

# NATURE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Now including Bee & Mammal news

February 2019 Issue 25



NATURE SOCIETY  
Making a real difference



## SPRING IS SPRINGING

Walking round the Marina it soon becomes obvious that much is beginning to stir especially with the flora.



These lovely **Hazel** catkins show up well among all the bare branches and twigs, they can grow to anything up to 8cm long. The catkins

are wind pollinated so bees find it very hard to collect the pollen as it is not sticky. And the grains actually repel each other.

Hazel leaves provide food for the caterpillars of many moths, including the large emerald, small white wave, barred umber and nut-tree tussock. Hazel nuts are also eaten by woodpeckers, nuthatches, tits, wood pigeons, jays and a number of small mammals.

The wood can be twisted or knotted, and as such it historically had many uses. These included thatching spars, net stakes, water divining sticks, hurdles and furniture. Hazel was also valued for its nuts, or 'cobs'. Today, hazel coppice has become an important management strategy in the conservation of woodland habitats for wildlife. The resulting timber is used in many ways, and is becoming increasingly popular as pea sticks and bean poles, used by gardeners.

## Hazel Mythology

Hazel has a reputation as a magical tree. A hazel rod is supposed to protect against evil spirits, as well as being used as a wand and for water-divining. In some parts of England hazel nuts were carried as charms and/or held to ward off rheumatism. In Ireland hazel was known as the 'Tree of Knowledge', and in medieval times it was a symbol of fertility.

**The Elder** is also breaking out with new leaves and the flowers forming already.



Valuable to wildlife the flowers provide nectar for a variety of insects and the berries are eaten by birds and mammals. Small mammals such as dormice and bank voles eat both the berries and the flowers. Many moth caterpillars feed on elder foliage, including the white spotted pug, swallowtail, dot moth and buff ermine.

Elder wood is hard and yellow-white. Mature wood is used for whittling and carving, while smaller stems can be hollowed out to make craft items.

The flowers and berries are mildly poisonous, so should be cooked before eating. The leaves are also poisonous. The flowers are often used to make wine, cordial or tea, or fried to make fritters. The vitamin C rich berries are often used to make preserves and wine, and can be baked in a pie with blackberries. They are also used to make natural dyes.

## Elder Mythology

It was thought that if you burned elder wood you would see the devil, but if you planted elder by your house it would keep the devil away.

As well as shrubs and trees other plants are also putting in an appearance. These **Snowdrops** coming up out of the leaf litter.

As an early flower plant, they are invaluable to some insects such as flies.



Traditionally snowdrops were used to treat headaches and as a painkiller but in modern medicine a compound in the bulb of the snowdrop has been used to develop a dementia treatment.

A lectin compound contained in snowdrop is known as an effective insecticide.

However, snowdrops and their bulbs are poisonous to humans and can cause nausea, diarrhoea and vomiting if eaten.



**Red Dead-Nettle**, another early plant now beginning to show its flowers.

The generic name is *lamia* meaning 'devouring monster'. This refers to the helmet shape of the flower which has the appearance of open jaws.

It is likely that this plant was introduced to Britain with early agriculture and evidence for it has been found in Bronze Age deposits.

The whole plant is astringent, diuretic and purgative. It's dried leaves were used in traditional medicine as a poultice to stem hemorrhaging whilst fresh bruised leaves were applied to external wounds and cuts.



The Primrose is also coming back and preparing to show its flower buds. It's Latin name means 'first rose of the

year'

April 19th is 'Primrose day'. This date is the anniversary of the death of the former British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and the primrose was his favourite flower. Queen Victoria supposedly sent him bunches regularly and to this day primroses are laid at his statue by Westminster Abbey on this date every year.

According to superstition a primrose flower will come up red if you plant it upside down.

## BLACK GARDEN ANT

This was a surprise, it was seen in the toilet block of FB1 on January 9th. These worker ants do not usually emerge until spring. This would have been a worker which forages for food for the Queen and the colony. The Queens life span is up to 15years.



Black Garden Ants nest mainly in dry soil and humus. Although their nests are most often noticed in gardens they are also common in dry grasslands and heaths. From their nests, they forage widely for food along scent-marked trails across soil and ground vegetation and across paved surfaces and into houses, where they are attracted to sugar and crumbs. Outside human habitation, they feed on many things: small live insects, dead insects, nectar, seeds, etc. They also feed on the sugary secretions produced by aphids, some other sap-feeding insects and certain caterpillars, and often tend them to protect the source of this food from predators.

What it was going to find in the facilities block is anyone guess.

## OTHER SURPRISES

Coots and Mallards have been mating. The breeding season for both of these species is from March.

The Green Woodpecker has also been heard with its laughing call and the Song Thrush also making mating calls. The last one has been recorded across much of Southern Britain and is calling two months earlier than normal.

Also, clearly seen at feeding station on the Marina are two Warblers, namely a Chiffchaff



and male Blackcap. Usually summer visitors a few of these species are now remaining in Britain over winter.

## A BUSY START TO THE YEAR

There has been a lot of Nature Society activity already this year. The hedge layers were out in force and had obviously remembered what they had learned from last year. They made great progress and will carry on again next month.



Some pictures of the work done were sent to the instructor and his comments were:

**‘That’s blooming fantastic. The hedge laying looks brilliant. Absolutely fabulous work, I’m so pleased with the results, thank your team for making my day!’**

A great accolade to them all.

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## FACEBOOK

There is now a facebook group called ‘MERCIA NATURE’ you will find lots of different things here. Video snips of our wildlife, currently a hedgehog in the woods and an active bird feeder. Access to the newsletters, information about local groups you can join, timely reminders of events and a ‘Species of the Month’ this will take a short closer look at flora & fauna which is much in evidence at the time. If you have not joined yet please do, I’m sure you will find something to interest you.

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## SPONSOR A BEE NESTER

What a response we have had to this, all the nesters and locations were taken within a few hours. What a wonderful community we have with an obvious interest in caring for our wildlife.

During February there will be a map of locations in the office and a list of sponsors. So, we would ask you to please choose you location and leave the money in the

office. The nesters will be labelled and put in position from middle of March. You can keep an eye on them throughout the summer and will be invited to join in the emptying and cleaning in November. The owner of the most cocoons will receive an award. So thank you all for helping make our Red Mason bees happy.



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The annual RSPB Garden Birdwatch took place last weekend. We have the results from two of those who took part, these will be added to our recordings. A good variety of birds were spotted on Grebe island and behind the lodges. Sixteen different species in total.

Four of our species were counted in double figures: 14 Goldfinch, 13 Chaffinch, 10 Blue tit, 10 Great tit.

Of course, within 15 minutes of ending the count here on Grebe, three Bramblings appeared, I’m sure they wait in the wings (ooops, no pun intended) until the counting has stopped.

So, what are Bramblings exactly? They can often be confused with Chaffinches. Looking a little like a wash-out version.



Bramblings are migrants, wintering south of the breeding range and in varying numbers depending upon the availability of beech mast. It is only really in poor mast years, with bad winter weather that any number can be seen feeding in British gardens. Most of those reaching Britain come from Scandinavia, arriving via the Continent to avoid crossing the large expanse of the North Sea.

If anyone else took part in the count please let us know what you saw, you can post on facebook or hand a list into the office.

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## BATS

Last month we were waiting for a date for the bat talk & walk. This will be on June 1st. As sunset is 9.20 on that date the talk will start at 8.15 which will then be followed by the walk around the Marina with bat detectors. This is usually an hour but may be a bit longer depending on the number of species we detect. As stated before numbers will be strictly limited and booking information will be announced shortly. To avoid disappointment please make sure you book early.

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## NATURE WALK

The first, hopefully of many, of our seasonal nature walks is planned for March 16th. Exact location to be announced but it will be within the Marina's perimeter. Starting at 11.00 and lasting approximately an hour, a gently stroll will help us spot things we usually walk past. Please bring binoculars and cameras but no dogs please, we want this to be an observational walk without too many distractions.



Suitable for everyone, the terrain not too arduous, experienced nature watchers or beginners. This is of course weather dependent as usual.

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## MOTHS

It has been suggested that a number of people would be interested in a Moth trapping session. This is certainly something we can look at doing. The traps are not too difficult to arrange but the identification of the creatures requires a certain amount of knowledge, so many of them look very similar. We will be contacting a local entomologist to see what can be arranged. Watch this space.

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## SUMMER STALLS

The Nature Society have set two dates for their stalls this year namely May 26th and Sept 29th. These will be based on 'What is Wild in Your Garden?' It will encompass not just bees and birds but all sorts of wildlife that commonly visit gardens. Based mainly on education we will be collecting various things throughout the coming months which children can get hands on with. This has proved very successful in the past. There will of course be the opportunity to buy bee and bird related items as well as the usual Lucky dip and raffle.

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## MAMMALS

We hope to start our live mammal trapping survey again in the summer and would welcome anyone interested in this to get involved. We managed to trap and record many small mammals two



years ago and look forward to continuing this now a lot of the landscape work has been completed.

If you are interested in mammals then you may like to think about joining the Derbyshire Mammal Group. They are a lovely friendly organisation (affiliated to the Mammal Society). They record mammals for the county, (we submit sightings to them) They have many events and hands on experiences you can get involved in. With six monthly newsletters, which they are more than happy to receive articles for. It only costs £5 per household to join. If you are interested please visit their website to find out more.

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## POETRY

Thought it might be nice to have a poetry competition for the Nature Newsletter. It would need to have a nature slant to it. It can be amusing, thoughtful, emotional or just observational. From wildlife, flora, weather the list is endless as to what it can be about. Anywhere between one and six verses will be fine. A prize for the winner and all entries will be published in the newsletter. If you would like to join in please either hand in at the office or send to me direct. Closing date end of February.

If you would like to make any contributions, or have ideas for the newsletter please contact Jane Wakeham at [janetavi5@aol.com](mailto:janetavi5@aol.com)