

# Teme Valley Wildlife Group

## NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2026

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

Numerous small woods bear the name copse or coppice, reflecting their former role in the manufacture of traditional products such as fence posts, hedge stakes, hop poles, sheep hurdles and gates from a renewable wood resource.



The practice of coppicing, cutting down a tree and then harvesting its straight regrowth, began in the Neolithic period but came to a halt after the Second World War.

The oldest evidence for the use of coppice products in England comes from the 4,000 BC site of the "Sweet Track", a causeway in the Somerset Levels whose watery domain has preserved its lining of coppiced brushwood to the delight of archaeologists many millennia later.

There are lots of coppices along the Teme valley, many of them of ash, not a surprise given the thousands of hop poles which were once required.

A quick look at the map brings up Mill Coppice, Bine Coppice, Brickbarns Coppice, Rock Coppice and Slashes Coppice to the south of the river and Rough Coppice, Hackenhop Coppice, Howney Coppice, Ash Coppice and Pudford Coppice to the north.

Their names represent their owners, the type of tree they contained or, in the wonderfully named Hackenhop Coppice, the sort of work that went on in them.

Woods were typically divided into different areas or "coupes" which were cut in rotation so that usable wood was available every year. For different woods and different uses the trees were cut down in cycles varying from 5 to 20 years.

There was always wood to cut and always some just beginning to grow. The great secret of broad-leaved woodland is that it is endlessly renewable. Coppicing extends the lives of these trees, unlike conifers which cannot recover after felling.

Woodland managed by traditional coppicing is alive with wildlife. The cutting of a coupe lets light onto the woodland floor which is followed by a profusion of primroses, violets, foxgloves and wood anemones and bluebells.

Fast-growing tree shoots rapidly turn into leafy bushes and bramble makes thickets which provide cover and nest sites for birds and small mammals. Butterflies thrive. Of birds, warblers in particular are attracted to this habitat and make the most of new food and nesting opportunities.

As the trees get bigger and light begins to diminish, bees and insects feed on tree nectar and shadier conditions hide larger mammals and provide roosts for larger birds. Rarer plants such as herb Paris and broad-leaved helleborine prefer a denser tree canopy so they wait until conditions are just right before putting up their shoots.



Woods which offer subtle gradations in light and in tree maturity host the greatest variety of plants and animals. Coppicing creates these conditions whilst also producing usable wood, a fact known to our ancestors, but sadly we no longer rely on wood for brushes, brooms, pea sticks, spade handles, basketry, clogs, wattle and daub, firewood, kindling or charcoal.

If woodland is managed in the traditional way, wildlife gets a huge boost so bean sticks, anyone?

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

Our first meeting of the year in January had to be delayed for a week, due to the sudden dump of snow by Storm Goretti.



However, it was worth the wait, and a well-attended talk was given by Steve Woodison with the added attraction of six of his beautiful owls that he brought along to the hall. Three were native species: the barn, tawny and long-eared owls.



Steve gave an excellent presentation and everyone appreciated the opportunity to see his birds close-up and admire the detail of their plumage.

The birds didn't seem to be at all phased by their human audience and I make no apologies for including more than one photo of these avian celebrities. ....and Steve.



February's talk will be given by Andrew Fusek Peters and is entitled "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 wildlife at a time when many species are in decline or struggling.

**Please make a note in your diary to attend the next meeting and listen to Andrew's talk at 7:30pm, on Thursday February 12<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

Each January, for the past 8 years we have lived here, it has been necessary to take part in the high stakes game that is the TB testing of cattle. We accepted the deal as soon as we agreed to take on the small herd of Dexters that already lived here.

Despite being in a 'High Risk' area, we continue to stave off the apparent inevitability of bovine TB by making sure our 'girls' don't come into contact with other cattle or, as we put it, that they don't talk to strangers.



Fortunately, we don't have many boundaries that abut other cattle pastures and, where we do, we install an electric fence 10m away from the neighbour's fence-line to prevent any ill-advised chatting and possible contact.

The standard 'skin test' involves injecting two different types of inactive tuberculin - one avian, the other bovine - into the skin of the neck to determine whether they trigger a localised allergic reaction.



Three anxious days later, the vet checks for any swelling at the sites of the injections. A 'Pass' will show no reaction, or the same reaction, to both the avian and the bovine antigens. A 'Fail' will show a larger reaction, in

terms of the swelling in the skin, to the bovine antigen than to the avian.

We soon learnt the test regime in detail and, during the worrying three days in January, I took every opportunity to check on potential swelling at the injection sites.

Each of our Dexters are formally checked by the vet and we awaited the hoped-for: 'OK, she's fine'.

Breath is held and fingers are crossed until the last cow is finally checked:

'All good'.

The Dexters had no idea why we were so joyful - for this year, at least.



The accuracy of the test is measured in terms of its 'specificity' and 'sensitivity'. The specificity is the probability that an *uninfected* animal is correctly identified as such and the bovine TB skin test has an accuracy of 99%.

So far, so good.

However, the sensitivity of the test, which is the probability that an *infected* animal is correctly identified, is significantly more variable, within the range of 50-80%. Therefore, all things being equal but optimal, at least 2 out of every 10 cattle could be infected but remain undetected by skin testing and then return to the herd with the potential to infect the others.

Not so good.

Unfortunately, until an effective vaccination can be produced, likely for both cattle and badgers, and a test can also be supported that distinguishes between a cow that has been vaccinated and one that is infected with TB, the skin test, and the relief or misery that follows, will continue to be a stressful feature of the cattle owner's calendar.

Michael Northwood



### Moths of the Month

#### Oak Beauty

The Oak Beauty is a stunning and relatively large moth species (wing span ~50mm) which is widespread thinly throughout the Teme Valley.

This moth appears in February and has a fairly short life cycle as an adult, disappearing from the records usually before the end of March. 10 years ago, this would have been mid April, so there is just a 6-7 week window to see this species each year.

Eggs are laid, often as the name suggests, on Oak, but they will utilise other deciduous trees, with the caterpillar larvae appearing mid-May to mid-June and typically feeding at night when predation is much reduced.



Pupation occurs often in the soil, where it over-winters, before the adults re-emerge in February the following year.

Considered to be a primarily woodland species, they can appear anywhere in the Teme Valley and will often appear at light, especially on warm evenings during this period. In the wild, they are extremely difficult to locate visually as their camouflage makes them all but invisible on the likes of cherry tree bark, grasses and dead leaf litter.

#### Spring Usher

The Spring Usher is the true harbinger of Spring in the Teme Valley. Appearing in February, this beautifully marked little moth, with a wing span of 30mm, is somewhat similar in appearance to the Oak Beauty, but smaller and far more delicate.



This also is a woodland species and again often found where Oak trees are present. This species also has a similar life-cycle to the Oak Beauty in that the eggs develop into caterpillar larvae which are full grown by June. Over-wintering in the soil and pupating into fully grown adults in the following February.

Danny Arnold

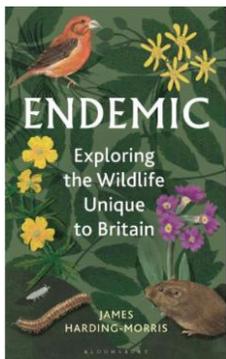
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### Book of the Month



Although there are 70,000 species that call Britain their home, James Harding-Morris has concentrated on some of them that can be found here and *only* here, joining those working to save them along the way. The book covers

species of plants, mammals, birds, invertebrates and fungi, and the chapters are clearly laid out, so that you can easily dip in and out if you wish.

However, with a writing style that is both knowledgeable and humorous, you are more likely to read *Endemic* from cover to cover. James meets the experts devoted to saving the species from the brink of global extinction because many of these are at risk of disappearing forever – and before most of us have even realised they exist. He also questions the extent to which the most appealing species are historically favoured with funding and public support.



### App of the Month:

#### Picture Mushroom: Identifier



It has to be said that they don't give much away in the free version of this app, but you can have one month's trial use for £1.99

to see how you get on with it. After that, it's an annual subscription of £29.99.

However, the app has received good reviews (4.7 out of 5 from 23k. ratings) and it encourages you to take multiple photos to improve identification. It also provides useful information on where you would normally see the fungi to compare with your own findings.

There are a number of interesting articles included with the app to further your knowledge and even access to some books on the subject. It may be worth waiting until fungi start appearing before activating the one month's trial?

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

Although not native to the UK, snowdrops can be found naturalised under hedgerows on roadside verges in the Teme Valley.

And probably in your own gardens.

February is considered to be late Winter but, with our milder and wetter weather, some days feel more like Spring. Certainly, the primroses are starting to think so.

Their rosettes of puckered leaves are starting to stand out amongst the somewhat chlorotic grass, after the snow and rain of January, and even a few flowers are making an early appearance.

While you're waiting for the wildflowers to provide some colour, have a look in a damp woodland area (not difficult to find at the moment), for the fungus *Sarcoscypha coccinea*, otherwise known by its far more common and poetic name of Scarlet elf cup. It prefers fallen branches that are damp and decaying on the woodland floor.



### Common Bird Survey

A quick reminder to those of you who would like to get involved with the Local Common Bird Survey for 2026. Please contact Danny Arnold via the Teme Valley Wildlife Group Facebook page.

And if you're already taking part, please make sure you update the online spreadsheet before the end of each month.

If you want to see the Report for 2025, including a comparison with the figures for 2024, please go to Danny's Facebook message posted on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2026.



### Dates For Your Calendar:



#### Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February @ 7:30pm:

Talk by Andrew Fusek Peters at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall – "Garden Safari".

Andrew is a wildlife and landscape photographer with over 800 photos, features and cover shots for The Guardian, The Times, BBC Wildlife, Country Life and Amateur Photographer.

He has spent the last eight years photographing the incredible diversity of species in his garden and in green spaces all over the country and showcasing them in his latest book 'Garden Safari'.

#### Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March @ 7:30pm:

Talk by Alicia Leow-Dyke at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall to give an update on the Welsh Beaver Project.

With over 10 years of experience of working with beavers, Alicia is well placed to let us know about the managed re-introduction of beavers into Wales and how the Project is focusing on their re-establishment.



### And looking further 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 the talks and allow us to continue to bring you these excellent speakers, please become a full member of Teme Valley Wildlife Group.

Annual membership is only £25 and gives you free access to all eleven of 2026's talks and to the guided walks that we are planning to bring during the year.

### Before you go.....

If you have any suggestions or articles for the newsletter, please leave a message on our Facebook page when the newsletter is posted and we'll get back to you. Thank you!

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)).

