

NATURE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Now including Bee & Mammal news

November - January 2020 Issue 30



NATURE SOCIETY
Making a real difference



REVIEW 2019

2019 saw a mixed year. With a lot of the planned events being cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances and the newsletter becoming quarterly instead of monthly. This change also saw the introduction of 'Spotlight' to the newsletter. An article by new roving report April Showers concentrating on a small area of the marina each time to encourage us to look closer at what is around.

With weather patterns being unusual, a very mild start to the year, record temperatures in summer and an extremely wet ending. We saw birds starting to nest earlier than usual. Coots and Mallards were mating in January and Chiff-chaffs and Blackcap seen on feeders and Black Garden ants spotted on 9th. Likewise, many plants in the cottage garden were well beforehand with their flowering. This pulmonaria was in full flower in early February as was the Rosemary.



A 6-spot ladybird also out in February by Nuthatch path.



A very wet and cold start to April may also have impacted on the red mason bees. (more on these later)

Some unusual visitors put in an appearance. Muntjac prints spotted in the new bund area in February, Red-legged Partridge in March on Moorhen island and a passing Wheatear in August. There were also more sightings than usual of Hornets during the summer.

Happily, we were still able to donate £550 to our charities. The Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Entomological Society have subsequently been in touch and would like to carry out some moth trapping here next year. This is something we have wanted to do in the past but felt unequal to identification so this is something to look forward to. They also would like to discuss recording our insect population which would be added to the county records. Will keep everyone updated after I have had the meeting with them.

STARLINGS

Interestingly we had a couple of reports of flocks of Starlings being seen in certain bushes. These were most probably migrants as our resident population is in serious decline.



Have you ever seen a murmuration? A few small, black dots begin to fly in: Common Starlings. They're joined by more and more coming from left, right and centre, until thousands of starlings come together as one,



and suddenly you're watching a breathtaking murmuration. With so many thousands of birds dancing through the winter sky above you, it's easy to be fooled into thinking the species is doing rather well. Sadly, this couldn't be further from the truth. Between 1995 and 2016, Britain's breeding population of Common Starling crashed by a staggering 51 per cent. It means that there are now only half as many starlings in Britain. The situation in England is even worse: we saw an 87 per cent decline between 1967 and 2015.

Many of the starlings you see at this time of year will have travelled here to escape the winter freeze in countries to the north and east. In those places too, numbers are falling, and we're seeing fewer of these birds arriving each year

Starlings are heavily dependent on soil invertebrates like earthworms and leatherjackets, and it is possible this food supply has either declined or perhaps become less available during dry summers.

Please report any sightings of starlings as this could be very important. To find out more in detail there is an interesting document on the Mercia Nature F/B page.

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RED MASONS

Well what an amazing result from our Sponsor a Bee Nester. The weather at the start of April was not good. Cold and wet means that at the time the female bees are starting to emerge there is less nectar and pollen available than normal. This can result in the bees re-absorbing their eggs as they need to provision each egg cell with nectar. The number of eggs each bee has to lay is finite so if re-absorbed there will be less available to lay. This being the case we were afraid that numbers would not have increased as much as expected. How wrong could we be? 483 cocoons were released in March and we harvested 868 new cocoons in November.



As you can see we had an enthusiastic band of helpers eager to get cleaning the nester tubes.

Sue Hicks lovely granddaughter, Beatrice was extremely interested and took an information pack to her school. After discussion we hope to be able donate a nester and some cocoons to the school for them to start their own project. Will keep you all updated on this. We will also be posting details of sponsorship for 2020 very soon.



n.b. The importance of all our bees to the food industry cannot be underestimated, with the red masons being essential on the pollination of fruit trees. However, the humble bumble bee alone contributes a staggering 600 million pounds to the economy of this country each year. They alone have the ability to pollinate certain crops such as tomatoes, blueberries, aubergines to mention just a few.

We fortunately appear to have a strong population of bumble bees encompassing a goodly number of different species. Red-tailed, White-tailed, Buff-tailed, Early, Tree and Carder. Taken as a whole these can be seen most times of the year. Queens can and do appear in January, this is the time they may need help with some sugar solution. Carders can be seen into November.

PROTECTION OF OUR BEES IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL

FLY AGARIC

Have we been visited by fairies this year? You may be excused for thinking so, for the first time in recent years Fly Agaric fungi has appeared beneath the trees leading down to Grebe pontoon.



Famous, enchanting and highly toxic. Fly agaric is the home of fairies and magical creatures and a lover of birch woodland, where it helps trees by transferring nutrients into their roots, but if eaten can cause hallucinations and psychotic reactions.

Fly agaric has a bright red cap with white spots and white gills. It can grow to 20cm across and 30cm tall and has a savoury smell.

Cap: scarlet or orange colour, sometimes with white wart-like spots.

Gills: white to cream located under the cap. Closely packed and not joined to the stem.

Stipe (stalk): white with a brittle texture. The base has a bulbous volva (cup-like base from which the stem emerges) with shaggy rings of scales around it and a large skirt.

Spores: white and oval.

The 'spots' are remnants of the white veil of tissue that at first enclosed the young mushroom, and are sometimes washed off by the rain.

Mythology and symbolism

Fly agaric has a long history of use in religious ceremonies, particularly in Asia. For over 4,000 years it was the ingredient in a sacred and hallucinogenic ritual drink called 'soma' in India and Iran; while the Siberian shamans would give it out as a gift in late December.

This toadstool has turned up in many fairy tale stories and features in the story of Alice in Wonderland when she is given some fly agaric to eat.

It was common on Christmas cards in Victorian and Edwardian times as a symbol of good luck and its colours are thought to have been the inspiration for Santa Claus's red and white suit.

CORMORANTS

These guys are always around but often cause interest.

Large and conspicuous the cormorant has an almost primitive appearance with its long neck making it appear reptilian. Regarded by some as black, sinister and greedy, they are supreme fishers which can bring the onto conflict with anglers and they have been persecuted in the past. Oddly their plumage is not waterproof but this has the advantage of allowing them to dive deep, as buoyancy is reduced. Thus, they are often seen standing in high places with wings held out to dry.

They can be seen on both coastal and inland waters. When on the water they swim low with their bill raised and often dive with a leap from the water's surface presumably to give themselves a more streamlined entry into the water. Under water they propel themselves with their feet.



Our young one here at the Marina (photo by Martin Jordan)

An adult bird and below in breeding plumage, showing the white spot on the thigh.



Cormorants are colonial nesters, using trees, rocky islets, or cliffs. The eggs are a chalky-blue colour. There is usually one brood a year. The young are fed through regurgitation. They typically have deep, ungainly bills, showing a greater resemblance to those of the pelicans, to which they are related, than is obvious in the adults.



2020's CHARITIES

This year the Nature Society has chosen to support **THE WOODLAND TRUST**. Why? Because trees are one of the best ways to fight a changing climate.

13% That's how low the UK's woodland cover is.

108 Ancient woods are threatened by HS2 development.

95% Of native ash trees will vanish from our landscape.

2.4% That's how little of the UK is covered by ancient woodland.

40% Of ancient woodlands planted with non-native trees.

They are creating woods for future generations. We all need woods and trees, but there are simply not enough of them in the UK.

Their woodland planting projects are making new habitats for wildlife, buffering existing woodland and creating new natural spaces for people to enjoy.

They are creating a Young People's Forest By empowering young people to get involved and be a part of our Young People's Forest at Mead in Derbyshire.

They offer free trees for schools and communities and want to make sure everybody in the UK has the chance to plant a tree. So are giving away hundreds of thousands of trees to schools and communities.

They work with landowners and farmers to utilise trees on their land. Trees can help regenerate soil, prevent flooding and provide shelter for livestock.

These are some of the reasons we want to support them.

Our other charity choice is **BRITISH TRUST FOR ORNITHOLOGY (BTO)**

Their purpose for birdlife is as follows:-

Making birdwatching count - We empower 60,000 bird-enthusiasts to gather vital data, develop their skills and be part of a vibrant community.

Championing impartial science - Answer the most pressing questions about birds, through our thorough and impartial scientific research.

Sharing our bird knowledge - Communicate knowledge and expertise to increase the value of birds and other wildlife for all.

There are many projects we can get involved with such as Bird nesting survey and Wetland birds. They also run

many courses. Do you fancy becoming a bird ringer? For instance.

The Nest Record Scheme gathers vital information on the breeding success of Britain's birds by asking volunteers to find and follow the progress of individual birds' nests.

Each year, hundreds of volunteers submit observations of nests they have monitored to the Nest Record Scheme. Their data are used to assess the impacts that changes in the environment, such as habitat loss and global warming, have on the number of fledglings that birds can rear. Anyone can be a nest recorder: some people watch a single nest box in their back garden while others find and monitor multiple nests of a whole range of species. As with all BTO surveys, the welfare of birds comes first and all nest recorders follow the NRS Code of Conduct, a protocol designed to ensure that monitoring a nest does not influence its outcome.

We know you will continue to support us and hope you approve of our choices.

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BIRD EVENTS



We had carefully planned a bird stall for November, the weather forecast was good so we got all setup just in time for the weather to decide to totally ignore the Met office.



Well what a surprise. However two of us stayed the course for a few hours before the cold and wet became too much. There were hardly no visitors and the lucky dip for children did not even get its cover off.

But as always to the rescue came our wonderful moorers who purchased much seed, some feeders and a few left us generous donations as well. THANK YOU ALL

We obviously have plenty of stock left so made the decision that having an indoor, evening sale event may be rather good. Add into the mix some free competitions, tea, coffee, cake and a leisurely chat and we have everything in place for an informal drop in café.

We have all heard of 'pop-up' this and that well this is our version, a 'Drop-in' instead. Please come along and see us. Have a cuppa, buy some seed or feeders or maybe you have some questions about birds you would like to chat about. Whatever your reason it is a chance for a little get together.

DROP IN BIRDS CAFE

The Nature Society are having a garden bird event on January 17th 18.00 – 20.00 Willow Tree

Reasonably priced seed, nesters, feeders and other accessories will be available for sale. Take the chance to pick up some bargains.

Bring all your questions about our birds and we can have a relaxing chat over a tea or coffee even a piece of cake.

 

Free to enter competitions.

Come along and enjoy



All totally informal.

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Let's all work together to make 2020 a good year for our wildlife. You can help by reporting what you see or hear, if in doubt about what it is then a photo will help enormously with identification.

A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL



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