

# NATURE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Now including Bee & Mammal news

December 2017 Issue 11



NATURE SOCIETY  
Making a real difference



## BACK IN THE WOODS

Nature society are again getting to grips with the woodland.



Jo and Keith busy flexing their muscles.

Lifting the canopy and thinning out some of the undergrowth will allow more light in. This is great for encouraging butterflies and other wildlife and will open up more areas to allow for native wildflower planting. The plants put in last spring did very well so hoping to get more next year. Please don't forget anyone is welcome to come along and lend a hand.

## BEE COCOON WORKSHOP

What a fun and fascinating evening cleaning the bee nesters.

Excellent results from the Red Mason Bee nests. Good take up by the females laying their eggs in the special tubes.

These tiny bees are amazing creatures.



It is important that we make sure the cocoons are clean of mites and other parasites as these will increase year on year and after a short period of time the hatching bees will be so laden down they cannot fly and will of course die of starvation.

As these bees hatch early they are of particular importance in the pollination of fruit trees and the loss of them would bring dire consequences to the fruit growing industry.

## WHAT DOES THE NATURE SOCIETY DO? (part 2)

Apart from planting, sowing, woodland work and arranging various events they also spend time from spring to autumn monitoring the small mammals at the marina. Live trapping, camera trapping and walks looking for animal signs. Bee walks reported to Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Workshops on mammal identification.



Here investigating owl pellets.



One of the stars of the live trapping.

There have been good results from the trapping and spotting enabling us to better understand the ecology of the marina. It has also thrown up some surprises in what is actually passing through.

Want to know more? Then please feel free to get involved. It is great fun and we learn lots. There is no need to be involved everything, just keep eyes open for announcements of events and come along whenever you want.



The picture on the left is of a full-sized adult.

She lays female eggs first, putting pollen and nectar into each cell before sealing it with mud. Then male eggs are laid. This is done as the males hatch first, the females two weeks later.

## SHOULD YOU FEED THE BIRDS?

Autumn is a tricky time for birds as food becomes scarcer and territorial tantrums are rife. There are new kids on the block and everyone wants a piece of the action on our bird feeders.

The melodious sounds we hear in the autumn might seem beautiful but they are often part of territorial displays. The robin on a spade seems like a wildlife gardener's best friend but he's actually choosing his perch to survey his territory while pumping up that red breast as a warning to other birds. Singing loud and long, especially during the dawn chorus, lets other birds know, "I'm still here and this patch is mine."

So, providing food for birds is one of the most helpful things we can do for our feathered friends, so long as we are thoughtful with our feeding. However, it is suggested that feeding birds during the colder months should be a priority.

Dawn and dusk are the key times of day to ensure there is food available, especially during these colder months.

### Feeders and bird tables

Putting out a good mixed feed on bird tables and in feeders will encourage most birds and provide them with essential energy.

It is also important to provide the birds with access to clean water to drink and bathe in and bird baths should be regularly cleaned.

Winter is the hardest time of year for all our wildlife to survive due to scarcity of food. Fat balls [seeds mixed with fat] will be popular additions to our feeding stations and are readily available to buy.

Some come in a nylon mesh bag but always remove these because birds get their claws caught in the mesh, causing injury and potentially trapping them.

### Making your own fat balls

As a cheaper option, you can make your own. Melt some lard and add twice as much dry ingredients as fat. You can include dried fruit, oats, seeds and dry mealworms into your fat feeder mix to add protein and carbohydrate. Put into a hollow coconut shell or plastic pot and allow to set. Make a hole in the base of the pot before filling and add a string to tie it up with.

**Never use polyunsaturated fat or butter as these can cling onto birds' feathers.**

**Only use these in the winter as warmer temperatures will melt the fat, causing it to go off.**

### Mealworms

Mealworms are an excellent source of protein.

Live mealworms are packed with protein and



moisture and are an excellent bird food, quickly attracting birds such as robins and thrushes.

Dried mealworms are very good, just soak in water before putting them out to provide birds with valuable moisture.

Avoid using discoloured worms which may carry diseases such as salmonella.

### Fruit

Fruits are another great bird food as they have a high water content and are energy-rich with all their simple sugars.

Thrushes, blackbirds and winter migrants such as waxwings will all enjoy left-over windfalls



Fruit such as apples, pears and plums can be halved and left on either the bird table or ground for the robins, blackbirds, and thrushes to

enjoy.

If you have any fruiting trees or bushes, by leaving some of the windfall fruit, you have just provided food for birds through the summer and autumn.

### Peanut

Being high in fats and protein, peanuts are a favourite with tits, finches, nuthatches and woodpeckers.

However, be sure to buy them from a reputable supplier to avoid harming the birds.

**Avoid salted peanuts as most birds cannot process the salt and may die from ingesting too much.**

Try not to leave out whole peanuts in the spring unless they are in a wire mesh feeder, as busy parents may feed them to their young, potentially choking them.

Crush them up and the problem is solved - it will also attract robins and dunnocks to feed on them too.

Push some peanuts into holes drilled into old logs or branches to set a challenge for nuthatches and woodpeckers.

### Sunflower seeds



Many birds are attracted to sunflower seeds as they are rich in protein and unsaturated fats.

Whole seeds provide

more natural foraging but be aware that it requires substantially more effort for the birds to remove the husks.

Putting out sunflower hearts or kibbled (crushed) seeds from late autumn through to spring when times are hardest saves them spending unnecessary effort.

### Coconut

Drain and then cut open a fresh coconut and hang it up for tits. Once the coconut has all been eaten the

remaining shell can make a great container for home-made fat balls or other seeds.

**Avoid putting out desiccated coconut as this can swell up in birds' stomachs making them very ill.**

### Niger seeds



Finches and siskins relish niger seeds. However, they are tiny and will fall straight through most feeders. Either mix them with other seeds in a plastic

feeder, stir them into your fat ball mix or put them on a tray or special niger seed feeder.

### Leftovers

Dried fruit, unsalted bacon rinds, cooked rice, leftover grated cheese and the remnants from the bottom of your cereal packet can all be left out for birds, so long as they are finely chopped.

**Avoid fat from cooked meats as this smears in a way which is not good for birds' feathers.**

**Biscuits should be crushed and soaked where possible to avoid choking birds and to add moisture.**

**Never give birds milk as they cannot digest it. Avoid cooked oats but uncooked are fine.**

### High and dry



All birds need a drink. Seed-eating birds have very dry meals and need to be able to wash them down.

As water sources

freeze over in the winter our birds have to spend even more energy searching for places to have a drink and give themselves a preen.

By making sure there is a bathing site you'll be encouraging birds to see your patch as a one-stop shop for their daily ablutions.

### Saving lives

Recent years have seen severe declines in our finch numbers as a result of the spread of a fatal infection known as trichomonosis.

Over the last six winters the number of greenfinches visiting feeders has halved.

Greenfinches are the hardest hit but other finches and house sparrows can also be affected.

By the time an ill bird can be caught it is almost invariably too late to help them, but you can prevent the spread of this disease and others to your garden through some simple hygiene care

Feeder food levels should be monitored carefully to avoid overfeeding and to ensure the surrounding areas are free from droppings and mouldy food.

Washing bird tables and feeders with 5% disinfectant solution and rearranging them regularly can also help to prevent bacteria and parasites from bedding in.

Always keep food in a dry and cool environment away from pets or other animals to avoid contamination.

### Bread to waterfowl?

Feeding bread as well as some other food items can cause a disease called ANGEL WING which causes deformities in the bird's wings making it difficult or impossible for them to fly.



Results of angel wing.

These types of food also cause algae, encourages vermin and changes the bacterial makeup of the water leading to many avian diseases.

So please ONLY feed our waterfowl with good things such as corn, peas, chopped lettuce, birdseed (any type or mix), duck pellets, rice (cooked or uncooked), mealworms.

**Please do not feed the waterfowl with bread, cakes, chips, sugary food etc.**

### DID YOU KNOW? BIRD FACTS.

In autumn months as the weather turns, all sorts of birds flood in from Europe.

There are starlings, siskins, bramblings, thrushes, robins, chaffinches, goldcrests, gulls and even pigeons passing through or stopping by for the winter.



Where is your blackbird really from?

It is all about food, water and shelter. And it is not just international. Blackbirds from the east of the UK will move across to the west and south-west in the winter, around the same time that the blackbirds from the continent arrive in the east. This is called chain migration.

## Outnumbered

There are secret cycles going on that we might not know about. Birds come and go between their favourite feeding grounds throughout the day.

Ringed studies have shown that at any one time we only see about 10% of our garden visitors.

So, if you regularly see about 10 blue tits, there are probably around 100 individuals actually using your feeders through the course of the day.

## Feeders 'out of favour'



Robins prefer bird tables to bird feeders

Feeder designs do not necessarily have birds in mind.

Given half the chance

most garden birds will take food away to eat it in the relative safety of a bush or hedgerow.

Feeders are often out in the open where we, and spying predators, can see them but it is much safer for the birds to feed under cover.

Some larger birds such as robins and blackbirds cannot land on or cling to birdfeeders, so you may see robins attempting to hover to reach the food.

## Pecking orders

Coal tits will be bullied off the feeders by blue tits and great tits, who in turn give way to nuthatches.

They will flee at the arrival of woodpeckers, and all of them will be spooked by the flapping of pigeons.

Within same-species flocks the sinister hierarchies continue.

Dominant pigeons force younger and weaker birds to the edge of the group where they become potential sparrowhawk fodder.

More gregarious birds such as house sparrows can have complex hierarchies where everyone knows their place.

## More than meets the eye

Birds have four types of colour receptors in their eyes giving them the ability to see light from outside of our visual ranges.

Much communication between birds is through visual displays.

The blue tit's cap or the robin's red breast are quite vivid to us but if we could see in the ultraviolet light range we'd see that these are brightly contrasting beacons.

We struggle to tell the difference between male and female garden birds, but to them the UV ranges of light provide a great deal more visual information.

The brightness of a great tit's yellow chest and the width of his black belly stripe indicate his worth as a strong

mate, whereas the UV reflecting pigmentation in a blackbird male's bill attracts the females.

We really have little idea of how complex the lives of our native wildlife can be.

SO PLEASE DO ALL YOU CAN TO FIND OUT MORE AND HELP US TO MAINTAIN A HEALTHY THRIVING WILDLIFE POPULATION AND A KNOWLEDGABLE COMMUNITY.

A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND A GREAT NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL

FROM THE NATURE SOCIETY AND ALL OUR WILDLIFE

