

NATURE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Now including Bee & Mammal news

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NATURE SOCIETY
Making a real difference



IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS -

It is surprising what you may find. Firstly of course the ever-perennial nature society beavering away to try and improve the habitat.

I use the word beavering specifically because where Nigel has been working it does tend to look as if we have beavers. Only joking, but it's no good wearing camouflage gear the camera will still find you.



Here is Keith another stalwart of the nature society looking a bit lost in the undergrowth. We did get him out before we had finished for the day.

However, it is amazing what signs of wildlife you can find in the woods, even at this time of year. Here we have clear signs of Thrush activity. These lovely birds make use of an 'anvil' to break open snails.



You can clearly see the stone which has been used and it is surrounded with broken shells.

Regular runs through the undergrowth are much more visible now as are footprints in mud and snow. Even frost can show signs of a passing animal, as seen here on a pontoon.



Can you identify them? These are the hind feet.

Another good sign of animal activity is where they have been eating. This will be our old friend the Wood Mouse, where he has tucked into some fungi.



Little furry grey and brown bodies
We are busy the whole year through
Out searching for nutritious food
While keeping an eye out for you
For us the tiny mice and shrews
Worms, beetles or fungi will do.
While some of us need other food
Grass shoots for us field voles please
You can find us about out in the fields
Battling the weather during a freeze
We are not like the lucky squirrels
Snuggled tightly up in the trees.

So, if you are out on a walk
Your friends to meet and greet
Taking time out for a breather
On a convenient seat
Remember that we may just be
Sitting right beside your feet.

BLACK SWANS

There has been much interest in the Black Swans seen at the Marina but little seems to be known about them as a species. So here we have some surprising details.



Black swans are native to Australia and are the state bird of Western Australia. They were brought to the UK as ornamental birds like peacocks and golden pheasants. Like many other captive birds, they occasionally find their way out into the wild. Black swans were also introduced to New Zealand where a feral breeding population has become well established.

The black swan is also very popular as an ornamental waterbird in western Europe, especially Britain, and escapees are commonly reported. The number of locations at which the birds are found has more than doubled in the past five years, while the number of breeding sites has more than tripled, new research from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) has found. The research suggests the black swan numbers have increased at such a rate that they may now be added to the authoritative "British List" of birds found in the UK. Until now, the black swan population has not been considered self-sustaining.

The project has uncovered 500 reports of black swans, in at least 170 different locations around the UK. Of these locations, 37 are thought to be sites where the birds are breeding. A survey in 2004 found only 11 breeding sites.

The largest cluster is in Dawlish Warren, in Devon, where they were introduced in the last century. They have been the town's emblem for more than 40 years.

Because they are more aggressive than other species, there are fears they may "out compete" white – or mute – swans for food and habitat in many areas. They could also breed with mutes – a hybrid has been created in captivity called a blute swan.

A mature black swan measures between 110 and 142 cms in length and weighs 3.7–9 kilo. Its wing span is between 1.6 and 2 mtrs. The neck is long (relatively the longest neck among the swans) and curved in an "S"-shape.

They utter a musical and far reaching bugle-like sound, called either on the water or in flight, as well as a range of softer crooning notes. They can also whistle, especially when disturbed while breeding and nesting. When swimming, black swans hold their necks arched or erect and often carry their feathers or wings raised in an aggressive display. In flight, a wedge of black swans will form as a line or a V, with the individual birds flying strongly with undulating long necks, making whistling sounds with their wings and baying, bugling or trumpeting call.

It has been noted that the Australian black swan only swims with one leg, tucking the other leg above its tail. The reason for this may be that the swan can more easily change direction when swimming on the surface of the water, if needed to escape an oncoming predator or to more quickly get to food.

They feed primarily on algae and aquatic plants which the bird obtains by plunging its long neck into water up to 1 m deep. They also eat grain, grasses and crop foods, such as wheat, potatoes and carrots - especially in the winter when other food sources aren't readily available.

In shallow water, Swans may use their strong webbed feet to dig into submerged mud and, like mallards, they tip up - plunging the head and neck underwater - to expose and feed on roots, shoots and tubers. They also forage by swimming and picking up plant material from the water's surface or water's edge. Occasionally they will graze on land, but they are clumsy walkers.



As has been noted ours seem happy to take food from the hand but please be careful it is not unknown for swans to bite. Also please remember no bread, cake, biscuits etc. please

Let's just enjoy them while they are here and see what happens in the future.



Dawlish Town Council

"Dawlish - home of the black swan"



ANOTHER VISITOR

We have had a number of sightings of a Redwing around the site. Usually they flock with other winter visiting members of the thrush family such as Fieldfares. Smaller than our Song Thrush, with a cream flash above the eye and red beneath the wings they are a lovely bird. As well as feeding in fields they will visit gardens in very hard weather and they also love where they busily tuck into berries.



HOW DO OUR BUTTERFLIES COPE IN WINTER?

We have seen ice, sleet and snow in many parts of the UK recently. As we turn up the thermostat and get out our gloves, what were the more ingenious ways our wildlife use to keep warm.

Despite their seemingly delicate nature, butterflies and moths are surprisingly resilient to the winter chill. Different species have evolved different strategies to survive the coldest months.

Some overwinter as dormant adults, sheltering in caves, buildings and vegetation, or as eggs, but the majority spend the winter as caterpillars or pupae, often hidden underground or in cosy nooks of plants. A few species are active either as adults or as caterpillars during the winter.

New research has revealed that many UK butterflies actually do better after a cold snap. In years when winter temperatures are unusually warm, many species see a fall in population the following year.

Additionally, the population size of 13 species increased significantly in association with extremely cold winter days while only two species showed a negative relationship.

So, while cold spells during winter tended to be neutral or beneficial in their impacts on butterfly populations, warm spells in winter were generally detrimental.

With winters predicted to become milder in the UK as part of climate change, with negative and unexpected knock-on effects on our butterflies we must surely have a reason to hope for a snowy winter.



FINALLY, THANK YOU

So many of you have provided your time or financial support to the ventures of The Nature Society, which was launched in February 2017. The money raised from the Wildlife Weekends, Hedgehog Crossword and evening talks has enabled us to donate £200 to Bumblebee Conservation Trust, £200 to Butterfly Conservation and £50 to British Hedgehog Preservation Society. All these organisations are more than grateful for our support as it enables them to continue to provide the help our wildlife so desperately needs.

Much work goes into arranging, not just the events mentioned but also the physical side of conservation. Working in the woods, hedgerow improvement, planting, seed sowing and maintenance of the cottage garden. While we have a small team, which does most of this work at the moment we would like others to get involved as well. The Nature Society was not developed as an exclusive club but to create a community with an interest in improving its surroundings for the benefit of wildlife, the environment and subsequently our own welfare.

It has been proven many times that being outside close to nature has many health benefits not just physically but also mentally and emotionally. Who does not like to hear a bird sing or see the first spring flowers pushing through. So please feel free to join in any activities. There is so much to learn and fun to be had. Don't forget we all should aim for at least 40 mins exercise a day so why not do that by helping out with any of the projects and improving your health at the same time as making new friends, having a good laugh and making a real difference.

WISHING EVERYONE A HAPPY & HEALTHY 2018



n.b. The footprints on the pontoon are domestic cat. Did you get it right?