblers eating berries. A blackcap swallowed one whole, looking like a snake swallowing a frog! I have seen a family of goldcrests in the orchard trees. Everywhere extremely dry and tree leaves are drooping now. Tonight it is forecast to fall to 6-8degrees C which is cold for August. Our fruit is late forming and slow to swell and ripen – no plums yet apart from one very early variety. Apples and damsons are scarce and damson trees do not look healthy.

24.8.16 Warm again – 29C yesterday and we have had some heavy rain. However it is now dry again and heat too much for some plants – some autumn colour already evident and leaves falling. I have been increasing buddleias and

other plants to attract butterflies in recent years, but still I see very few. I have seen a few painted ladies lately but little else. The family of kestrels are doing well. We seem to have a pair of short eared owls, which I am guessing at by the noises they make to each other every evening in the orchard as they move amongst the trees. It is a squeaky screech, which sounds as if they have sore throats! I have listened to various owl sounds on the RSPB and other websites, and am almost certain these are short eared owls. It is lovely to hear them each evening. There are many tawny owls about also and occasional barn owls. We have a family of green woodpeckers, which spent some time pecking at an ants nest near our kitchen window. I also saw a common shrew when working in a flowerbed and a slow worm on a rock in my rockery, enjoying the sun.

30.8.16 I have seen a few holly blue and small tortoiseshell butterflies recently. We sit out until dark in the evenings to cool down after the hot days and each evening we hear the short eared owls. One evening a tawny owl began calling in the tree above us, an oak tree. The other two owls were in another oak tree but immediately flew towards the one behind us and chased the tawny owl away. It flew off quickly and the other two sat above us squeaking to each other, then returned to the tree they came from. Interesting, and very noisy! We did see their shapes but it was too dark for any detail.

I have become aware that I have not seen any swifts throughout August. I assume they have gone, or joined with those in Ledbury prior to leaving. I was amazed at the high number of swallows and swifts in Northumberland, where we went on holiday, when there are so few around us here. However, we have just watched about 50 swallows lining up and preening on our electricity supply lines, about 30 feet from us, in the bright sun, showing all their beautiful colours. They have been building up for a few days and will soon be gone.

We had many honey bees on ceanothus today and I watched two wasps attacking some. We have had wasps crawling all over our living room for about two weeks, making it unusable. They are very dopey, but we cannot find where they are coming from, although we have several nests, they are away from the house.

21.9.16 September has been exceptionally warm, up to 30C or more. We have had some thunder storms and heavy showers, but mainly it has been lovely summer weather. This has led to a lot of butterflies, many painted ladies, tortoiseshell, red admiral, holly blue and one comma. Swallows and house martins have stayed on, but are now less each day. Our two short eared owls have been protecting what seems to be their chosen territory (our garden) each

evening, although there are also many tawny owls about. Jays have been active and noisy, and we have a daily visit from a muntjac, who seems quite comfortable with us about. We have been preparing ground to plant our new hedge in autumn and have had to rearrange some paving. Under some slabs we have found several large toads and a field vole. We relocated them all suitably. We also found a grassy nest under another slab, but do not know who made it. I wondered whether a robin or wren may have, or some small mammal. The slab was raised from the ground as part of some steps, so a bird could use it. My albertine rose is in full bloom again. I cut it back severely in July as it developed rust spots, which could kill it, so I took the risk, but I have never know this variety to repeat flower!

12.10.16 September continued hot and dry and so far October is the same, so we enjoy the evenings listening to our short eared owls. Swallows and martins have all gone, but many birds active – we have quite a few house sparrows, which have been absent for years and a beautiful grey wagtail has joined two pied wagtails daily on our roof. The sun shining on his yellow colouring makes him glow. Many painted ladies and quite a few red admirals about and a lot of large green dragonflies suddenly about. Muntjacs come nightly, and recently a fox also. Several more toads have been active. Moles are also more active lately.

23.10.16 The grey wagtail is still with us, and occasional red admiral. We are putting up new nest boxes as old ones are rotting. Our five year old granddaughter helped to make them and took one home with her, with high hopes. There are wasps everywhere, trying to get in the house every time a window opens.

1.11.16 A heron flew over the lane, heading for our pond, flying low, so I chased it off.

9.11.16 November has begun very different from October! It has been a cold week, but still bright and dry, until last night – rain all night. Some areas have had several centimetres of snow, mainly Scotland, but also Cumbria and Pennines into Staffordshire. We have had several sharp frosts. Birds feeding more now and a large frog was in some leaves I was clearing. A toad was also active. The three wagtails are still here and several sparrows in a hedge by the house. Blackbirds feeding on pyracantha and holly berries, which are plentiful. Redwings have arrived and I have heard fieldfares. Goldfinches and chaffinches have increased in numbers and a family of long tailed tits visits

daily. There are several nuthatches coming – probably those that nested in the garden.

8.12.16 Last two weeks of November were cold, bright and frosty, down to -7C at night and several days not rising much above freezing. It has been beautiful, with lovely sunrises and sunsets and some trees still with leaves glowing in the varying light. I have kept the birds well fed and there have been many – pied and grey wagtails still here and a male bullfinch, several house sparrows and a pair of adult starlings, which I have not seen for years. Usually a flock of young fly over in the autumn, not stopping, but these two are staying a while. Many redwings now and fieldfares, who with the blackbirds are rapidly stripping all the holly berries. All the usual finches, tits, robins, dunnocks are daily feeders, and pheasants, two rock doves, a song thrush, and several mistle thrushes. I have found the carcasses of three large wood pigeons recently, completely plucked, but not taken away and wonder what killed them. I think a fox would take the bodies, so guess it would be a buzzard, as they are large pigeons for a sparrowhawk to tackle. The many goldfinches around no longer eat niger seed, so I don't put any out. They seem to prefer mixed seeds and they love the seeds of verbena bonariensis, plentiful in my garden, so I leave the heads on until Spring for them. We are enjoying a brief few days of warmth, from the Azores – today it is 14degrees C! A few wasps are still trying to get into the house.

26.12.16 Almost record breaking warm temperatures over Christmas. For about three weeks of December I have been hearing the great spotted woodpeckers drumming in Wellington Heath and Frith Woods, which I usually first hear about mid January. I have primroses in flower and bulbs appearing everywhere.

28.12.16 I saw a pair of firecrests in our cherry tree and as they flitted through the branches close to the house I had a very clear view.

31.12.16 Five robins appeared as soon as I had refilled the feeders today and although there was some aggression shown, all stayed feeding for a while. I have seen four before, but five is unusual! They were accompanied by about six long tailed tits. There are about 20 visiting daily at present. We have plenty of fieldfares and redwings around daily, but I have seen no other winter visitors yet.

Carolyn Evans

A Fowl Weekend

For the last few years we have taken a mid-winter break, with a group of friends, to Sidmouth in South Devon. Sidmouth was our 'go to' whilst growing up in Devon, that is another story but, suffice it to say, we spent many happy hours on the beach and around the area as teenagers. Natural history has always been a given in our lives and with a little more time to spend we decided to combine our trip this year with visits to some nature reserves as well.

Leaving around 9.00am on Friday we enjoyed an easy drive south via the M4 Severn Bridge and arrived at Darts Farm near Topsham in time to enjoy a leisurely look around the centre. Cotswold Outdoors have a good shop there (and offer good discounts to RSPB, WWT members in case anyone doesn't know). The centre is always busy and the restaurant quite crowded but we only have a light lunch so a drink and a piece of cake hit the spot before we set off for the main event which was a walk to the RSPB reserve at Bowling Green Marsh.

The reserve is on the east bank of the Exe estuary on the confluence with the Clyst and provides a shelter for many wildfowl. There is a very comfortable hide which provides a good view of the area, and sometimes tea and coffee. We were able to enjoy the antics of many lapwing, black tailed godwits and dunlin as they flew around the reserve. We spotted a fox holed up on the far side of the reserve, the birds didn't seem to mind him but were more wary of any perceived threat from above which made for some good displays when they all took off. A little further on is the Clyst viewing platform which provides a panoramic view of the estuary. The tide was out so the birds were some distance away but we still managed a good view of some sixty or so avocets for which the Exe is noted as

well as many other species. There is no parking at Bowling Green Marsh itself but the walk from Darts Farm is well signed and takes in part of the Exe cycle route. You can also walk from Topsham town along the 'Goat Walk' which is a



Avocet

wall on the estuary which also provides a brilliant view of the birds. Both are a significant distance but provide an enjoyable walk.

Saturday took in a walk from Sidmouth to Branscombe, not for the faint-hearted, apparently there are about 900 steps on the route up and down the combes! It was however very busy with walkers and birds were fairly scarce although we did spot some oyster catchers and a stonechat. The oyster catchers also dot about on the sea-front lawn outside Sidmouth Cricket Club all the time and are easy to spot and study.



Sunday afternoon saw a trip to Seaton Marshes. This is a delightful area on the River Axe. It comprises four main sites, three are accessible from the main car park through a cemetery and provide good walk ways, toilets and three well positioned hides. The other site is a short distance away, best driven, and has a good hide overlooking the marshes and a tidal part of the River Axe itself. This site has been fairly recently developed by East Devon District Council and still has a slightly ‘new’ feel but all the usual suspects were present and we spent a happy hour looking out for snipe, curlew, redshanks and sandpipers – trying to sort out who was who. The information states there are nearly four miles of trails to enjoy. Signage to the reserves isn’t that brilliant so, though the sat nav did a reasonable job, we were very pleased we had an OS map with us.

Very quickly it was time to return home and we decided to visit Steart Marshes, a short detour off the M5 at Bridgewater. Steart Marshes is a joint project

between WWT and the Environment Agency where they have breached the bank of the River Parrot to allow the fields on the headland to flood and assist flood defences as well as providing sanctuary for thousands of waterfowl. The physical work on this project started in about 2014 and the changes in such a short time are quite remarkable with the area already taking on the desired salt marsh characteristics. This is a **big** site! There are many newly constructed pathways taking in hides and viewpoints over the new marsh area and lagoons. The walk from the main car park to the breach is about an hour but armed with our OS map we did find a car park a little nearer – the actual breach is only accessible from this side in summer so if you really want to get up close you do need to be prepared to walk.

Again there was a wide variety of wild fowl present and the Quantock Hide in particular provided a very good close up view of large flocks of Golden Plover and lapwings. There were also lots of ducks: pintail, shoveler, shelduck and large numbers of teal.



Pintail drake

It is very difficult to describe these reserves in detail in a short article but each of them is well worth a visit. If going solely for the wildfowl experience it would be well worth studying the tide tables, which are readily available, and planning your visits to coincide with high tides when the birds are nearer the viewing points. We spent a truly enjoyable weekend and saw a multitude of birds. All the sites were well looked after and provided car parking, toilets and leaflets with maps but very little in way of ‘shops’, which in my opinion is a bonus, so you do need to take drinks with you – especially to Steart.

Next year we hope to visit some of these places again and I will write a more detailed report!

Wendy Tanner

Chairman's Report

As I have only recently taken on the job of chairman I don't have a great deal of current wisdom to impart but what I can say is I have never seen the club in better heart. That is not to take anything away from all those who have gone before but the challenges of modern society bring with them new difficulties in running a society such as ours. All manner of things compete for our free time and we have to keep our organisation and the things we do well to the fore of public perception if we are to survive when so many other organisations have fallen by the wayside.

The one person who has done more to drag us forward out of our comfortable old ways is, of course, our secretary Alan Pike and we owe him our thanks for all his hard work.

If you take time to study the Field Survey Report you cannot help but realise what an accomplishment this is and what a depth of knowledge we can call on from our members. Janet Parry's efforts in collating and coordinating all the information and producing the final report have brought praise from outside the club and we must thank her again for all her work.

Also we must thank Kate Wollen for all her work coordinating the Garden Survey and Alan Starkey for keeping our finances in order.

There have been changes on our committee and I can be sure they will all work hard to produce a good program of visits and talks as usual.

Finally I would like to reiterate our appreciation of all the work Brian Willder has done for us over his years as Chairman and wish him well for the future.



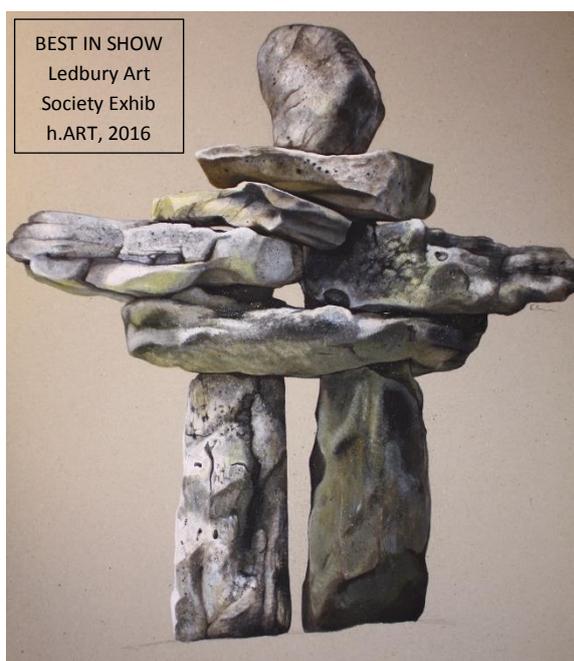
Brian's Birthday 'Bash' at Llangaron, May 2016

Club members got together and commissioned a painting of a Barn Owl which was presented to Brian at the AGM and this was very ably executed for us by Kirsten, a local artist and member of the club. (See the advert below)

I am writing this at the end of an afternoon in the garden, the sun has been warm, the birds are in full voice and our wild daffodils are out so let's look forward to another good year for Ledbury Nats.

Eden Tanner

KIRSTEN HUNTER



Wildlife Artist

I paint a variety of subjects in acrylic and watercolour inspired by my love of nature, the landscape and bird life. I also paint portraits, pets and aircraft and have a range of greetings cards.

Commissions taken. Catalogue available by request.

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