

and I will just provide the plans, recording sheets, input the results, provide the feedback and cover all the other interesting jobs(!).

We will probably start this exercise in early April. Could all those people interested please contact me (Andrew): e-mail cartlia@yahoo.co.uk or tel 01684 438649.

Plant Identification Group (PIG)

from Andrew Cartlidge

Last year the PIG's season started badly as the first few tasks had to be postponed because of rain. After that the weather proved much kinder, except on the blisteringly hot day when we went to Piddle Meadows. All in all I think everyone enjoyed themselves throughout the summer and some of us may have actually learned something.

WWT have found the results of our exercises useful, especially at Hollybed Farm. Here, because of our results, they switched the donor hay strewing meadow from Far Starling Bank to the Orchard which proved to have a richer flora. Hopefully this will give a more varied flora to the recipient meadow and alleviate pressure on Far Starling Bank, the SSSI. The WWT have repeatedly thanked us for our efforts on all sites we have visited. The dates and contact details for this year are below. There are some new sites for us, as well as some of our old favourites, so it should be an interesting year.

Thurs 23rd April 10.30 am, Blackhouse Wood

This is a new reserve that Worcestershire Wildlife Trust is in the process of buying. We will be doing a general flowering plant survey to record what is there. This should be quite an interesting task as, from casual observations, the site appears quite rich. NB As always, no experience is necessary.

Sat 2nd May 10.30 am, Hill Court Farm

We are returning again to this lovely site to continue our survey of last year. This is a large site and is being managed primarily as a bird reserve, but it is proving to have an interesting flora as well.

Wed 6th May 10.30 am, Boynes Coppice and Melrose Farm Meadow

These two small reserves are located fairly close to Malvern. They have a rich flora, including green-winged orchids which may be in flower when we are there although it is slightly early in the year. We will be doing some general surveys as well as some species counts.

Fri 29th May 10.30 am, Piddle Brook Meadows

This is a follow up to this delightful site we visited last year. The Trust has asked us to perform some species counts as part of their management.

Mon 8th June 10.30 am, Tiddesley Wood

As you know, this is a very large reserve. We will be looking at two smallish areas that have been coppiced in the last few years to see how effective this work has been in the restoration of the ground flora.

Sun 14th June 10.30 am, Hollybed Farm Meadows

No year could be complete without a return to Hollybed. This year we will be assessing how effective the management plan of hay strewing has been on the two meadows involved. This should not be too daunting as it is still very early days in the restoration of these meadows. We will also be looking at the other end of the SSSI to see what is there and its abundance.

Ambling/Study Group Outings

These are for a slower, closer discovery and study of local wildlife. We meet at a local nature reserve or area of wildlife interest and wander slowly along with our binoculars and reference books for about 2-3 hours. It is very informal, no experience is necessary and we all share our knowledge. Everyone is very welcome. Dates, times, locations and other details are advertised at Indoor Meetings and by e-mail to members and friends on the Malvern Group e-mailing list. Contact: Carol Bradley (01886 884372/07929 091814).

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Indoor Meetings

Indoor meetings are held at 7.30 pm on the first Thursday of the month at the Lyttelton Rooms in Church Street, Great Malvern. Adults £2, children free, refreshments available. Non-members of the Trust are very welcome.

Thurs 2nd Apr: 'Butterflies in Britain' by Roger Umpelby, entomologist and horticulturist.

Thurs 7th May: 'Foxes and Badgers' by Derek Crawley, chairman of the Staffordshire Mammal Group.

Thurs 3rd Sept: 'The Birds of Northern Britain' by Graham Wren, wildlife photographer.

Outdoor Meetings

If you are joining us for the first time – welcome! Do always wear suitable clothing and footwear.

Phone Brian Bradford (01684 574849) regarding day trips, which must be pre-booked. Full details were included on the booking form in the last mailing. It can be downloaded from our website and is available at our indoor meetings.

Phone Margaret Vernon (01684 565079) regarding walks.

Sun 12th Apr: 'Spring Walk' with Alison Uren, about 3 miles with some hills. Meet at the free Bromsberrow Estate carpark (SO757349) at 10 am. £2 donation to WWT suggested.

Tues 28th Apr: Oxford Botanical Gardens and Harcourt Arboretum. Depart from The Splash at 7.30am. Limit 16. £25 including guided walk around OBG.

Fri 8th – Sat 16th May: Bardsey Island trip.

Wed 17th June, 10 am: 'Summer Wild Flowers Walk' with Andrew Cartlidge. Circular walk around Chase End Hill, about 3 miles. Meet at the Conservators' Golden Valley car park near Hollybush (SO767368). £2 donation to WWT suggested. Contact: Margaret, or Andrew on 01684 438649.

Thurs 25th June: Birds and Bees, Banbury (plus Church Meadow and/or Radway Meadow and/or Goldicote Cutting depending on time & weather). Cost £20. Depart from Splash at 7.30 am. Limit of 16.

28th June – 1st July: 4-day trip based at the Dorset WT Kingcombe Centre and visiting several reserves. Information and booking form from the website or from Margaret.

Wed July 22nd: Dyfi Osprey Project (plus Glaslyn and/or Llyn Mawr depending on time & weather). Cost £15. Depart from Splash at 7.30 am. Limit of 16.

Contributions

Please send ideas or contributions for future Newsletters to Margaret Vernon (01684 565079) email m.vernon613@btinternet.com

Committee Contact

Margaret Vernon (01684 565079)



NEWS & VIEWS

from Margaret Vernon

As we all know, members of the committee hold some of the key roles in planning the way our group runs. Their responsibilities are wide and varied but all are essential. A huge "thank you" is owed to all of them and particularly at this time to Brian Dawkins who has stepped down from the committee. His contributions to the indoor meeting programme, the walks and the coordination of the newsletters in recent years have been significant and we are very grateful for all he has done. Brian Iles (and the rest of the group) is pleased that he is to continue his assistance at the outdoor events.

Debbie Kirkham has taken on the important task of coordinating the refreshments at our indoor meetings, for which we are all grateful. She is also to join the committee and therefore some roles and responsibilities will change later in the year. We will keep you posted!

Fundraising for the Wildlife Trust

Our annual collection will again be at Morrisons in Malvern, this year on Thursday 30th and Friday 31st July.

It would be good to have our 2-manned hourly rota complete a.s.a.p. If you can give an hour or so of your time, please contact Dave Cook (01684 564603) or sign the rota at our indoor meetings.

Bees Swarming

by Brian Dawkins

On a very hot day last July I was mowing my front lawn and noticed a lot of bees around a large tree in my neighbours' front garden. I walked over to investigate and discovered a swarm of bees in the shape of a cone hanging from a branch. Bees swarm when their hive becomes overcrowded and they want to produce a new queen. The old queen takes off with part of the colony to establish a new nest, so the swarm on the branch were all protecting the old queen.

I contacted the Malvern and Upton Beekeepers Association and rang a member, Chris, who said he would be very pleased to come over and take them away. He arrived with his daughter, both suitably dressed in protective gear, to remove the swarm. He held a large box under the swarm, hit the branch hard a couple of times with his hand and most of the bees fell into the box. He then placed the box upside down on a white sheet with a small gap between the box and the sheet. The bees were moving in and out of the box but eventually they all went in. Chris wrapped the sheet around the box and took them away.

It was a fascinating event to watch.

Walk around Colwall Orchards with Tim Dixon, 12/12/14

by Alison Uren

On a crisp frosty morning in December, twelve of us went on a walk with Tim Dixon, bird and tree expert and manager of the Colwall Orchards Project. There are many orchards in Colwall, some of them dating back to the 16th century, and while they are not commercially viable now, they are a haven for wildlife. Pears, apples, plums and cherries abound and their fruit provides food for many overwintering birds. We saw redwings, mistle thrushes, fieldfares, blackcaps, jay, treecreeper and tits. A sparrowhawk flew overhead, sending them all scattering for cover.

Tim spent some time showing us the mistletoe in the orchards and giving us much fascinating information about this strange semi-parasitic plant. Mistletoe is common in this part of the UK, but rare elsewhere. In Colwall many species of tree are laden with it, especially hawthorns, limes, poplars and fruit trees. This is good in some ways, but not in others. Mistle thrushes, blackcaps and waxwings eat the berries and several invertebrates depend on it, notably the rare mistletoe marble moth. However, too much mistletoe eventually kills the host tree, so in Colwall they cut the plants back by a third each year.

We finished our morning with mulled apple juice and mince pies at the Colwall fair. A very pleasant way to spend a sunny winter morning!

Strolls with a Purpose

from Andrew Cartledge

If you are waiting for a bus, what sometimes happens is that two come along together. The same apparently occurs with wildlife surveys: Worcestershire Wildlife Trust has asked us to perform some hedge surveys in part of the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), whilst Worcestershire Biological Records Centre has asked us to do some general surveys within the Malvern area. Fortunately we can combine them together. The initial survey area is the part of the AONB that runs south from Malvern Common through Welland and finishes just past Hollybed common. As this is very local for most of us, I am hoping some of you would like to take part.

We will be strolling the footpaths in this area, recording what is there in very simple terms e.g. are the fields arable or pasture, are the hedges all of one species or many, etc?

I will be leading the first few strolls, which will act as training as well as recording sessions (although training is a bit too strong a word it!). After that, it is hoped that others will do the strolling and recording