



The Cam Valley Wildlife Group Newsletter

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From the editor...

Due to the country-wide shutdown, though fortunately not for the country wildlife, the paper version of the newsletter will not be printed and mailed this month. If you are in receipt of the electronic version perhaps you may like to forward it to any friends who might be expecting the newsletter in the post.

Liz Brimmell

A Mendip beekeeper – a second season's view

Having started the hobby of beekeeping halfway through 2018, last year was my first full season as an 'apiarist' so I thought I would share my highs and lows with the readership of the Cam Valley Wildlife Group.

Early spring is a critical time for the bees, as they risk starving to death if they cannot find enough forage when the weather is bad for an extended period, and they will have depleted most of their stores over the cold winter months. Luckily for me, my single colony (previously christened 'Alpha'; my 'Beta' colony having perished at the end of last summer) had survived, and I helped it along by feeding my girls with fondant at my first proper inspection in mid-March. As it turned out at my next inspection a week later they had hardly touched it, as there were ample spring flowers for them to feed on.

Last year the weather was better in March than it is now, so I was able to start my weekly inspections as the temperature was above 10°C; any lower than this and the bees will be in their 'winter-cluster' for warmth – you really don't want to disturb them in this state! The bees started to go from strength to strength, with their numbers increasing steadily, drones appearing and the workers drawing out lots of lovely white comb. I was now looking forward to a good 2019 with a view to splitting my colony and establishing a second (most beekeepers like to maintain at least two hives for contingency and you often need a second for various manipulation purposes).



The hives

Alas my period of bliss was not to last... One of the reasons we undertake weekly inspections is to look for signs that a colony is about to swarm – the natural process that bees undertake to reproduce their colonies. If spotted in time, you can take preventive measures to split the colony and set up a second hive so that you don't lose most of your bees with the swarm and of course the honey that they will take away with them).



'Tanith'

However back to my point. I am a family man and that means I have other commitments outside of tending to my bees' needs; I undertook a fortnightly holiday and so unfortunately missed a few inspections. Upon my return in May, I discovered that my colony had swarmed and my 'Julie' was gone forever (as evidenced by several capped and un-capped queen cells present on the frames). That in itself I was okay with (the bees are just following their nature of course!), but having left the hive undisturbed for three weeks (to allow the new virgin queen to fly, mate, return and start laying), I was upset to see that this process had failed and that a new colony did not appear to be establishing itself. The agony...

Fortunately for me, a very kind, generous and helpful colleague at my bee club was able to loan me one of his colonies so that I could start building mine back up again from scratch (the colony I named 'Mark', the queen I named 'Blossom'). So at least I could continue with my hobby for the remainder of the season.

A few weeks after I had convinced myself that my Alpha colony had failed (nearly a full six weeks after the swarm) I saw that the bees were now bringing in pollen - a sure sign you have young. Upon the subsequent inspection, I saw eggs and many big, fat, juicy, lovely grubs - proof indeed that I now had a viable queen in residence (duly named 'Tanith'). For the first time in my bee-keeping career I now had two working colonies at the same time and could legitimately call myself an 'apiarist'! ...The ecstasy!



2019 Honey Harvest

The rest of the season went swimmingly with my undertaking a 'Bailey' method procedure to get Blossom (and her daughters) out of the borrowed hive and into my own; harvesting a modest 12kg of honey from Tanith's hive alone. Finally, having treated them for *varroa* (a parasitic mite that can kill off a colony if left unchecked) and given them a good feed of syrup in September and early October, I left them undisturbed throughout the winter.

I am very happy to announce that at the time of writing this article (mid-late March) both of my colonies have survived (so far!) and I am now looking forward to the new bee-keeping season - roll on 2020!

Dr Russ Stokes

Red alert

Researchers at Queen's University, Belfast, have concluded that the Grey squirrel, being a Yankee intruder, has no instinctive fear when a Pine Marten appears so promptly gets zapped, whereas the Red Squirrel departs the scene as fast as its little legs can carry it!

Fergus Callander

The Cam Valley Glow Worm Watch 2020

I had not had any new reports of glow worms in the Cam Valley area since 2015 until last year when some were seen in Coleford. This makes three sites now where they have been seen in the Cam Valley (membership rather than geological) area. The two photos below show one of the glow worms taken both with and without flash!

Are there any other glow worm sites to be discovered? Would you be willing to spend a few evenings looking in your neighbourhood to see if there are any more colonies within Cam Valley?

The best period to look for them is during the last two weeks of July and the first two weeks of August (although they may be around from June to September) and the best time is in the hour and a half after dusk (9:45 to 11:15). Remember that the glow is rarely visible if you use a torch, presumably because of the loss of the dark adaptation of the human eye.

If you are able to spot any glow worm please let me know when (time and date), where (grid reference if possible) and site type (e.g. south facing hedge) so that I can collate the results to send to Peter Bright at Westbury-sub-Mendip. My email address is p.gait@tiscali.co.uk. It would also be useful to know if you have looked but not found any.



Phil Gait

One good turn deserves another

At Kilcoole beach, County Wicklow in Ireland, there is a small stretch of pebbly east-facing shore much favoured by the Little Tern in the spring when returning back from migration to West Africa. This bird lays eggs among the pebbles that they resemble so relying on camouflage.

Notices have been erected and wardens are present twenty four hours a day. Nevertheless there are some stropo dog owners that don't seem to understand the advice given or choose to ignore it, which is to keep 'doggy' on the lead. Consequently eggs get smashed.

However the most feared predator is the Red Fox, which on one occasion burrowed beneath the electric fence and snapped up thirty eggs and thirty chicks. The next night at 2.00am the reynard came back for a second helping but a reception squad awaited him, so he was shot dead.

Fergus Callander

Winter 2019 AGM and EGM reports

In the last newsletter we announced that the AGM business would be concluded at an EGM, which was held before the Re-wilding talk on 19th February.

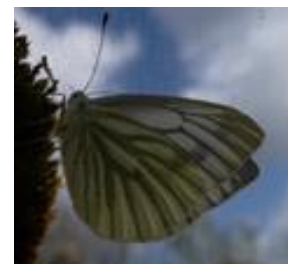
At the AGM on 4th December 2019, Diana Walker presented a round-up of the Cam Valley Wildlife Group year, complemented by a slide show showing images from the botany walks throughout the year. Diana also reported as Membership Secretary that we had 222 members in 118 households, of which 99 households were fully paid up. The group's accounts were circulated by Carol Powley. Diana issued an appeal for people to help Gary with Barn Owl box checks. It was noted that there was no volunteer at that point to take over the Treasurer's role from Carol.

The appointment of Jim Crouch as Treasurer was duly announced at the EGM on 19th February. The other business of the EGM was to propose the Co-ordinating Team of Deborah Porter, Diana Walker and Judy Hampshire for 2019/20 and take a vote. The proposed team was approved and that concluded the business of the EGM.

Deborah Porter

Spring Pierid butterflies

Our resident Pieridae, the 'Whites and Yellows' family, are mainly known to emerge in April, but the Wood White (which you will not see around these parts) emerges in May. The earliest to emerge is the Brimstone, usually followed a week later by Green-veined and Small Whites, then the Orange-tip and finally the Large White. Having said that, changes in the climate are affecting the flight times of many of our butterflies and moths! The Brimstone and Orange-tip only have one brood per year, but the Large, Small and Green-veined Whites also have a summer brood. Spring and summer broods have more or less pronounced markings depending on species and sex. Although some of these butterflies are instantly recognisable, such as the male of the aptly-named Orange-tip and the lemon-yellow male Brimstone, others can be somewhat tricky unless you are pretty close up or using binoculars.



*Green-veined by
Deborah Porter*

The Large and Small White have a known fondness for cultivated crucifers, the brassicas, but the caterpillars of the other species use mainly wild plants. These are wild crucifers for Orange-tips and Green-veined Whites, the Buckthorns in the case of the Brimstone, and vetches and trefoils for Wood Whites. One further white can be found in the UK, the Clouded Yellow, which is a summer migrant that does not usually appear until mid-May. It occasionally over-winters in the south of England, leading to sightings as early as March in the South and early April in the South-West. The food plants of the Clouded Yellow are clover, lucerne and trefoils, so it is primarily found on cliff tops, on flowering downland and in cultivated clover fields.



*Female Large White
by Phil Hall*

Large Whites (photo of male to right by Phil Hall) can often be identified by their size and general appearance, but size is not always a good guide. They can be distinguished from Small Whites by

the black wing-tip markings that extend a long way down the outer edge of the forewing, but are less extensive on the Small White, as can be seen on the female Small White below). A female Brimstone flying by can appear at a glance to be a large white butterfly, but a more intent look reveals its colour as a pale green. Its wings are also differently shaped from those of the Large White.



Females of Large, Small and Green-veined Whites and female Orange-tips can be confused more easily if seen in flight or from above, but they can be told apart once you know what to look for, especially if the butterfly is at rest or feeding. The mottled underside of the female Orange-tip is a very good feature and the mottling shows through when you look from above. The Small White has unbroken grey or black wing tips above, whereas the Green-veined White's dark tip markings are broken. The Green-veined white has shading round veins on both the upper and under-sides, which are particularly obvious on the underside (see photo above).



By Deborah Porter

Deborah Porter

A special thank you to Maggie Macmillan who is working full time for the NHS for proofreading this edition.

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Next Newsletter: The copy date for the next Newsletter is **15th June 2020.**

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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