

Teme Valley Wildlife Group

NEWSLETTER JULY 2026

Stephanie Mocroft's View from the Teme Valley

I found myself visiting the parish of Mamble twice in close succession during the months of April and May, to join two different guided walks along its many footpaths.

A walk by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust was billed as a chance to see bee orchids, whilst the object of Mamble History Group's walk was to see the evidence of former coalmining in the parish. On both occasions, dry sunny weather allowed the participants to enjoy beautiful landscapes, lots of fruit blossom and a host of wildflowers.

It is always a surprise to incoming valley dwellers to find that this quiet rural location once played a significant role in industry.



Coalmining began in Mamble during medieval times and only came to a halt in 1972, even though plenty of coal remains in the ground. What is also unexpected, is that nature has swiftly and completely cloaked man's exploitation of such resources with abundant vegetation.

Hunthouse Wood is now a Worcestershire Wildlife Trust nature reserve but in the past, coal was hauled up steep inclines after being laboriously worked from shafts and adits along the Dumbleton Brook.

It no longer resounds to the clang of explosives blasting rock from the coalface. Instead, its engines, chimneys and buildings have given way to a deciduous woodland where bats, dormice and three species of woodpecker enjoy utter peace and quiet.

The history group's guide took us past long-abandoned coal bell-pits which are now ringed by mature oaks.

Beneath those trees, sheep and lambs welcomed shelter from the sun.

Elsewhere, the raised foundations of a former tramway, which once led to the Southnett terminus of the long-defunct Leominster canal, was knee-deep in bluebells, wild garlic and red campion.

Considerable imagination was required to see coal-tubs rolling past, heading for a wharf to be loaded onto narrowboats for onward sale.

Fortunately, the history group's members were on hand to help, with a display of photographs, maps, documents and vintage coalmining picks, plus tea and excellent cakes in the village hall.

They had secured permission to visit "Harry's shaft", a 1920's coal shaft which proved unsuccessful as a coal source but has been remarkably successful in remaining virtually unchanged for more than a century. It even retains the windlass and chain used for hauling up its treasure. The views from this spot were magnificent – it did not feel anything like a coalfield.

And what about the bee orchids of Mamble? Unfortunately, none were to be found, or even admitted to by the WWT's walk leader. "I didn't write the publicity material", he explained.

The walk was still enjoyable though, having lovely views, good company and the sight of a noisy pair of ravens seeing off some buzzards. I later made good my bee orchid deficit and visited a patch of grass verge where I've looked for them in previous years. It's opposite a layby on



the A44, near the turn-off to Martley, and this year there were lots of bee orchids flowering there in the last week of May. As a bonus, they were joined by common spotted orchids and pyramidal orchids too. Result!



Teme Valley Wildlife Group's Monthly Meetings and Talks

For June's meeting, Carol Wood gave the Group a talk on the aerial life of the swift and the decline in numbers that this migratory bird has suffered – partly due to the loss of suitable nesting sites.



Swifts arrive in Britain in April and May after a 6000-mile journey from central and eastern Africa and, unlike other migratory birds, they will spend the whole of that time in the air, not only eating and drinking whilst flying, but also sleeping and mating!

After producing just one brood of chicks, they will then leave here in August to return to Africa. Carol explained that Swifts, on average, can live for 6-10 years and are very site-faithful in their nesting habits.

Therefore, if a nesting hole is blocked up or destroyed, a breeding season can be lost while they look for another nest. In the absence of natural nest sites, Carol was very keen to emphasise the importance of installing the ready-made swift boxes to help these amazing birds increase in number.

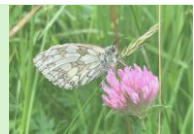
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July's talk will be given by Geoff Hall and is entitled 'Further Travels of a Shropshire Lad'. It is a photographic exploration of the Shropshire and surrounding countryside, with Geoff recording and promoting the wildlife that he has uncovered on his travels.

Expect intimate wildlife portraits and stunning landscapes!

Please make a note in your diary to attend the next meeting and listen to Geoff's talk at 7:30pm, on Thursday July 9th 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

When we first came here, almost nine years ago, the grass in the hayfield at the top of the hill was quite sparse in places and the remainder didn't have the dense springy base of the adjacent paddock. Having later found out that since the early 1800's, the field has been known as Barebones, maybe we should have realised that it wasn't going to be the most productive.

We also didn't know a great deal about managing grass for hay, so we called in a specialist we had met at the Tenbury Agricultural Show and I guess it was no surprise that he told us it was short of every nutrient imaginable and needed aerating and dosing with fertiliser for the next three years.

We now realise that would have been the death-knell for any wildflowers that we hoped might return to the hayfield and, thankfully, we couldn't afford all that work anyway. So, we left it as it was and, for once, both the weather and our haymaking contractor unwittingly conspired *with* us, which resulted in a late cut and baling at the end of August.



The following year, we realised that this late cut had allowed the grasses to re-seed themselves and the gaps of bare soil were quickly filling in. And to a large extent, we have continued this approach ever since.

Our haylage may not be as nutritious as the commercially produced bales, but our Dexters have full-time jobs with their conservation grazing, so we are not looking to fatten them up for market.

We also have no need to give them extra rations of grain or soya concentrates either, as they are more than capable of tipping the scales with their unprocessed plant-based diet.

They also naturally take-in the essential minerals they require by grazing the deeper rooting plants, like Ribwort Plantain. Eating the leaves of Bird's-foot-trefoil has been shown to inhibit parasitic worms in livestock, due to the condensed tannins, and the salicin in willow is well-known for its anti-inflammatory properties – and for giving the world Aspirin.



In addition to the late cut, we had one other piece of luck when we noticed the odd patch of yellow rattle in the hayfield. Yellow Rattle is known as the meadow maker because it is hemi-parasitic on grass; but we've noticed that it tends to be the coarser grasses, such as Rye-grass, Yorkshire-fog and Cocksfoot that suffer, whereas the finer species, such as Sweet Vernal Grass and Common Bent, remain relatively unaffected. As each year has passed, we have seen small coarse-grass-shape patches of soil into which the wildflower seeds can land and germinate, and the finer grasses can expand.



with the added colour of cuckoo flower, meadow vetchling and self-heal; meadow brown and gatekeeper butterflies flitting around; the raspy buzz of grasshoppers and cricketsand a few swallows making the most of the new food source.

Michael Northwood

Moths of the Month

This month we're looking at Green moths of which, there only a small handful. Several are however relatively common in the Teme Valley and worth looking out for. Both of these species are easily identifiable and come to light. So keep an eye open at a lit window or porch light this month. These two are on the wing now in this area.

Large Emerald

The Large Emerald is the largest of the green coloured moths in the UK with a wing span of up to 50mm.



As such it is fairly unmistakable from its size alone. The larvae feed primarily on birch. So if you have birch in your area, this species is almost certainly on your patch.

V Pug

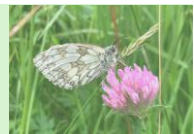
The second green coloured moth is the V Pug. This is much smaller than the Large Emerald at around 15-20mm. It's easy to see why this little pug moth gets its name.



The black V markings in each wing being very distinct and obvious when the moth is at rest. If you have elder or bramble in your area, look out for this one as the larvae use these as food plants. They come readily to light.

Danny Arnold

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Book of the Month

COLLINS BRITISH BIRD IDENTIFIER



A new book, just published, and a new approach to bird identification, detailing five unique visual features that the author suggests will identify every species of British bird.

The book would be used in addition to typical field guide books (including an excellent one produced by Collins!) as there is minimal text and no description of bird song.

The illustrations are arranged so that similar species are grouped together with only five features needed to differentiate between them.



What To Look Out For In July.....

The first Saturday in July marks Plantlife's National Meadows Day. So, to celebrate, we're promoting three meadow flowers to look out for because they should be more common. However, due to circumstances beyond their control, there are now on the Red List as plants that are vulnerable.



Already in flower is **Betony**, whose latin name, *Betonica officinalis*, alludes to its traditional use as a medicinal herb (the 'officinalis' part) with a range of soothing and healing properties attributed to it.

Flowering slightly later this month, but continuing into October, **Devil's-bit scabious**, can often be seen with Betony, giving a pleasing combination of magenta and purple. The 'Devil's-bit' part of its name relates to the fore-shortened roots that look as if they have been bitten off and, if in doubt, blame the devil.



With a flowering season similar to Devil's-bit scabious, the **Harebell** tends to be associated with dryer ground and, despite its delicate appearance, is both tough and resilient. It has a number of local names, including fairy bells, old man's bell (the



devil again...) and, just to add to the confusion, it is known as the bluebell in Scotland!

And Three To Find.....

As Butterfly Conservation's 'Big Butterfly Count' is due to start later this month (See 'Dates For Your Calendar') it seems appropriate to search for three butterflies that are around in July.

The first is a **Marbled White** which, despite its name and appearance, is actually one of the brown group of butterflies that includes the Meadow Brown.



It's likely to be seen on old grassland and prefers the purple flowers of scabious and knapweed.

The second one on the list is the **Gatekeeper** which can be found along hedgerows, often feeding on bramble flowers.

With the wings closed, it can look like a small Meadow Brown but, when open, the upper wings have orange patches that make it stand out.



The third and last butterfly to find is the **Ringlet**. When just emerged, the wings can have an almost velvet appearance and are dark brown – almost black – with a variable number of roundels which are more visible on the female than the male.

The Ringlet's preferred habitat is a woodland glade or tall lush grass.



Dates For Your Calendar:



Thursday 9th July @ 7.30pm:

Talk (and some superb photos!) by Geoff Hall at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall – 'Further Travels of a Shropshire Lad'. Geoff's describes his visits to the hidden areas of Shropshire and the surrounding counties to see and record the wildlife.

Fri. 17th July – Sun. 9th August:

Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count! Taking part only needs 15 minutes of your time but that can help to make a huge difference. Simply follow the steps below to submit your results:

1. Download the mobile app or sign in through the Butterfly Conservation website.
2. Find a sunny spot
3. Spend 15 minutes counting butterflies & moths.
4. Record what species you see & how many there are.

Sunday 19th July @ 2.00pm:

Richard Pill (TVWG Chairman), has kindly offered to take Teme Valley Wildlife Group members on an easy walk along the footpaths that run beside the banks of the River Teme for both relaxation and a chance to see the wildlife that is evident at that time of the year.

The walk starts at 2:00pm in the car park next to St Mary Magdalene Church in Little Hereford, accessed via the track next to the village hall (please don't park in the village hall car park).

What3Words: ///head.river.shortcuts



Tenbury Countryside Show

For the second year, Teme Valley Wildlife Group will have a stand near the Countryside Ring at Tenbury Show on 1st August 2026 and you have a chance of one year's free membership by taking part in our Wildlife Quiz!

We look forward to meeting you all and having a chat about your nature sightings.



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