

Visit to the fritillary meadows

19th April 2016. By Sue Peasgood

When Margaret heard the fritillary fields were flooded at Cricklade Meadow she swiftly arranged a suitable alternative to ensure our trip would not be a wash-out. Guided by Ellie from the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, we enjoyed a very successful visit to Clattinger Farm.

After passing ditches gilded with vibrant marsh marigolds and crossing several fields we reached the hay meadow where fritillaries thrive. A lesser whitethroat called from the hedgerow behind which a roe deer lurked, and amongst a carpet of cowslips there nestled many stunning snakes-head fritillaries. From a distance we enjoyed the rich purple hue of the bell-shaped flowers, but when we crouched beside them we could admire their exquisite snakeskin markings. The crimson criss-crossing veins stood out even more splendidly on those flowers that were still in pale-pink bud.

After lunch we visited Upper Waterhay Meadow, where the rarer white snakes-head fritillaries grow. Although they lack the more striking markings of the crimson snakes-head, they are delicately beautiful. A myriad of these fragile white lanterns in their secret meadow made an impressive impact.



We continued to Blakehill Farm in the hope of seeing redstart, wheatear and short eared owl. Whilst the first two species obliged us, sadly no owls were visible. However, the walk in the afternoon sunshine, accompanied by the joyous song of many skylarks was a delight. A fly-past from a red kite was a fitting salute to a splendid day.

The Wildlife in my Garden

By Rachel Salisbury

As a horticulturist, I grow plants. I don't garden specifically to attract wildlife, but I try not to engage in harmful practices

I have a large rural garden in Crumpton Hill, with native hedges; beyond is a small wood and a cider orchard. These provide ideal habitats for a range of wildlife and I can't claim credit for all that comes into my garden.

I'm not a meticulous recorder of wildlife, although a keen observer. I did record butterflies a few years back - 19 species, including a silver-washed fritillary. Purple hairstreaks occasionally drop out of the oak treetops in the wood; they seem to be attracted to cider! My horticultural interests ensure that there are plenty of flowers for bees and butterflies and we do seem to get better than average numbers.

Sightings of mammals are infrequent, apart from squirrels, but the fox comes through occasionally. More exciting this year is the hedgehog, the first we've seen in the garden for

several years, now encouraged with nightly snacks of catfood.

We get a wide variety of birds as you might expect in an area of woodland and orchard (around 25 species are regular visitors). Not in the garden, but very close by, a barn owl has been attracting our attention this year.

Our pond is currently a disaster area! I suspect that there are still creatures living in there, despite the drop in water level and the covering of duckweed. It's a project in waiting, but I was reassured when I turned over a nearby log last week and found a great crested newt. Wildlife doesn't worry about aesthetics!

My highlight this year? Returning home after a very long day and taking a drink into the garden, I sat down and saw a piece of rope in the grass - it moved! For twenty minutes the grass snake and I watched each other. He moved only his tongue and I moved the finger operating the shutter. We were close to the compost area so I hope that's where home is.

I too am at home in my garden and am happy that wildlife sees fit to share it with me.

Rooting for Wildlife.

By Sarah Allum.

Wildlife gardens provide a mosaic of micro-habitats. Our garden, about quarter of an acre in Callow End, includes trees, shrubs and hedges, bird boxes and feeders, compost heaps, a log pile, an insect hotel, a small pond and of course, lots of weeds! Pride of place must go to the hazel tree, with its delicate catkins in early spring, followed by the leaf canopy offering a source of insects for a variety of tits. It gives shelter, roosting perches and song posts for all our regular birds. As the hazel nuts ripen in autumn, the tree is frequented by great spotted woodpeckers, jays and athletic grey squirrels. Our local sparrowhawk alights there sometimes.

We try to encourage insects by growing flowers which are not only good for nectar and pollen, but also flower over a long period. Early queen bumblebees visit pulmonaria in February and green alkanet is a magnet for a variety of bees. In summer, origanum, wild scabious, knapweed and alliums attract butterflies. The nettles and garlic mustard beneath the hedge are tolerated, serving as food plants for their caterpillars.

A thick cover of ivy on walls and tree trunks produces autumn flowers with a welcome late supply of pollen and nectar for flies, bees and wasps. Later, the blackberries are a feast, greedily devoured by hungry blackbirds, thrushes, blackcaps and woodpigeons. Apple trees provide windfalls for returning redwings and fieldfares and the white sticky berries of mistletoe are particularly attractive to blackcaps and mistle thrushes.

Over the years we've seen declines, especially in greenfinches, bullfinches, frogs and butterflies and sadly, we've had no maybugs this year. To compensate, the bird feeders entice once elusive goldfinches, coal tits, long-tailed tits and in really cold weather, siskins and redpolls into our garden. We have to be optimistic!

Contributions

Please send any ideas or contributions for future Newsletters to the editor alison.uren@gmail.com or phone 01684 567819

Malvern Group Newsletter



Summer 2016

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Worcestershire

NEWS & VIEWS from Alison

I am writing this in May, and we have just enjoyed our last Indoor Meeting of the spring season. Roger Pannell gave us an excellent overview of Birdwatching in Britain, complete with videos and atmospheric recordings of birdcalls.

Talking of birdwatching, we are so fortunate to live near the Malvern Hills where interesting birds come and go all the year round. Redstarts, whitethroats, stonechats, meadow pipits, swallows and martins are fairly common. There are buzzards and kestrels all over the place, and quite a few other raptors including red kite. There have recently been sightings of ring ouzels on North Hill and several wheatears on British Camp. At least four cuckoos are in the area. When Carol Bradley took a group on an amble around St Wulstan's Nature Reserve they saw 25 species in an afternoon. We even managed 22 species on a cold, wet April morning when we did the Four Seasons Walk around Wood Street!

We will be doing a collection in July outside Marks and Spencer and the proceeds from that will go towards the restoration of Blackhouse Wood. Many thanks to all the members who have volunteered to help.

I hope you will enjoy our next season of Indoor Meetings, listed below. We try to cover a very wide range of interests and specialities. Any ideas for future speakers, trips or walks are always gratefully received.

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, WR14 2AY. Adults £2.50 with refreshments included. Children are free and non-members of the Trust are very welcome.

September 1st: Butterflies of the Chilterns, and Butterfly Conservation

David Dennis, Chairman of Butterfly Conservation from 2011 to 2014.

October 6th: Animals Behaving Badly

Dr Michael Leach, wildlife photographer and author.

November 3rd: Can we restore our native mammal predators to Britain?

Johnny Birks, mammal researcher and conservationist.

December 1st: Our Local Raptors

Ed Drewitt, freelance naturalist, broadcaster and wildlife detective.

Outdoor meetings

Saturday 3rd September: Alfrick and Lulsley Annual Horticultural Show

12.30pm onwards at Alfrick Playing Fields, WR6 5HJ. An interesting and fun afternoon for all the family. The Malvern Group will have a stand.

Tuesday 6th September, 8pm: Bats around the Malvern Hills

A 2 hour guided walk with Johnny Birks looking for bats around the Malvern Hills.

Booking essential as group is limited to 20 people: please phone Margaret.

Meet British Camp car park (SO 763404)

Wednesday 7th December: Slimbridge Wetland Centre. Depart from Splash 09.30. Limit 16

Cost: Wildfowl & Wetland Trust members £10

Non-members £18

We will be visiting Slimbridge at an important time in the winter season. There are thirteen hides from which to observe the many winter visitors that will be present on the reserve, including the Bewick's Swans, newly returned from their long journey from Arctic Russia.

There is a visitor centre, cafe and gift shop.

For more information on trips and walks, please phone Margaret on 01684 565079, or Brian on 01684 574849. Full details are also on the website.

Summer Butterflies around the Malvern Hills

By Mel Mason

Regular sightings of common blue on lower slopes signal the start of summer. Look out for the blue and brown wings of the female, which can be confused with brown Argus. Large skipper appear in June before small and Essex skipper, the most recent addition to skipper species found in the region. July is the busiest month with meadow brown, ringlet and gatekeeper counted in their hundreds on some sites. Silver-washed fritillary soar above Gullet Quarry and Swinyard Hill, pausing to lay eggs in bark by the woodland edge; while white admiral fly in Langdale Wood, laying eggs on honeysuckle. Marbled white use the ridge of the Malverns to navigate but it occurs in much larger numbers at lower sites, such as Cother Quarry and Brotheridge Green. The upper slopes are busy with small heath searching for sheep's fescue to lay eggs. Grayling, the rarest species in Worcestershire, inhabit the eastern ridges of North Hill. Perfectly camouflaged at rest, it flashes orange upper-wings with large black eyes and white pupils when disturbed. The under-recorded purple hairstreak flutters round tops of oak trees on warm evenings at Old Hills and Guarlford. Wherever elm trees survive, white-letter hairstreak are present, often seen accidentally whilst searching for other species. Speckled wood, an overlooked summer regular, dominates the wooded lower slopes in late August and September. Finally, as summer ends, the migrants emerge in larger numbers. Red admiral feed on fallen apples before returning to the southern continent to breed. Painted lady feast on buddleia before journeying to North Africa and, if you are fortunate, you will see a clouded yellow drawn down to a patch of red clover.