

# Teme Valley Wildlife Group

## NEWSLETTER APRIL 2026

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

"Appley Dapple, a little brown mouse, goes to the cupboard in somebody's house" wrote Beatrix Potter of the wood mouse, a creature known for helping itself to apples in store for the winter.

The wood mouse is the most widespread of small British mammals but hasn't been given a very apt name because it is more likely to be found in grasslands, hedgerows and gardens than in woods. It is an attractive quick-witted character possessed of shiny black eyes, large ears and a long tail which has black hairs above and white hairs below.

Wood mice do like apples though, alongside a wide range of nuts, seeds, shoots, berries, insects, caterpillars and small snails. Wood mice don't hibernate, they are active all year round, and like to carry their food to a place where it can be eaten in safety. In common with voles, they often repurpose old birds' nests as dining tables.

When eating hips, haws and elderberries they aim for the seeds whilst leaving the flesh behind, whereas voles do the opposite, preferring the flesh and discarding the seeds. Nature has a niche for every activity, but whether mice and voles work together when dining I haven't been able to find out.

Wood mice breed rapidly, reaching maturity at only 7-8 weeks of age and are capable of having as many as five litters a year. They nest underground and burrow to create lairs beneath tree stumps and within thickets from which they emerge at night to forage for food.

Despite their ubiquity, they stay out of human sight but may be detected by their footprints. Like all rodents, they have 4 toes on the front feet, 5 on the back, but their long tails can leave a long thin line of a print behind their footsteps, revealing their identity. Their main predators are tawny owls and weasels.

In 1894, a closely related species was discovered which looks very similar to the wood mouse and was formerly included with it. A new species called the yellow-necked mouse was described. It was distinguished from the wood mouse by having a more pronounced band of

yellow fur across its chest. Such mice are only found in southern England, south of a line drawn from the Mersey to the Wash.

They favour the Severn valley, so are likely to live around here. Yellow-necked mice are far less common than ordinary wood mice, making up only 2% of the total "wood" mouse population.

The reason I wanted to write about them this month is that, like Beatrix Potter, I found that wood mice had gone to my cupboard.



Mouse carving by Stephanie's uncle, Ron Packman

Two opportunists had entered my kitchen from under the sink. This has sometimes happened before, because my kitchen bin lives there and a few crumbs can drop down below.

On this occasion though, my two visitors had crossed the kitchen, scaled a dresser and enjoyed themselves in my vegetable drawer. Onions and garlic they ignored, three carrots they sampled, but with an avocado pear they'd had a banquet.

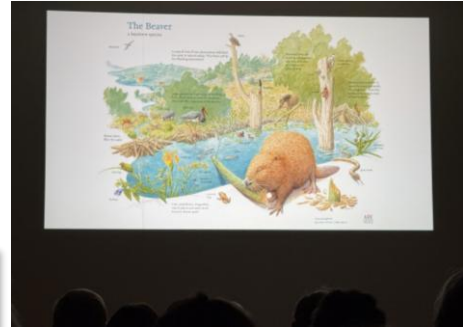
Whilst not on the designated list of known wood mouse food it was clearly an exotic item which they relished. Who would have thought it?



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

March's meeting welcomed the return visit from Alicia Leow-Dyke with an update on her talk exploring the fascinating world of the Eurasian beaver and the efforts to reintroduce them into Wales. Alicia has worked with beavers for over 17 years, starting in Scotland where she managed an enclosed beaver project before moving to Wales to become the Beaver Project Officer for the Wildlife Trusts in Wales.

Despite the wet weather, it was a full house in the village hall and Alicia's comprehensive talk was very well received. After giving a background into



beaver ecology, Alicia explained how this once extinct keystone species not only assists in providing natural flood mitigation, but also enhances the landscape to provide habitats for a wide range of other species.



The aim of the Welsh Beaver Project is to ensure a well-managed reintroduction of beavers into the wild and to see them being accepted as a native species in Wales once again. As Alicia summarised at the end of her talk, there is a place for beavers in Britain – it's about re-learning to live alongside them once again.

April's talk will be given by John Lightfoot of the Shropshire Barn Owl Group. The Group was formed to halt the decline in the numbers of Barn Owls by tackling one of the main reasons: a lack of nest sites.

John's talk will answer the question about whether the nest boxes have increased the number of Barn Owls in Shropshire and what we can do to help these beautiful birds increase and thrive.

**Please make a note in your diary to attend the next meeting and listen to John's talk at 7:30pm, on Thursday April 9<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

Understanding the characters of each of our Dexters and their position within the herd hierarchy is not only interesting to work out but also important for our safe handling of them. Especially during April, when they are in the confines of the barn, but are keen to get back out eating the fresh grass instead of last year's haylage.



Being descended from the upland cattle of western Ireland, they are more than capable of tolerating the worst of the weather and staying outside the year round.

Unfortunately, and despite their smaller size, their hooves would still poach the wet ground causing damage to both the structure of the soil and the flora within it.

At least when they are inside, they do seek the benefit of our company and probably more than they would care to admit. Most of the cows enjoy a good scratch on the neck and shoulders despite being able to improvise for themselves using one of the wall-mounted brushes within their pen.

Each has their own method of asking. Willow, one of our two reds, will lick our jacket or jeans, Hazel will give a nudge with her head and her mother, Bonnie, will just follow us around expectantly, lowering her head when we turn towards her. The end result is the same: a good scratch and a rub on whichever side is offered for treatment.

The contented expression on their face is the domesticated cattle equivalent of a dog or cat appreciating some fuss, but without the adoring look in return..... or the frightening prospect of jumping on your lap.

Unlike outside in the open spaces of the orchards and meadows, the herd hierarchy is more evident in the barn. Philippa will head-butt Bonnie away from

the haylage feeder for no other reason than she knows that she can without any retaliation. However, Bonnie then needs to maintain her standing by butting Lily, who is lower in the pecking order, and so the hierarchical ripples continue on down through the group.

Unfortunately, this means that Hazel and Cherry, who vie for the lowliest position, always bear the brunt of any power play higher up the order. It is also why we tend to give them more attention than the others. This is anthropomorphism at its most helpless.

None of the Dexters have ever shown any unnatural aggression towards us but I would never take our relationship with them for granted. I would not want to be pinned against the barn wall by 350kg of mischievous cow nor be caught in the middle of some bovine disagreement, no matter how little malice was intended towards me.



However, for the majority of the time, there is something very calming about being with and amongst the cattle in the barn during their winter and early spring holidays, although I'm not sure that I fully understand why.

Maybe it's because they acknowledge our presence more readily than when they are outside. Maybe we are able to briefly transcend the Dexter family hierarchy and become part of the herd. Or maybe it's just that we tune in to their slower pace in the barn and their rhythmic cud chewing. Whatever the reason, we can testify to its efficacy.

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

#### White-marked

The White-marked moth really is one of the Teme Valley's speciality species. It's distribution throughout the UK is extremely sparse, let alone in Worcestershire, and it is pretty much confined to the Severn and Wye valleys and their tributaries. The vast majority of Worcestershire records come specifically from our Teme Valley area. Presumably, owing to its very localised distribution, very little is known about its life cycle in the wild. What is known, is that it prefers wet or damp woodland and, as such, the Teme Valley dingles provide excellent habitat. With a wing span of 34-38mm the moth does come to light in small numbers and can be found visiting willow blossom, a tree on which the larvae have been raised in captivity.



#### Frosted Green

The Frosted Green moth has the ability to disappear from view easily in vegetation with its exceptional camouflage. A medium sized moth with a wing span of 30-35mm, this is a species associated with Oak trees and Oak woodland and, as such, is found in low numbers throughout the Teme Valley.



The larvae caterpillars can be found on Oak from May to July and the larvae overwinter as a pupae in leaf litter or under moss before emerging in the Spring.

Danny Arnold



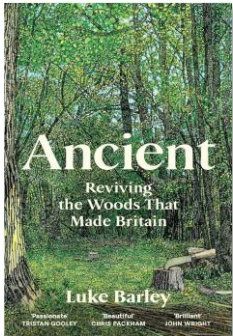
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### Book of the Month



Luke Barley is a Chartered Forester, a trustee of the Ancient Tree Forum and senior advisor on woodland with the National Trust, so he certainly has the right credentials for writing this book on the history, loss and revival of

ancient woodland.

Oliver Rackham, together with George Peterken, conceived the definition of Ancient Woodland as a means of gaining protection for these ecologically significant areas of Britain.

By visiting and describing the woods that have shaped his career in arboriculture, the author explains why these woodlands, which may date back to the 'Wildwood' that followed the last ice age, have, until more recent times, had an interdependence with people.

With lyrical prose, Luke Barley endeavours to rekindle our ancient connection with these special places.



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

Our warming climate may have convinced Blackcaps to stay all year round in some areas of the Teme Valley, and the Chiffchaffs seem to have already arrived from the southern Mediterranean.

But, in April, the more well-travelled birds from south of the Sahara will make an appearance.

Look out for Garden Warblers, Redstarts, Flycatchers and Whitethroats making an appearance and seeking out new or previous year's nesting places.



The aerobatic Swifts, Swallows and House Martins will be screaming and chattering overhead and possibly making

your house their home for the summer. And it's true, playing a recording of Swift calls near to a suitable nest box is more likely to attract these sociable birds to it.

Unfortunately for the Dunnock and Meadow Pipit, the female Cuckoo will be on the look-out for their nests to lay her eggs in. However, despite the Cuckoo's evolved subterfuge, it is difficult not to be in awe of a bird that, after being nurtured as a fledgling by an unrelated species, decides to fly alone to a country 2000 miles away that it has never visited before, then returns, often by a completely different route, to sing a song it has never heard before!

If you want to learn more about the cuckoo, go to the British Trust for Ornithology's webpage ([Cuckoo Tracking Project | BTO](#)) where you can follow the individual routes of 12 tracked cuckoos.

If you're looking down, rather than up, you may still be reminded of the arrival of the cuckoo by the flower *Cardamine pratensis*, sometimes known as Lady's Smock but more usually as Cuckoo Flower, as its appearance coincides with that of its namesake.



In the fields and meadows, the yellows of Spring still remain, with the Cowslip, *Primula veris*, taking over from its cousin Primrose, *Primula vulgaris*.



Primrose



Cowslip

April also sees the early blossoms of cherry in the traditional orchards around the Teme Valley and along the hedgerows, the billowing blossom of blackthorn is reaching its peak before handing over to the mayflower of hawthorn.



### Dates For Your Calendar:



#### Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> April @ 7:30pm:

Talk by John Lightfoot – "The Shropshire Barn Owl Group". John will answer the question about whether nest boxes can increase the number of Barn Owls in Shropshire. You will also learn about the main reason for Barn Owl decline and what we can do to help these beautiful birds increase and thrive.

#### Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> May @ 6.00am:

##### Dawn Chorus in the Wyre Forest.

In previous years, this has proved to be a popular event with sightings of redstarts, wood warblers, pied flycatchers and tree pipits. Once again, it will be led by Ed Benbow with his knowledge of where these birds can be found.

We will meet 05.55 (for a 6am start) in Hawkbatch Wood Car Park (Free). Postcode is DY12 3AF.

#### 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, ancient woodland and how they are managed with the assistance of native cattle and a scythe.

The visit in May should see meadow flowers that were considered 'common' but are now increasingly rare, such as common spotted orchid, common twayblade, common milkwort, etc. and, hopefully, the chance to see some of the migrant birds, such as Redstart.

Please email Michael:

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Or Tony Simpson:

[tonysimpson.1945@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:tonysimpson.1945@hotmail.co.uk)

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



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