

Teme Valley Wildlife Group

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2026

Stephanie Mocroft's View from the Teme Valley

The Teme Valley Wildlife Group organised a second local wildlife survey this summer, the chosen site being an area of Worcestershire meadowland tucked away in the village of Stoke Bliss. Last year's meeting also included grassland, but the setting of Nash churchyard in Shropshire, although equally remote, felt quite different.

Such surveys have attracted the rather Star Wars-ish title of "bioblitzes", where a group of wildlife enthusiasts descend for a few hours to note down all the plants, birds, animals and insects which they might happen to see.

We were fortunate that both days saw sunny weather, meaning that mobile creatures were likely to be out and about, rather than hiding from wind or rain. Each event was open to all.

Stoke Bliss's Hollow Meadow is situated on a smallholding long managed for the benefit of wildlife. Lower lying meadowland has a stream running through it, and a pond has been created to increase its habitat opportunities.



Slightly higher ground affords sunny banks, perfect for butterflies and more delicate wildflowers. As our group enjoys the expertise of the county's moth recorder, a series of temporary traps emitting alluring pheromones was set up to allow us to see some very secretive moths.

These were members of the clear-wing family, a very pretty variety of moth distinguished by a transparent "window-pane" area in the centre of each wing. Two types, the orange-tailed and the red-belted clearwings were trapped almost immediately.

Although they are day-flying moths, I've never actually seen one on the wing.

Dragonflies patrolled the stream whilst I helped to look at the flowers on the grassy bank. Low-growing yellow rock-rose was abundant in one area, overtopping some of the ancient ant tumps.



Common Rock-rose

Lady's bedstraw, usually a tall plant, was stunted as it clung on in the same places. Medicinal betony and edible salad burnet, the latter has faceted globe flowerheads, were just coming into bloom.

The grassland is kept short by a small flock of rare-breed Soay sheep, who were obliged to look on as we did our work in their usual pasture. We're lucky in the Teme valley to have small pockets of land which have never been brought into intense cultivation. Remote, hilly and inaccessible places contribute to a legacy of traditional meadow plants which are a joy to see.

One of my co-workers asked me about a form of wildlife which I don't find a joy to see – my local muntjacs. I explained that although they're still visiting, I've managed to protect some flowers with canes and copious amounts of black cotton. Only crocuses and phlox have been deer-pruned this year.

I could also report that Mitzi has a new partner, Malcolm, a smaller, lighter coloured and shorter-horned buck than her former beau, Marmaduke

I even felt sympathy for them, because I discovered a perfect, but dead, fawn lying beneath the large-leaved Gunnera plant in my front garden. There was no sign of disease or injury, nothing to indicate why it had died - RIP, little one.



Teme Valley Wildlife Group's Monthly Meetings and Talks

July's talk was given by Geoff Hall and covered Geoff's photographic exploration of the Shropshire and surrounding countryside.

We were treated to some stunning landscapes and beautiful images of wildlife in their natural surroundings – most within a fairly short drive from Geoff's home.

There were also some insider tips on how to get closer to rare migrant birds by using your car as a hide!



Geoff rounded-off his excellent talk with the trials, tribulations and eventual success in capturing some dramatic shots (see above) of the aurora borealis – without travelling to Norway.

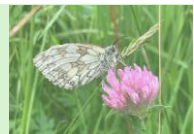
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August's talk will see a welcome return visit from Ellie Williams, Reserve Manager at Fenn's, Whixall, and Bettisfield Mosses National Nature Reserve. Straddling the English border, near Whitchurch in Shropshire, the Mosses are one of the biggest and best raised bogs in Britain, and their varied wildlife makes them a place of international importance.

Ellie will be talking all about the endangered species of dragonfly found on the Mosses called the White-faced darter. She will be going through the life cycle of the species as well as the different projects taking place at the Mosses to help the species.

Please make a note in your diary to attend the next meeting and listen to Ellie's talk at 7:30pm, on Thursday August 13th 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

What a difference a month makes – especially one with zero-point-zero millimetres of rain.



I feel sure that our Dexter cattle and Ryeland sheep think they're being forced to eat a form of pick-your-own hay. It probably tastes similar to the all-you-can-eat offering, when they're in the barn over winter, but with the added inconvenience of spending energy to graze in the first place.

On the plus side, our hayfield was cut, tedded, rowed and baled by mid-July – some 4-6 weeks earlier than previous years. There seemed little point in waiting any longer as the majority of the wildflowers that we were trying to encourage in the hayfield had already set seed. The seven acres produced just over forty of the large round bales – at least ten bales less than normal – but these will be sufficient for our livestock to last the winter and the inevitable cold early spring.



The aftermath grass in the hayfield which, by now, should be a fresh green sward for the Dexters to enjoy, is the same height and colour as it was when cut. Only the dusty green leaves of the deeper-rooting plants such as Ribwort Plantain, Birds-foot-trefoil and Red Clover, stand out against the surrounding yellow ochre grass. And even these plants are maintaining a low profile, minimising

moisture loss, above a soil that is oven-baked by the sun and fan-assisted by the gusting southerly breezes.

I had started scything the bracken in the Lower Orchard to keep it in check, but I gave up during the early weeks of July when I realised that I was sweating more than I could ever take-in from hydration drinks. With the scything still not a particularly palatable option in our continuing mediterranean climate, I am considering the use of more modern machinery. However, I'm still weighing-up the odds of continuing the bracken management with the alpine tractor against starting a grass fire from the flail hammers hitting a stone.

Surprisingly, the orchard trees don't appear to be too stressed. The grass underneath is just as dry as the hayfield, but the trees themselves are retaining their green leaves and bearing fruit. Some of the apple and most of the cherry haven't produced much, but this is a fairly typical alternate year fast after last year's 'soft mast' feast. The plums and damsons



seem to enjoy the heat and the thinner branches are drooping under the weight of the fruit, while the birds and insects do their very best to lighten the load.

The rowan trees have also produced their regular crop of red and orange clustered fruits. This year, we've noticed an increase in numbers of Mistle Thrush, as we're often reminded when we hear their reproaching, rattling call while we walk up the track to check on the sheep. However, like many songbirds that have decreased in numbers and now appear on the Red List of conservation concern, any sustained increase is definitely welcomed.

Michael Northwood

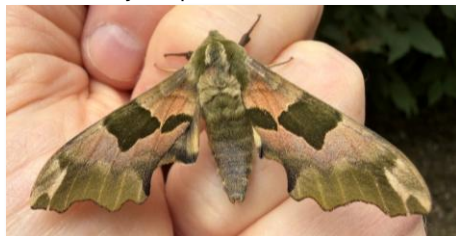


Moths of the Month

We have a few Hawk-moths in the UK and these two might be considered two of the more common and colourful ones.

Lime Hawk-moth

The Lime Hawk moth, as the name suggests is synonymous with Lime trees and, as such, is often found in areas where they are present.



Curiously, it is often found in urban areas where good numbers of lime tree have been planted in avenues along road-sides in the towns and cities. In the Teme Valley it is present, though sparse, as there are no real concentrations of lime trees. It's the larvae caterpillar that feeds on the lime, although it will also use Birch and Alder.

The complex coloration of the wings which span some 60-70mm, means that once in vegetation, spotting it is almost impossible, so good is the camouflage. It's more of an early summer species but this year they have been recorded in July.

Elephant Hawk-moth

The Elephant Hawk-moth is just the classic picture post card moth.



Bright vibrant pink and green colouration means that it is fairly easily noticed. With a wing span of 50-60mm its streamlined shape makes this an impressive encounter if seen. The moth gets its English vernacular name from its caterpillar's fanciful resemblance to an elephant's trunk. And if you want to go looking for the larvae, search it out on Rosebay willowherb which is a favourite food source for the caterpillar. Look out for the adult around light and around honeysuckle, a favourite nectar source of the adult moth.

Danny Arnold

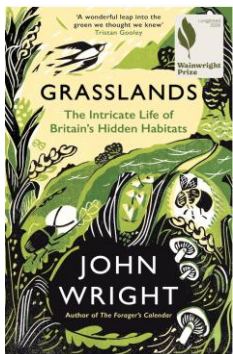
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Book of the Month



To give it its full title of 'Grasslands: The Intricate Life of Britain's Hidden Habitats', this is a relatively new book by John Wright, an author already known for his published works on foraging, fungi, hedgerows and

other topics of natural history.

With his usual wit, style and thorough research, John explains why species-rich grassland isn't just grass and explores the extent of biodiversity that this vulnerable habitat is capable of supporting.

Most of all, he shows why we should care about their survival.



What To Look Out For In August.....

Weather patterns that suggest steady, but not torrential, rain showers. Hopefully.

Despite the parched grass, there still seems to be plenty of insects for the recently fledged birds to feed on.

Look out for the school run of Long-tailed tits flitting between trees and hedgerows with the encouragement of their parents, aunts and uncles. Also, the young



Rowan trees

Buzzards calling to their parents, from dawn to dusk, for more food.

The branches of Rowan, Hawthorn and Guelder Rose are struggling to keep upright with the weight of berries they're carrying.

Hopefully, this also

bodes well for our Winter visitors, flying from Scandinavia.

The later-flowering plants of the meadows and pasture have been struggling with continuing heat-waves and parched soil,

but the deeper-rooting Yarrow, Common Knapweed and Fleabane are still able to



Yarrow

Fleabane

put on a display, although they'll quickly run to seed.



Tenbury Countryside Show

For the second year running, Teme Valley Wildlife Group had a stand at Tenbury Show on 1st August.



The continuing spell of hot weather eased for the day, and the stand was a great success with both new interest and old friends visiting to say hello and have a chat.



Many also took part in our interactive quiz, with various wildlife items to identify. The answers will be posted on our Facebook page, and the winner will be contacted to confirm their prize of a year's free membership to Teme Valley Wildlife Group.

Dates For Your Calendar:



Thursday 9th August @ 7.30pm:

Talk by Ellie Williams at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall – 'The White-faced Darter'.

Ellie's talk will explore the restoration of the peat cuttings at Fenn's Moss which has led to a dramatic increase in the nationally important White-faced Darter. The population of this dragonfly at Fenn's Moss is one of the most southerly in The British Isles.

Thursday 10th Sept. @ 7.30pm:

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

Moors Meadow is an intriguing 7-acre organic hillside garden 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. The talk, by the owner, 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 – 'Sustainable water management – Increasing Biodiversity and Reducing Flooding'.

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.



Before you go.....

If you have any suggestions for articles for the Newsletter, or have a piece that you would like to be included, please do not hesitate to contact us via our Facebook page or the 'Contact' page on our website (www.teme-valley-wildlife.org/contact). Thank you!



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