



The Cam Valley Wildlife Group Newsletter

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Jersey Tiger moth

Along with the usual white butterflies and Peacocks we spotted this Jersey Tiger moth on the Buddleia in mid-August. The distribution of this moth has been spreading north from well-established colonies in the Channel Islands - hence the name. It is now seen regularly along the South coast and has spread inland as far as London. It breeds here, but numbers may be boosted by migrants from mainland Europe.

In the South West, the moth is regularly reported in Cornwall, Devon and more recently in Somerset, but our area is on the northern limit of its current range.



Frank Loughran

Sightings on CVWG website

It is a pity there are not more records reported to the sightings section of the CVWG website. We are all interested in the local wildlife, so come on tell us what you are seeing! It could be your first or last sighting of the year of a species or something that you rarely see. But it does not need to be anything special – it could be just what you see when you look out of the window in the morning, walk around your garden or on your way to the shops.

Reports of what is being spotted locally are even more important during this pandemic when our opportunities for more organised surveys and outings are so restricted.

Frank Loughran

Members' photos

Butterflies and grasshoppers have long been associated in the public mind with sunny summer days, and with good reason. Maggie Edwards has captured two images, one a female Common Blue butterfly and the other a Meadow grasshopper, most likely a male.





Common Blue butterfly – Maggie Edwards

Maggie's butterfly has blue on its wings near the body and the forewings have strong white markings around the dark spot beyond orange crescent-like spots called *lunules*. The amount of blue dusting that the females have on their predominantly brown upper wings is very variable and usually restricted to the basal half, and it is said that the bluest females tend to have a northern and western distribution. Some Common Blue females in Ireland are very blue indeed and have particularly bright orange markings. The amount of white edging on the hindwing spots is also variable. The Brown Argus also has orange *lunules* on brown wings, and they are bright and bold unless the butterfly is old and worn. That species has no blue scales and barely any white edging to the spots. There is sometimes a blue sheen at certain angles but not blue scales.

Often we hear grasshoppers without seeing them, except as they hop or fly away from us as we walk through grass. Looking at bodily structures is essential to grasshopper identification by sight. Grasshoppers have quite short antennae unlike the long thread-like antennae of crickets. Grasshoppers also have blunt ends to their abdomens.

If you get sight of a Meadow grasshopper it might be pretty green, as many of them are... but you may not be able to rely on the colour for identification – some of them are very pink! The *pronotal keels* on the thorax between the head and the wings are gently incurved – a feature that Maggie's photo shows well - and there is a slight bulge near the front of the wing, called the *costal bulge*. The females usually have short wings that do not allow them to fly, but sometimes have long wings like the males.



Meadow grasshopper – Maggie Edwards

You will often hear this grasshopper singing on sunny days alongside the Field grasshopper. Grasshoppers rub a row of tiny pegs on the inside of the femur (the more chunky section of the leg) on a raised vein near the edge of the forewing to sing (stridulate). The Meadow grasshopper's usual song lasts from 1 to 3 seconds and consists of about 5 'notes' in succession – I like to think of it as chirping its name in five syllables 'Mea-dow-grass-hopp-er', because it helps me remember which call is which. The Field grasshopper's normal song is a couple of chirps in one second, then a gap, then another couple of chirps and so on until it has been singing for between 8 and 20 seconds, but just to confuse matters they sometimes call back and forwards at one another! The typical male song is not all you will hear from grasshoppers, though, so beware too much reliance

on apps that only present you with the one song. The male also has a more complicated courtship song that he uses when a female is close and the females sing as well, by way of reply. Their song is quieter because the structures they use to stridulate are less evolved than the males.

If you want to get more familiar with grasshoppers, a useful book is 'A photographic Guide to the Grasshoppers & Crickets of Britain and Ireland' by Martin Evans and Roger Edmondson, which gives good quality information including where and how to find various species and actual size drawings. A useful app is simply called 'Grasshopper' and includes diagrams, photographs and other information, including recordings of the male song.

Diana had to do some quick footwork to grab her camera in time to take a photo of a Sparrowhawk in her garden. This resident bird can be seen at any time of year and, although essentially a woodland bird, can be found hunting in gardens and the wider countryside. The males are smaller than the females and almost exclusively eat birds of up to 100 grams (about the weight of a blackbird); females will tackle birds of up to 500 grams such as Woodpigeons. Some Sparrowhawks will take bats.



Sparrowhawk – Diana Walker

Gary Kingman has sent in photographs taken on the Writhlington pithead area of two declining species of bird, the Bullfinch and the Yellowhammer.



Bullfinch



Yellowhammer

Bullfinches, on the amber list, are seed, bud and shoot eaters but also feed invertebrates to their nestlings. The voice of the Bullfinch is not big and bold like the male's magnificent plumage, which Gary's photo shows well, but is quiet and unassuming. The Bullfinch is generally a bird of forest, woodland and farmland. In the current British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) report it is flagged up as one of nine species showing 'statistically significant long-term declines of between 25% and 50%'.

According to the BTO's Garden Birdwatch, the Bullfinch is typically seen in fewer than 10% of gardens in any week, preferring rural gardens connected to small woodlands.

The Yellowhammer is a farmland bird on the Red list that belongs to the Bunting family. It eats seeds, especially cereal grain, and feeds its young on invertebrates in summer. Its once-familiar song, popularised by Enid Blyton as 'a little-bit-of-bread-and-no-cheese', has become far less of a countryside feature as breeding habitat and good winter food sources have become increasingly scarce. In the current BTO report it is flagged up as one of 28 species for which their 'best long-term trends show statistically significant population declines of greater than 50% over periods of 32–50 years'.

I was lucky enough to snap five Common lizards together warming themselves on slate in my garden in early September. As you can see in the photo, they were wise to my approach and several of them quickly slipped away. Common Lizards are *viviparous*, giving birth to their young in a clear membrane that the baby lizard quickly breaks out of. This usually happens in July but lizards will give birth from late June to early September. Freshly born young lizards are always dark brown, almost black, and gradually change over time. Juveniles have dark blotches with white centres, especially on their sides.



Five lizards – Deborah Porter



Bee - Maggie Edwards

The adults vary in colour, with some individuals predominantly sandy and some being dark or even quite green, but not like the bright green sported by male Sand lizards in spring. Males tend to have a flecked pattern on their backs and females to have stripes, and the cream, yellow or orange belly is brighter in the male. Common Lizard is a protected species and has a diet of both soft and hard-bodied invertebrates including crickets, grasshoppers, spiders, bugs and flies. The main threats are reduction of the structural diversity of habitat, the use of chemicals and predation by invasive introduced species (e.g. pheasants and domestic cats).

With thanks to Maggie, Diana and Gary.

Please send photos for the next members' photos article to Phil Gait at p.gait@tiscali.co.uk or to camvalleywildlife@gmail.com, making sure to give permission to use any personal details you are happy with being printed (e.g. name)

Deborah Porter

A wandering minstrel's choice

As I perform as your minstrel from time to time I am alert to discovering song tunes appropriate to the activities of my comrades in the countryside such as:

The fly on my turnips

The Rowan tree

The last rose of summer

The blackbird and the thrush

Sing out from every bush

And you may have heard this next one had you been a 'folksy' in the eighties – here it is in full: 'What's the Life of a Man', learned by Fergus Callander, Cheddar Folk Club member.

Fergus Callander

What's the Life of a Man

Chorus:

**What's the life of a man any more than a leaf
A man has his seasons so why should he grieve
All through this life we appear fine and gay
Like a leaf we must wither and soon fade away**

As I was walking one morning with ease
A-viewing the leaves as they fell from the trees
All in full motion appearing to be
The leaves that are withered they fall from the tree

If you had seen those leaves a few days ago
How beautiful and bright they did seem to grow
A frost came upon them and withered them all
And storm came upon them and down they did fall.

If you look in the churchyard there you will see
Those that have withered like a leaf on a tree
With age and afflictions upon us do call
Like a leaf we must wither and down we will fall

Fergus Callander



...And more members' photos



Very young toad – Phil Gait



Very old toad – Phil Gait



Holly for Christmas – Phil Gait



Moth – Phil Gait



Wild flower garden, perfect for bees – Phil Gait

The Diary of a Mendip bee keeper in the year of Covid-19

I began 2020 looking forward to a full and hopefully fruitful season of bee keeping. Both of my colonies had survived the winter and were in full vigour. The previous summer my girls had given me a good crop of honey so I was hoping for the same this year. Unfortunately Mother Nature had other ideas.

My first colony (Alpha) was two years' old and was in need of a good spring clean and I intended to undertake a 'shook swarm' manipulation. This entails pouring your entire colony into an empty clean hive then disposing of your old frames. Being a novice, I needed the assistance of a bee keeping colleague to help me and was all lined up to do so when the lockdown struck, scuppering my plans. Due to the social mixing restrictions I was now on my own for the most critical spring swarming period of the bee keeping season.

Despite my best endeavours both of my colonies swarmed, one failed to re-establish and the rainy summer resulted in my worst harvest to date - only ten jars of honey in total!

Having treated my remaining colony for the Varroa mite with formic acid strips and providing them

with several feeds of syrup over September (via a feeder you place on top of the hive), I am now ready to wrap-up the year's activities in the apiary. To help them through the winter ahead all that now remains is for me to give the ladies a block of fondant (to top up their food stores if needed) and reduce the hive entrance (to keep out pests and keep the heat in).



I am not overly optimistic of their chances of making through to next spring, as the colony isn't overly strong, but fingers crossed that they do - and I look forward to seeing them buzzing out again in March 2021 - when hopefully the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted and I can again count on the support of my bee keeping friends.

Russell Stokes

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

To contribute articles, or provide feedback on previous articles, contact the Editor:

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