

# Teme Valley Wildlife Group

## NEWSLETTER MAY 2026

### Stephanie Mcroft's View from the Teme Valley

Mankind has found many uses for plants, employing them as food, fuel, clothing and construction materials and learning to exploit their properties in medicines, dyes and perfumes. One aspect of plant use which I had never considered before was their potential contribution to civil engineering.

Not, that is, until a friend lent me a hefty tome with the somewhat uninspiring title of "The uses of vegetation in civil engineering". The book is crammed with fiendish-looking mathematical formulae calculating such details as the forces of water absorption through plant roots and the torsional effects of increasing windspeed on the trunks of trees growing up hillsides.

I ignored these and, following the main principles outlined in the book, began to look anew at the landscaping schemes used at the completion of civil engineering projects.

We are all familiar with the sight of rows of tree-guards protecting new shrubs and trees planted along dual carriageways and we enjoy the flowers of cowslips and ox-eye daisy which are often seeded into new grass verges.

Trees and shrubs may be planted as screens, windbreaks and noise diffusers but my friend's book concentrated on the use of grasses, shrubs and trees in preventing the erosion of soil by wind and rain and in stabilising steep banks of bare soil left after the creation of deep road and railway cuttings.



*Willow 'spiling' to stabilise a landslip*

I sometimes drive along the A417 at Birdlip, Gloucestershire, where huge works are in progress at the site of the old Air Balloon pub. Thousands of tons of rock have been blasted away and

and countless tons of earth have been shifted and smoothed over in a project that seems far from finished.

Some of the new slopes look very steep and it will be interesting to see what is planted to help keep them in place. The type and structure of the soil determine the depth that roots can penetrate and plants with different root depths and root configurations can be selected for any given site.

Grass roots spread widely but not deeply, and they are good for trapping water and protecting soil from the effects of water, wind and footfall. Deeper-rooted plants might be chosen for steep slopes, and my eye was drawn to a technique in which bundles of horizontal willow twigs were dug into recesses at regular intervals along the sides of a high bank.



Willow plants root very easily, even under water, and grow rapidly, making them ideal for such projects, particularly when used along riverbanks in schemes designed to counteract river erosion. It seems apt to use a plant with diverse other uses, namely for basketweaving, as a source of the medicine aspirin, and as the raw material for making cricket bats.

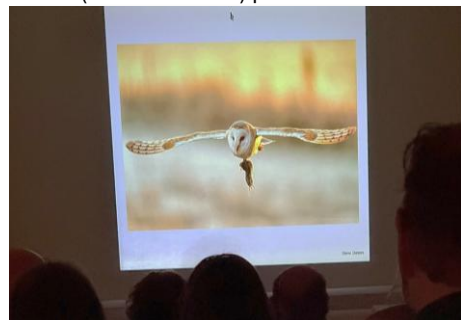
Next time you pass a new road scheme, look at the planting. Is it just for visual enhancement or is it performing a structural function? Whatever the reason, growing plants is always to be encouraged. And I think I can give my friend his book back now!



### Teme Valley Wildlife Group's Monthly Meetings and Talks

For April's meeting, once again we welcomed a return visit from John Lightfoot with an update of a talk he previously gave to the Group in 2022.

John co-founded the Shropshire Barn Owl Group in 2002 to increase the breeding population of barn owls in Shropshire by providing nestboxes in areas of suitable habitat and working with farmers and other landowners to improve and conserve the tussock grass habitat that voles (and barn owls!) prefer.



John explained the importance of the nestbox being deep enough (c.450mm) to make sure that the fledglings were capable of 'flying' up to the entrance opening, to minimise the chance of falling from the nestbox ledge.



The Group's work has certainly paid-off with 555 nestboxes installed in Shropshire since 2002, 3087 young barn owls produced in the nestboxes and the number of breeding pairs virtually doubling over the 24-year period.

May's talk will be given by Alison Wakeman on the importance of bees in the environment. When Alison is not tending to her own and other people's bees, she has established a business as a multi award-winning speaker and educator on all things bees.

**Please make a note in your diary to attend the next meeting and listen to Alison's talk at 7:30pm, on Thursday May 14<sup>th</sup> at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall, WR15 8RS.**

**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](http://www.teme-valley-wildlife.org)).**



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### Wild Life

The siren call and cat-like mewing always draw me in. They produce a pavlovian response to look up and search the sky for the finger-tipped wingspan of the buzzard. I will always stop and watch the masterclass of effortless flight.



The contours of our hill, and the gentle folds in those that surround us, provide a nursery for the lower air currents to grow, combine and feed into the upper winds that have taken the easy route over the top.

There is no energy-sapping wing-flapping from the buzzard. The elbows and wrists of his wings are locked-out at their full extent and the only discernible movement is from the primary feathers as they feel their way through the air currents, searching for the next upward gust that will continue the raptor's defeat of gravity.

As the effect of the hill slopes diminishes with height, the buzzard's search for buoyancy extends to the real energy provider of flight: the thermal. When the sun bears down on the land, different features will absorb the radiated heat energy at varying rates.

These differences in temperature release 'bubbles' of rising warm air - not unlike smoke rings - that can turn plain flying into soaring.

A ploughed field, especially with the Teme Valley's dark red soil, warms up quickly and soon starts re-radiating the sun's energy back into the air. Our south-facing Lower Orchard, with its varying shades of green, takes a little longer. In contrast, the woodland tends to be a heat-sink during the day, absorbing the sun's energy, but will breathe out the warm air later in the evening when the surrounding land is cooling down.

The rising columns of thermic air are not visible, but they can be felt. It is the feeling in your stomach when a lift starts to move up to the next floor in a building.

With experience, the buzzard will know where reliable thermal sources can be found but, while gaining that experience, he (or she) will feel the air for those rising currents. Flying in a straight line, he will probably pass straight through the thermal with only limited benefit.

However, by flying in a circle, following the perimeter of the thermal column, he stays within the rising air. Our buzzard now gains height rapidly with each circuit.



For me, there is always vicarious pleasure in the sight of a soaring buzzard. In years past, I have experienced the joy and frustration of unpowered flight from the cockpit of a glider.

Fortunately, the brief joyous flights have dulled the many frustrating times when I struggled to both find and use, to any lasting effect, the same rising currents of air that our buzzard masters so effortlessly.

However, I did experience one metaphorically uplifting moment when a buzzard joined me in a thermal. That brief moment of aerial ballet has stayed with me ever since and was probably one of my shortest but most exhilarating flights.

**Michael Northwood**

**(P.S. If you're interested in a guided tour of our small farm on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May, please see 'Dates For Your Calendar' on the following page....)**



### Moths of the Month

#### Brimstone

The Brimstone Moth, not to be confused with the Brimstone butterfly, is a common, largely ubiquitous moth found throughout Teme Valley. Locally it can have up to three generations per year and as such can be found on the wing from April right through to October.



The larvae can adapt to feed on a wide range of trees and shrubs including Hawthorn and Blackthorn, which of course, is abundant in our area. The adult moth readily comes to light and can often be disturbed from long grasses and other vegetation during daylight hours. Wing span 32-37mm.

#### Lesser Swallow Prominent

There are two almost identical species of this moth. The Swallow Prominent and the Lesser Swallow Prominent, (the species shown here). Appearing first in May and June, this moth can have two generations per year locally, with the second brood appearing in August.



The larvae of the Lesser Swallow Prominent feed primarily on Birch, whereas the Swallow prominent larvae is more partial to Poplars and Sallows. The wing span is 45-50mm Both species come to light, and both are relatively common in our Teme Valley area.

**Danny Arnold**

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### Book of the Month



'Britain's Birds' has been the bestselling bird guide-book since it was first published in 2016 and for good reason. Over 500 pages of superb photos, covering all plumages likely to be seen for all species endemic or

visiting Britain and Ireland.

The descriptions are both clear and vivid. As an example, the Goldcrest is described as *'Minute; like tiny, dumpy, olive-green warbler with well-marked wings, 'plain' face. Can skulk but often high in trees'*.

A joy to read and an indispensable guide to your local bird population.



### What To Look Out For In May.....

Early May is the last chance to seek out woodlands filled with the glorious violet-blue haze of bluebells, Hyacinthoides non-scripta, and their delicious scent that ebbs and flows with the breeze.

Bluebells prefer ground that remains undisturbed and are slow to colonise new areas. Because of this, they are considered to be an indicator species of Ancient Woodland.



Patches of bluebells in more open areas can often be indicators of where Ancient Woodland used to be, before it was cleared for agricultural use.

We tend to think of bluebells as being quintessentially English but their range

extends throughout most of northern and western Europe. However, the UK is the main stronghold, being home to 50% of the global population and with single woodland areas containing thousands of these beautiful flowering bulbs.

### And Three To Find.....

**The Hawthorn Shield bug** is a common insect within the Teme Valley owing in part to the abundance of its food plant which, as the name suggests, is Hawthorn.

The insect lives in the fruit of the Hawthorn tree. Sometimes known as "Stink Bugs" due to the foul-smelling odour emitted when disturbed, the substance is designed to ward-off predators and humans alike.



**The May Bug or Cockchafer beetle** comes into its own in the month of May, as its vernacular name suggests. A large,



clumsy beetle which is easily attracted to light and is often the cause of "loud bumps" on a lit window in the evening as it

crashes into the glass pane. Considered a pest species, the larvae can decimate rootstock of young fruit and other deciduous trees.

**The Scarlet Tiger moth** is a beautiful day time flying moth found in our Teme Valley gardens in mid summer. At this time of year however, the caterpillar larvae is often encountered with its distinctive black body adorned with regular yellow and white markings.

Look out for it especially if you have Comfrey growing locally, although the larvae will also feed on a range of other plant and tree species, Such as nettles, honeysuckle and willow.



Danny Arnold

### Dawn Chorus Walk 03/05/26

Once again, Ed Benbow led a group of 14 of us from the Hawkbatch car park at 6:00am and into the Wyre Forest to both spot and hear the early morning birds.

Despite the previous day's heavy rain and the somewhat gloomy start to this day, spirits were soon lifted by Blackcaps, Garden Warblers and Song Thrushes in full voice.



With Ed listening out and his brother Andrew acting as spotter, we just had to follow and stop at the appropriate moment to enjoy the sights and sounds of the birdlife the Wyre Forest had to offer.

In particular, two rare Red-Listed birds – a Tree Pipit and a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker – were worth the trip by themselves. Pied Flycatchers and Common Redstarts added to the impressive tally of 40 species. Our thanks to both Ed and Andrew for a thoroughly enjoyable (early) morning.



### Dates For Your Calendar:



#### Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> May @ 7:30pm:

Talk by Alison Wakeman – "The Importance of Bees in the Environment". at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall, Bromyard Road, WR15 8RS.

#### Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May @ 10.30am:

A guided tour has been arranged of the 'Wild Life' farm featured in Michael Northwood's articles to give you the opportunity to see, and ask your questions about, traditional orchards, species-rich grassland and ancient woodland. The visit will include meadow flowers that were considered 'common' but are now increasingly rare, and the wildlife that these habitats attract

Please email Michael: [michael\\_northwood@btinternet.com](mailto:michael_northwood@btinternet.com)

to receive route map details of how to get to the farm which is near Stockton on Teme.

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