



# The Cam Valley Wildlife Group Newsletter

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ISSUE 100

AUTUMN 2021



## Newsletter 100 – a look back in time!

This is our 100<sup>th</sup> newsletter! The newsletter, however, is not quite as old as the group and, like the group, it has gone through some changes over the years.

Cam Valley Wildlife Group was formed by the Cam Valley Group of the Wildlife Trust for Bristol, Bath and Avon which made the unanimous decision to go independent at its July 1994 meeting. It was officially launched later that year at the September talk on fungi. Andre Fournier volunteered to be in charge of Newsletter production and the first Cam Valley Wildlife Group newsletter was produced in January 1995. There was some initial crossover with group reports covering the period from July 1994 to September 1995, but the group adopted a more formal structure and the need for these ceased.

Four newsletters were produced in that first year, three in each of the following years, one in 1998 and three again in 1999. Andre edited the first thirteen of these and we have had six other editors since, five of whom are still group members – Helena Crouch, Stephen Porter, Maggie MacMillan, Deborah Porter and our current editor Liz Brimmell. The number of newsletters edited by the various individuals varies but, setting aside the small numbers edited by Stephen, Maggie and myself, there has been an upward trend – 13, 16, 22, and now 39, including this one!

The first newsletter was a double-sided sheet of A4. Originally, the newsletter did not have an ISSN number as it does today. Helena organised the issue by the British Library of this unique identifying number (specific to serials) for issues 27 (Spring 2003) onward.

**Cam Valley Wildlife Group**

*Chairman: Andre Fournier,  
1 Bloomfield Lane, Paulton, Avon, BS18 5QU: Tel 01761 418153*

**News for January 1995**

**INSECTS & CREEPY CRAWLIES**

**DRAGONFLIES**  
In 94 [redacted] was appointed as the Recorder for Avon & quickly added to the county list, Yellow Winged Darter (a visitor from Europe) & Kowled Skimmer. He also had a Golden Ringed Dragonfly near Frome- 50 miles from its normal range!  
In 95 we are keen to extend the Cam Valley survey work and volunteers to help will be needed from April - We will probably hold an identification workshop as a lead in. So far we have 15 species on the Cam Valley list with Migrant Hawker being added in 94. All survey work we carry out will feed into the Avon Dragonfly Recording Scheme.

**BUTTERFLIES**  
1994 was rather a poor year. We will continue to provide survey information into the Avon Butterfly project during 1995 whilst adding more information to our local records. If you would like to help then let Steve know before the Brimstones and Orange Tips start to appear in March.

**GRASSHOPPERS & CRICKETS**  
A new interest for the Cam Valley Group! We hope to hold an introductory talk or workshop for anyone interested in learning & helping survey.  
[redacted] is our creepy crawly man - ring on 01761 [redacted]

**BIRDWATCHING**  
1994 Highlights:  
• May: 24 hour birdwatch cut short by break in to car - but not before the highlight: Montagu's Harrier at Stakes Pools  
• May: 6 Bee Eaters at Radford! (We all missed them)  
• Jul: Nightjars & Long Eared Owls on the Mendips  
• Aug: Hobbies seen at 2 of the Barn Owl breeding sites. Goshawk flying over Turley.  
• Sept: Trip to Cornwall brings 2 Spotted Gulls & Pied Billed Grebe amongst others.  
• Oct: Steve Piddley finds American Golden Plover at Chew Lake - a first for Avon.  
• Other Chew highlights - Spoonbill in Oct. followed by Osprey stayings for 3 weeks with Bittern; 2000 Sand Martins in Spring, Barn Owl & Black Throated Diver.  
• Nov: Avocet, Dusky Warbler, Black Redstart & Slavonian Grebe at Dawlish  
• Other local birds included: Tree Sparrow, Brambling, Wintering Cuckoo, 400 Golden Plover Flock, Stonechat, Dunlin, Gadwall, Cormorant & Redpoll.

**Plans for 1995**  
• Always lots of activity - Many more trips - (Weymouth, Exe, Kites in Wales? etc: etc) usually organised at short notice. To join the local hotline ring [redacted]  
• 2 x 24 hour bird watches in May?  
• 1 in Avon - 3 in Cam Valley!  
• PB - [redacted] passed 350 on his life list and now has a page 1  
• 1995 already off to a good start with new years watch on 1st Jan: Green Winged Teal & Snow at Chew and on 2nd - Rough Legged Buzzard & Hen Harrier at Salisbury Plain.

**BARN OWLS**  
1994  
Our work as part of the Hawk & Owl Trust national survey was a tremendous success. We hosted 4 breeding pairs in the south of the area and one single bird roost. 9 young were fledged which gives hope that some of our 20 nest boxes already erected will find occupants in 95. Thank you to all of those who helped.  
Thanks to Tony Whitchurch of Braysdown for making & donating many of the boxes and to the Hawk & Owl Trust for a grant of £100.  
1995  
There is a national survey jointly by Hawk & Owl Trust & BTO. We will be covering the 2 chosen areas in the Cam Valley but also checking out the south of the area where we feel sure we will find some new pairs. We need to check out the existing nest boxes and also have more to put up as part of our overall campaign. Work will start in January. I will be contacting last years surveyors - new volunteers will be needed so ring  
Andy Fournier on 01761 418153


**BIRDS OF PREY** With Barn Owls, Hobbies & Goshawk to complement the more common raptors such as Tawny & Little Owls, Kestrel, Buzzard & Sparrowhawk, the Cam Valley is looking to be a very rich site. I would like to collate as much information as I can in 1995 - Any sightings or if you want to help - Ring Andy Fournier on 0761 418153 - We also have some Kestrel nest boxes if you know of a suitable site.

**BATS**  
1994: Congratulations to Adel Avery who earned her licence in 1994. This will be of great help for local roost visits. Also in 94 we continued to work closely with both Avon & Somerset Bat Groups with whom we visited some excellent, but confidential sites. A significant Greater Horseshoe roost site was found in the Cam Valley and reported through to English Nature for protection, we continue to monitor this. Other roosts included Lesser Horseshoe winter roost, Scardine, Pipistrelle, Long Eared & Whiskered. 8 injured bats have been cared for with three successfully returned so far (including two baby Pipistrelles).  
1995: We do hope to register as a Bat Group in our own right and at the same time continue the excellent working relationships we have established with the Somerset & Avon Groups. Our priority will be survey work for English Nature where we will be working with colleagues from Bristol University on the feeding habits of Greater Horseshoe Bats. Additionally we hope to extend our survey work in the Cam Valley where we have already found at least ten species. This is a specialised subject needing special equipment - but if you would like to learn more then contact Adel Avery; 0749 840640

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Issue 27 - Spring 2003



**Update on the Bath & North East Somerset Local Plan**

You may remember from the Spring 2002 edition of this newsletter that Cam Valley Wildlife Group has submitted a detailed response to the consultation draft of the Bath and North East Somerset Local Plan, the document which will provide the planning framework for the district for the next decade. Since then, we have been in discussion with B&NES council officers to expand upon our concerns and discuss ways in which they can be addressed.

One of the biggest issues relates to Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) - these are the sites which are of greatest importance for biodiversity at a local level, and which form the cornerstone of the Local Plan's wildlife conservation measures. In our response to the plan, we expressed a number of concerns - that the selection criteria given in the plan were so vague as to be meaningless, that there was no evidence that a criteria-based approach had been followed in drawing up the boundaries, that several key sites were not designated as SNCIs, that some designated sites appear to have little wildlife value, and that the boundaries of some sites appear not to relate to real on-the-ground boundaries between good and poor habitats.

Discussions so far on this have concentrated on gaining an understanding of where the SNCI selection process has fallen down. We have established that a detailed set of criteria does exist and that the criteria listed in the plan are not actually those that were used, merely a set of 'headings', the real criteria date from 1995 and were inherited from Avon County Council, and they have been used for previous local plans and by other local authorities in the former Avon area. We understand that the set of boundaries in the draft B&NES Local Plan were also inherited from previous local plans, but were amended in the light of a review carried out by Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC), a department within Bristol City Council's Museum service to which each of the four local unitary authorities contract out such work. We have been unable as yet to establish the terms of reference for the review, although B&NES have informed us that the majority of changes were minor cartographical revisions.

The fact that this review was conducted in this way is a matter of concern, as the opportunity has been missed to incorporate much new data on local wildlife sites. BRERC has an extensive database of wildlife records for the Avon area, but as would be expected there are areas where it is weaker than others - records of many invertebrate groups, for example, are poorly represented. Recent data for the Cam and Willow Valleys constitute another area where BRERC's database is rather light. Fortunately, however, Cam Valley Wildlife Group's recording projects have been gathering extensive data on many groups of species over the last few years, and we make this data available for conservation and educational uses, in much the same way that BRERC does with its data.

In 1999, after becoming aware that a new Local Plan was to be drawn up for the B&NES area, Cam Valley Wildlife Group met with staff at BRERC in order to establish how the data that we hold could be utilised in any future SNCI reviews. Our offer to supply data for this review at that time was turned down by BRERC on the grounds that they did not have sufficient resources to process this data; instead it was agreed that when the next SNCI review in B&NES was initiated, BRERC would seek our assistance at that point instead; disappointingly this did not happen, due, we understand, to subsequent staff changes at BRERC two years or so ago.

The good news is that B&NES council has agreed to look at the SNCI boundaries in our area with us, and if possible agree a more relevant set of boundaries, using the best of the two datasets available. Tarring of this may be an issue as the cut-off date for work on the Revised Deposit Draft is the end of April, so this piece of work may have to be carried out after that. Some time in the summer we expect to receive a formal reply from B&NES, detailing whether and how they propose to amend the plan in the light of our objections. Keep your eyes on this newsletter for a further update.

Steve Preddy and Deborah Porter


In the first newsletter there were reports on many of the projects that CVWG was working on. Interestingly it was noted that the group was 'holding discussions' with Wessex Water about 'the old batch at Paulton Sewage Works' (Goosard Reserve) and we were 'hopeful of making headway in '95'. We managed the reserve without any formal legal agreement for many years, and there came a time when Wessex Water said they wanted a legal agreement regarding management of the reserve. We required one suitable for a modest volunteer group and the matter remained unresolved year on year...until now. We appear finally, in 2021, to be on the cusp of signing a straightforward, plain English, agreement suited to us!

The earlier newsletters show that group initially concentrated on raising its profile with public events such as walks and talks but pretty much hit the ground running, delivering a diverse portfolio of activities from helping toads across the roads to involvement in local strategic land use planning. The

newsletters document the way the group enthusiastically took on species-specific work and practical conservation projects. An e-group was set up to improve group communications. Projects came and went, some reaching a natural end, some being pursued outside the group instead and others ceasing for one reason or another and there were many project-related articles over the years. The group still runs a number of projects to this day but the e-group has gone.


There have been several format changes, the first being in Autumn 1999. One of the changes was quite controversial - the change to a smaller font size, which was considered by some to be discriminatory and by others to be a pragmatic move. There was also a junior newsletter for a while, 2013 - 2014.

Issue 19, New Year 2001 was the first electronic newsletter in addition to paper form. That 2001 newsletter reported that the group subscriptions had reached 100 and that



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**I**t is becoming distinctly autumnal now, so here is a newsletter to read in front of the fire. There is still plenty to do in the autumn. Recording for the new Bird Atlas starts again in November - see the request for help on page 2. It will soon be time for our AGM (see back page) and Fungal Foray (see Events Programme), and help is always needed on workdays at our reserves (see Events Programme). The weather has resulted in a mixed year for Barn Owls (see below) and for butterflies (page 6). There is a report of this year's botany walks and you can read about sightings in two members' gardens. Please consider writing something about your own wildlife sightings, in your garden or further afield, for the next newsletter.

*Helena*

**Barn Owl Survey Results for 2008**

It has been something of a mixed year for Barn Owls in our area with as many questions as answers for our team of three: Carol Powley, Richard Harris and myself. On the positive side we had pairs at five new sites:

- One in a church
- One in a dovecote
- One in a tree cavity
- Two in boxes erected about 18 years ago

Also a pair returned to the Paulton site after a two-year absence and may have bred. Nest inspection revealed nothing but it is a hollow tree with many cavities in the nest hole where chicks could hide. We were very hopeful that the new sites would bring a great boost to the number of nesting pairs. However the bad weather and shortage of food supply had a negative impact with a high failure and abandonment rate.


In summary:

- We had 13 pairs at nest sites this year - a good start!
- 5 pairs definitely bred and between them hatched 11 chicks - disappointingly low!
- 4 pairs abandoned eggs after laying - bad news!
- 1 pair never laid - a bit more bad news!
- For the remaining 3 pairs, results are uncertain, as we were unable to inspect the nest properly.
- 2 sites where pairs have bred for the last five years were unoccupied in 2008 - yet more bad news!
- For one other site where they have regularly bred we await 2008 report.

The longer-term impact of all this remains to be seen and much will depend upon weather conditions in spring and summer 2009. Over the winter we hope to build and erect a number of nest boxes at potential sites. Survey work starts in late March 2009. Anyone who would like to help, please let me know. You can contact me by telephone or email below.

*André Fournier*

Telephone: 01761 418153 /  
email: andre.fournier@btinternet.com



much of the membership was involved in species recording and practical conservation including the successful flora and insect recording projects and the Barn Owl Project. The Bat Project had conducted five years of surveying, contributing to the national bat monitoring programme to year 2000 and was about to re-start after a break and the Flora Project was contributing to Atlas 2000. The group was involved with species conservation and active management work on five sites – Goosard Reserve, Paulton Nature Reserve, Stephen's Vale, Ammerdown, and Radstock Railway Land. Involvement in campaigns reported to 2001 included purchase of Greyfield Wood by the Woodland Trust, Chewton Wood and Radstock Railway Sidings development proposals, changes to wildlife protection law and the proposal to introduce genetically engineered crops. That issue contained an interesting retrospective going back to 1994.

In Issue 22 (New Year 2002) the launch of our first website was announced. Issue 32, Summer 2004 opened with a programme of summer celebratory events, including our 10<sup>th</sup> birthday picnic at Radford Mill Farm. CVWG membership was now at around 300 individuals and some of the group's impressive conservation and recording achievements were flagged up. Issues 38 – 44 included a regular Children's Corner article and the next change was the look of the newsletter, with Ann Mead taking on production. Ann, an accomplished artist, took on design from issue 48 (Summer 2008) and the newsletters included many of her own hand-drawn illustrations. Change from black and white to colour met with resistance for some time, but eventually arrived with Newsletter 67 (Winter 2013). The newsletter has retained the same format over the intervening years but is now noticeably different in at least one aspect – the number of photographs!

A dedicated team of people make sure that the newsletter is edited, printed and sent out to members and organisations, some by post and others by email. I'm sure all members are with me in extending a big thank you to all those who have helped to make our newsletter the well-presented and informative publication that it has been over its 100 editions.

Thanks to Helena for her help with this article.

***Deborah Porter***

## **Ancient trees**

In the last edition of the Newsletter, Phil Taylor was wondering about the reason for certain trees' longevity and whether it was linked to being pollarded or coppiced. The short answer to his question is 'yes'.

Trees do not have a fixed lifespan although certain species, given the right conditions have the capacity to outlive others by many centuries. Oaks are the obvious examples of long lived trees in the UK and it is said that 'oak takes 300 years to grow, 300 years it stays and 300 years it takes to decline'. The ultimate height of a tree is a compromise between growing bigger to produce more leaves to provide more food by photosynthesis and the investment of energy taken to produce the extra wood to provide the height and strength – the tree is in effect a self-optimising unit.

Growth however can't stop completely whilst the tree is still alive. We all know that trees have annual growth rings and the energy to produce this growth has to be provided by the leaves. So the girth of a fully mature tree still increases but the number of leaves to sustain this growth does not, and eventually the tree cannot sustain all its branches and will start retrenching – shutting off

the supply of water and nutrients to some of the branches, most notably the upper most, causing stag headedness at first and ultimately complete death of the tree.

Pollarding a tree on a regular basis keeps the increase in height and branch size in check. When a tree is pollarded new shoots appear from epicormic buds which are found in the cambium – the live layer of the wood – so in effect the tree is renewed and it never reaches an unsustainable size and can keep on growing in girth almost indefinitely.



Phil also speculated on whether pollarding would help ash trees survive ash dieback disease. The disease is too new to Europe to have any clear answers but some evidence from research in Denmark is showing that this may at least sometimes be the case. Certainly this picture of ash trees taken by my husband Alister in Chilcompton in early June, show a marked difference in foliage health between the pollarded tree on the left and unpollarded one on the right. We will return later in the summer to see if that healthy growth has been sustained.

### **Sue Rankine**

#### **A footnote from Tiny French re the trees in the last newsletter:**

*Sycamores are maples and sugar maples recover well from being sliced about for extracting maple syrup. Never to this extent, though.*

*‘Ancient man’ used to save themselves work by setting fire to the base of trees until it became easy to chop through with flint axes. Modern ‘vandal-man’ missed a trick here. I don’t think a sycamore would survive burning... assuming of course that there were sycamores around in those days.*

## **When is a Pool frog not a Pool frog? When it is extinct!**

The Timsbury and Paulton Somerset Coal Canal basins have survived since the early 1800s and have probably remained as water field ponds for all that time. What began as vast industrial waterways to transport coal from the mining villages back into Bath, have been delightfully reclaimed by nature and are a thriving habitat for the resident swans, ducks, moorhens, coots and herons. These in turn attract more temporary visitors such as swallows, black headed and other gulls, egrets, large and small dragonflies and damselflies.

There is nothing quite like strolling alongside the water on a warm summer’s day, watching the ducklings darting about, jumping for flies, and the swans gliding on the water; the moorhens skittering across the surface or the ‘beep’ sound of the coots hiding in the reeds.

However, come the middle of May, there is a new distinctive sound that puzzles newcomers but brings broad grins to the locals and regular walkers as everyone gathers at whatever point of the

bank that emits the 'waaacks'. The sound builds to a fine chorus and then fades just as quickly, particularly if you are spotted. Then you will hear a loud 'plop' as the affronted chorister dives to safety. On fine days the sounds carry to the houses and fields that surround the field and continue until dusk.

If you are lucky enough to find a patch of weed free clear water, you might have a crystal clear view of a great number of little bright green frogs, sunbathing on the surface, often with just their huge eyes appearing above the surface. Suddenly, they will skate across the surface, performing a jaunty little dance, where they appear to continually change partners.

These noisy little frogs are not our common frogs and despite a great deal of speculation over a number of years from experts and amateurs alike, the jury is still out as to what the actual species actually is.

Whatever their identity finally turns out to be, these elusive but very noisy little creatures are loved by everyone who walks the basins. Their presence in the canal basins begin from May onwards, where they can be seen and heard over the summer months. They are very shy, diving below the surface if they detect being watched but they give away their exact location every time because they are so very, very loud! If you move or a duck swims close, there is a 'plop' and they are gone! This is a necessary skill as they are part of the food chain for herons and grass snakes, both of which are resident on the ponds.

If you train your eyes, you can often observe numerous pairs of eyes staring back at you; invisible in plain sight amongst the pond weed. They are our very own green frogs who fill the surrounding area with their unique mating call, as they perform their courtship dances on the surface of the water.

So, why the mystery? Well, our frogs resemble the native but extinct 'Northern Pool frogs' in every way including hibernating late (until April); making the identical long 'quacking' sound; the males having white vocal sacs; laying their spawn in May and June and loving to bask on the surface in the sunshine and they look like a Pool frog (but are a brighter green than most and lack the line down their back). So, what do the experts say? In 2011, a report was completed by the CVWG for the SCCS (article in Weigh House number 73):

'On the March visit, what appeared to be Marsh frogs were observed on the bottom of the eastern pond. The timing and reported sound of the calls supports the presence of Marsh frog, but visits in May are needed to record the frogs and determine the species (CVWG hope to be able to record the sounds). Marsh frog is one of the Green frog complex; a member, or members, of this complex are definitely breeding in the pools. There is public interest in the frogs, and some people visit the pools just to see and hear them. It is most likely that this frog has been introduced, almost certainly imported with carp or other fish, bought in to stock the pools for a fishing enterprise. In the recent past, there were regular signs of otter predation of the stocked fish. There was no obvious sign of commercial fish on the March visit, but Sticklebacks were observed.'

In 2017, RAGS (Amphibian Group from Somerset) visited the ponds said: 'The initial guess based on appearance was that they are Pool frogs (*Pelophylax lessonae*), a species once native to Norfolk. However, these were declared extinct in 1995 and have since been reintroduced since in that area with Swedish stock. Recent new colonies have been seen across Britain, thought to have been introduced with fish stock. However, the Pool frog co-exists with other species such as the Marsh

frog that can interbreed to produce hybrids. So, although they look like Pool frogs, later generations may appear from hidden genetics emerging.'

In 2018, Frogs Life told me: 'You're right, these clearly have white vocal sacs which mean they are definitely not Marsh frogs. They could however be Edible frogs, the hybrid between the two species. There are Edible frog populations in the UK and they are much harder to differentiate as the characters are somewhat intermediate between the two species. That said, at least one individual in your pictures does not look like Edible frog.'

In early 2021, ARC (Amphibian and Reptile Society) said:

'The reason we can be rather certain, is that native Pool frogs became 'properly extinct' in the UK. It is easy to see why you thought they might be, just impossible to be sure of the species/hybrid.

Certain populations of Green frogs certainly help support other species such as bitterns and grass snakes.

All the 'green frogs' (or Water frogs; *Pelophylax* sp.) are very variable and no resources adequately display the range of variations they show! The only thing that's pretty certain is that they aren't native British Pool frogs, which tend to be much browner (though still variable!).

However, there are certainly Pool frog colonies in the UK of foreign origin and these are often greener like yours. But there are other options – because at least six or seven different species of *Pelophylax* are established here, and my money would be on them being Spanish Marsh frogs (*P. perezi*) which are well-established on the Somerset Levels (e.g. at Ham Wall nature reserve) and likely spreading well! The individual with the stripe looks particularly like this species or they could also be a hybrid between any two of the species that occur here and there would be no way to tell without genetic analyses I'm afraid!

So if we do have the Perez's frog, (also known as Iberian Water frog, Iberian Green frog, or Coruna frog (*Pelophylax perezi*) here on our basin ponds, it is a species of frog in the family Ranidae and is native to southern France, Portugal and Spain. It is widespread and common, as evidenced by its Spanish name *rana común* (Common frog).

Wikipedia: Its natural habitats are temperate forests, temperate shrub land, Mediterranean-type shrubby vegetation, rivers, intermittent rivers, swamps, freshwater lakes, intermittent freshwater lakes, freshwater marshes, intermittent freshwater marshes, sandy shores, arable land, and urban areas. It is not considered threatened by the IUCN.

The Pool frog now: The last known colony at NWT Thompson Common. Research carried out in the 1990s showed that the English Pool frog belonged to a distinct and rare northern group of Pool frogs found in Norway and Sweden. As a part of the Breaking New Ground Landscape Partnership Scheme, Norfolk Wildlife Trust worked with Amphibian and Reptile Conservation to plan the frogs' return, using the latest approaches to recovering lost species. This rare amphibian has now been reintroduced to two Norfolk sites.

Conservation status: Pool frogs are very rare in the United Kingdom. This species is fully protected under UK law under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. It is an offence to kill, injure, capture or disturb them, and to damage or

destroy Pool frog breeding or resting habitats. It is also illegal to sell or trade Pool frogs. This law applies to all life-stages.

Deborah Porter from CVWG has said: 'Whatever their identity is, any removal breaches the Wildlife and Countryside Act. By the way, no spawn should be collected and transferred to local ponds. The transfer of any type of frog spawn, even of our native frogs, can be risky due to the potential to spread fungal disease'.

So, there you have it, when is a Pool frog not a Pool frog? Answer: When it is extinct!

The experts offer conflicting information and only the Somerset RAGS have actually seen the frogs.

My own researches informs me that if the males have white calling sacs (which they clearly do), they are not Marsh frogs (whose sacs are grey).

They clearly make the sound of a duck quack, not resembling laughter (which is the sound of a Marsh frog). There are several recordings online of Pool frog calls and these are identical to the Canal frogs.

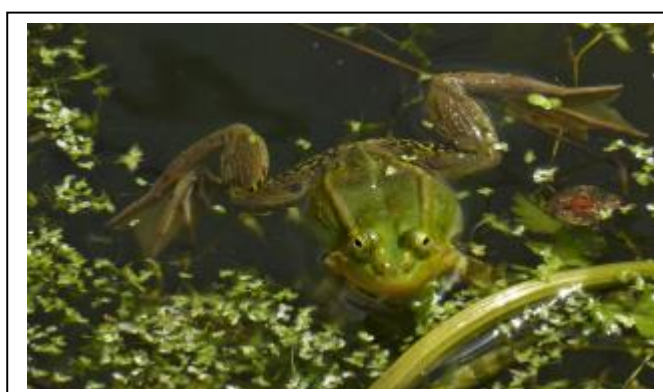
So if it looks like a Pool frog, has the same life cycle as a Pool frog, sounds like a Pool frog and the males have white sacs, then I believe we can enjoy this amazing colony with all the joy and behaviour that the genuine article would bring!

Some say that these frogs may be predators, destroying our native species. However, visitors to the ponds during February and March can observe masses of frogspawn in the shallow pools by the canal. In June we have the march of thousands of spider-sized toads across the entire area - so these are also thriving alongside these little green curiosities. The heron prowls the banks all the year round and so there must be plenty of fish. The RAGS team concluded that they were not causing any harm to the environment or other species.

The restoration of the canal continues, with plans to reinstall the terminus bridge. I am a member of both SCCS and CVWG and hope that the two societies can continue to complement each other and work together in harmony into the future. We all need to play our part in protecting and preserving this amazing and unique ecosystem that we have on our doorstep.



*A mating pair*



*Distinct colours and markings*

*See over for more frog images*



*Froggy back trio*



*A group of 4 dancing*



*Inflated white sacs*



*White sacs*

**Sheila Hetreed**

## Hedgehogs in our garden

It's still busy in our garden. Around now is the time that the second litters of babies are born. Many of them unfortunately don't make it to a good weight to be able to hibernate and survive the winter so it's really important to keep feeding any visiting hedgehogs you have in case it's a nursing mother.

Sadly the tiny hedgehog I found lying in the sun in our garden died. The hedgehog rescue said he was extremely dehydrated and had a huge burden of lungworm so despite treatment they were not able to save him. At least he was cared for in his final hours.

I've no actual hedgehog photos but I've bought 2 new hedgehog houses. I have five in our garden now but unfortunately none occupied at present. I'm hoping some hedgehogs will find them to hibernate in as they did last winter. I've made a wildlife and pond area so the plants just need to grow round the houses.

Also I thought I'd share the following photos of a wonderful moth. I thought it was a leaf stuck to our trampoline net. Our cat was showing an interest so I went to have a look and saw it wasn't a leaf. I safely moved it. I'm pretty sure it's an eyed hawk moth?



**Zoe Nicholls**





## Puss moths

The photos I sent in to the last newsletter were of larvae on my poplars that I hoped were Puss moths; in fact they were the no less welcome Poplar Kitten moth caterpillars, and they have been numerous this year. However, I am delighted to report near full grown Puss moth larvae on my young Lombardy Poplars (photo) as well as Poplar Hawk moth larvae...

Also noteworthy are the profusion of Pyramidal orchids in our area.

**Gordon Morse**



## Members' photos

**Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) by Maggie Edwards.** Maggie took the photograph of this very well-named native orchid, in June. It attracts male bumblebees to it using bumblebee-like cues including furry brown lips, yellow markings and wing-like sepals. It seals the deal by emitting a female bee scent to persuade any passing males to attempt to mate with it. In the UK, it is self-pollinating so does not require pollen transfer, which is thought to be a reason for the high incidence of 'freak' or 'monstrous' forms here. This orchid can grow up to 30 cm tall and flowers after 8 years of growth. Unfortunately the orchid is unlikely to flower again once picked and so picking causes loss of the chance of setting seed. It needs nutrients from fungal hyphae to be able to grow and can colonise places with the right conditions and fungi present, sometimes in large numbers. It seems to like disturbance and is found in quite a variety of places including chalk



grasslands, disused quarries, railway embankments, waste ground, mine spoil-heaps, sand dunes, clayey meadows, damp places such as shallow fens, roadsides, and even lawns. Sadly, this very attractive orchid is in decline.

**White knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) taken by Phil Gait in July.** Phil spotted this white Common/Black knapweed in Edford Meadows. Helena Crouch advises that most species of flora are also found in white and that she has a pure white Common Spotted Orchid in her garden... but she has not often seen a white Knapweed. It is found in a variety of grassland habitats and is not only a good source of high-quality nectar for insects such as butterflies, bees and beetles, but also provides seeds that are an important wild bird food. It is now being sold commercially in some seed mixes for attracting garden birds.



**Carrot (*Daucus carota*) taken by Deborah Porter at end of July.** The many flowers of the Wild carrot umbel are usually white with the exception of the red central flower, but the flowers often look reddish in bud. In this carrot a rich cerise colour has been expressed in the petals to beautiful effect. We have had wild carrot in the garden for years, but as it is a garden setting there is always the possibility that there has been hybridisation with a domesticated variety that went to seed in another garden. We did not notice any particular difference between its attractiveness to insects and that of the adjacent white-flowered one.

Genotype studies of a variety of subspecies of cultivated and wild carrot indicate that eastern carrot (includes purple, red and black varieties) may originate from Western Asia and western carrot (orange, yellow and white varieties) may be selected from eastern carrot. Different wild *D. carota* subspecies may have contributed to the domestication of cultivated carrot but there is high genetic differentiation between cultivated and wild carrots, which appear to be due to strong selection effects for desirable traits, in particular decreased allergenicity [taken from abstract of *New insights into domestication of carrot from root transcriptome analyses (2014), Rong, J. Lammers, Y. Strasburg, J.L et al*].



Wild carrots have tough white/ivory-coloured roots that do not make good eating for us but are used by root-boring insects. Like the Black knapweed above, it is now being sold commercially in seed mixes for attracting insects and garden birds.

**Solitary wasps using sand pile by Deborah Porter.** These two species were photographed using a sand pile in the garden provided specially for solitary wasps. The small one is the Common Spiny Digger Wasp, *Oxybelus uniglumis*, photographed from the side and pulling its fly prey into its nest, one of several it will stock a nest cell with (from 2 to 16, depending on size) before laying an egg, sealing the cell and making another. It is often associated with bare loose sand and has been observed in golf course bunkers but also occurs on heavier soils. Its nest has two or three cells, which are said to take about two hours to dig.



Very successful females can provision a whopping 34 cells in a (long!) day. Stephen and I found that these little diggers were still about for some time after other wasps had long given up work. The larger yellow-and-black wasp is the aptly named Cuckoo-spit Wasp, *Gorytes laticinctus*,

listed as Rare (RDB 3) but somewhat elusive and probably on the increase... though the shocking weather this year around these parts has not done bees and wasps any favours on the whole. It stocks its nest cells, usually in light soils, with bugs like the Common Frog-hopper responsible for 'cuckoo-spit' and has been observed nesting in soft mortar.





**Ruby-tailed wasp by Maggie Edwards.** This appears to be one of the *Chrysis* species, most likely one of the *Chrysis ignita* aggregate. DNA analysis is being used in an effort to separate out the true species from variants/subspecies of *C. ignita*. Some *Chrysis* species can be difficult to tell apart even for an expert. Ruby-tailed wasps are cuckoo wasps that are parasitic on certain solitary species of wasp and bee.

**Burnet moths and Mullein caterpillar by Maggie Edwards.** Maggie has photographed two species of burnet moth – coupled Six-spot Burnets in July and what is probably a Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet. The very similar *palustrella* subspecies of Five-spot Burnet is unlikely as the photo was taken in the latter half of June, and all the more so in this case as the moth looks so pristine. The adults are difficult to tell apart reliably, and the best way to pin down the ID is to look at the hairs of the caterpillars. All three of these moths' caterpillars will use Birds-foot Trefoil, but the Narrow-bordered Five-spot uses mainly certain vetches, clovers and Meadow-vetchling. The moth caterpillar Maggie has seen is the Mullein. In numbers, it can strip the leaves of large Mulleins.



**Coronet and Herald moths** captured at light by Deborah Porter. The Coronet is an attractive moth that came to an Actinic light in the garden. On release the next day, I had hoped to get a more natural-looking photo but it promptly flew under a picnic-style table, not ideal for a photograph! You can't see the wing pattern, but the sculpturing of the hairs is interesting.



Another lovely moth, the Herald, was more co-operative and when released carefully settled in full view.



**Crane fly (*Tipula maxima*) by Deborah Porter.** This rather co-operative insect settled in the greenhouse. It is the UK's largest crane fly, with a leg span of 100mm and a lovely pattern to its wing. Its eggs are laid in the damp mossy fringes of streams, ponds and ditches. The larvae first exist just below the water surface and then continue their development in submerged leaf litter.



Crane flies are true flies and there are about 500 species in the UK. The UK Crane fly Recording Scheme, however, also records two other similar families, adding about another 20 species. They are an important part of the food chain, including for a range of birds and bats. The true crane flies are ancient, found in the fossil record about 230 million years ago. They originated in the super continent, Pangea.

**Deborah Porter**

## CVWG: it's your Group – we would love to see you take a leading role

Our wildlife group is small and friendly, run and supported by individuals within the communities covered by the Group's activities. To ensure everything is done 'properly' the Group has a Constitution that sets out how it goes about its activities. This is available to view on our website.

We've had a Constitution setting out our Governance since 2000, and are now on our 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, which has been in place since 2017. I've been taking a look at it to see if we need another update or if it's doing what it was written to do – and thought I should share with the members of the group (that's everyone on our membership list!) a little insight on how it all works.

We are putting this out now as every year at our Annual General Meeting (AGM) the members of the group vote for the leadership of the CVWG, so you really should know what you are voting for; and who knows you might just want to join in!

Truth to tell, with everything that's been going on over the last eighteen months we've been a little lax in keeping everyone informed as we should have done so here's where we are:

- Decisions about the group and its activities are made by The Coordinating Team (CT), currently consisting of:
  - Deborah Porter – Chair/Lead
  - Diana Walker – Membership
  - Judy Hampshire – Events
- The CT are supported at this time by:
  - Helena Crouch – Botany Project
  - Gary Kingman – Barn Owl Project
  - Peter Watson – Goosard Batch Lead
  - Jim Crouch – Finance; I must record here our thanks to Carol Powley who has looked after the CVWG finances over many years.

There are many others who help look after our website, newsletters and so on.

This is all in line with our Constitution which allows for a CT of up to ten people, and Committees and Project Teams led by other members of the group. Obviously with the 2020 AGM not happening we haven't had the confirmation vote, hopefully we'll get that fixed this year!

Unlike some organisations the CVWG Constitution is not prescriptive about roles and responsibilities beyond the CT. This enables individuals to contribute as much or as little as they feel comfortable with, with the CT acting collectively on behalf of the members of the Group to delegate roles, responsibilities, and authority as required.

All members of the Group are entitled to attend, and to have access to records of CT and project team meetings. We have to put our hands up here as well; we could do with some help with the minuting and recording of the various meetings. It's all been a bit ad hoc thanks to COVID-19. We want to change that going forward and look to all of you in the Group to help us.

A number of 'the supporters' are prepared to join the CT and help with the decision making, but it would be great if we could see some new faces coming forward and joining in with steering the

Group and its activities. Help in note-taking and recording, chivvying us to meetings, reminding us of our responsibilities within the Constitution etc. would also be most welcome.

If you want to play a part in the Group's leadership please get in touch with Deborah Porter via [camvalleywildlife@gmail.com](mailto:camvalleywildlife@gmail.com) at least two weeks before the AGM on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 to have a discussion about what that looks like and we can take it from there.

We look forward to hearing from you.

*Jim Crouch*

## Nature notes from November 2020 to January 2021

Each day I make a nature note. It could be about something new to me or unusual, but in winter quite a few notes are about common place things that trigger questions I then try to answer. For this period, most of my wanderings were quite close to my home in Lower Coleford.

**9<sup>th</sup> November 2020:** I saw a Buff-tailed bumblebee squirting fluid out of its rear end. Do bees pee? No – they excrete ammonia and uric acid, which is fairly dry and usually white or yellow. However sometimes the nectar they collect is so high in water that they remove and jettison some of it to keep a balanced water 'budget'.

**15<sup>th</sup> November 2020:** The stream through Stoke St Michael used to disappear underground into Stoke Lane Slocker, a sinkhole leading to a large cave in which human and animal remains have been found. Now a new waterfall and sinkhole have appeared about 15 metres before the usual 'slocker'. They are very close to the foundations of an old building, now held up by a pit prop.



**13<sup>th</sup> December 2020:** Walking across a field near Leigh on Mendip, I was wondering why there are so many mole hills at this time of year. To survive, moles need to dig and eat for about 4 hours, before sleeping for 4 hours. To help with this, moles build underground larders at this time of year. This would explain the proliferation of mole hills. By inflicting a poisonous bite on earthworms' heads, they can store worms alive but immobilised in these larders.

**24<sup>th</sup> December 2020:** For us, spending time with friends and family at Christmas, meant meeting up with one of our sons and his girlfriend for a walk, some bird-watching and a Christmas picnic on the Somerset Levels. We saw Gadwall, Wigeon, Teal, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Great Egret and more at Westhay Moor Nature Reserve, but the highlight was a large number of Cattle Egrets in the fields near Mudgley.



**31<sup>st</sup> December 2020:** In Cranmore Woods, we found hair ice, an unusual ice form that only occurs on moist dead wood from broadleaved trees. It needs a temperature slightly below freezing and humid air. In 2015 scientists found that it also needs a fungus, *Exidiopsis effusa*. This fungus consumes part of the plant tissue leaving complex molecules of lignin and tannin behind. These molecules mix with water in the wood pores and affect the shape of the ice that grows from the

water, possibly by inhibiting ice hairs from re-crystallising into more stable shapes.

**25<sup>th</sup> January 2021:** We decided to sort out a problem with a section of the ceiling in our garden room. Last year wasps frequently went behind the fascia board, so we were not surprised to find a wasps' nest. It was between the insulation and a very thin area of plasterboard. The wasps had been taking bits to make their nest with. The result was a weak, crumbling section of ceiling with a very flat nest behind it. The flat slab of nest extended a considerable distance sideways. On one side it had the cells for eggs/larvae. The other side was solid, with small 'ties' where the wasps had attached the nest to the insulation. We were relieved to read that wasps build new nests each year. The ceiling is repaired and the fascia board screwed down tightly.

***Veryan Conn***

## From the editor

Owing to some confusion resulting from some changes made to articles in recent newsletters, I have made some mistakes for which I apologise. I will acknowledge all contributions but I would be grateful if for any reason you send me a revision or an update to an article you previously sent to me, please can I ask that you send me the whole article again including any attachments or photos. Please would you include the date of your email and the article title in the Subject heading. It would also be helpful if you could highlight or use coloured text to show where the changes have been made.

The reason I'm asking is that I hope it will avoid any confusion over changes, especially when I have already started compiling the next edition.

***Liz Brimmell***

*The front cover image is a fungus called Scarlet Elf cup by Phil Gait.*

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**Next Newsletter:** The copy date for the next Newsletter is **15<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

**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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