

Teme Valley Wildlife Group

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2025

Stephanie Mocroft's View from the Teme Valley

Autumn is here, bringing a welcome end to the soaring temperatures delivered by Summer 2025. I took the opportunity of some cooler walking conditions to complete the Isbourne Way, a route which traces the River Isbourne from its source in the Cotswold Hills to the River Avon at Evesham, which I had begun to walk earlier in the year.

The latest section began at Wormington in Gloucestershire but soon crossed into Worcestershire. There were few hills to negotiate but on tackling a low rise across recently harvested fields I looked down to see what crop had been grown there.

Lots of shiny red-brown field beans littered the surface and I wondered which animals or birds might come along to take advantage of such free food.

As I bent down to pick up a bean my eye was caught by a small fossil lying on the soil surface. It was rather unexpected and proved to be a fossil which I recognised as the shell of a long-extinct oyster called *Gryphaea*.

Walking along, I saw that there were hundreds, possibly thousands, of these shells littering the field, a sight I had never come across before.



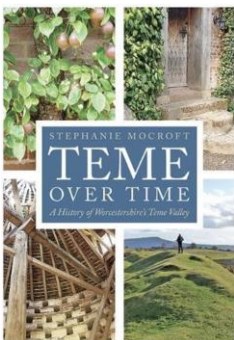
I have always been excited by finding fossils and knew that a band of fossil-bearing limestone crossed Britain from Lyme Regis in Dorset to Whitby in Yorkshire. However, I hadn't realised that it crossed the south-east corner of Worcestershire.

The ancient oysters lived in warm shallow seas during the Jurassic period when Britain looked very different from the way it looks today.

The abundance of these fossils led to them receiving the common name of "Devil's Toenails" and in the past they were used as charms and in some parts of the country were thought to be able to ward off rheumatism.

Here in Worcestershire, not far from the Malvern Hills, I thought of the opening to the medieval poem "Piers Ploughman" who looked down on "a fair field full of folk" and thought that I had in front of me "a fair field full of fossils" instead.

The walk was very enjoyable with every imaginable autumn fruit and berry on display. Even a spray of hops fell across the path, which I plucked and draped round my neck, much to the amusement of some sewage plant workers I met along the way.



Those of you who know me, know that I am equally interested in local wildlife and local history. I hope, then, that you will not mind me mentioning the recent publication of a book I have written on Teme

valley history called "Teme over Time".

It is published by Brewin Books and is available from the Tourist Information Centre and Nice Things gift shop in Tenbury, from Wyre Forest Books in Bewdley and The Castle Bookshop in Ludlow. It is also available online from the publisher or directly from me, for a lower price, by contacting stephaniemocroft@gmail.com

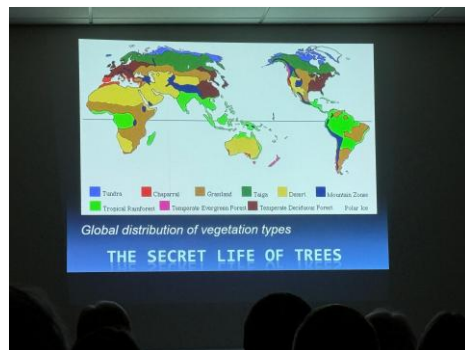


Teme Valley Wildlife Group's Monthly Meetings and Talks

October's speaker, Simon Gulliver, gave a fascinating talk on 'The Secret Life of Trees'. Simon is a Gardens & Parks Consultant for the National Trust and not only has 20 years experience in horticultural landscape and plant collection management but also has great enthusiasm for this subject.

The talk covered how the various tree species, that we consider to be native, migrated to Britain after the last ice age when Britain was still part of mainland Europe.

Simon explained what defines a tree as a tree, rather than a shrub, and gave examples of the tallest, most massive, oldest and broadest trees that have existed – or still exist – in the world.



Of the many interesting facts given by Simon, one of the most astonishing was that elms and pines have evolved to be able to 'taste' the saliva of attacking caterpillars and release chemical analogues of parasitic wasp pheromones to attract beneficial insects to launch a counter-attack!

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Please note that it has been necessary to make a change to the last meeting of the year as, unfortunately, Robin Pote is now unable to give his talk on the Birds of the Western Isles of Scotland.

However, Rosemary Winnall has agreed to step-in and give the group her latest illustrated talk on 'Churches and Nature'.

Churchyards can be surprisingly rich in nature, and many of the plants, fungi, and animals found within a churchyard can often pre-date the church buildings themselves, if these rare habitats are managed sympathetically.

Please make a note in your diary to attend the next meeting and listen to Rosemary's talk at 7:30pm, on Thursday November 13th at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall, WR15 8RS.

All are welcome, at just £3 on the door, or free if you have taken advantage of our annual membership!

For up-to-date information on what wildlife is being seen in the area, or to give us your sightings or comments, please visit our Facebook page.



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Wild Life

Gravity is now starting to win its tussle with the deciduous trees and the spectacular display of autumnal colours along the Teme Valley is gradually being wiped away to reveal the arboreal supporting structures. Along the farm



track that runs between our two cherry orchards, the grey stone has been almost lost under the yellow, orange and red carpet of poplar, rowan and viburnum leaves.

It is the time of year when my thoughts turn away from managing the grassland areas and look, once again, at how we can create better habitats within the woodland, now that it's no longer difficult to see the wood for the leaves.

For once, we don't have a significant problem with bracken or bramble, but we are lacking in a shrub layer that would encourage more birds and small mammals to make the wood their home. This shrub layer is missing because there aren't the open glades to let-in sufficient light for the sort of bushy growth that creates good habitat.

Before coppicing:



Over the past couple of years, I've started to coppice the overgrown hazel and hawthorn and take out any spindly oak and silver birch that are unlikely to reach maturity but are adding to the shade.

After coppicing:



One of the few benefits of having woodland on the side of a relatively steep hill is that you soon find ways of utilising any cut material in-situ, rather than making umpteen trips with the tractor and trailer.

Having seen brash being used to make dead hedges on one the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust's sites, I soon learnt how to make use of every last scrap of coppiced and felled wood – with the exception of some larger sections that could be used on the wood burner.

I'd have to say that making the dead hedges is really quite therapeutic and there are also benefits to the woodland and to its inhabitants.



The meandering hedge passes over the stools of coppiced hazel to provide some protection for the new growth from the resident muntjac deer and, more recently, a couple of young roe deer families.

Whilst we would prefer to have the native roe deer, rather than the alien muntjac, they do have longer necks and a longer



reach, so I've realised that I need to make the dead hedges taller and wider if they are to give the new growth

sufficient protection from being nibbled.

In the same way that the scrub in our grassland areas provides a safe environment for young birds to forage and gain confidence during their early juvenile period, so the dead hedges do the same for the woodland birds while they're waiting for the living hedges to arrive.

Michael Northwood



Moths of the Month

Red Green Carpet

Looking at this moth, it is not difficult to comprehend how the Red Green Carpet moth got its name. The red and green colouration is variable but always noticeable. A common species here in the Teme Valley, this Autumn species appears in October and November, then hibernates over winter as an adult, before re-appearing in the early spring.

With a wingspan of around 30-35 mm, it is a delicate little moth but one that will seemingly fly in all weathers if the temperature is sufficiently mild.



The larvae feed on many deciduous trees including Rowan and Oak, which of course is widespread hereabouts and, as such, is primarily considered to be a woodland species.

Feathered Thorn

The second moth this month is the Feathered Thorn. A larger species which epitomises that autumn is here. Flying in October and November this is another common species here in the Valley and one that will readily come to light.

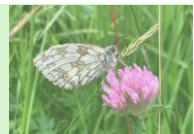


As such, it is often seen (from the underside) on a lit window in the house. The degree and depth of brown colouration does vary, some being quite dark with relative dark chocolate markings, whilst others are far paler in colour. The moth gets its name from the feathered antenna which are only present on the male, making determination of sex relatively straight forward. The one shown is therefore a female with no noticeable feathered antenna.

The wingspan is 35-45 mm and the larvae are quite gregarious, feeding on a variety of deciduous trees and shrubs.

Danny Arnold

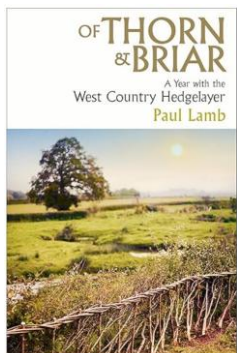
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Book of the Month



Not quite winning the prize, but coming in Highly Recommended in the Nature Writing category of this year's Wainwright Prize, 'Of Thorn and Briar' follows the author during his season of traditional hedgelaying.

Paul Lamb lives in his converted old lorry and travels the south-west corner of England maintaining and restoring the ancient boundaries of the British countryside.

He describes his life on the road and the practical aspects of his job whilst celebrating the beauty of the landscape he's spent his life caring for.



App of the Month:

OutDoors GPS



If you like walking in the great outdoors but would prefer not to get lost, Ordnance Survey gives you two options of either using a foldaway map or a phone app.

Paper maps are great for planning routes in the comfort of your home when you want to the bigger picture of your route. However, I have found they are less practical when you're on the summit of Hay Bluff, trying to find the route back to the car, whilst wearing the map on your face.

The OutDoors GPS app uses Ordnance Survey maps – either live if you have a signal or offline if you don't – and allows you to follow a pre-mapped route and show you where you are on the route.

The combination of a road map, Explorer (1:25k) and Landranger (1:50k) maps provides increased detail the more you zoom-in. The annual cost of the app is £30 which, somewhat bizarrely, is £5 cheaper than the OS equivalent.

What To Look Out For In November.....

Look out for some patches of waxcap mushrooms in the grassland areas – maybe more in hope than expectation as, so far, they have been conspicuous by their absence. Despite the rain showers, and lush grass that has forgotten about the dry months of summer, the ground is still a bit too firm underfoot for waxcaps.



Fortunately, the absence of fruiting bodies above ground doesn't mean there is a lack of mycelium below ground, so there may still be a chance to see these colourful jewels later in the month.

However, if the mild weather continues, there are some woodland fungi that are worth looking out for, such as the aptly named brittlegills and milkcaps.

The cap of the brittlegills can be almost as colourful as the waxcaps, although larger and they tend to fade to a more muddy colour over time.

The stem and gills on the underside of the cap are usually a clean white or cream colour. Running your fingernail across the gills generally reveals the 'brittle' part of the fungi's name.

Not surprisingly, the distinctive feature of the milkcap is the droplets of milky latex that exude when the gills are damaged in a similar way:



On a fungi foray a few year's ago, I was invited by the group expert to dab a small amount of the 'milk' on my tongue. There was no discernible taste but after a few seconds it felt as though I had just put a fairly fiery chili pepper in my mouth!

Needless to say, please do not try this at home.....

The first full moon of November usually heralds the arrival of one of the more unusual winter migrant wading birds from Eastern Europe: the woodcock.

They are seldom seen during the day unless accidentally flushed whilst walking near scrub on damper ground. In which case, you're likely to be startled by the explosive take-off only a few paces away from you.

At dusk, in an area of clear sky, you may see woodcock doing their 'roding' display, flying circuits just above the treetops.

Their call is equally unusual with a series of grunted or growling notes followed by short 'wissup!' sound.



Dates For Your Calendar:



Thursday 13th November @ 7.30pm

Join us for the final talk of the year at Stoke Bliss and Kyre Village Hall.

In a change to the published events calendar, our speaker will be Rosemary Winnall, with an illustrated talk on 'Churches and Nature'.

And looking ahead to next year.....

We have our line-up of speakers arranged for next year's meetings, with talk subjects that range from owls to swifts, beavers to deer, bees to dragonflies and gardens to wetlands.

To make the most of these talks and allow us to continue to bring you these excellent speakers, please consider taking out an annual membership to Teme Valley Wildlife Group.



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!

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