

Teme Valley Wildlife Group

NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2026

Stephanie Mocroft's View from the Teme Valley

Our garden pond has been a great joy. Over the years we've witnessed so many unexpected wildlife encounters that I can't thank the garden's prior owners enough for having had the foresight to put it in.

Wanting to build a garage, but not possessing anywhere flat, they had found themselves moving rather a lot of soil to create a level base. The homeless soil ended up as a retaining wall on another slope, which they then filled with water to create a small pond.

They were keen on dragonflies, so tailored the pond to meet dragonfly needs. We have continued to look out for them and, as they had done, to send yearly records to the county dragonfly recorder. All told, we've seen twelve different species of dragonfly and damselfly either visiting or making themselves at home.



The pond is situated only yards from the kitchen window, so we have a fairly constant view of what's going on there.

Many's the time we've dropped the washing up to rush outside and see what's new, maybe a water shrew, a heron, a bat, a sodden sparrowhawk drying its wings, a frog, a turquoise flash of kingfisher, even next door's cat looking to pounce on a grass snake!

Don't worry, we distracted the fascinated tabby and "hissing Sid" slid into the water. He (or she) had been around for a few days, taking leisurely swims and drying off in the sun at the pond's edge.

Whilst monitoring its activities (and protecting it from felines!) we'd seen it attempt to catch one of our resident toads.

The toad was none too pleased and fought back, slowly drawing its legs out of the snake's jaws and valiantly waging a war of strength against the snake.

This was no mean feat because the snake, a large and full-grown adult, was many times the size of the toad.

Unfortunately, we did not get to see the end of this tug-of-war because both snake and toad disappeared under the water to continue their duel.



It may be that the toad retrieved the rest of its body from the snake's jaws because the next time we saw the snake it had no telltale bulge to suggest that it had recently eaten a large meal.

The incident reminded us of another tussle worthy of a David Attenborough commentary which we witnessed some years ago, again featuring a toad.

We had spotted an unusual visiting dragonfly and were just using binoculars to check its appearance against the details in the dragonfly guide, when a toad popped its head up out of the water and grabbed our subject of interest.

Perhaps unwisely, the brown hawker dragonfly, for that is what it was, had rested on vegetation quite low to the water's edge.

Expecting the match to be very one-sided, we were surprised by how tenaciously the dragonfly held on to the leaf it had grasped. A very slow trial of strength ensued. Gradually, gradually, the dragonfly pulled more of its abdomen free and eventually, some fifteen minutes later, flew off.

But we didn't see another brown hawker that year.



Teme Valley Wildlife Group's Monthly Meetings and Talks

For August's meeting, there was a welcome return from Ellie Williams, the Reserve Manager for Natural England at Fenn's, Whixall and Bettisfield Mosses National Nature Reserve. Her talk started with a summary of how the Mosses were formed to become the third largest lowland raised bog in the UK but that peat extraction and commercial tree cover had caused considerable damage – both to the peat and the native wildlife – that has taken 36 years to restore.



The remainder of the talk focused on the endangered species of dragonfly found on the Mosses: the White-faced darter.



Ellie explained the life cycle of the species as well as the different projects taking place to help the species recover.

The evening was rounded off with Ellie answering some interesting questions from the meeting's audience.

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September's talk will be given by one of our members, Ros Bissell, who is the owner of Moors Meadow. This is an intriguing 7-acre organic hillside garden overlooking the Kyre valley.

The talk 'Moors Meadow: a Wildlife Garden' will give an insight into the creation and ongoing work in the garden to grow both native and rarely seen cultivated plants in a way that works with nature and encourages wildlife.

Please make a note in your diary to attend the next meeting and listen to Ros's talk at 7:30pm, on Thursday 10th September 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

It seems like the run-up to September has finally fulfilled the weather forecasters' weekly promise of some rain showers, although it remains to be seen whether this is just a brief respite from the drought or the start of the rainy season – or autumn and winter as it used to be known.

Not that a few rain showers will suddenly make the orchard and meadow grass verdant. But they have given one of our later-flowering plants, the Devil's-bit scabious, a welcome boost and sufficient encouragement to produce their pin-cushion flowers, and a much-needed source of nectar for foraging bees.



Not all of the ground is parched. Part of the Meadow flanks the brook on the bottom boundary and, despite the heat and lack of rainfall, the spring-fed brook is still running, although quietly ambling might be a more accurate description. Being in a cleft of one of the many folds in the valley, there is also sufficient shade from the trees on the southern bank during the hottest part of the day.

The flora has still suffered, but there are tinges of green in amongst the washed-out grasses, while the Betony, Knapweed and Meadowsweet still flowered, but quickly ran to seed. There is also a small patch of heather, although how that managed to find itself there is a bit of a mystery.

Ever since we came here, there has been a small section of the Lower Orchard that has been known as the 'Boggy Area'. It is a relatively flat piece of ground where water collects in ever-softening ground before its final outfall into the brook.

Back in June, it had a haze of bright pink flowers from one of the few plants whose Latin name, *Silene flos-cuculi*, is more poetic than its prosaic common name of Ragged Robin.



Normally, you would avoid the shortcut across the boggy area in case a boot was held just long enough for the next step to be in socks only.

For the moment at least, the area is more of a dry ford, although it does retain the spirit of its earlier self by being awash with the colour and smell of pale pink water mint.



Our hot summer may have caused some of the native and migrant birds to produce either later or second broods, as plenty of juveniles are still apparent. The youngsters have become bold and want to find out more about their local habitat – some of them just before leaving.

In particular, the extended families of long-tailed tits can be seen flitting between trees, each one connected to the last by an invisible thread.

The bullfinches prefer to be heard and not seen amongst branches of the young rowan trees that line the track. Their plaintive whistling call sounds almost apologetic, in complete contrast to the male's loud salmon pink waistcoat.



Spot the Spotted Flycatcher!

The flycatchers were recognisable by their staccato flight patterns and the redstarts by the flash of rusty-red tail, but a closer look of both would have been good.

However, it is a truth, universally acknowledged, that a man in possession of a good pair of binoculars will have left them at home when he sees something interesting.

Michael Northwood



Moths of the Month

This month we are looking at a couple of moth species which you might expect to be common in the Teme Valley, but in fact aren't. Or to be more precise, they are not often recorded.

Both of these two are "first" records for our area this year, yet it is a little puzzling as to why, for at least one of them, more are not recorded, as the food plant on which the larvae feed on is locally widespread.

Mocha

The first is the Mocha. This is a medium-sized moth with a wing span of 18-22mm. The colouring shades can be variable but the pattern stays pretty constant. It has two broods – one early summer, one late summer – so is effectively on the wing for most of the summer months.



So given that the larval food plant is the Field Maple, of which there are plenty in our area, we might expect to encounter it more often than we do. Maybe it just doesn't come to light that easily.

Small Ranunculus

The second moth is the colourful Small Ranunculus. This species became



all but extinct in the UK in the early 20th century. Latterly it gained a foothold in the South-East, down in Kent, presumably from a migrant population coming across the English Channel.

Slowly, this population has moved steadily north and has this year, turned up in the Teme Valley. The larvae feed on both wild and cultivated lettuce.

Danny Arnold

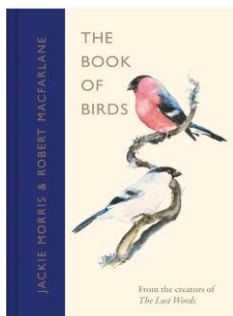
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Book of the Month



Despite the authors' contention that *The Book of Birds* is a field guide, it would be too heavy to carry in the field and there are more detailed, and less expensive, guides on the market.

Weighing-in at £35 – though most bookshops now sell it for nearer to £25 – our Book of the Month doesn't appear to earn its title. However, this is no ordinary book of birds, as those of you who have read the previous books of writer Robert Macfarlane and artist Jackie Morris would come to expect.

The 49 birds that are so beautifully described, in both words and paint, are just a selection from the 199 that are on the Amber and Red Lists of Conservation Concern. The authors' hope is that 'Knowledge may lead to wonder, wonder to care, care to action, action to change'. Maybe, that's worth the book price, after all.



What To Look Out For In September.....

If the weather continues to be warm or mild, there may continue to be sightings of two migrants. But these are not birds, they are butterflies and moths: The Painted Lady butterfly and Humming-bird Hawk-moth.



Incredibly, both will fly here each year from Southern Europe and North Africa and, due to warmer summers, they are

reaching further north with each year. If, like the aurora borealis, you've missed every sighting this year, there may still be time to see them both.



Photo courtesy of Richard Pill

And you are just as likely to come across the Painted Lady and Humming-bird Hawk-moth feeding on the nectar from your garden plants.

However, being strong fliers, they are not the easiest to capture in a photograph.

And Three To Find.....

Towards the end of the month, the Redwings should start to arrive from their breeding grounds in Scandinavia and Iceland to join their Mistle Thrush cousins making the most of the berried treasure to be found on Rowan, Hawthorn and Viburnum.

Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)



Rowan is also known as Mountain Ash, not because it is a large tree but because of its ability to thrive at

high elevations and its leaves are superficially similar to those of the common Ash.

The berries are loved by both animals and birds and are rich in Vitamin C. They are the favourite fruit of the Waxwing, but we tend only to see the birds here if there is a shortage in their breeding grounds in Scandinavia – circumstances leading to their 'irruptive' behaviour.

Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)

A superb tree for wildlife, due to its profusion of cascading scented flowers in May (one of its common names is May tree) and its Autumn fruit.



Another of Hawthorn's traditional names is Quickthorn, due to its rapid growth, making it an excellent hedge plant with the added bonus of spines for stock-proofing. The red fruit – the haws – persist on the tree well into Winter, providing a long period of nutritious food for both native and migrant thrushes.

Gelder-rose (*Viburnum opulus*)

The Gelder-rose is a relatively small tree (up to 4m) with white flowers in late Spring and later red fruit, with a sickly honeyed smell to them.



It's not clear whether birds have a similar sense of the smell, but the fruit tends to stay later than most before being eaten. The Autumn colour of the leaves, ranging from butter yellow to crimson, provide one of the best displays of our native trees.



Dates For Your Calendar:



Thursday 10th Sept. @ 7.30pm:

Talk by Ros Bissell at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall – 'Moors Meadow, a Wildlife Garden'.

Moors Meadow is situated on the hillside in Herefordshire facing north over the Kyre valley. Originally a small farm, over the last 50 years it has evolved into a tranquil haven for wildlife and plants.

Ros was born and brought up at Moors Meadow and her talk will give you an insight into the creation and ongoing work in the garden to grow both native and cultivated plants in a way which works with nature and encourages wildlife.

Thursday 8th October @ 7.30pm:

Talk by Beth Norris at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall – 'The River Teme Catchment'.

Beth is the Wildlife and Water Officer for Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and leads their input into water and wetland advice, assisting with delivery of nature-based conservation work at a landscape scale.

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