

# NATURE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Now including Bee & Mammal news

March 2019 Issue 26



NATURE SOCIETY  
Making a real difference



## WHAT AN INTERESTING MONTH!

With the temperatures being well beyond what is normal, the only exception being Feb 1st, there has been much activity in the natural world.

CATKINS – If you have found pale powdery deposits along your gunnels and roof after windy weather this is pollen from many of the catkins around the Marina now. Some of which are a couple of weeks early.



NESTING BIRDS – Coots have been collecting sticks for at least two weeks and the Canada geese are also beginning to make nests. One egg has already turned up but this may have been one from last year.

BLOSSOM – Outside the Marina much Blackthorn is in full flower, this is also at least two weeks early.



BUMBLEBEES – Many Queen bees have been spotted, while this is not particularly unusual with some species a lot of reports are suggesting these have Yellow bottoms which may mean that they are the Early Bumblebee. Despite the name these usually appear in March. If this is what they are we have not recorded them before.

Not always easy to identify. Here is snapshot of what the commonest species look like.



Early bumblebee



Red-tailed bumblebee



Buff-tailed bumblebee



White-tailed bumblebee



COTTAGE GARDEN – Rosemary is in full flower, Pulmonaria as well, these are early too.

As mentioned in previous newsletters this is not always a good sign for wildlife. If plants flower too early the insects they need for pollination may not be around at the same time. Bad for the plants and the insects as when they do come along the flowers will be over.

Bird nestlings are fed on insects and caterpillars if they nest too soon they may well starve.

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## UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS

We have had some reports recently of different species being identified here.

Report of a dead Otter being removed from the water has come in. Photo evidence would really help here. Especially as no Otter has ever been recorded in the Marina before. We know that there are Mink just outside, a family of them has been identified. There are a number of similarities between the species.



MINK



OTTER

However, if swimming the otter tends to show head and shoulders only while the Mink shows the whole length of its body.

Please, everyone keep your eyes open. Particularly for any mammals in or around the water. If you are struggling to identify, try to get a photo. Whatever, it always best to get another person to see it as well if possible. Positive identification is crucial, especially if we report to Derbyshire Mammal Group.

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We have a dunnock with strange growths on it's feet. From a distance it looks like a lot of white feathers but closer inspections reveals it to be like a warty growth. It appears this is mite called fringilla papillomavirus and is



most commonly seen on Chaffinches, as in the picture, or Bramblings. The growths may vary in size from small nodules to larger warts that engulf the whole leg. The warts develop slowly over a long period

and affected individuals may otherwise appear quite healthy. Some individuals may become lame or lose affected digits. Our Dunnock seems ok at the moment, feeding, flying, singing. Let's hope it does not spread to others, will keep a close eye on it.

Another new one for us has been Muntjac prints seen and photographed on the new bund and in the field.



It is a very small, stocky deer, the Muntjac Deer is about the same size as a medium dog. It is gingery-brown, with a pale underside, darker stripes in its face, and small, single-pointed antlers.

The small, Chinese Muntjac Deer was introduced to Woburn Park in Bedfordshire at the start of the 20th century and rapidly spread into the surrounding area. Muntjac Deer are notorious browsers, eating the shoots from shrubs, as well as woodland herbs and Brambles. Male Muntjacs have short, unbranched antlers that slope backwards, and a pair of long canine teeth. They breed all year-round, but females usually only have one kid at a time. Muntjac Deer are also known as 'Barking Deer' because of their dog-like calls.

Muntjac are now well established in the south of Derbyshire around Calke and Ticknall. One was found dead on the road in Ticknall village in spring 2004 and damage to gardens has been reported in this area. They have been seen at DWT's Carvers Rocks and Spring Wood reserves. Muntjac colonised the suburban fringe of south Sheffield in the 1990s (Rotherham 2000) and there are recent records from locations in north-east Derbyshire including Whitwell Wood. There are also a small number of scattered records, including from north of Ashbourne. It is likely that muntjac are expanding their range in the county, but slowly. Although their spread is of interest to mammal-watchers, experience from other parts of the UK shows that they can cause considerable damage to woodland flora, especially bluebells and other plants of the woodland floor.

A good way to gauge size when taking a photo is to place a coin close by. This picture shows clearly the size of the print in relation to a one penny piece.



## COOTS

As previously mentioned Coots seem to be intent on nesting now. These are really interesting birds from foot slapping to weird calls and what looks like fighting to the death perhaps we should put the spotlight them.

Closely related to Moorhens, Coots have prominent frontal shields on the forehead, with red to dark red eyes and coloured bills. The featherless shield gave rise to the expression "as bald as a coot," a phrase which was in use as early as 1430.



The feet are quite remarkable, not webbed like those of ducks, but sectioned and well suited to walking on soft, uneven surfaces, such as water weeds

and mud.

At this time of year they can be seen and heard slapping a foot on the bank or a bare, wet, muddy mound, about the size of a large molehill, close to the edge of the water. They fluff up the feathers hold the head down close to the ground and point the bill forwards. The foot slaps can be heard across the water for about 100mtrs. It is assumed that this is a territorial display prior to mating.

The Coot also has territorial fights which occur between them. They start by swimming towards each other at high



speed. Then, there is violent and prolonged striking with feet, clawing at the breast of the opponent and stabbing with bill. Both birds spread and hold back the wings in order to unbalance each other. If you have never seen it have a look on Youtube, it's worth it.

The chicks are odd looking little things, black with scattered yellow down around the head. The bare crown is reddish. The bill and the very small shield are red. Eyes are hazel to grey-brown.



A common bird definitely worth another look.

## REED MACE

These are now shedding their tiny seeds which are minute, 0.2 millimeters long, and attached to fine hairs. When ripe, the heads disintegrate into a cottony fluff from which the seeds are dispersed by the wind.



When it lands on the ground or pontoons it looks just like candyfloss and soon melts away.

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### LATEST NEWS

02.02.19 A flock of 14 Long-tailed tits visited fat cake feeder by Grebe

04.02.19 2 Gadwall seen by Owl pontoon

18.02.19 Muntjac prints seen on top of new bund

19.02.19 Oystercatcher returned to island on new lake

23.02.19 6 spot Ladybird on small leaf by footpath near Nuthatch/Owl

12.02.19 Pair of Mute swans seen in the water by Egret at 9.00pm

Various times Bumblebee Queens seen in new lodge field and around FB3 area

Frequently a Kestrel is seen hunting over the long stay car park.

Thank you everyone who lets me know what has been seen. It really helps to keep an eye on what is happening across the whole site. Hopefully when we start the Nature Walks we will be able to pick up on much more and help people on identification. Not just with seeing but also hearing and smelling. You would be surprised how much we really do miss as we go about our daily chores. Have any of you been aware of the Buzzards calling and soaring and the Green Woodpeckers laughing? It has been going on now for a few days. Both are fantastic to listen to.

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## HEDGELAYING

The Nature Society volunteers have now finished laying the hedge in the North Field and an excellent job they have made of it. Well done to all those involved.



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## BEE NESTER SPONSORS

If you are one of those who are sponsoring the red mason bee nesters then please visit the office to choose your location from the map (please do not remove the map from the office). Cross your choice off the list, fill in the form, pick up your information pack and pay the sponsorship fee. Then sit back and await results, the nesters will be going out middle/end of March. Each will be identified with the sponsors number and name.

There will be a variety of different nesters but please be assured that each one will have the same amount of nesting tubes/canes in to keep it fair to all. The bees will not be counting just looking for somewhere.

You can see in the picture that she is carrying a ball of mud to seal up one of the egg cells. She has special tiny 'horns' to enable her to carry the mud.



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## QUIZ NIGHT

January's quiz night was not based on wildlife this time but all the proceeds raised from both the entry fee and the raffle went to support the Nature Groups charities. The winning team very generously gave back their winnings which brought the total raised to £127. A really great result and a fabulous fun evening. So, a big thank you needs to go to all those who took part and the helpers who always give their time in setting up.

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## WINTER WILDLIFE CHARITY COMPETITION

There is now a new competition in the office for the Wildlife Charities. Different one this time, 'Find The Missing Letters' Four different categories for you to fill in and reveal the names of Birds, Insects, Mammals & Flora. Just £1 as usual.

Here is just a taster of what to expect

Question M-S-L- / T-R-S-

Answer MISTLE THRUSH

Simple, at least I hope so.

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)