



SPRING 2020

LEDBURY NATURALISTS
NEWSLETTER

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Without a doubt Lednats have had another good year. The summer and winter programmes had varied activities and surely there was something to appeal to all interests. My personal highlights include our Open Meeting with Jemima Parry-Jones from the ICBP and the summer residential trip to the Knepp Estate in Sussex.

We were faced with raising a significant amount of money to get Jemima to come and talk to us. This made us a little bit nervous but in the end we needn't have worried. A very good audience turned up to hear of the work of the ICBP. This information was given in her easy, humorous and slightly irreverent style and a rather naughty barn owl entertained us by flying round the hall and ignoring most of the commands he was given. At the end of the meeting I was very pleased to see all the money that was donated to help their work trying to reverse the catastrophic decline of the Indian vulture population.

The summer trip to RSPB Poulborough Brooks, The Knepp Estate and Pagham Harbour was also very enjoyable. We saw new the ideas in nature conservation at the Knepp, different habitats and species not found in our beloved Herefordshire and all got to know one another on a more social level. After a morning guided tour of the Knepp many of us just chose to sit in the warm sun on the bank of a pleasant lake to chat and watch nature go by.

Sadly our annual summer survey has slipped away but Kate Wollen has kept us busy with enjoyable days looking for pearl-bordered fritillaries, drab looper moths, wood white butterflies and glow worms in Haugh Wood. The Swift Group has had a rewarding second year studying the birds in Ledbury Town and next spring we plan to launch a project lead by Alan Pike and Anne Crane to encourage



The naughty barn owl



Lednats at Pagham Harbour



Glow worm in Haugh Wood

hedgehog awareness and conservation in and around Ledbury.

So Ledbury Naturalists Field Club is in rude health?? Well yes it is but continued success is not guaranteed. New challenges are always arising, other interests are always competing for membership and funds and the costs of putting on meetings have risen quite steeply. Discussion of how we are to meet these challenges takes up a great deal of committee time and I am very grateful to all our committee members for their ideas and enthusiasm. We could increase our annual membership fees, which are after all quite low, but at some point this might well be counter-productive. So you will see various new ways of raising funds to cover our costs. We have already instigated a raffle at our indoor meetings to raise funds. The Archie Miles meeting, 'Heritage Trees of the Three Counties' was potentially going to be costly but the raffle allowed us to break even in spite of having such a high profile speaker. So please support our future draws as best you can.

Another suggestion was to sell greetings cards and we now have some Lednats branded cards for sale. At the moment this is just a pilot scheme to see how it goes so we would very much welcome you feedback, positive or negative, to see if we can develop it further.

A few years ago Alan Pike dragged Lednats kicking and screaming into the 21 century when we instigated our website. This has helped with the dissemination of information about meetings and other information and now we have, with the help of Chris Loten, taken this a stage further by setting up a Facebook page. At a personal level

I always thought that Facebook was the work of the devil but for a small club trying to survive, to grow and spread the word about nature it will probably work very well. We have yet to determine the best way to use it so again we would welcome your feedback so that we can use this tool to its best advantage. Please spread the word by pointing all your friends and acquaintances with an interest in nature to this site so that they know who we are.

So on the surface, Ledbury Naturalist's Field Club sails serenely on into another year but I can assure you that under the surface your committee is paddling very hard. You will hear their names in the election of committee members and officers of the club. I am sure the majority of you know the individuals who stand out for their input into this society. I have thanked them every year since I took over as chairman and I must now mention them again.

Alan Pike still puts in a tremendous amount of work organising the program and making sure everything happens when it should.

Alan Starkey still keeps our finances in order in spite of our reckless attempts to spend all the money!

Kate Wollen and Mike Bradley still happily undertake the organisation of the summer residential trips which just seem to get better and better.

At a personal level and on behalf of the club as a whole I would like to thank all the committee for their contribution.

So now on with the next year!

Eden Tanner

MEETING REPORTS

Last year's summer program started with an April walk on Marcle Hill which was well attended by members glad to get out in the spring sunshine. We saw lots of spring flowers including shiny cranesbill, toothwort and some early orchids which looked like early-purples but were much bigger and stronger than normal so were likely to be hybrids.



Shiny Cranesbill

In May we had a walk around Awnells Farm at Much Marcle. We were led by Viv Green who works for the Countryside Restoration Trust. They manage the farm in traditional ways to try to preserve the wealth of nature which once thrived across the country. The orchards were in full blossom with the large old traditional pear trees particularly impressive. Spring flowers provided plenty of interest and the early butterflies were active. A grassy bank in one of the fields was buzzing with tiny wasps going in and out of their burrows in the red earth. After the walk we were all provided with tea and cakes which were much appreciated.

In June we went to Ellsbatch Wood, near Great Witley to visit a woodland area run by Cherry Greenway's son, Tom. We saw plenty of nature but were also shown a spectacular tree house, a woodland working camp, wicker sculptures and even a pottery kiln, all hidden away deep in the

woods. Again, we were all treated to drinks and cakes at the end. We must thank Tom and Cherry for their hospitality.

On 21st June we had an evening stroll around Hollybed Common. There were lots fungi about including some spectacular parasols and puff balls. We also found grass vetchling. Cherry Greenway briefed us on a rare little plant, whose name now eludes me, which used to be found on the common. Sadly we did not find it but the close scrutiny of the sward required did mean we noticed many other things that we might otherwise have overlooked.

In late June and early July we had two visits surveying in Haugh Wood for glow worms to help Kate Woollen with her work for the Forestry Commission. Several people had come quite a long way in the hope of seeing glow-worms for the first time and they were not disappointed. We split up into small groups to investigate different areas of the wood and everyone managed to see at least one glow worm. Sadly the numbers found were not large but we were able to confirm that a significant population is still present in many areas of the wood. Management can be targeted to try to ensure that they continue to thrive. On one of the evenings we came across some people running a moth trap and so we had the additional benefit of viewing their evening's catch.

On the 20th July we undertook a survey of Trehumfrey Farm. Trehumfrey is a mixed farm and has been in higher Level Stewardship for nearly 20 years. HLS is a grant given to land owners to undertake habitat enhancement. At Trehumfrey this involves creating plots for nesting lapwings, creation of wildflower meadows and margins around the fields.

Trehumfrey also has hares breeding in the fields

and otters use the lake and the Gamber and Garron Brooks that run through the farm.

Highlights from the survey were Marbled White and numerous small skipper butterflies in one of the wildflower areas and a Red Admiral landing in Sally's hair! Following the survey the group had shared a BBQ picnic at the log cabin in the woods.

At the end of July we were led on a visit round the Doward by one of our members, Chris Harris. This is a fascinating area of woodland, full of footpaths and archaeology relating to mining, woodland industry and smallholdings from an earlier era. We visited a number of nature reserves run by The Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, all of them slightly different in spite of their close proximity. The White Rocks Reserve is actually a restored municipal rubbish dump and I can well remember having to cope with a steady stream of 'dustbin' lorries in the very narrow lanes on visits years ago. The site is now well naturalised again and is a good place to see grizzled skippers in late spring. We saw birds nest orchids (well past their best), white helliborines and also caught a glimpse of a grayling butterfly.

The visit to Rodborough Common near Stroud proved to be too far for most of our members but a small band or regulars investigated Swellshill Bank for butterflies and nature in general. The area is noted for its adonis blue butterflies but unfortunately the timing was just out and we were a week or two too early and did not see any. That's the problem with all our visits, you just can't predict what nature is going to do. We did see a good number of other butterflies though, including chalkhill blues, brown argus and dark-green fritillaries. Interesting plants included clustered bellflower, carline thistle, stemless thistle, juniper and turkey oak. At the end of the afternoon we called in to Winstones Ice Cream shop on the common. This is renowned for miles around for their superb ice cream and no



visit to the common should pass without sampling their wares.

The weather proved very cruel for the visit to Nant-y-Bedd Gardens near Abergavenny after all the hard work done by Alan Pike to organise it especially for our less agile members. The heavy rain the day before and poor forecast meant that we had to seriously consider calling it off but Lednats proved to be made of 'stern stuff' and the visit went ahead as planned and was enjoyed by all who went.

Late September brought a visit to Uckinghall near Ripple to investigate the restored gravel workings that you can see as you pass over the River Severn on the main M50 bridge. We saw lots of water plants, a good number of late dragonflies (including migrant hawkers) and damselflies and wildfowl.



Migrant Hawker

The highlight was, undoubtedly, the excellent view we had of family of hobbies hawking for the dragonflies throughout the afternoon.

On the 19th October about 15 of us shared cars to travel to Llangorse Activity Centre where they have a lake and stream on the farm where beavers live. The owner of the farm, Colin, was joined by Alisia from the Welsh Beaver Project to spend the afternoon and early evening with us and introduce us to all things beavery.

As the European beaver, *Castor fiber*, was hunted to extinction in this country in the 16th century, the beavers at Llangorse were brought in from Europe. They currently have a pair and hope they will breed possibly this year. After a tour of their lake home in the daylight, we were then given a talk on beaver ecology and history and an introduction to the Llangorse beaver project.

Then the highlight and surprise of the visit was that in the stable, waiting for us was the male beaver. He had been trapped the day before for his health check. Colin kindly kept him so we could all see a beaver close up and witness his release back on the lake just before dusk. We then watched him swim about from the comfort of the hide until well after dark. After the visit the group decided to have supper together in nearby Talgarth in a wonderfully unique evening cafe, the Bookshop. It was a great trip, rounded off with a very sociable dinner.

For our first indoor meeting in October Richard Mundy, the Forest Waters Officer for Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, gave us a talk on 'The Secret Life of the Crayfish.' We learned of their natural history, study methods and conservation efforts. He gave us the sad history of the spread of Crayfish Plague, a water mould - *Aphanomyces Astaci* - which has decimated the native crayfish population in recent years. The mould is spread by the introduced signal crayfish, an invasive species from America, which is relatively resistant to plague but acts as

a reservoir for the infection. Richard was very modest about his knowledge and did not think he deserved a fee so we had a collection which raised over £50 for the Nature Trust.

Archie Miles gave us a talk on 'Heritage Trees of the Three Counties' in November, Archie is high profile photographer & author on all matters to do with trees and he entertained a larger than normal audience with descriptions and histories of our oldest trees. These included The White-leaved Oak, the Eastnor Wellingtonias and the Much Marcle Yew amongst many others around the locality

.In January the members evening went well with 41 members present. Eden Tanner showed us pictures for the summer visit to Sussex and Alan Parry reminded us of the visits to Ellesbatch Wood and Trehumphrey Farm. William Lambourne, our youngest member, had gone to a good deal of effort to give us a presentation of his pictures together with accompanying sound and Hilary Ward showed us slides of trip to France studying orchids. Robin Hemming has been on a birding trip to the Outer Hebrides and showed pictures of sea eagles, corn crakes, arctic terns and many other birds. The evening was rounded off with pictures of the work of the Swift Group.

One of our members, Suzanne Noble, explained her work 'Growing Native Orchids' for our February meeting. This included the natural history of this unique group of plants and their association with certain species of soil fungi. We also heard about the various techniques for in vitro culture.

Sadly our last two meetings had to be postponed due to Covid 19.

FEBRUARY FINDINGS

While out and about in the garden this wet February my best sighting was a female bullfinch in our front garden which is on Bridge Street.

I am a keen wildlife photographer and living where we do is great, even though it is practically in the middle of Ledbury. Our back garden is long and thin but wild.

I have a trail camera that I had for my birthday last year and have captured a lot of footage of hedgehogs; they seem to be very prolific in Ledbury. This year they don't seem to have hibernated as they have been visiting our feeding station in our garden all months.

This time last year, and every year, the frogs in our pond spawn. They come on the 14th of February and by 15th there are the first blobs of frog-spawn. I've just been out to look in the pond and there are 5 blobs of spawn, exactly the same amount as this time last year. I spotted 10



frogs, though there are often more.

I have made a smaller pond in the garden though have only seen a frog and not spawn in it. It is a very new pond so maybe some of this year's froglets will make it their new spawning ground.

The goldfinches seem to really like the elder tree at the bottom of our garden, they also like the



leylandii in a neighbour's garden.

Yesterday I saw a mouse making use of dropped bird food! We have seen him regularly.

We have a pair of collared doves and I think they may be the same ones we have seen for a while. I wonder how long they live for?

Other creatures I have seen this February in the garden are blackbird, blue tit, buzzard, coal tit, dunnock, great tit, jackdaw, pigeon, robin and slow worm.

I wonder what next month will bring!

William Lambourne aged 11

Editors note

Well done, William! Great Photographs! RSPB suggest that collared doves can live for up to 10 years

SPOTTED FLYCATCHER IN MY GARDEN

A pair of flycatchers has been nesting in our garden for the past five years. For the past three I have noted arrival dates: 2017 on 01 June; 2018 on 23 May; 2019 on 11 May. Is summer arriving earlier?

They use the same spot each year, making minor repairs to the nest which is on a trellis underneath our bedroom, only partially screened by the leaves of a vine. Last year one did not arrive until six days after its mate, by which time I was anxious that the first was destined to spend a solitary period of summer mourning. But the wait was clearly worth it. Their courtship is enchanting: standing bill to bill, the male makes small bobbing gestures to its mate where they perch on the rose arch. This arch, a fence post and a London plane tree provide the perfect trio of launching pads for their twisting and tumbling aerial insect assault. Last year they successfully brought two broods off the nest – the first time I believe. They appear untroubled by human activity in fairly close

proximity, though I am reluctant to gaze for too long in case I inadvertently draw the attention of squirrels and magpies to the nest. Once fledged, they do not stay around for long but spread their wings and move further afield.

An observation: this surely cannot be the same pair of birds? The chances of two escaping the hazards of migration and natural old age must surely be minimal? But, if not the same pair, then at least their descendants, or just one from each pair (how else would the flight path be ‘memorized’)? But then are birds not too genetically troubled by in-breeding? Answers on a postcard please.

I have seen the flycatcher referred to as a ‘rather insignificant small brown bird’ but to me its arrival heralds the coming of summer and is eagerly awaited. Should it not appear this year I will feel bereft. I trust, post-Brexit, that it will not find more attractive lodgings elsewhere.

Jen Mackie

The Greater Diving Bitesnatcher

A fine flight of flycatchers pied

An assortment of thigh-scratchers dried

A network of spy-snatchers snide

A bundle of sty-thatchers tried

A bevy of eye-catchers wide

A batchload of dye-matchers tied

A nursery of fry-hatchers spied.

Who says we lack diversity?

John Burns

GARDEN SURVEY REPORT 2019

Nine members kept records of the wildlife in their gardens during 2019 from Colwall to Putley. Some of the highlights include, Lesser Horseshoe bats roosting in summer and hibernating in a garden wood store along with hibernating Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies and Herald moths. A badger visited one garden most nights to feed on the remains from the bird feeders.

Brimstone and Painted Lady butterflies were seen in 7 gardens and a Grass Snake skin was found in a compost heap in one garden. Marsh Tits bred near to a garden in Colwall and were feeding on the garden feeder. A Merlin was seen near to one garden on the roadside. Spotted Flycatcher, Barn Owl and a Little Owl were seen in one garden.

It was noted that Greenfinches had returned to one garden after many years of absence. Of concern, it was noted by one recorder that this was the first year Cuckoos, Weasels, Small Copper and White-letter Hairstreak butterflies had not been seen.

Birds-

First dates for the migrants were Blackcap 6th April, Chiffchaff 23rd March and Cuckoo 22nd April. As expected species such as Blackbirds, Blue and Great Tits were seen by all recorders.

House Sparrows were recorded in 6 gardens, but only 3 gardens had them present all year round. Red Kites and Sparrowhawks were seen in or over 3 gardens and Swifts over 3. Bullfinch was seen in 2 gardens, Greenfinch in 5, Starling and Chaffinch only in 5. Other species recorded in just 1 or 2 gardens were Tree Creeper, Siskin, Lesser Redpoll, Peregrine (over), Grey Wagtail and Willow Warbler.

Mammals-

Badgers, Muntjac, Stoat and Bats were recorded in only garden. Brown Rat, Squirrel and Rabbits recorded only from 4 gardens. Moles were recorded in 3 gardens. Hedgehogs were only recorded in 4 gardens.



Grey Squirrel

Insects-

Brimstone, Small and Large Whites, Painted Lady, Comma, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell were seen in at least 7 gardens. Silver-washed Fritillary was recorded in 2 gardens and Marbled White once. Small Coppers were not recorded by anyone reflecting a national trend.



Marbled White Butterfly

Garden Tiger moths were recorded in 3 gardens and Herald moths hibernating in one. Hummingbird Hawkmoth was recorded in 2 gardens and Harlequin Ladybirds in one.

Amphibians and Reptiles-

Slow-worms were seen in 3 gardens. Newt species were recorded in 3 gardens. Great-crested newts were seen in 1 garden, under rubble and breeding in a very small garden pond.



Juvenile Great-crested Newt

Grass snake was only recorded in 1 garden. Frogs were seen in 4 gardens, with toads in only 2.

All of the findings from our Garden Surveys reflect the National trends, showing declines in many common species such as Chaffinches, House Sparrows, Small Copper butterflies and Hedgehogs. Some native species such as Garden Tiger moths and Silver-washed Fritillary butterflies are making a small come-back, so we hope that this increase continues.

If everyone can help wildlife in their gardens, even if just in small way, then our garden wildlife can thrive. Being a little untidy in the garden and thinking of providing for stages of insect's life-cycle can reap huge benefits for wildlife.

Kate Wollen

HARTPURY HEDGEHOG CONFERENCE

One of our members represented the Led Nats at a university conference on the 1st of February. Following a keynote address by Pat Morris, widely respected as the father of hedgehog research, aspects of hedgehog welfare and rehabilitation were presented to an audience of vets, academics, students and sanctuary staff.

Animal science student Lucy, hopes she will be able to work with Alan Pike and the Led Nats team towards the launch of the hedgehog monitoring project later this Spring



Footnote

Sadly, after all the hard work put in by Alan Pike and Anne Crane preparing the launch of The Led Nats Hedgehog Monitoring Project it fell foul of the Covid19 restrictions but I am sure it has only been postponed for the time being and all their efforts will not be wasted.

PARASITIC FLIES MORE NICELY KNOW AS BRISTLE FLIES

I have recently been studying Hoverflies but still have to photograph most of them to be sure of their identification. So, when reviewing photographs on the computer I often find I have photographed something different or unexpected. One of the unusual flies I came across several years ago was a large fly like a fat overgrown housefly about ½ inch long but brightly coloured with an orange-buff abdomen overlaid with brown or dull black markings. It was NOT a Hoverfly, and only has a Latin name *Tachina fera*, and is a member of a group of flies which are known as ‘parasitic flies’ the *Tachinidae*. Although called parasitic flies they are in fact parasitoids, which means that their larva in fact kill their hosts as they develop within them. Rather gruesome I do admit. In recent years to make insects easier to study and to encourage lay observers, the scientific community has been trying to give many insects common vernacular names. So, this group of flies, numbering some 270 species in the UK, now has its own website and followers, where they are known as ‘Bristle Flies’. However, some entomologists are calling them ‘Punk Flies’, but whichever name is used it sounds less unpleasant than parasitic flies. When you see the pictures below it is clear why they might be called bristle or punk flies, with their spiky emergent bristle-like hairs. The species I first recorded in the garden was *Tachina fera*, common and widespread and being large and quite distinctive I have noticed it every year since. But, I still take photographs when good opportunities arise. These flies enjoy feeding on colourful flowers and basking in the sun on a prominent leaf where it can be seen day after day.

Consequently, whilst reviewing 2019’s photographs I came across something that, whilst superficially the same, was obviously

different. This I identified as *Nowickia ferox* another one of the so called Bristle Flies, with the same outline, bristles on the abdomen and general colour pattern. But, this fly was much more brightly coloured, as if only gloss paint was used topped off with a layer of varnish. Other distinguishing features are *N. ferox* has black antennae, eyes and legs whereas in *T. fera* they are brown.



A Bristle fly Nowickia ferox resting on Tutsan.



A Bristle fly Tachina fera on Apple Mint

Both these species live in similar habitats and feed on similar prey, the larvae of certain moths, but my new discovery *Nowickia ferox* was until recently found only in southern England. So, this is again another example of an insect moving north with our changing climate. I doubt that I would ever have noticed this new Bristle Fly if I had not been taking pictures.

In August I had a large brightly coloured fly land on my empty cup whilst sitting on the patio, and whilst I went to get the camera it obligingly landed on the magazine I had put down. So, the picture is nice and clear as a consequence, even if it looks rather artificial. I decided that it most looked like a hoverfly and after twice laboriously going through my guide of the 270 or so British species, I could not identify it.

So, in frustration I posted the picture on iSpot, a website setup by the Open University to help people get their wildlife discoveries identified. Almost immediately somebody suggested it was *Phasia hemiptera*, which was correct. This of course, turned out to be another member of the *Tachinidae* parasitic flies. What had thrown me

was the use of the common name Bristle Flies for these insects, making me assume that they all had bristles. *Phasia hemiptera* is an example of a Bristle Fly without bristles, and now I have identified it I shall not be confused again.

This is just one of many examples of how common English names of organisms can be confusing or misleading. The photograph shows a male which is quite distinct from the female who lacks his metallic blue markings on the wings. This parasitic fly targets species of bugs rather than moth caterpillars as with the previous species discussed above.

David Taft



*A male Bristle fly Phasia hemiptera,
a species without bristles.*

THE MILLENNIUM GARDEN

I had walked past the neglected municipal garden, aka *The Millennium Garden*, at the entrance to Bye Street Car Park many, many times and wondered why it looked so sad and abandoned.

Later, in 2015, when my son William was six years old, I set out to discover who was responsible for it and to propose that I take it on, together with friends who like me, were home educating their families. After being batted from Ledbury Town Council to Balfour Beatty to Herefordshire Council a few times I was eventually directed to the *Ledbury in Bloom* committee.

So it was that with a group of HE families we began restoring the garden but introduced more native species and tried to create a colourful and interesting ‘wildlife friendly’ place. Many of the families have now moved on, or their children have grown up so the workers are fewer. Happily, a few new families turned up Monday 20 January 2020 for a litter pick and a bit of sprucing-up. We do our best to keep it under control but at the same time allowing it to be wild and have received only positive comments when we are working there. Thankfully the people who may not like the untidy look, don’t express that to the children and keep any negativity out of sight!

Over the years litter has decreased and there has been only minor vandalism. I like to believe that as people see that children are involved the garden is generally respected.

The garden ticks boxes for *Ledbury in Bloom* on judgement day and the RHS judges have been extremely interested and engaged when they meet the children. So, the project continues... If you know of, or have, children who may wish to join us please let us know.



I have similarly walked past Queens Walk for the same number of years and thought how that too lacked plant diversity. When a stand of conifers was felled I thought “Hmm! what will become of the empty ground?” so once again I set

out to investigate. Guess what?after some enquiries I found that *Ledbury in Bloom* were taking it into their portfolio. So last June I approached them to discover what plans they had, and to propose that the area where the trees had been could be developed for wildlife thus improving the biodiversity and available habitat, whilst offering educational opportunities for those who cared for it. Not only that but to get the wider community interested to participate too.

After another bout of toing and froing with *Ledbury in Bloom* they agreed step back so the area can be improved, with wildlife and habitat creation in mind..

I approached Ledbury Naturalists to ask for support for the project and have met Steve Betts, Anne Crane and Alan Pike to engage the club and develop an initial plan of action which is of course a 'work-in-progress'.

After a bit of remedial work on some railings there will be a 'mass planting' of a hedge along the length of the fence line, for which I have, hopefully, sourced some free trees - 280 native hedge plants which I hope will be coming early in March. Hedge bottom plants will be introduced, and the rest of the area eventually

planted with nectar rich and insect food plants along with yellow rattle to inhibit the grass.

As I write things are moving fast, so far as engaging with the public is concerned. The Scouts, and Busy Bees Nursery have both agreed to help with planting and I await responses from other schools and the Youth Drop-in Centre. The main aim for this phase is to get local children actively involved in the project which will have considerable benefits in spreading the word via parents. With luck new projects being planned, such as the Ledbury Naturalists Hedgehog Survey and the Town Trail improvement will benefit from the increased awareness.

I will be so happy if people in the Ledbury community continue to offer practical help with the continuation and expansion of these projects and welcome suggestions for further work in creating habitat as an exemplar of how gardens can be transformed for wildlife.

Keep a look-out for updates on how we can make this happen! Ledbury Naturalists Facebook page, and the regular messages from their secretary, will also carry updates.

Amanda Lambourne

Footnote to Millennium Garden

There is little in the online record of the origins of the Millennium Garden other than a report of its planned opening by 'local schoolchildren on the town's Britain in Bloom judging day, Friday, 14 July 2000' (Hereford Times 16 June 2000). However, before that Herefordshire Council was considering that site, as one of a number, identified as a location for new public toilets. The garden was designed by Stephen Large and implemented by the then chairman of Ledbury in Bloom, Tom Deane, who seems to have maintained the garden for some years subsequent to its opening. A millennium capsule is buried in the garden. capsule is buried in the garden.

Since those early years the Millennium Garden had become neglected through a shortage of volunteer gardeners so it is praiseworthy, through the initiative of Amanda, that the Millennium Garden is experiencing a renaissance and is once more a stopping place for the Britain in Bloom judges, this time as a wildlife garden.



BRIMSTONES AND RED ADMIRALS IN FEBRUARY

2020 started with every month ending with a warm sunny week or two. The end of February was exceptional and many insects were on the wing a month or more before they would normally be expected.

Brimstones (*Gonepteryx rhamni*) were regularly in the garden from the 25th February. Our longest lived butterfly these insects which emerged from a pupa in July or August have hibernated through the winter. Whilst I find hibernating Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks in my wood-store on a regular basis I have never found Brimstones, and I assume somewhere more natural is preferred for their hibernation. They always re-appear in the spring looking newly minted. After they have mated and laid their eggs they will continue to be seen into May and sometimes June. I so look forward to seeing these large beautiful pale yellow butterflies, that I decided rightly or wrongly to give them some assistance.

Their distribution is tied to the availability of their caterpillar's food-plant, the Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*). This shrub forms part of the understorey of woodlands and its occurrence is patchy and infrequent in this part of England. I bought some small seedlings from a woodland plant supplier to plant in my garden where it meets the woodland edge.

After planting, I had a few plants left over which I left in their container in front of the garage, and where on 20th April as I was parking the car, I saw a female Brimstone. I watched her from close quarters for several minutes as she laid eggs on the underside of the newly emerging leaves. She seemed too busy to worry about my presence and I marvelled at the care she took during egg laying. The pictures I took show how small the leaves were, and I pondered how she found this unplanted Alder Buckthorn. I found



A Female Brimstone (Gonepteryx rhamni)



Brimstone (Gonepteryx rhamni) eggs on Alder Buckthorn (Frangula alnus).

several references to the females apparently being able to smell the leaves from distances of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile. Continuing the butterfly theme I also saw a Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) in flight and taking nectar from the flowers of an ornamental cherry tree on the 24th February. This butterfly like the Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) migrates from northern Africa and Spain to visit us every year. Later in the year the offspring of these immigrants attempt a return migration, not remaining here for winter. But, with changing climate there is now increasing

evidence that Red Admirals overwinter especially in the south of England. Unlike Brimstones, Commas, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells they do not become completely torpid and consequently during mild spells in winter are more likely to be found on the wing. So I think that the sighting on 24th February is more likely to be a successfully overwintered individual rather than a newly arrived immigrant.

I also saw several Red Admirals locally during I also saw several Red Admirals locally during

October 2018 with the final specimen basking on my patio on the 26th. I suspect that these specimens were more likely to be ones attempting to over-winter and were not planning to return to the continent. As the picture of the Red Admiral on the Cherry blossom shows it is important for all insects that hibernate to have access to readily available sources of nectar when they awake from their winter slumbers.

David Taft



Red Admiral (Vanessa atalanta) on ornamental cherry blossom.

STEART MARSHES AND THE EXE ESTUARY

For the last few years we have taken a winter break in Sidmouth. This provides a little beacon of light in the winter doldrums and we are able to combine our interests in bird watching and join friends for a sociable weekend.

This year we were fortunate that the highest tides at Steart Marshes coincided with our trip and we stayed overnight at Bridgewater to enable an early start. (Who knew Bridgewater has two Premier Inns - not us until we tried to check in to the wrong one!) Steart Marshes is a joint WWT and Environment Agency initiative where the flood defences have been deliberately breached to form a working wetland salt marsh.

Accommodation issues overcome, we set out straight after breakfast for Steart and arrived about an hour before one of the highest tides of the year. The marshes were stunning as they filled with the incoming tide. The weather chose to behave for the few hours we were there allowing us to enjoy the spectacle of thousands of waders as they moved around the site. Most impressive was the flock of approximately 7000 dunlin who displayed beautifully over the River Parrott for a long period. We were surprised to find that we were almost alone on the reserve apart from the warden who eventually arrived to open the hides. We were able to observe knot, dunlin, redshank, lapwing, golden plover and curlew in significant numbers. I am sure there were also less common species but the area of the reserve populated when the tide is high is huge and it proved quite difficult to identify individuals against the light conditions.

We then continued on what has become a bit of annual pilgrimage to RSPB Bowling Green Marsh and the Exe Estuary. This did seem a little tame this year after the excesses of Steart but was still enjoyable. Local bird watchers advised that a significant number of birds had tak-



en to roosting on Exminster Marshes on the other side of the Exe this year so a little homework is probably needed to get the best out of these sites when travelling a distance.

What can I tell you about the rest of the weekend at Sidmouth during Storm Ciara except that it was wet, wet, wet! We did venture out, wet weather gear protected us but I couldn't resist videoing the waves breaking over the sea front and am now one mobile phone down - oh dear!

Our usual visit to Seaton Marshes was curtailed as the path to the best hide was a few feet underwater so we proceeded to Lyme Regis in search of Purple Sandpipers who we were told live in the harbour. This was a bit of a long shot given the conditions and really, I just wanted to see the sea at high tide breaking over the cob. It had to be done - and was pretty amazing. We did manage to view a little group of turnstones having a party and rock pipits on the beach so we did see some bird life.

Last Autumn we went on the Exe Avocet Cruise, something we have been wanting to do but the tides have never fitted with our Sidmouth weekend. So we made a special visit which proved to be as good as reports suggest. I can recommend this trip and could spend many hours on Exe Estuary with its various highlights.

Wendy Tanner

MUD-PUDDLING BY BUTTERFLIES

Wonderful television programmes depicting wildlife in warm tropical climates have shown exotic butterflies landing in clouds to settle on wet sandbanks alongside rivers. They state that the butterflies are drinking the moisture in these wet soils to extract the essential salts and minerals which are dissolved in the water. This habit is known as mud-puddling. I assumed this was something that butterflies living in hot countries needed to do, and did not imagine I would ever see this behaviour in Britain.

However, in April 2019 I was walking across the fields and along the hedgerows adjacent to the Whippet's Brook on the north side of Malvern. After recent rains there were some wet muddy patches in the field edge alongside the stream, and here I was surprised to see two Holly Blue butterflies settled on the ground amongst the mud. I managed to photograph one of the two; they both had their wings folded over their backs showing the undersides, rather than having them open and flat as normally seen when resting.

In this picture it is just possible to see the butterfly's proboscis probing into the mud just in line with the front most leg. It looks like a fine black thread coming from the underside of the head just in front of the eyes. The proboscis is a flexible hollow tube that is normally rolled up into the mouth out of the way, and is mainly used for drinking nectar from flowers, which being mainly dissolved sugars provide the insect with its energy.

How and why butterflies need to drink other liquids that contain dissolved salts and minerals seems to be unknown, although it seems to be mainly males that are recorded. Like all creatures they need salts and minerals to live, but why males in particular should need to supplement their diet is as yet unknown although various theories are being guessed. I did not manage to see if the two Holly Blues were males or females as they can only be differentiated by the markings on the upper-side of their wings.

David Taft



Holly Blue Butterfly

BIRD BOX RESTORATION IN DOG HILL WOOD

Twenty one bird boxes were installed in Dog Hill Wood by life member Dave Coker around 2009 in the hope that they might attract flycatchers. They did not but the boxes are still there and now occupied by blue tits and great tits plus some nuthatches. The boxes are located in a small area alongside the Green Lane at its north end (approx. SO 714 384) and some are visible from the lane.

Another member Philip Weaver expressed concern that some of the boxes were deteriorating so we agreed to a restoration project and on Saturday 29 February 2020 we set off with a ladder and tools to fix up the boxes. This has been completed so we now wait for new tenants in the forthcoming breeding season. Ideally it would be good to check the boxes to determine usage but we have not committed to doing this. Is anyone interested in taking this on? We will maintain the boxes annually. If you are walking nearby let us know

An addendum to this note is that some of the box lids were very difficult to remove due to them being 'welded' to the box side by an extremely tough material which formed the nest of wax moth larvae (Dave Coker pers comm.).



Alan Pike



Wax Moth Larvae nest

Birchwood, Herefordshire.

18th March 2020. On a sunny westward facing slope, whilst pruning raspberry canes, I noticed by my boots a couple of tiny golden blobs. Looking closer I saw that each blob was on a stalk about a centimetre tall. I knew they were Cordyceps but not the one our Fungus Group occasionally finds, *Cordyceps militaris*. I took a photograph then dug up one specimen (there were six scattered around) with its surrounding soil. I knew Cordyceps grew from a host which can be an underground truffle, pupa or larva and dead insects. It was exciting and gruesomely fascinating slowly and carefully removing the soil and exposing a dead caterpillar, three and a half centimetres long with the fungus growing from its head.

Now to the books for identification. I found it in FUNGI OF SWITZERLAND Vol. 1

Ascomycetes (1984) Breitenbach & Kränzlin, fondly known as 'B & K' : *Cordyceps gracilis* and the host the Common Swift moth.

Cordyceps is avidly collected in China for medicinal purposes but I won't be using this one!

Cherry Greenway



Lock Down

As we are in the process of finalising this newsletter in March we are faced with the ever increasing threat of COVID 19. We have cancelled our last two winter meetings and, as the common sense advice from government has become more and more restrictive as each day passes, it may not even be possible for Lednats to see through our summer program which Alan Pike had just about finalised before the outbreak hit. All the committee can do is react to the advice when it is given. Rest assured we will do our best to salvage as much of the summer program as we can, if and when it becomes possible.

Until the picture becomes clear let's all stay as safe as we can and be thankful that we don't live in a big city, at least we can get out for walks in the countryside without meeting other people. Currently we are a week into the initial three week 'Lock-down period,' and the prospect is that this is likely to be extended

Luckily we live at Leddington where there are lots of footpaths, including The Poets Paths. We can walk through the countryside without meeting a soul. Sadly most the ground is intensive farmland and we are reduced to looking out for arable weeds & various footprints left in the muddy tractor ruts following the wet weather. Badger footprints are very common but there are also lots of smaller prints, including rats and hedgehogs. We also walked an old footpath down to the railway/canal route to Dymock and found the footprints of a mink. They are very like polecat prints but since they were on the bank of a large pond I expect they were mink.

Surprisingly there are still remnants of the daffodil fields of old, especially where large modern tractors cannot cope with the meanders



Hedgehog footprints



Snakeshead fritillaries

of the Preston Brook. In the loops which have been left fallow there are still lots of wild

daffodils celandines and wood anemones. We have also seen lots of peacock and small tortoiseshell butterflies and we also caught a glimpse of a stoat.

The garden is looking much tidier than it has done in recent years as we have had plenty of time on our hands and the weather has been fair. We have had a fantastic show of wild daffodils and snakeshead fritillaries which came out together this year. Usually the daffodils are well over before the fritillaries come out

I was working the garden the other day and a red kite flew over, it was hovering on the wind was directly overhead at a height of about 30 feet for quite a while. Sadly the camera was indoors!

One of the poet's paths crosses an arable field which has been fallow all winter and we regularly see a flock of about 50 linnets which feed there. One afternoon we put them up and a sparrow hawk swooped down and took one. We had a good view of the hawk as it landed with its catch on a nearby fence post. Other birds also have their favourite places. There is spot on our walks where we regularly see a kestrel hovering and a length of hedge where there is usually a yellowhammer or two.



Barn owl at dusk

There is also a old orchard where we often see a barn owl hunting in the rough grass if we are about at dusk. They have a bad time if there are long periods of inclement weather which stops them hunting so we were worried that it would not survive but we just seen 'him' again and hope 'he' finds a mate and breeds again this year. Last year they successfully raised a brood on a neighbours property.

I know we are incredibly lucky to live where we do but I hope you all manage to find a little bit of nature to keep your spirits up during these difficult times.

Eden Tanner



A flock of Linnets at Leddington

BIRD BOX DIARY

There was not much interest in the camera box early in the year. A pair of great tits had a look but moved on in early April. As it was getting late in the season I expected no more interest.

25th April I saw movement towards the box about 11am & was surprised to see a blue tit in the box with a beak full of fluff or grassy material. It was fluttering urgently into the corner & pushing material into all corners. It had already brought in quite a lot, so may have begun yesterday. Another bird was chirping to it from outside & material was brought in very fast, so from nearby. We watched them going into a flowerbed by our cider house. Is this a second attempt after a failed brood? Other boxes in use in the garden are quiet at the moment, so could have failed, been abandoned, or possibly fledged? These birds seem to know what they are doing & are working fast! This continued all day &, checking at 10.15pm, the blue tit was asleep in the box. This is the most 'instant' nest we have seen develop since we have had this camera!

26th April There was clearly what looked like an egg in the nest at 7am, but no birds. I checked later but still no birds. About 3pm I could not see the egg shape, maybe more nest material had come in, but no sign of any birds. I checked at 10.50pm & the bird was in the nest, apparently sleeping on what appeared to be a large number of eggs.

27th April 7.40am bird still in nest, breathing fast, but she soon left. There is definitely one egg! Must have been a trick of the light last night! I could not see the egg later as more material including feathers had come in and covered it. Bird in box at 10pm.

28th April 7.15am bird has left the nest – I saw 4 or 5 eggs & a white feather making it hard to see clearly. The bird was cheeping outside, so not far away, & she was back in at night.

29th April Not sure what is in the nest! Yesterday's 'eggs' were bits of fluff and white feathers! Today they are scattered across the nest and two are egg-shaped and could be eggs. 6.45am bird coming in with more fluff. At 7.45am the bird was staying in the box more. A cheeping conversation commenced with the other bird outside resulting in him coming in to the box to feed her a white grub. After this she left & another egg shape was quite clear – but is it an egg?!

2nd May The bird has been in the box each night but gone by dawn. Today she was still there at 7am, moving around in circles pulling fluff under her. She eventually left & we

could see 4 or 5 eggs – one could be fluff! I checked through the day & never saw her in the nest, but the eggs had been moved about. She came in for the night about 7pm, when it was still light.

3rd May She was on the eggs at 7.20am, & the male came in and fed her. This happened several times & after a longer wait she went out. He came back with food & found her gone, & made a lot of noise about it! She then returned & he came in & fed her. While she was out there were clearly 7 eggs. She stayed in after all this.

6th May Bird has been sitting on the 7 eggs for the last few days, going in & out occasionally, but the male has been bringing food in for her regularly also. All going well so far...

16th May 7am the bird seemed more fidgety than usual, but was settled on the nest. 8am she was feeding young – three had hatched, The male came in also and the female covered the nest and fluttered her wings as he gave her food. He then left and she settled on the nest again. The male returned and fed the female quite quickly. 3.40pm the fifth chick just hatching and the female went out for food.

17th May 7.30am the female left the nest & there was one egg & six chicks visible. The male came in with food & fed the chicks but did not do it with confidence! After several attempts a chick did take his offering, then he left & the female returned & settled on the nest again. She seemed reluctant to take food from the male. All hatched by lunchtime.

19th May Mother was very attentive & chicks developing fluff & not looking quite so pink. Feeding is a bit odd as the male comes in regularly with food, but the female seems reluctant to take it from him, so he tries to feed the chicks. This is problematic as the food items being too big he offers them to one chick who cannot cope, so he takes it out of its mouth & offers it to the next one. Some does get eaten, but he eats the rest himself & leaves. Usually the female leaves the nest while this is going on. The chicks seem OK, & the female is on them most of the day & night. Perhaps it is a learning curve!

20th May 7am – 7 gapes very clear. All seem equal size & lively when mum came in with food. Both parents now feeding and mum settled on them about 7.10pm.

23rd May Chicks developing well & now very fluffy. Both parents out collecting food for longer periods & was still light.

26th May Chicks looking like small birds now rather than fluffy balls & are becoming much more active. Both parents are in & out frequently, sometimes both together. Food seems plentiful, an advantage of late nesting perhaps. At 4pm the chicks had become active & adventurous, stretching wings such as they are. Two had climbed out of the nest and into two corners. Each time they tried to turn & move back they caught the wooden side of the box. Those still in the nest thought it was a parent coming in with food & all gapes were opened. Mum came back at night, but sitting beside the chicks, who were still very lively.

28th May Checked a few times yesterday, which was a Bank Holiday so quite busy, & all seemed OK. This morning there are 6 chicks eager to be fed, looking like small blue tits with feathers forming & wings stretching. The 7th seems to be missing. I think it may be under the others, but less active & not being fed, but cannot be sure. This was about 7.30-8.45am. They are quite noisy now. 5.15pm still 6 chicks, but mother chasing a bluebottle all over the box. Male came in also to feed & chase the fly. Mother settled on the chicks to protect them, but the chase continued.

29th May We can see what looks like a dead chick at the edge of the box below the entrance hole. No idea what has happened, but it looks as if an adult tried to remove it but it was too big. Perhaps it was one that had climbed out of the nest & became too chilled. The remaining 6 seem alright today & are feeding well. One seems more determined to reach the food first, but they all get a fair share.

30th May Only 5 gapes, but hard to define. Sometimes looks like 6, but white markings on wings can look like a mouth when they are resting.

31st May Five gapes quite clear, but no sign of another dead chick, so it must be under the others. They are all quite big now & the nest box is looking crowded. No more flies about & both parents in and out frequently with food. Chicks are noisy now & stretching their wings a lot. 9.50am – there are now two dead chicks lying below the entrance hole.

1st June This morning there seemed to be only four chicks alive & 7.30 this evening only three. One is out of the nest, preening its wings & there seems to be two dead chicks beneath the other two in the nest. I have no idea why this is happening. They all seemed to be thriving, food plentiful. Apart from one or two wet days the weather has been warm. The parents have done all they could & should. All chicks are wing stretching & now (7.40pm) two are out of the nest. Both parents in at times.

2nd June 3 chicks being fed in the morning after an uncomfortable night on top of two dead chicks. A fly was

in the box at one point. Checked at 10pm & mother not in the box. Three chicks trying to sleep out of the nest at the edge of the box. They are now very active, stretching a lot, but also preening a lot. I did wonder if mites may be a problem. They have tried settling in the nest, but are understandably reluctant. They look like small blue tits now, fully feathered & coloured, so I just hope they survive to fledge soon.

4th June 3 chicks still active & feeding well. They show no signs of wanting to leave the nest yet. Worryingly there is a persistent bluebottle in the box trying to reach the dead chicks underneath the three.

5th June One body seems to have been hauled out of the nest & is lying beside it. The three chicks are much more active, fluttering a lot & trying to teach the hole. One did reach it briefly. Parents are calling from outside, trying to encourage them out, so I think they will fledge soon. I hope so, as the nest is becoming an unhealthy place to stay. Forecast is OK for today & tomorrow, but Friday is going to be wet. It would be best if they can have at least 24 hours dry before that, to acclimatize.

6th June 8.15am – 3 chicks jumping up to hole & looking out all the time & cheeping constantly. Both parents feeding & trying to lure them out by tempting them with food but taking it out again. By 9am two have fledged, following an adult out. The third seems reluctant to go. 2.45pm third chick still in the box. The other two must have reached the lilac tree nearby, where the parents line up to feed them, but all quiet out there. Third chick has been fed all morning. Bad news is that a named storm is due to come across UK overnight, with 40-50mph winds & heavy rain. This chick will need to go sooner rather than later to gain shelter & build up strength. 3rd chick left the box several times at about 5.30-6pm, but kept returning. We went out about 6.15, returned 8.45 & it had left the box, all was quiet, so I hope all OK. The night & half of Friday was dry, so a chance to find shelter & family, but over the next 24 hours we had about an inch & a half of rain. I have not seen the birds again, which I see as hopeful.

Carolyn Evans



OCHRE HILL 2019

3.1.19 Visited Slimbridge & only 99 Bewick Swans have come this year. I bought a new bird feeder & back at home we moved our bird table to a safer site, further from where cats & squirrels climb up, & after two frosty days with more cold weather forecast I stocked the feeders up.

I have comfrey as ground cover near the feeding area. This is flowering well and attracting early bees.

5.1.19 Bird table is being well used, mainly by blue tits, great tits and robins. Ground feeders are increasing with many chaffinches and several greenfinches which also use feeders on the poles. It is cold today, still below freezing at 10am, but more sun than yesterday.

7.1.19 A male blackcap has been eating some of the few berries left on the pink rowan tree outside the kitchen window. Most have been eaten by blackbirds, redwings & mistle thrushes, it is almost bare now. It is mild & damp now, & getting windy. I have been outside pruning & potting up cuttings today & I noticed a large hole in the compost heap, through some apple pulp. I thought it was probably a brown rat. A jay has been joining the rest of the crow family eating bread I had thrown out.

14.1.19 Still mild, but a lot of snow has fallen in parts of Europe - over 3 metres in Austria, causing avalanches & roof collapses, so I hope we do not have that.

I walked in the nearby woods today & saw purple vetch & a lot of red campion in flower. It has been very dry & I have had to water plants in containers. Many blue tits now everywhere, & jays & green woodpeckers in the trees in the garden. A raven flew across from the woods & I saw a coot on the pond across the field at the bottom of our garden. Birdsong increasing & light now about 5pm, so very cheering.

19.1.19 It has been cold for several days with some rain & sleet. Birds are coming more to feeders – blue tits, great tits, coal tits, long tailed tits, robins, nuthatches, chaffinch, goldfinch & greenfinch. dunnocks & house sparrows are usually elsewhere in hedges & flowerbeds. A pied wagtail is a regular roof visitor still & many blackbirds, wood and rock pigeons. We have more pheasants than for some years, usually five males & seven or more females daily. I have seen field voles also & a brown rat in the compost heap.

24.1.19 Yesterday we had a dusting of snow which stayed all morning then melted. Surfaces were very icy. Birds, especially chaffinches busy on grass and feeders. A nuthatch, or possibly two, back and forth a lot. Pheasants

always present & about 8 or 10 blackbirds always to be seen eating the apples I have thrown out.

26.1.19 Heard a green woodpecker but did not see it. Mild today, 12deg.C, so birds singing all around, feeling pleasant but not to last!

30.1.19 Cold and frosty, some areas have had snow, but so far not us. Big Garden Birdwatch over the weekend showed a good variety of birds, but not in large numbers. Today in addition to two nuthatches & a great spotted woodpecker I counted about 50 redwings flying over. Two large mistle thrushes, several fieldfares & two song thrushes were all on the grass with about ten chaffinches. A squirrel was trying to get some food also, amongst the competition.

1.2.19 Snow overnight, about an inch, on top of ice, but only hovering around freezing, so hope it will not stay long. No smaller birds about, but larger ones feeding on grass. Yesterday a green woodpecker came down under the cherry tree amongst the many blackbirds, causing quite a commotion but lovely to see so close.

17.2.19 Since early February it has been mild, with over a week of sunshine & 12-15deg.C. Two days ago I saw a yellow brimstone & two red admiral butterflies, the first of the year. They were interested in the Daphne bush, now in full bloom & scenting the area around the house beautifully. A Sarcococca bush, also in full bloom, by our front door was alive with honey bees & there were many bumble bees about everywhere. Yesterday I checked the small pond area for frogspawn. There was none yet, but a few yards away I saw a large frog in the flowerbed. I have also seen a crested newt in the big pond. Today it is mild but windy, so no butterflies. I unfortunately fell down our back doorstep, so was put out of action.

23.2.19 My fall has resulted in a broken leg, so I have been restricted in my observations, other than through the windows! I can move around slowly & have enjoyed some glorious sunshine all week, up to 17deg.C. Birds are pairing up & blue tits are looking in the nest boxes. Long tailed tits are showing interest in some parts of the hedges, sparrows & blackbirds busy collecting moss and twigs. Quite a few brimstone & red admiral butterflies daily, & bumble bees enjoying the scented bushes.

24.2.19 About 9.30am I was watching the camera nest box & two birds came to the box cheeping to each other. One began hammering on the box with its beak for a few minutes, but no bird entered the box & I was not sure what they were. If not blue or great tits they could have been

sparrows, who are actively nesting in the hedge nearby & there are several around. We saw a frog in the top pond after lunch.

27.2.19 No more interest in the camera box. Weather has been lovely - bright sunny days up to 21deg.C, record breaking for February, & today huge fires broke out on Saddleworth Moor due to warmth and dryness. Today frogspawn appeared in the small top pond during the afternoon. The frog has been in the pond for about 4 or 5 days. Brimstone & red admiral butterflies still about daily. Blue tits going in and out of the summerhouse nest box, but no sign of nest building yet. The garden is very colourful as early flowers have kept going as later ones are flowering early. Snowdrops almost over now.

28.2.19 More frogspawn today & frog quite active in the pond. Two toads in the big pond & a rare appearance of the large green carp who lives there. It is slightly cooler but I have managed to work on a few small flowerbeds, shuffling around on a cushion. I am not one to let a broken leg stop me from getting outside, enjoying the sunshine & the wildlife as it carries on around me!

2.3.19 Storm 'Freya' approaching – March coming in like a lion? Rain & 60 mph winds coming. Great spotted & green woodpeckers in the garden, the great spotted one was drumming. A willow tit was on the feeders, with a small flock of greenfinches & some chaffinches.

5.3.19 This morning a bird landed on the camera box but did not go in so I did not see what it was, but hope it will be used. A buzzard landed in the cherry tree outside the bedroom window & looked glorious in the sunshine. It took off & glided through the bird feeders very low and down the hill.

10.3.19 Weather has been quite stormy but bright between, with gales. Some areas have had snow but we have had a brief hail shower & a lot of wind! No more interest in the camera box but I have seen birds going in & out of the holly tree box at the top of the garden. On our way out in the evening a rabbit ran along in front of us & when it ran into the hedge another animal was running along the road. When we got closer we could see it was a badger, quite small (young?) but not in good condition, so hard to see until we were close. It seemed to have hardly any fur – do they get mange? It went under a hedge.

17.3.19 We have had a week of gales and storms, including storm 'Gareth' & it has been a time to stay indoors. Birds are about, but avoiding the wind. The bird food just blows away. Many plants & blossom ahead of time due to warm weather. Frogspawn beginning to hatch. There is less than previous years but plenty for the pond it is in. There are a few toads about and frogs in the stream.

19.3.19 About 7.30am a great tit came into the camera box. It stayed a while, fluttered about then pecked the

sides & left.

20.3.19 A red kite circled overhead then headed towards Coddington, where they have been known to nest for a few years. Today I disturbed a large frog when gardening & it leapt into the small pond. Later I saw two great crested newts in the larger pond. A small flock of starlings flew over- about 50 birds.

21.3.19 Red kite overhead as yesterday, then headed for Coddington.

23.2.19 No more interest in camera box, but blue tits nesting in holly tree box & summerhouse box. Frogspawn all hatched out now but newts have arrived in small pond, not good news! More sparrows around than for some years & several seem to be nesting in the hedge by our cider house.

29.3.19 A chiff chaff has been in the garden for two days now, & lovely to hear in the sunshine & 15deg.C for several days now. Two nest boxes in the orchard are now in use. A pied wagtail was on the cider house roof this morning.

31.3.19 Clocks changed last night – British Summer Time & an hour more daylight! Unfortunately weather is not supporting this – it is cloudy & cooler today, about 13deg.C max., but frost is forecast & a cold showery week with hail, sleet & snow & a little sun between! Butterflies have been flying daily, now including peacocks & some brown ones too distant for me to identify. I was stung by a wasp as I removed some fleece from a bush – it had been overwintering under it. I did not expect this in March! I pushed over a long dead pear tree which had become unsafe as it started rocking. It was a hazard to visiting grandchildren, but had looked attractive with a clematis growing up it for a few years, & had been a standing eco-pile also. As it fell it dislodged three cockchafer grubs amongst the rotting roots, I relocated them but am not sure they will survive.

4.4.19 Today we have snow. It is beginning to settle, 8.30am, but I do not think it will last as it is about 6deg.C & not due to freeze but is grey & gloomy, so several hours of falling snow ahead. A couple of days ago I saw an orange tip butterfly in the orchard. Yesterday we put netting around the trees with nest boxes to deter cats etc. from climbing the trees. We saw fox & hedgehog droppings in the grass. Snow continued until after lunch, settling for a while, but was washed away by very heavy rain & hail later. A very wild day, but milder overnight.

6.4.19 We watched a kestrel being mobbed by long tailed tits, first two, then more & more joined in – maybe 8 or 9 in the end, then the kestrel gave up.

11.4.19 It has been cold with frost at night after a few wet days it is now drying up but with a nasty East wind. A small frog was by the greenhouse, probably one from last

year. In the sunny afternoon I saw two swallows overhead, the first I have seen this year. A lot of orange tip butterflies also in the garden.

18.4.19 Weather improving daily & evenings warmer. 22deg.C today & we sat out in the evening & watched two swallows swooping low over us. Later two bats also.

We had a lovely day at Slimbridge & I saw a black kite which I reported to the staff, as they are not usually seen in the UK. Back at home I saw a holly blue butterfly & several newts in the big pond.

23.4.19 A lovely warm Easter just passed, 22-25deg.C. Small tortoiseshell, holly blue & peacock butterflies all about in large numbers. Swallows now all around & looking at our garage for possible nest sites. Two jays very noisy overhead & a kestrel. A frog is singing nightly at the edge of the pond, & many newts as usual. Our green carp made a surprise leap in the dark which was a shock – it is very large! Bats are out each night from our roof. A sparrow hawk flew along the hedge & moved on. I found a dead slow worm by the compost heap. There are a lot of wasps about & the house fills up with bees when the door is left open, my neighbour is having the same problem, but I do not know what sort of bees they are. I have not seen this behavior before.

25.4.19 Two blue tits busy nest building in camera box. We had hedgehog droppings near the back door & on the grass, but have not yet seen any hedgehogs.

27.4.19 Saw a muntjac trying to cross the Ledbury Bypass by the river, very risky move & nerve racking to watch but it did cross in one piece, then a badger ran across the road in front of us as we came up through the village.

29.4.19 Heard my first cuckoo this year, near to us & our dog barked each time it called!

30.4.19 Cuckoo called again & flew overhead.

3.5.19 May has arrived & weather has changed. Showers for the last few days, so I have been greenhouse gardening. An Arctic Blast is promised from tomorrow for a few days, with frosty nights, but drier. Bird in camera box now on 7 eggs. Cuckoo calling daily but from a distance. Our wildlife camera trap has shown a fox, confirming droppings we have found & rabbits & muntjacs night visiting. I saw a speckled wood butterfly today.

8.5.19 It has rained all day, but less cold at 13deg.C. Birds in summerhouse box feeding frantically all the time now & some feeding in holly tree box also. There are several swallows daily now, but no swifts so far. The cuckoo still calls daily. Several damselflies now appearing from the ponds.

13.4.19 19deg.C today. I saw three swifts overhead, but

very few house martins so far. A few holly blue & speckled wood butterflies about. Cuckoo still heard daily. The pond has a lot of whirligig beetles this year, more than recently, & I have been fascinated by 8 of them going round & round, quite hypnotic to watch!

15.5.19 Whilst relaxing with a cup of tea we were disturbed by agitated swallow calls. A sparrow hawk flew low over our heads pursued by 4 swallows, who continued their pursuit across several gardens.

18.5.19 All eggs in camera box hatched by lunch time. Saw several holly blue butterflies & one peacock butterfly today. A red kite flew overhead. I have not heard the cuckoo today.

28.5.19 David saw a large orange insect in the orchard today & wondered if it was an Asian Hornet, as one has been found in Worcester recently. It seemed aggressive but we decided it was a wood wasp. There are still very few butterflies about generally, but plenty of wasps and hornets, which could be nesting in the house roof. We have bees nesting in a bird box in the orchard. This box did have blue tits in it earlier. Swallows are always overhead & must be nesting nearby, but I think not in our garage. Up to 6 swifts seen regularly now, joined by more house martins & swallows. A red kite flew over again. Orchids are appearing in the grass but seem later than usual, & less of them. Other wild flowers in the grass we allow to grow are attracting many bees & other insects. We heard a skylark as we approached Colwall this evening.

18.7.19 Due to some eyelid surgery I have been unable to spend much time in the garden or to see much going on, but I am able to say that we had 35 orchids eventually. The other wild flowers were very successful & attracted many insects, including large numbers of meadow brown, gatekeeper & ringlet butterflies & others I could not identify with certainty, but possibly were hairstreaks. A few tortoiseshells & a comma & painted lady were also seen. There were many honeybees on the lavender & other plants. Wasps are nesting in our cider house roof, as usual & in a flowerbed – more of a problem. We have goldcrests in an oak tree, possibly nesting, & a family of long tailed tits fly through the garden daily. Today I have seen two pied wagtails, probably young ones, quite grey in colour, but pied wagtail markings. I have seen 12 swifts overhead regularly & I love to watch them in the evening mixing with swallows & house martins chattering and screaming overhead. Three ravens come to the area where we have now cut the wildflowers, where they must be finding food. There is a new hole at the bottom of the orchard &, having set the wildlife camera up, I know there is a badger living in it, I had seen a latrine the other end of the path. Two foxes are also regular night visitors. My neighbour has two hedgehogs visiting her garden nightly & has seen two foxes.

19.7.19 First day with rain for a couple of weeks which will help the recently cut wildflower area to recover. Last week I saw a scarlet tiger moth on some comfrey, beautiful with its bright red wings. I have not seen one before. Today I watched a female blackbird breaking snail out of its shell, as a thrush would do. About 20 sparrows lined up on the telephone wire to greet us as we returned from shopping – I have not seen so many for years. They all flew into the holly hedge, chattering for a while. Whilst eating lunch a heron landed in the top of our biggest oak tree & stayed for about five minutes.

25.7.19 We have another heatwave! 39deg.C expected in London today, another record, 33degC.C here. We had spectacular thunderstorms the night before last, with 55,000 lightning strikes apparently – how do they count them? I have seen a peacock & a red admiral butterfly yesterday - only one of each, but a few tortoiseshells & many meadow browns & gatekeepers. A flock of about 30 swifts flew overhead, screaming & a lot of swallows & house martins about daily. Bats are out at dusk, but it seems less than usual. We have had two badgers, a fox or two & muntjacs eating Herman plums, which have all fallen off the tree overnight. Our camera has caught these animals, but a fox did appear about 8pm when it was still light. The hole the badger was living in seems empty now & full of leaves. We have a mole making hills in the orchard. The wild flower areas still left long are no longer beneficial to the insects, as flowers have gone to seed, so we will cut it soon. Our white mulberry is shedding fruit & the tree & ground beneath are full of blackbirds & other birds – garden warblers seem to like this fruit each year.

30.7.19 Very wet today after a good weekend, but warm at 24deg.C More peacock butterflies about, I have seen 6 on a buddleia bush & several red admirals. Many bees about, as all year & the lavender is full of honey bees. There are a lot of hoverflies, which have been scarce until now. Frogs can be heard in all 3 of our ponds daily, but I have not seen any yet. Our camera trap has picked up a lot of activity along our top strip of grass between us & our neighbor & going through the hedge. Nightly we have two very active hedgehogs, three foxes, two badgers & several muntjacs. I worry about the survival of the hedgehogs with the badgers using the same routes. We have not seen any for a while, so it is good to see two large & healthy ones. It is good to see wildlife returning to our garden after a marked decline over the last three years, while a lot of new houses have been built on Ochre Hill, destroying the well-used routes of the animals & removing some hedges and trees. Since cutting the long grass the areas are full of thrushes & blackbirds eating the variety of seeds left behind. A green woodpecker has also been looking for ants nests.

7.8.19 So far August is a little cooler, 23deg.C & more comfortable. Some areas have had a lot of rain & a dam at

Whaley Bridge is in danger of collapsing, leading to evacuation of about 1500 people. The Country has been invaded by painted lady butterflies – many thousands in some areas, including Lindisfarne & Farne Islands, but not my garden! I have seen quite a few, but only about 30-50 at a time. Lovely to see though. They enjoy the lavender, verbena bonariensis & herb plants, often joined by peacock butterflies. A large hedgehog was outside the kitchen window one evening, after dark, causing the light to come on so I was able to watch it for a while shuffling around & into a flowerbed & into the foliage, out of sight. One, or maybe two badgers have dug out a large wasps nest on the edge of a flowerbed. The nest was in pieces, with not much left to see, but the back edge remained in the hole, with some very angry wasps busy trying to find their home. The hole showed the nest to be the size of a large football, but hardly any soil was left to fill the hole. It needed two buckets of soil to refill it, when safe to do so!

15.8.19 The wasps are still active round where their nest was & the badgers have tried to dig more out. I set the camera on it and had some pictures of the badger activity. Still many swallows & house martins about, but I have not seen swifts since the large group flew over on 25th July. We have been busy having to drain and repair our big pond, which had developed a leak. We have now lined & refilled it, so hope all will be well as it settles in. We have two immature pied wagtails daily on the cider house roof. They are quite entertaining as they run about. They have come from a nest nearby. Since the weather has become wetter the butterflies have all disappeared. The rain is needed as the garden shrubs & plants are looking quite stressed after the hot, dry spell. More eyelid surgery has meant I have not been able to record much for a few weeks again.

3.10.19 After a short holiday in September it is already October & the rain keeps coming! Today we have Storm Lorenzo, the remains of a hurricane. We have over 100 flood alerts in the country with more rain to come. Swallows have been very active & numerous and we have had 100 or more on our telephone lines for several days. These have been a pleasure to watch and listen to. There are only a few left now. The fruit harvest has been very poor this year, as the plums and damson all fell off, the apples hardly grew due to drought and those that we have picked are not keeping, so the birds will have a feast in due course. We watched the pied wagtails on the cider house roof when two house sparrows landed and fought over a large white feather they found. Each was very determined to get hold of it but why did they want it at this time of year? It was very entertaining. They were joined by two robins, probably a pair as they seemed to tolerate each other, & the feather was forgotten.

I found a large newt in the hall, down some steps, about 8 inches long & very dehydrated after being there at least overnight. It was lethargic, but alive, so we put it in a damp flowerbed, where it did recover. There are also quite a few frogs & toads about, more than recent years. The foxes badgers are still visiting almost nightly, but I have not seen the hedgehogs for a while on camera.

6.10.19 Today was dry, but soggy after overnight rain. 14deg.C in the evening & a pleasant day. I heard a lot of birds overhead & was pleased to see quite a large flock of swallows & house martins, who stayed overhead for some time – I thought they had all gone by now. I still hear a chiff chaff & have several coal tits & nuthatches on the feeders. Blue tit numbers have increased. A red admiral was on a buddleia bush today. There are still many flowers attracting bees & butterflies. Later a sparrow hawk flew over and all the birds vanished.

16.10.19 Rain is now preventing any gardening work, as the ground is too wet to walk on, & slippery on the hill. Our camera still showing nightly visits from two badgers and foxes & a fox has been out in the daytime also. Bats still flying regularly. Quite a few peacock & red admirals on the pears which have fallen. Small flocks of starlings are overhead daily & I have heard, but not seen, redwings. The berries they like to eat are not good quality, many are brown & shriveled, but the holly is full of berries.

26.10.19 Rain still continues, but it is mild so the flowers keep going & I have a lovely new display of roses. Butterflies & bees are benefitting from this, & painted lady & tortoiseshells have returned to the garden. Birds are returning & a lot of blue tits, great tits, long tailed tits, robins, sparrows & goldfinches have appeared after a gap. Redwings heard regularly. More flooding beginning to build up.

29.10.19 Three dry days & a touch of frost, so I could get out again. A commotion near the top of the oak tree seemed to be caused by a grey squirrel attacking a nest – possibly an owl? I know kestrels nest along the bottom line of trees, but have not seen them in this tree. The only other possibility may be another squirrel's day.

5.11.19 November continues as October ended- wet, with brief glimpses of sunshine, showing up the lovely Autumn colours all around now, especially Frith Wood. The River Wye peaked a week ago at 5.7m, not far off 1960 levels. Hereford has been flooded for a while, in the Greyfriars area & others. It has gone down slightly, but is now rising again. Wasps & red admirals are still enjoying rotting pears. Pied wagtails on the roof again & a flock of about 10 long tailed tits, probably a family, fly through daily. A wren is in a hedge by the house, with a robin, dunnocks & many sparrows, so it is quite noisy! The fallen apples in the orchard are attracting badgers, foxes, rabbits, mice, squirrels, & muntjacs, day and night, as shown on our

camera. It has been a good year for fungi & we have had all sorts in the orchard, On the bottom path under the oak trees we have seen some colourful ones in shades of green, red & brown. Some that looked and smelled like field mushrooms are always found in a nearby field.

9.11.19 Floods around us receding, but other areas now suffering worse, further north. Today after a frosty start we have had some rain turning to sleet, but passing over. This is bringing the leaves down fast, after the beautiful display we have enjoyed. More birds on feeders now.

13.11.19 7deg.C. & frosty start to recent days, but still it rains daily & floods building up everywhere again. More flocks of starlings overhead now.

15.11.19 Still it rains! We have had 2 inches in 24 hours & some was very wet snow. Redwings & now fieldfares overhead daily. They, together with many blackbirds, are stripping the holly berries fast. Most trees now bare & the outlook not as golden as a week ago.

22.11.19 Drier & colder, with a nasty east wind. Birds on feeders more. I have seen blue, great, long-tailed, marsh & coal tits all together, with a few goldfinches. Flocks of redwings & fieldfares now much larger & about all the time, as well as starlings. I saw 15 blackbirds under the cherry tree eating apples I had thrown out.

24.11.19 Gloomy & wet, but today I saw a male blackcap on the pink berried rowan outside our kitchen window, eating the last of the berries.

5.12.19 Still raining & ground completely saturated even on top of the hills. Roads, cars, animals & hedges all looking the same muddy colour now, but I did manage to gather a varied collection of colourful flowers & foliage from the garden to brighten the house up. I was outside at about 6.50am this morning & heard tawny owls in Frith Wood.

26.12.19 December has been hectic with family outings and gatherings, but the month has generally continued wet and gloomy. Floods have not abated. We even have flooded grass at the top of our garden. Crops have rotted in fields & farmers are really struggling. A sparrow hawk flew low over chasing a mistle thrush, making distress calls. I shouted and waved my arms which unusually distracted the hawk & the mistle thrush flew to safety. I watched my cat walking towards the house near the ginkgo tree, where birds were feeding nearby, & a jackdaw on top of the tree spread its wings in an aggressive manner & screeched at him. The cat thought he would climb the tree & stretched himself up the trunk, but the jackdaw became even more aggressive, so the cat gave up. I think we've had enough rain now – I hope we get some dry weather for 2020!

Carolyn Evans