

NATURE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Now including Bee & Mammal news

June 2018 Issue 17



NATURE SOCIETY
Making a real difference



WHAT A DIFFERENCE A MONTH MAKES

At the end of last month so many trees and shrubs where hardly even in leaf, now the whole Marina is bursting with greenery, young birds, insects & butterflies. Such a lot to report on. Swifts, Swallows and House Martins are all back skimming across the water. However, many people find it hard to distinguish between them.

SWIFTS

The fast, high-flying Swift is more likely to be seen as a scythe-like (crescent) silhouette against the sky. They are often in parties, swooping, screaming and chasing one another all day long. The Swift is almost uniformly sooty-brown apart from a whitish throat. The beak is small but the gape is very wide and perfectly adapted for catching flying insects. They have a forked tail, but it is not as forked as the Swallow's. The bill and legs are black. They feed exclusively on spiders (carried on the wind) and insects caught on the wing. They fly at different altitudes for insects depending on the weather, or rather where the insects can be found. When it is warm, the insects are carried to higher altitudes by the thermals. When it is colder, the insects are nearer the ground.



Swallows, like Swifts, feed on the wing by catching insects in their large gapes. The long tail feathers give Swallows exceptional maneuverability, better than House Martins and Swifts.

HOUSE MARTINS

They have metallic blue-black upperparts, white underparts and rump. The wings are broad, short and pointed and the tail is forked, but lacks the streamers of the Swallow. Both the wings and tail are brownish-black. Their tiny legs and feet are covered in white feathers. They are most easily confused with Sand Martins, but these are smaller, brown and lack the white rump. In flight, House Martins appear black and white, with the white rump being a key characteristic. House Martins feed on the wing; the diet is insects, such as flies, beetles and aphids.

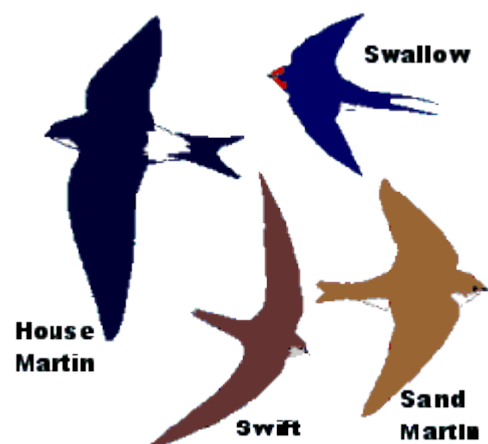


Swallows are larger than either Martin and have long tail streamers as well as the red throat. Swifts appear black and it is the slim tapering body and scythe-like wings that are key identification features.

SWALLOWS

Swallows have long wings and long tail streamers and are often found circling gracefully overhead or swooping low over water and ground. The sexes are very similar, having metallic royal blue upperparts and breast

band, cream-buff underparts and russet (red-brown) forehead, chin and throat. The tail has white markings along the inside edges of the fork. The bill and legs are black. The female's tail streamers are shorter than those of the male.



COCKCHAFERS (reported a few times)

Seen a few times lately and they can be quite scary and intimidating. Someone said it looks like an acorn, a very good description. So, what exactly are they and are they dangerous?



The Cockchafer is a member of the beetle family and goes by many different names i.e. Maybug, Billywitch, Doodlebug or

Spang beetle. They appear late April – Early May and can frequently be seen and heard flying into lit windows.

Common cockchafer males can easily be distinguished from the females by counting the number of 'leaves' on their remarkable antler-like antennae, males sport seven 'leaves' while females have only six. These leafy antennae can detect pheromones, enabling males to find females even in the dark!



Life begins as an egg laid around June - July, hatching into a white grub which lives underground. Grubs can spend 3 years underground (up to 5 years in colder climates) until they pupate. As grubs they munch on roots and tubers until they reach around 4cm. This is the point when they pupate, emerging as an adult beetle in the spring. They live as adults for a mere six weeks during which time the female can lay as many as 80 eggs.

Cockchafers were once highly abundant until pesticide use in the mid 20th Century almost obliterated them. Thankfully they have been making a come-back since the 1980's with the regulation of pesticides.

HORRIBLE HISTORY

These creatures were considered especially problematic to agriculture, so much so that adults were caught and killed to break the life cycle, in 1911, more than 20 million individuals were collected in 18 km² of forest. A less conventional approach was taken during 1320, when the cockchafers (as a species) were taken to court in Avignon where they were ordered to leave town and relocate to a specially designated area, or be outlawed. All cockchafers who failed to comply were collected and killed. Both adults and grubs have been considered a delicacy at times and are still eaten in some countries.

In ancient Greece, young boys used to catch the unwitting cockchafer, and tether it by tying a thread around its feet, amusing themselves by watch the poor chap fly aimlessly around in spirals. It's to be hoped we have moved on since then.

NOCTULE BAT (heard on 10th May)

The noctule bat is our largest bat. It has long, narrow wings, and the short fur lies close to the body. The back is reddish-brown and develops a glossy sheen during summer. The belly is a duller, lighter brown. The wing membranes, nose and broad triangular-shaped ears are blackish-brown.



The noctule bat favours open habitats and is found in woodland, large parks, wetlands, pasture land and large gardens. Small to medium-sized woodlands are preferred but they may forage up to 20 km from the woodland at night. They take to the wing at dusk and forage off and on throughout the night sometimes still on the wing at dawn. Taking prey as big as cockchafer's and Hawkmoths. Their flight is fast and high making rapid turns and diving frequently.

When roosting through the day, the noctule bat usually seeks out tree holes or even bat boxes attached to the tree trunks. From October to April, noctules hibernate in trees, bat boxes, buildings and rock fissures. They sometimes sit on top of each other to keep warm though, in particularly cold winters, up to half might freeze to death in inadequate hibernacula.

A single young is usually produced in June or early July; the young can fly at 4 weeks of age and reaches independence at around 7 weeks. Noctule bats are known to live to a maximum of 12 years of age.

Like all bats, the noctule is vulnerable to a number of threats, including the loss of roost sites; hollow trees are often felled if thought unsafe or 'untidy'. Habitat change and loss, affecting the availability of insect prey and causing the fragmentation of feeding habitat is a serious problem for many bats, furthermore pesticide use has devastating effects, by causing severe declines in insect prey abundance, and contaminating food with potentially fatal toxins.

At the marina we also have Daubentons bat which feeds very close to the water. Easily heard on a bat detector.



WILLOW SPIRAL

A small team of volunteers spent the evening of May 2nd learning how to weave and look after the willow spiral. Alastair kindly gave of his time to do the teaching.



Paying close attention to instruction.



Of course, no work could be done without the help of Fraser.



If you have not seen the Willow spiral please pay it a visit. It is located in the lake field under the bridge.



You will find an information board explaining the story of the spiral and the history behind it.

It is a lovely spot and reading some of the flags attached can be quite moving.

Many thanks go to Alistair. We are very blessed here with the multiple skills of our lovely moorers and lodge owners. Many of whom are more than happy to pass on their skills.



Thank you to Gill Welch for supplying the photo's.

COTTAGE GARDEN

Of course, no newsletter would be complete without an update of our cottage garden. We are still surprised at the number of people who have not yet found it. If that is you, then just take a look behind FB2. The garden was created especially for bees, butterflies, moths and other insects. It has been a wonderful success and does indeed attract a world of wildlife. The idea was first devised in May 2016.

August of that year saw the foundation of the beds going in swiftly followed by the planting.



By October the picket fencing and an explanatory sign were in place. Now over to the plants to develop the garden and boy did they?

Incredibly this was taken in June 2017



May 2018, the garden continues to develop with different plants and soft fruit bushes.

The is also a herb bed which attracts all kinds of bees to its lovely flowers. A mini pretend composter, gooseberry bushes and current bushes. These are particularly important for the early emerging bees. All the plants were especially chosen to give a long flowering period.

The garden is also the main home of the Red Mason bee nesters which already this year are getting lots of interest with many of the nests already filled. Amusingly last week a Red mason was spotted going into the nest, coming out again and then going straight back in but backwards. She had obviously finished one cell and reversed back in to lay an egg. If you sit and watch for just a few minutes it is amazing what you see.



Of course, like many projects we have undertaken none of it would have been possible without the full support of the Marina and the hard workers of the Nature Society. They are out there in all weathers at all times of the year, nothing fazes them.



January 2018, a cold day but work needed doing.

A really big thank you to everyone for making an initial idea such a wonderful success.



LATEST NEWS

Cockchafer (Maybugs) have been reported a few times.
09.05.18

Three Oystercatchers flying low around the Marina.
Subsequently seen on the spoil heap in the field. 10.05.18

Four Common Terns calling and flying across the water. 10.05.18

Noctule bat heard on bat detector from Grebe. 10.05.18

Young Field Vole rescued from the path by Finch. Looked stunned but soon picked up when held in the hand. Possibly been played with by a cat. Was taken to the woods and released.
11.05.18

Three red Kites photographed close over the Marina.

First Damselfly spotted (Red)
15.05.18

Six new cygnets out and about.
16.05.18

Single baby Coot seen alongside parents. 20.05.18

Holly Blue butterfly spotted alongside footpath from FB1 – FB2 21.05.18

A Hedgehog has been seen twice around the cottage garden area.
Or maybe hedgehogs!