

Teme Valley Wildlife Group

NEWSLETTER JUNE 2026

Stephanie Mocroft's View from the Teme Valley

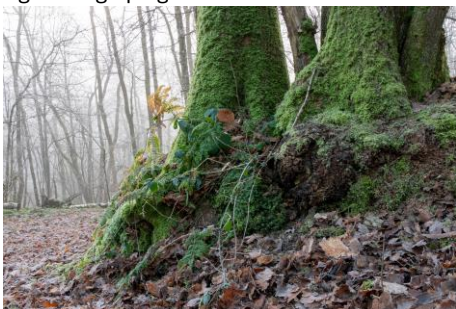
The idea for this month's article was sparked by the Royal Horticultural Society's recent advice on coping with moss in lawns - which is to learn to love it.

I seem to remember that the RHS said the same thing about the garden slug, but I suspect that gardeners will find their suggestions equally unwelcome. But moss itself is an interesting subject.

It is a primitive form of land plant covering many different species which have each adapted over the millennia to live in a surprisingly wide variety of habitats. Mosses differ from higher plants in having no proper leaves, roots or stems. Nor do they have a system of xylem cells to circulate water and nutrients.

Instead, they absorb water through every part of their structure. Mosses are made up of thin "leaves" arranged spirally round flimsy stems with strong thread-like rhizoids to anchor them down. They don't have roots because they don't need soil.

All flourish in damp places where they can find light, water and a few nutrients. In dry conditions, they simply turn brown and wait for some moisture before greening up again.



Winter is the time when many mosses come into active growth. Within woods they may be the sole sign of winter green.

They grow on the ground, on trees, on stones and sand-dunes and in the cracks between paving slabs. They also live in watery domains such as bogs and may even be found in streams, holding fast to pebbles and tree-roots.

One specialist moorland moss has made its home on the dung of grazing animals; another colonises the barely habitable surface of burnt ground.

In fact, a major aid to the identification of mosses is the knowledge of where each type grows. More familiar to gardeners are the sphagnum mosses, which are commonly used as hanging-basket water absorbers. This is not surprising given that their leaves are full of hollow cells capable of being waterlogged by many times their own weight in water.



The life cycle of mosses is curious too. A film of water across the moss's surface allows the male elements to "swim" to the female elements to fertilise them. The next generation of plants to grow sends up slender stems carrying spore capsules at the top. The shape of the spore cases provides another feature which can aid identification.

These dry out and release spores onto the wind. The spores are dispersed and grow into another generation of plants which only produces the male and female elements once again. It seems that mosses don't have enough energy to produce both together and so have opted for an alternate generation system.

Finally, here's something which has potential usefulness to ramblers. Moss usually grows out of the reach of the prevailing wind, so tends to grow on the north of west facing trunks of trees.

Should you get lost, this information could help you with a little route-finding. My husband once mentioned this to a much younger work colleague and received a mystified look in return.

"What's moss?" she asked, having been brought up within the sheltered confines of a large city. I'm glad we don't have to ask.



Teme Valley Wildlife Group's Monthly Meetings and Talks

For May's meeting, Alison Wakeman gave the Group a talk on the life of honeybees and their importance in the environment.

Not surprisingly for someone who has established a business as a multi award-winning speaker and educator on all things bees, Alison held the audience's attention with a constant stream of 'I never knew that' facts and a good sprinkling of humour.



She took us through the life of the honeybee colony from the initial point of a swarm, to finding a suitable cavity for a nest, and then building the intricate structure for storing honey and pollen, and to house the new brood. Along the way, Alison explained the incredible properties of substances such as propolis which is antibacterial, antifungal and antiviral!

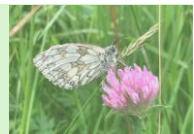
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June's talk will be given by Carol Wood on Swifts (and including some Swallows and House Martins).

Carol's interest began when she realised that the cottage she had recently moved into had swifts nesting in the roof space and so began a project to discover how these amazing migratory birds live.

Please make a note in your diary to attend the next meeting and listen to Carol's talk at 7:30pm, on Thursday June 11th at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall, WR15 8RS. We look forward to seeing you there.

For up-to-date information on the wildlife being seen in the area, or to record your own sightings, please visit our Facebook page. For news on upcoming events, please visit our website (www.teme-valley-wildlife.org).



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Wild Life

First of all, many thanks to those of you who gave up your Sunday morning for a walk in the hills of our farm, a few weeks ago in May.

Although the earlier period of cold weather had persuaded the intended stars (the orchids) to make only a limited appearance, there were still some colourful jewels, in the form of Common Milkwort, Common Lousewort and a couple of avian stars, Common Redstart.



Common Milkwort



Common Lousewort

Which brings me to a brief thought to consider: how much more common were these plants and birds, to have been given the epithet 'common' in the first place?

I guess the oft-quoted "97% of wildflower meadows have been lost since the 1930's" gives a clue to how common the plants could have been. But this calculation was only relevant up until the mid-1980's. The remnant 3% is considered to be nearer to 1% now.

Whilst the Redstart is currently on the Amber List for Birds of Conservation Concern, the Milkwort and Lousewort – together with two other plants we have here, Betony and Devil's-bit Scabious –



Betony

have now been included on the BSBI Red List as being 'vulnerable to extinction'.

Sad to say, the downhill trend in numbers from 'least concern' to their current poor status has only happened in the last 20 years.

During the time that we have lived here, I have grown to appreciate and then cherish the periods over which the plants flower, and the changing form and

colours they bring to our orchards and meadows. However, I would have to say that before we arrived, I had never heard of Milkwort, Lousewort, Betony and Devil's-bit Scabious.

And maybe that's a large part of the problem. Plants that were once considered common have, over the years, gone unnoticed and unloved, and increasingly vulnerable to the typical causes of loss in the drive for food production - i.e. ploughing, fertilising or re-sowing with more nutritious crops.

Stephanie Mocroft's article on moss (page 1) highlights some of the disconnect between younger generations and the natural world, but my own lack of knowledge proves that 'common' plants are not as commonly known as they once were.

I hope that visits to our farm and to others, such as Maggie Kingston's Hollow Meadow later this month (see page 3), will engender a greater appreciation of these and other wildflowers and push them



Devil's-bit Scabious

further to the forefront of species worth admiring and saving in the natural world.

For our own part, we now recognise the biodiversity of wildflowers and birdlife that exists and is worth

protecting here, and need to make sure that we also continue to promote 'bio-abundance' to ensure there are sufficient numbers to maintain their long-term survival.

Michael Northwood



Moths of the Month

Diamond Back

So for June's moths, I thought we'd look at some potential garden pest species. The first species is a tiny moth (13-15mm wingspan) that ventures to the UK as a migrant from the continent. Some years we don't see many. But other years like this year, there are lots around. They have come over in their thousands.

This is the moth known as the Diamond Back, so called because of its interlinked diamond shapes down its back.



When it arrives in high numbers, it can cause havoc with gardeners growing brassicas like cabbage, broccoli and kale, as the larvae they produce thrive on this food source. They can turn up anytime between May and September. Can be widespread and common in the Teme Valley some years.

Current Clearwing

The second moth, and yes, it is a moth, though it doesn't look like one in the conventional sense, is the Currant Clearwing.



As the name suggests, it is associated with black and red currant bushes. The eggs are laid on the bushes and larvae feed inside the emerging shoots. It is primarily a daytime flyer and can often be seen on very warm sunny days, looking somewhat like a hovering fly around currant bushes in the garden. Wingspan 17-20mm. Only really found in very small numbers and as such, whilst present in the Teme Valley, is not particularly widespread, although localised populations will be present around the food plant.

Danny Arnold

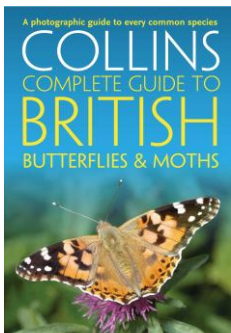
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Book of the Month



'Collins Complete Guide to British Butterflies and Moths' is promoted as the 'definitive photographic reference guide' and includes every species that occurs regularly in Britain (and Ireland), along with a section

dealing with the 'rarest of the rare' – extinct species or very rare immigrants. If you only wanted the book to identify butterflies, you might feel short-changed with the list price of £19.99. This is when you realise the extent to which British moths outnumber the butterflies. Just 50 pages are required to describe in photographic detail all of the butterflies – including the rare migrants and vagrants. The remaining 250+ pages are needed to cover the moths seen in Britain and only includes an 'introduction' to the micro moths! Happy hunting.



What To Look Out For In June.....

With the, almost daily, variation in daytime temperatures and on/off rain showers, there is the chance of seeing morning dew on the the web of a Labyrinth spider.



Despite the 'funnel-web' appearance, the densely-woven web is used to catch grasshoppers and crickets – the Labyrinth spider is completely harmless to humans.

A similar looking web covering, but without the reinforced opening and spun in amongst taller grasses, is likely to have been produced by an equally harmless Nursery-web spider. Well, harmless to humans.

During mating, the male presents a gift of food to the female, while laying perfectly still and pretending to be dead to make sure he doesn't become the dessert.

And Three To Find.....

The Harlequin ladybird is a relatively recent arrival to the UK first appearing in 2004. Since then, however, it has become widespread, being classified as an "invasive species".



Generally larger than the native ladybird species, they can out-compete them for food and even be cannibalistic towards them. Typically characterised by the distinct "M" marking on their head.

The Ichneumon wasps of, which there are hundreds of species, all have one thing in common. They lay their eggs on a host and then burrow in, eating the host from within.

Typically butterfly, moth and beetle larvae are the target. The species shown here belongs to the *Netelia* genus and is very common in the Teme Valley. Most *Ichneumon* wasps don't actually sting. However the females of this species can! So beware....



Cantharis pellucida, a species of soldier beetle, is a colourful little character that is often found feeding on pollen and nectar on Hawthorn.



Very common in the Teme Valley and can easily be found in the food plant when in blossom.

Danny Arnold



TVWG Farm Visit, 17/05/26

The guided tour of the 'Wild Life' farm (see previous page) started in the main barn, where the Dexter cattle were getting through the last of the previous year's haylage prior to being turned-out into the cherry orchard. There was a short walk to the top of the hill to the farm's hayfield which had signs of flowering herbs, such as yellow-rattle, common vetch and bird's-foot-trefoil, and was part of a longer-term plan to encourage a varied wildflower mix within the field. The tour continued through an area of ancient woodland to a lower orchard and meadow, where it was explained that encroachment by bracken was being controlled by a combination of scything and trampling by the Dexter cattle. Many thanks to Tony Simpson for setting up a moth trap to provide sample species for the day and to Danny Arnold for the pheromone traps.



Dates For Your Calendar:



Thursday 11th June @ 7:30pm:

Talk by Carol Wood – "Swifts" at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall, Bromyard Road, WR15 8RS. Worryingly, swifts are now on the red list of The Birds of Conservation Concern, and the problem may be due to human activities. Carol's talk is intended to encourage us to understand this amazing bird and to illustrate what we can all do to help.

Sunday 21st June @ 10.30am:

A 'Bio-Blitz' has been arranged at Hollow Meadow, a three-acre Local Wildlife Site in Bank Street, Stoke Bliss, WR15 8RY. Hollow Meadow is owned by one of our members, Maggie Kingston, and includes a seasonally wet wildflower meadow and calcareous wildflower bank. During the day, the intention is to record as many species as possible, including plants, moths, butterflies, birds and bugs. If you would more details, please contact Maggie (hollowmeadow23@gmail.com) or Tony Simpson (tonysimpson1945@hotmail.co.uk).

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