

Teme Valley Wildlife Group

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2026

Stephanie Mocroft's View from the Teme Valley

Last year I came up with a few ideas for seeing wildlife during 2025 and I thought you might be interested in a report on how I got on.

I'd hoped to spot hares and otters but although a variety of valley walks in early spring produced quite a few sightings of the former, always a joy to see and they seem to be faring well in our area, but no joy for otters so far. I'd love to catch a glimpse of one, but I remain hopeful because they are thriving and have re-colonised our local rivers.



I achieved little success with my flower hunting. A dry spring followed by a hot summer did not do our native wildflowers any favours.

I combined a trip to Gloucester cathedral library (including a cream tea, highly recommended) with a visit to a site where Pasque flowers are known to bloom.

The location was found without difficulty but there were no signs of any flowers, nor were there any seed-heads nor even any leaves.

It was a similar story when I hunted for bee orchids. I know a good spot by the A44 at Knightwick where there are usually lots of them. But I visited on my usual day of June the first and there was no sign of a bee orchid to be had.

It was no surprise therefore, that a two-day guided tour to Hampshire's top orchid sites was cancelled three weeks beforehand, due to a paucity of flowers.



Bee orchid

I went anyway and enjoyed the New Forest, which I hadn't visited before, but it was incredibly jammed with people and cars and I couldn't recommend it.

Later in the year though, in July, I had better luck and spotted three spikes of the orchid-like broad-leaved helleborine flowering in our nearby wood.

These have been little in evidence over the last four or five years, because of consecutive dry springs and because of being eaten by deer.

This year, some early coppicing had left enough brash on the ground to protect them and they did well, flowering and setting seed unhindered.

But back to my trip to Hampshire. Its highlight was a stop-off near Burghclere to see frescoes painted by Stanley Spencer at Sandham Memorial Chapel

He worked as a medical orderly in Northern Greece during the First World War's Salonika campaign. His amazing Resurrection scene shows horses and donkeys alongside soldiers killed in the war, all ready to rise from their graves.

He clearly mourned the thousands of animals lost in the conflict and he also painted some tortoises which were befriended by the troops as they dug in over the broiling summers and freezing winters of the slow campaign.

My final report from 2025 regards the successful breeding of ravens in the Teme valley.

Raven expert and recorder Mike Metcalf came to inspect our local nest and saw two juveniles flying with their parents. He had also inspected another successful nest at Hanley William where four youngsters had been raised.

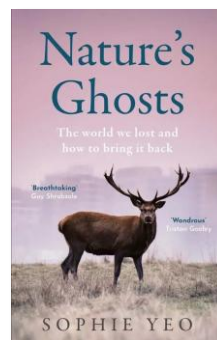
These are birds I love to see and it's great to know they are doing well.



Broad-leaved helleborine



Book of the Month



For thousands of years, the natural world has been shaped by humans. Our activities have permanently altered the environment – for good and for bad.

In *Nature's Ghosts*, award-winning journalist and

author, Sophie Yeo, examines how the planet would have looked before humans managed to reduce its diversity.

These were the landscapes that were carved out by megafauna and the primeval forests that emerged following the last Ice Age.

In this beautifully written book, Sophie encounters the environmental detectives – archaeological, cultural and ecological – who are now reconstructing, in stunning detail, the landscapes we have lost.

Nature's Ghosts has that rare blend of being well-researched, enjoyable to read and inspirational..... and comes thoroughly recommended.



App of the Month:



Nature Encounter

This free app, from author and nature writer Melissa Harrison, takes the form of a guided nature journal that allows you to record your

experiences and sightings while you're out and about in your favourite nature haunts.

Tailored tips and prompts, that are intended to be both inspirational and educational, will let you know what to look and listen out for, and when – from looking out for migrating birds to adding photos of plants as they come into flower.

There are also invitations to contribute to citizen science projects or to join local conservation initiatives.

We wish you all a Happy New Year and all the best in whatever you will be doing to observe, record and cherish nature in the beautiful Teme Valley in 2026.



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Wild Life

I'm looking out to the bird feeders from the kitchen after giving them their alternate-day refill of two kilograms of sunflower hearts. The day is cold but sunny with wall-to-wall pale blue skies. It's possible to tell the time of the year from the point where the morning sun rises above the horizon, although the horizon in the Teme Valley is usually the crest of the nearest hill. In our case, it is Walsgrove Hill, only 2½ miles away in Great Witley, and part of the ridge that continues south to form the Malvern Hills.

In the summer, the point where the sun breaches the horizon moves further north but is only ½ mile away from home, being the top of the hedgerow that lines the road into Pensax from Stockton.



Amongst the frenetic activity of the birds at the feeders, a grey squirrel looks decidedly ponderous in comparison as he (you can see he's a he) pulls and chews at the steel wire cages that protect the seeds from his eating habits and protects the birds from the eating habits of the sparrowhawk.

However, 'protection' is not a concept our resident male sparrowhawk understands or respects. The cages and radar-jamming wind chimes we have installed are merely inconveniences to his innate, and spectacular, flying abilities.

Being smaller than the female, the male is able to pirouette around the feeders and pick off any unsuspecting prey that hasn't heard the alarm calls along the flight path. Sometimes, we see the larger female. She tends to go for the fast, low, stealth approach, but has a lower hit rate.

Here, the male of the species is more deadly than the female – to misquote Rudyard Kipling (...or the band Space, if you prefer).

Out in the orchards, the predicted arctic weather patterns didn't quite live up to expectations. The snow is just a light covering, rather than deep, but the frozen ground is crisp and uneven.

The apples and pears that the cattle didn't get a chance to eat, and we didn't get around to juice, now lie in decomposing mats of yellow and brown under the bare canopies of the trees.

We had only partial success with the pond we had excavated at the bottom of the Lower Orchard, near the brook.



The new Willow Pond

It filled almost to the overflow pipe when we had the earlier mild, wet weather during the first two weeks of December, but then emptied just as quickly during the final two when the rain stopped.



The later Willow Wallow

Whilst the pessimist in me would suggest that the exercise was a waste of time, the optimist tries to convince that it at least provides attenuation for the water that runs off the hill and prevents any silt being deposited in the brook.

The pessimist has the upper hand at the moment...

Michael Northwood



Moths of the Month

Moths species on the wing in January are few in number and often limited to species that over-winter having emerged as adults in the autumn and then, having over-wintered, reappear in the spring.

Agonopterix heracliana

One such moth is the tiny Agonopterix heracliana, a tiny moth with a head to toe of only 10-11mm (22mm wing span).



It can be found on the wing on any warm winter day and often appears in January. It readily comes to light and can often be found on a lit window in the winter.

There is a very similar species, Agonopterix ciliella, which has a slightly different hind wing. As such, the species is denoted by recorders as an aggregate, indicating differentiation has not been specifically made between the two species.

This tiny moth utilises many umbelliferous plants as part of its life cycle and can be found throughout our area, being considered common in the Teme Valley.

Dark Chestnut

The second moth species this month is the Dark Chestnut. A heavy and dumpy little moth with a wingspan of 30-38mm.

This moth also has a confusion species, The Chestnut, which fortunately, with fresh specimens, are a little easier to separate, as the Dark Chestnut as pictured here, has a much more angled hind wings at its tips, whereas the Chestnut has rounded wing tips.



This species typically flies in October/November, but early specimens can be found throughout the winter. The larvae feed on catkins in the spring and later in the year, on various herbaceous plants. Common in the Teme Valley, though far less so, than the similar Chestnut moth.

Danny Arnold

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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Local Common Bird Survey

Once again, this year we will be running a Local Common Bird Survey.



This is a survey which is designed to be as unobtrusive as possible for people who just like to see their bird life and are happy to record what they see.

There is no daily or weekly commitment. You just need to record what you see on



your chosen patch once per month as a minimum And even if you miss a month out, that's no problem, just pick up and start recording the following month.

All we ask you to do, is to choose a "patch" to record in. This could be your garden, a regular walk you do or a larger area such as a farm or small holding.



Just make a note of what you see or hear from your chosen patch, then on subsequent days in the month, just add to it, or amend your records accordingly.

The data we want, is the most number of a species that you see all at once on your patch. So, if you see just one blackbird today and three all together the following day, then the most you have seen is three. That's the record you put in for the month. Then do the same for all other species seen.



You don't need to be an expert. All the birds on the list are either common or fairly easily identifiable.

You don't have to post or "send" any records in. Just fill in an on-line form which you will be sent.



All data will be collated and a yearly report produced based on all data received for all recorders.

So, if you'd like to get involved just drop us an email at:

danny.arnold@waterwide.com

and we'll get some info out to you.

And look out for the 2025 Local Common Bird Survey Report which will be produced in the very near future.

Danny Arnold



Dates For Your Calendar:



Thursday 8th January @ 7:30pm

Wednesday 14th January @ 7.30pm

Please note that due to Storm Goretti and the Amber Weather Warning that has been issued, our first talk of 2026 at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall will be on Wednesday 14th January.

Steve Woodison will be our speaker on Birds of Prey and he is hoping to bring some of his owls to both display and, all being well, fly around the hall to give you your own bird of prey experience!

Friday 23rd – Sunday 25th January

Take part in this year's Big Garden Birdwatch, the world's largest garden wildlife survey to help build a picture of how garden birds are faring.

Sign-up on the RSPB website... www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch

... and spend an hour watching the birds in your patch, between 23 and 25 January. Then record the birds that land and submit your results online or by post.

Thursday 12th February @ 7:30pm:

Talk by Andrew Fusek Peters at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall – "Garden Safari". Andrew has spent the last eight years photographing the incredible diversity of species in his garden and in green spaces all over the country, celebrating garden wildlife at a time when many species are in decline or struggling.

And looking ahead in 2026.....

We have our line-up of speakers arranged for this year's meetings, with talk subjects that range from barn owls to swifts, beavers to deer, bees to dragonflies and gardens to wetlands.

To make the most of these talks and allow us to continue to bring you these excellent speakers, please become a full member of Teme Valley Wildlife Group.

The £25 annual membership gives you free access to all eleven of 2026's talks and to the guided walks that we are planning for during the year.

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).

