



The Cam Valley Wildlife Group

Newsletter

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On a morning's walk

We do a walk most weekday mornings from our house along the Greenway to Radstock and back home. Over the past two years or so we have seen a wide variety of birds. In our garden we have a resident population of sparrows (10-20), goldfinches (up to 20), Blue tits, Great tits, Coal tits, robins, Collared doves, chaffinches and the odd starling.

During the Spring/Summer period we hear Song thrushes, wrens, robins, blackcaps, blackbirds, chiffchaffs, and occasionally a buzzard high above the fields. Along the River Somer we have seen dippers by the council depot at Radstock Road and then in Radstock Town Centre we have a resident group of dippers (2-4) and again a kingfisher on occasions. By the bridge near Riverside Cottages we have sometimes noticed a Little egret, and have seen five on one occasion. We have also been visited by a Grey heron now and again.

As you can see from the above we have a thriving bird population in and around Radstock Centre and along the valuable wildlife corridor that is the Norton Radstock Greenway. We have also seen an otter here but not for a few years now. We would recommend a walk along this stretch of river at any time of the year as there is always something to hear or see to brighten up your day.

David and Jacky Chalk

AGM report and CVWG round up for 2017

The AGM was well-attended this year and followed by more of Diana's excellent video and slide shows, covering local wildlife and also fauna much further north in Scandinavia, where she concentrated on filming beavers.

It was a successful year for the Events Team, and the excellent programme of outings organised by Judy and botany walks organised by Helena were well attended.

The Botany project run by Helena has seen some good records this year and the Barn owl project continues to do well. 2017 was the third best year for nesting pairs and the highest number of chicks were reported. Goosard Reserve continues to provide a haven for local wildlife.

A big thank-you was extended to André (Barn Owls and Insurance), Barb (Newsletter) Carol (Treasurer), Deborah (Website) Diana (Membership Secretary), Gary and Helena (Botany

project and walks), Judy (Events and hosting talks), Phil (Member communications), Roger (Goosard), Liz (Newsletter Editor) Telva (Facebook page) and all the volunteers who help with the projects and events. Phil was thanked for all his work on the Management Team, which he has now stepped down from.

There were some group announcements including an appeal for members to come forward with offers of space to store some of our tools and a request for suggestions for summer outings.

Membership has declined a little, but we are still attracting new members each year, which is good. Group finances are holding steady. We had a couple of unusual payments this year, and have received a generous donation from the High Littleton Beavers. Many thanks go to them.

A Management Team of four people, Deborah, Diana, Carol and Judy, was proposed and accepted. The newly-elected Management Committee said that they were happier with being called a Coordinating Team rather than the more formal "Management Committee", and that this reflected better what they do. There were also some minor adjustments to the Constitution to consider, so that it would reflect more accurately our current way of working and provide greater flexibility. The agreed changes were:

- (a) Amending the name of the former Management Committee to Coordinating Team;
- (b) Committing the Coordinating Team to meetings only "as needed", with the exception of controversial decisions, which would have to go to a meeting to be decided;
- (c) Relieving any Committee Coordinators of committees (which can be set up by the Coordination Group) of the requirement to provide a summary at the AGM;
- (d) Any necessary minor adjustments to wording required to make the constitution 'make sense' in the light of the three changes.

Please send any suggestions for outings to Judy (details on the Events programme). If you can store tools, please contact the Coordinating Team via the website contacts page, direct at camvalleywildlife@gmail.com, or by telephoning Deborah on 01761 435563.

Deborah Porter

Go with the flow!

The Bristol Avon River Trust recently held a meeting in the Town Hall, Midsomer Norton, which was basically a recruiting drive for potential volunteers and observers to help with improving and monitoring all the tributaries of the Bristol Avon which, even in these more enlightened times receives numerous pollutants. (There was a time when all the sewage of Bath was piped directly into the river – pong! And a punishment was ducking people into the filth).

More directly the call was made for help with the new Wellow Brook walk in Midsomer

Norton and the Wellow Brook itself, presumably in and around Wellow. Cam Brook does get a mention from time to time.

Fergus Callander

Solitary bees you can identify with confidence – Part 1

This is the first of a series of articles on solitary bees/mining bees and some cuckoo bees that are identifiable in the field (usually with some practice), or from a good image. Before getting down to the details, it may be useful to say exactly what distinguishes solitary bees from eusocial bees and cuckoo bees. There are varying degrees of social behaviour in eusocial bees, ranging from the highly developed form exhibited by honeybees, where the queen leaves all the foraging, nest building, defence and brood care to her virgin workers, through the social bumblebees in which both queens and workers do these things, to some *Halictus* and *Lassioglossum*, where there are multiple queens and only a relatively small difference in size between queens and workers. Female solitary bees make cells for their eggs in their chosen nest, which they usually create by digging out material to make tunnels or clearing out an old nest. Sometimes they will even clear an occupied nest, grubs and all. Solitary bees fall mainly into two broad groups, ground nesters and aerial (above ground) nesters, plus three snail-shell nesters. Nests can be in flat, sloping or vertical ground, in walls, wood or crevices, and in the dead stems of a variety of plants, depending on the behaviour of the species. Nests can be quite dispersed or can be communal, some species even sharing nest entrances. Each female, however, has her own nest within the colony. They provision each cell with pollen, and some species add nectar. They lay one egg on or near it. Often/usually they make cells in series, one in front of the other with females at the back and males in front, finishing off with empty cells to help foil parasites.

Spring bees of the genus *Andrena*

The *Andrena* species are mining bees. They make their nests in the ground and some of them are amongst the first solitary bees to emerge in spring. There is a high degree of sexual dimorphism in this genus. Males are more often difficult to distinguish to species level, but females can be more distinctive. The size of bees varies between and within species, depending on conditions and available resources. The large/medium large female *Andrena* species that can be identified in the field (with a bit of practice!), or from a good photograph, are set out in the table below. Species which you are unlikely to find in our area have been excluded. The table also gives flight times and a size guide that relates to a familiar insect, the honey bee.

<u>Species (female) and usual flight time</u>	<u>Usual size c.f. honey bee</u>
<i>Andrena cineraria</i> (Mar-Jun)	About the same
<i>Andrena clarkella</i> (late Feb-May)	Larger
<i>Andrena flavipes</i> (Mar-Jun & mid-Jun-Sept)	Smaller
<i>Andrena fulva</i> (late Mar-mid-Jun)	About the same
<i>Andrena haemorrhhoa</i> (late Mar-Jul)	A little smaller
<i>Andrena scotica</i> (<i>carantonica</i>) (mid-Mar-Jul)	About the same

All these species can be identified through a combination of their hairiness, their distinctive wing venation and careful observation, plus they have a distinctive feature on the face that is not present in other genera, the facial fovea. They have more extensive pollen-collecting hairs than most other bees, with plenty of hair on the hind legs and pollen-collecting 'baskets' made of long hairs on their sides. The facial fovea are broad strips of very short hair giving a velvety appearance that lie alongside the inner margins of the compound eyes (you should be able to see this on a good photograph of the face, or through a hand lens with the bee in a glass tube – but you may want to cool it down first!).

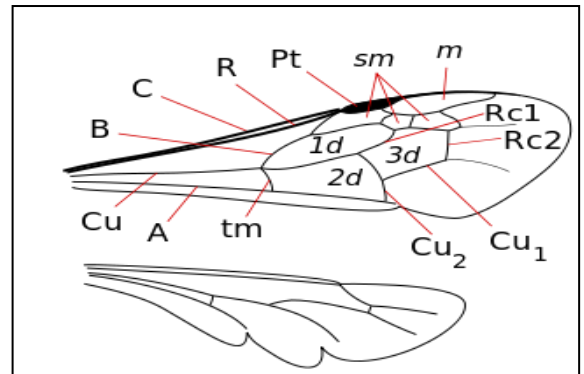


Diagram of *Andrena* wing venation
courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Here are some brief descriptions of the six species. It is worth noting that 'red' hair is usually a foxy-red at best, hair colours fade as the season progresses, hairs become abraded and rubbed off with age, and the colours of some individual bees just start off brighter or bolder than others. Steven Falk, the well-respected entomologist and author of the excellent Field Guide to the Bees of Great Britain and Ireland, provides a very good internet resource for helping with identification of *Andrena* species in his Apoidea collection at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/63075200@N07/collections/72157634554216556/>

Andrena cineraria, the Ashy mining bee

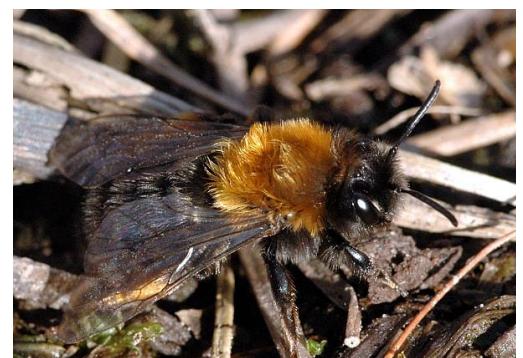
The female Ashy mining bee has a hairy thorax with bands of light grey and black hair forming stripes (grey at front and rear), a shiny black/blue-black abdomen tipped with black hairs, a white-haired face and mainly black-haired legs. The hind legs are almost entirely black-haired. It is about the size of a honey bee and lives in aggregations of individual nests in the ground, usually in a warm place such as a south-facing slope with short turf or bare ground, including tracks and lawns. It is sometimes found in gardens and urban 'greenspaces' and its colonies can be large. It averages at roughly honey-bee sized. [Note: the males are similar, but smaller, slimmer, with extensive white hair on the sides and front part of the abdomen and with white hairs on the femur of each leg.]



Cineraria female

Andrena clarkella, Clarke's mining bee

The female Clarke's mining bee is a striking very furry bee not easily confused with other species (except when rather small for its type). It averages larger than a honey bee in size, with black pile on the abdomen and reddish-brown hair on the top of the thorax, although some females have some brown hairs on the top front half of the abdomen. Its hind tibiae are orange, but this is often obscured by its similarly



Andrena clarkella

coloured pollen brushes and by pollen, which it takes almost exclusively from Goat-willow and Grey Willow. It is usually seen in its largest numbers when the pussy-willow blossoms are peaking in March and April. It can form large nesting aggregations on tracks, hedge banks, ground disturbed by rabbits, vertical faces and in some woodland settings, especially on south-facing ground.

Andrena flavipes, Yellow-legged mining bee

The female Yellow-legged mining bee has not got yellow legs! It has a brownish pile on the top of the thorax, substantial orange pollen brushes on its hind legs and quite a bit of orange-buff to buff hair on the upper surfaces of the legs in general as well as on its undersides, sides and face. The hairs bleach as the season progresses and it can give the impression of a bee with yellow legs. It has very obvious bands of buff-white hairs occupying the hind margins of its second to fourth abdominal segments with short black pile between them, making the abdomen look stripy. Its nesting aggregations can be large. It is a medium-sized bee, so smaller than a honey bee, and can be confused with one other bee, but that bee is very rare and confined to south-east England. It uses a variety of flower-rich habitats including gardens and 'greenspace'.



Andrena flavipes

Andrena fulva, Tawny mining bee

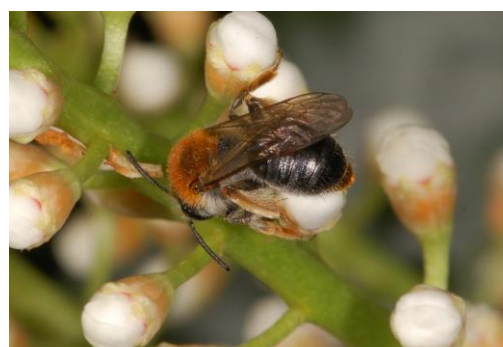
The female Tawny mining bee is absolutely unmistakable, and little like its name suggests. It sports a magnificent dense orange pile on its abdomen and a redder pile on the top of its thorax, which contrast with the black integument and completely black-haired head and legs. It is usually roughly the size of a honey bee and creates a good volcano-style mound of soil where it digs its nest and can be found in many places including parks and gardens. The male is the rather smaller dull, tawny-haired member of the pair but has wonderful jaws, being one of several species of bee with very long jaws with a projection at the base.



Fulva female

Andrena haemorrhoa, Orange-tailed mining bee

As the name suggests, the female Orange-tailed mining bee has a distinctly orange tail. The female bee averages a bit smaller than a honey bee on average and is a bee of pleasing contrasts that looks really attractive. It has a neat red pile on the top of the thorax, and a dull slate-black abdomen that is very sparsely haired on top and has bright orange hairs on the tip. It has yellow hind tibiae well-endowed with pale pollen brushes and



Andrena haemorrhoa

its facial fovea and facial hair are also pale to whitish. It is not fussy about habitat, uses a wide variety of plants and is one of the more frequent mining bees in urban environments and intensively farmed landscapes.

Andrena scotica, Chocolate mining bee

This honeybee-sized female bee is rather dull, or perhaps it would be better to say it has a certain consistency, which is more than can be said about its name.

Having been changed from *scotica* to *carantonica*, it is being changed back again! Although it can be confused with some other species, it is very unlikely that we will encounter those in our neck of the woods. It is a quite hairy black bee with often pretty scruffy-looking pale chocolate-coloured bands of hair on its abdomen, neater darker chocolatey-orange hairs on the top of the thorax and face, much chocolatey hair on



Andrena carantonica female

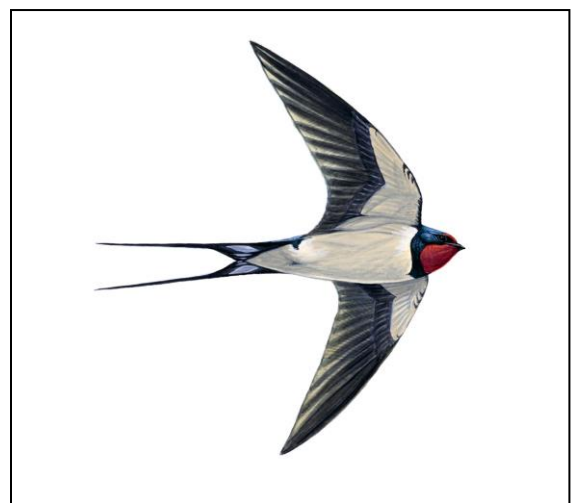
its body and black-and-buff haired legs. When it is freshly emerged, it has a brown-haired abdomen and a redder-brown thorax. The bee in general gives a chocolatey appearance. There are some other similar species that it might be confused with, but they are either unlikely here or have red on the sides of the abdomen. As it ages, its hairs fade and shed, so it is best identified early on in the season. Like the Orange-tailed mining bee, it likes blossom-rich habitats and is one of the more frequent mining bees in gardens and intensively farmed landscapes.

Deborah Porter

A little work yields swift rewards for bird lovers

From a letter to the Daily Telegraph: Rob Cowen's article on swifts could not fail to strike a chord with anyone who read it. Sadly, he is right to point out the threat that climate change poses to these fantastic birds. There is an additional reason for the current alarming decline – the drastic reduction in nesting sites.

Modern buildings and refurbished buildings do not have the gaps between slate and fascia board in which swifts nest, and old buildings are being replaced. Largely because of this trend, our swift population has declined by a third between 1995 and 2001.



For some small outlay and with little trouble, many of us are in a position to provide homes for swifts. Unlike some species, these birds make little mess, and the rewards are outweighed by the effort involved.

Avon Bird Report 2016

The 2016 edition of the Avon Bird Report has been published recently. It is available from the editor:

Harvey Rose
Arncliffe,
Coast Road,
Walton Bay,
Clevedon BS21 7FW.

It costs £9.50 including postage and cheques should be made to AOG.



Next Newsletter: The copy date for the next Newsletter is **15th March 2018**.

This Newsletter is published four times a year by Cam Valley Wildlife Group, an independent, volunteer-run wildlife group, covering Midsomer Norton, Radstock and surrounding villages.

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<https://cvwg.org.uk>