

# NATURE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Now including Bee & Mammal news

February 2018 Issue 13



NATURE SOCIETY  
Making a real difference



## BIRD NEWS

What a surprise! we have had a Water Rail spotted at the Marina. Apparently, they have been seen here before but not for a few years.

Water rails are genuine oddities amongst British birds. The cacophony of highly unbirdlike noises from reedbeds in winter indicates the presence of ever secretive water rails. These distinctive calls, most often heard at dawn and dusk, are a mixture of squeals, grunts and groaning screams likened to the cries of an animal in mortal agony. With their pig-like squealing, they are unpredictable and noisy, yet reclusive. Their slender legs and toes are adapted for walking on floating plants, allowing them to slip quickly through the marshy vegetation without being seen.

Smaller and distinctly slimmer than the moorhen, the water rail is a fairly common but highly secretive inhabitant of freshwater wetlands. Its preferred habitat is reed beds and swampy willow thickets. It has chestnut-brown and black upperparts, grey face and underparts and black-and-white barred flanks, and a long red bill.



While primarily feeding on insects and molluscs they can be very opportunistic, taking even voles, small birds, dead animals, seeds and berries. Cold weather can trigger more predatory behaviour, which is out of character with its largely insectivorous lifestyle, and they have been known to attack wrens, impaling them with a thrust of their beaks.

They are very territorial especially over breeding areas. Between May and August Water Rails have two broods a year each of between 6-11 eggs, laid in a shallow dish like nest made of broad leaves and grass stems in vegetation raised a little above water level.



They are attentive parents and have been observed as a family party, the parents marching alongside black downy young, head held high and both with a youngster dangling from the tip of their bills.



Difficult to see in the breeding season, they are relatively easier to find in winter, when they are also more numerous and widespread. Although secretive they are still far more often heard than seen.

Water rail can be seen widely but are thinly distributed as breeding birds across the UK, however they are absent from upland areas. They are most abundant in eastern England and among suitable habitat along the south coast. Water rail can be seen all year round, although numbers are higher in winter when many birds arrive from continental Europe.

## SWANS

It appears that our black swans are showing an interest in nesting and have been establishing a territory on the north side of the Marina. There is no reason why white and black swans cannot share a territory, they do so in many places in the UK.

They have been seen displaying and calling. If they do successfully manage to lay and rear some young this is what we may see. As our Mute swans often carry young on their back so do the Black swans. The cygnets are a light grey silvery colour.



As a note it seems that our Mute swans have been very late in chasing away their young. Once the cygnets are old enough to look after themselves the parents cut the parental ties with them and chase them away, sometimes quite aggressively. They will normally join the first flock of swans they encounter where they usually stay until they mature when about 4 years old. They will then choose a mate from within the flock and leave to start their own territory.

## NATURE SOCIETY

We held a water litter picking party on Jan 20th. We certainly had water as it rained the whole time but no-one was deterred. There were more than fifteen of us out with our nets, grabbers and bin liners. There was an amazing variety of 'finds' from a whole load of vegetables

including parsnips and onions to rusty coat hangers, complete with pegs, plastic dustpan. As well as the usual coal bags and lots of baubles from Christmas trees.



This litter picking may well be something that we will do periodically throughout the year as many of these items pose a danger to wildlife. We know, how dangerous plastics are as they break down into the water leaving microscopic particles. As we have many bird varieties as well as fish and molluscs we need aware of what we allow into the water.

As well as water borne litter many other things can be very dangerous such as tins, bottles, small pieces of rope, plastic bags, ring pulls and the plastic strapping from drinks cans. These all pose a threat to land mammals as they get stuck in them and then starve to death.

So, let's become more vigilant about what we discard or leave behind us. We will publicise beforehand when we are arranging a litter pick so keep eyes open for announcements.

## 2018 EVENTS

We are planning hold our usual two public event days again this year. These will be on May 12th and August 18th. We are looking to invite more organisations to attend. More details to follow as we get closer.

## WILDLIFE EVENING

However, one thing that is planned is an evening with 'Mercia's Wonderful Wildlife' on 16th March in the Willow Tree. A chance to see some of our animals in action, meet the mason bees, dissect some owl pellets, discover how we identify our mammals and watch them on the move in their own secret habitats.

## COMPETITIONS

Four or five times a year we will be running some competitions from the office such as word search, crosswords, anagrams etc. All proceeds to the wildlife charities. The first one this year will be a 'Mercia Butterfly & Moth Word Search'. £1 to enter, the first three drawn from the correct answers will win either a Voucher for a Head Massage on the Boardwalk, Bee friendly wildflower seed balls or a bottle of wine. So please help our British wildlife by having a go.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Mercia Butterflies Moths 2

Find the words from the list in the grid. They can be in any direction. Good luck

Z	N	M	D	Y	T	T	A	T	H	E	G	O	T	H	I	C	Y	H	N
P	S	Y	G	E	E	U	L	B	N	O	M	M	O	C	J	H	H	B	J
H	T	O	M	T	N	I	M	C	U	R	E	D	A	D	M	I	R	A	L
R	G	K	A	E	R	T	S	R	I	A	H	E	L	P	R	U	P	G	Q
E	R	R	O	T	R	H	Z	Q	O	U	W	C	J	I	Z	Y	O	Y	P
P	E	U	F	O	S	E	D	A	H	S	E	L	G	N	A	R	C	M	R
P	E	B	P	R	H	E	B	R	E	W	C	H	A	R	A	C	T	E	R
O	N	Y	O	T	B	A	T	E	L	G	N	I	R	N	L	T	P	A	Q
C	C	T	P	O	X	C	D	H	O	F	Q	J	G	D	R	P	K	D	M
L	A	I	L	I	E	C	O	V	K	D	K	E	J	E	I	C	G	O	E
L	R	G	A	S	N	B	Z	M	J	V	T	G	P	K	O	V	G	W	W
A	P	E	R	E	O	G	S	G	M	I	S	E	S	C	B	T	F	B	W
M	E	R	H	S	T	B	M	L	P	A	E	L	A	I	G	B	B	R	V
S	T	E	A	H	S	S	P	E	C	K	L	E	D	W	O	D	O	D	Q
Q	Q	K	W	E	M	E	V	E	E	A	P	K	W	Z	V	M	Q	W	T
I	F	I	K	L	I	V	U	T	M	R	Q	N	L	E	I	R	O	N	E
W	U	Q	M	L	R	S	A	S	E	L	A	R	G	E	W	H	I	T	E
F	U	O	O	Q	B	G	H	S	N	Y	F	Q	X	E	D	E	J	S	S
Q	T	V	T	T	S	U	G	R	A	N	W	O	R	B	J	W	F	H	A
H	N	H	H	G	O	N	H	I	Y	E	U	L	B	Y	L	L	O	H	T

ANGLESHADES  
COMMA  
GREENCARPET  
LARGEWHITE  
ORANGETIP  
PURPLEHARBREAK  
RUBYTIGER  
SPECKLEDWOOD

BRIMSTONE  
COMMONBLUE  
HEBREWCHARACTER  
MEADOWBROWN  
PEACOCK  
REDADMIRAL  
SMALLCOPPER  
THEGOTHIC

BROWNARGUS  
GATEKEEPER  
HOLLYBLUE  
MINTMOTH  
POLARHAWKMOTH  
RINGLET  
SMALLSKIPPER  
TORTOISESHELL



## QUIZ

In addition, the March Quiz will be Nature related (but no bird calls this time, that's a promise). There will also be a raffle on the night with the proceeds to go towards supporting our chosen charities.

## WOODLAND

The planting carried out in the woodland last year has done remarkable well, this is just one of the Wood Forget-me-nots, spreading out well after just one year.



We are hoping to continue the planting scheme with another area being prepared. These will of course be shade loving plants to compliment the area and chosen to bring more

butterflies, bees and other insects into the woods.

**COTTAGE GARDEN** This goes from strength to strength. It has

been in flower all year with many of the plants flowering out of season. Now we have crocus and anemones making an appearance.



Of course, we must not forget all the work that the bee group puts in.

Weeding, pruning and dead heading when necessary. Many of the heads are left on deliberately to provide places for insects to overwinter.



Lots of the plants are now beginning to start growing again ready for another spring and summer. It all makes for very enjoyable work for a couple of hours on a nice morning.

## SPRING?

Well, yes, it is only just around the corner. Squirrels have been out & about, birds busy mating, beginning nests and trees bursting with catkins as spring is also their mating season. We never think of trees as mating but of course that is exactly what they do. Some have both male & female parts on the same tree while others have different gender trees.



Willows and many other species such as Hazels and Alders have 'catkins'.

Wind, bees and birds all help with pollination. Alders also spread by floating their seeds on the water.

So, keep a close eye on the trees to see just which ones are getting ready for 'mating', and at the different ways in which they reproduce. If you look closely you will be amazed at what is happening.

**SO, GET YOUR THINKING HATS ON READY FOR THE QUIZ AND THE WORD SEARCH AND GIVE OUR WILDLIFE A BOOST.**