



The Cam Valley Wildlife Group Newsletter



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Barn owl chicks

I am sure the Group members have seen many images of Barn owl chicks, but these images from the CCTV in our nesting box are a very clear example of how a brood varies in age. These four chicks probably span two weeks - a strategy of nature so that the strongest survive. This year there seems to have been a plentiful supply of voles and all four chicks are nearing maturity. Their size is distorted by proximity to the lens but the gradient of plumage demonstrates the age difference.



Gordon Morse

Members' photos

Rob Ladd found an immature male Southern Hawker dead on 17th July. Dragonflies aggressively defend their patch to secure the best chance to mate and it is possible that this male was the victim of a stronger, mature, male. A mature female Southern Hawker was found by Deborah on its back in the road at Lower Whitelands, at the end of its life. When righted and placed on some soil, it went through the motions of ovipositing, arching its abdomen and pushing its genitalia downwards.

Southern Hawkers - Rob Ladd and Deborah Porter



The two photos show well the diagnostic features of this species - the broad ante-humeral stripes on the back of the thorax, the dark wing veins and (*pterostigma*) wing spots and the long triangular mark near the top of the abdomen (on segment 2). The immature male shows, as with all immature dragonflies, pale colours and has yet to develop its stunning livery of green and blue (on the final 3 abdominal segments) upon a black background. The female's earlier bright green markings and their brown background have darkened with age.

Beautiful Plume (*Amblyptilia acanthadactyla*) - Maggie Edwards



This attractive Plume moth is a common species that has two broods. It flies from dusk in July and again from September to early June and will come to light. Its caterpillar feeds on the flowers and unripe seeds of a range of plants including Hedge Woundwort, mints, goosefoots (such as Fat Hen), cranesbills, heathers and restharrow. It can be found in various habitats including rough ground, parkland, hedgerows and gardens.



7-spot Ladybird pupae - Rob Ladd

The ladybird pupae in Rob's photo appear to be quite freshly pupated, or perhaps have not quite finished, not having fully darkened and hardened and with the shed skin from the pre-pupa still in evidence, giving the appearance of protruding frilly growths. Rob has handily provided a 5p piece to show their scale.

The 7-spot ladybird is widespread and common. It is one of the ladybirds you are most likely to see, especially in some years – there are great fluctuations in its population. This beetle's spots are pretty consistent, but there is a little variation in their size and they can have up to nine spots. Spots are not found only on its red

wing cases, however – if you turn one over you will see a pair of white spots outside the bases of the middle legs.



Hummingbird Hawk-moth - Frank Loughran

This summer migrant from Southern Europe and North Africa, the Hummingbird Hawk-moth, has been captured feeding at Soapwort (*Saponaria officianalis*), one of the long-tubed-flowered species that attract it. Frank informs that they come to this particular plant every year. The photo shows beautifully the orange-brown hindwing, which is a good way of distinguishing it from Bee Hawk-moths in flight. This moth can produce a brood in the UK that develops into adults, but the species is susceptible to cold and does not usually survive winter hibernation. Some

sources say that it may be resident in the South-west. The caterpillars feed on Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Hedge Bedstraw (*Galium album*) and Wild Madder (*Rubia peregrina*) and has been seen laying eggs on Red Valerian (*Centranthus ruber*).

Goosard Work Team - Diana Walker

Readers may recall that the Cam Valley Wildlife Group now has an agreement to manage the Goosard Reserve in line with a management plan drawn up by Wessex Water. Regular monthly working days are held along with extra impromptu work parties as the workload requires, and Diana's photograph, overleaf, was taken on one of these workdays this summer.

The management work concentrates on maintaining the various diverse areas in good condition for the variety of species which favour each one and keeping paths within and around the reserve clear for the general public to enjoy. In winter certain areas are cleared cut on rotation to provide a greater variety of habitats as regrowth progresses, and shrubs and small trees in key places are cut back to allow in more light.

If you would like to join this friendly team or simply join in now and then, please contact Peter Watson on 07860 627744. (Wording mainly supplied by Peter Watson)



Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*)-Maggie Edwards

The Harebell is a tough and resilient plant some 15 to 40cm tall. It is found in dry, grassy, open places of various types, but cannot tolerate damp conditions. The petals of its hanging bells turn outwards, its basal leaves are roundish and those on its slender stalk are very narrow and linear. It is host to about 20 species of invertebrate and is a neat, pretty plant. Its population is stable, but there is some local decline at the edges of its range.



Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) – Maggie Edwards



The Hazel is a very familiar tree in woodlands, grasslands and gardens. It is widely used in hedges as it can survive the savage cutting but makes for a somewhat unruly and little-branched hedging component. It has soft leaves, unlike the similar leaves of elm, that are roughly hairy. It is *monoecious*, that is having both male and female flowers on the same tree/bush. Its hanging yellow catkins spreading their pollen in the wind are a familiar sight in spring, but the tiny bud-like flowers tipped with red styles often go unnoticed. Hazel is a host for over 100 invertebrates.

As a tree it will grow to about 12m in height and live for 70 to 80 years, but as well-managed coppiced tree, it will live for 700 years or more. Hazel has been coppiced for 4,000 years, according to The Wildlife Trusts, and hazelnut shells have been found at Poundbury dating back to the early Neolithic age, around 5,000-6,000 years ago.

Managed coppiced woodland provides open, wildflower-rich habitat and shelter for ground-nesting birds. The nuts are a favourite of grey squirrels, dormice and wood mice, and dormice also eat caterpillars that feed on Hazel leaves and are eaten by woodpeckers, nuthatches, tits, wood pigeons and jays and small mammals. Hazel flowers provide early pollen as a food for bees. However, as they are designed for wind pollination the pollen grains repel each other, nor are they sticky. This makes the bees' work much harder.

Hazel has been coppiced for its sticks, which have been used for centuries for a range of purposes. Traditional woodland products include fencing stakes and 'heatherings', the binding material used along the top of laid hedges. Historically, twisted hazel has been used for thatching spars, net stakes, water-divining sticks, hurdles and furniture. It is a popular wood for making walking sticks that, due to the nature of the wood, can be intricately carved and gardeners use it to make supporting structures for plants including the DIY trellis, pea stick and bean pole.

Deborah Porter

Nature notes from September to November 2021

Each day I make a nature note. This edition includes some 'variations' and adaptations plus two personal favourites.

6th September 2021



My son noticed these furry leaves whilst walking in an unmanaged field in the Mells Stream valley. They had a Woundwort smell, so a Stachys - perhaps an escapee or a hybrid or something rare. I went back the next day and took several photos, from which Helena identified it for us as *Stachys sylvatica* var. *subsericea*.



22nd September 2021



Visiting my brother in the Isle of Man, we saw plenty of Gannets diving and acrobatic Choughs, plus a Kestrel as we walked part of the coastal path. None were close enough to photograph, so I've cheated with a photo I took in North Wales in November 2018.

7th October 2021

Is it unusual to see a Comma Butterfly in October? No, they overwinter as butterflies and can briefly awaken on warm winter days, before emerging in March. The next generation appears at the end of June and the start of July. The timing of this new generation gives rise to two forms of Comma. If the larva is developing before the longest day they are likely to develop into a form known as *hutchinsoni*. This form has lighter undersides and brighter upper sides, than the late developers. They also go on to produce another generation later in the summer. My October butterfly is quite likely to be from this second generation. The darker, late developers hibernate before breeding.



11th October 2021



Around Coleford most of Black Knapweed we see is *Centaurea nigra* var. *radiata*. It is often flowering late in meadows where hay has been cut. I checked to see where this form is found – mainly in Somerset, Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire. Apparently it is often in areas where Greater Knapweed grows and starts to flower as its larger relative is finishing. 'Radiata' could be an adaptation enabling plants to benefit from the bees that visit Greater Knapweed.

26th October 2021

Lousy Watchman is another name for the Dor Beetle. We found out why when we rescued one from the middle of a well used track near Beckington. It had pale coloured mites attached to its underside. I found out that they don't harm the beetle as they are only hitching a ride to a new carcass, where they will hop off to feed and breed.

4th November 2021

Today we walked passed my favourite Oak. I checked the Ancient Tree Inventory. It was recorded as having a 5.42m girth (at 1.50m) and is classified as a veteran tree, with an estimated age of 290 years. It is south of Chilcompton, overlooking the site of Moorwood Colliery. The lower branch on the uphill side rests on the ground.



Veryan Conn

Six for Gold



In our mission statement we say that the Cam Valley Wildlife Group and its members have always taken a pro-active approach to wildlife conservation particularly to conserve the biodiversity of the area. I wonder what pro-active approaches are acceptable to members.

Over the past few years I have noticed an increase in the number of magpies and a decrease in the number and variety of small birds near our house and it has been heart breaking to hear parent birds when their nests are being ravaged by magpies. I don't know how many are too many but if there are too many magpies do any CVWG members agree that they should be humanely culled?

A recent Countryfile episode covered the destruction of trees by grey squirrels that had been newly planted to combat the growing climate change emergency. We planted six acres of trees in 2000 and I'd be happy to show anyone the damage that grey squirrels have done by stripping the bark off of many of these trees. Do any CVWG members agree that grey squirrels numbers should be reduced by culling, gene editing or contraception?

Phil Gait

Editor's comment:

In pursuit of our three aims to conserve the biodiversity of our area; to promote awareness and understanding of wildlife and its environment; and to encourage the enjoyment of wildlife, the group certainly has taken a proactive approach over the years. This has included some campaigning, involvement in the planning process at local level and higher, giving advice on wildlife matters, working with landowners and other organisations, as well as those activities more familiar to most members such as our walks, talks, hands-on conservation work, surveys, visits and trips.

The above article raises a number of issues including the matters of predation, non-native species, ecological balance, habitat management and human influences on the natural world. It will be most interesting to see how members respond, for publication in the next newsletter.

Viewing our website on mobile phones

We have received a comment about the 'usability' of our website on mobile phones. We would very much like feedback on its appearance on a mobile, the accessibility of parts of the site and how members think it could be improved.

Please send your comment to Deborah at camvalleywildlife@gmail.com, or by using the website's Contacts page.

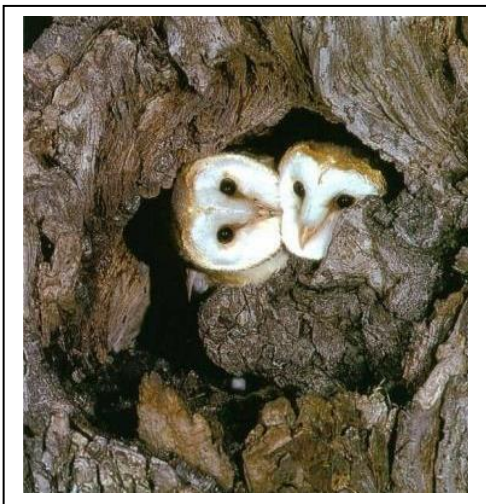
Our home page is at <https://cvwg.org.uk>

Deborah Porter

Barn Owl Report, Summer 2022

2022 was my first year as Project Leader, as Andre Fournier, who had led this very successful project since its beginning in 1994, stepped down. The year started very slowly with a wet February and some windy and cold weather. Unlike many birds, Barn owls do not have oiled feathers, so cannot hunt in the rain. They were not about much and unlikely to pair up early, in February, as we saw in 2018.

Then the weather started to warm up and the sightings in the early morning went up. The project had been on hold in 2020 due to Covid 19 restrictions, but with the lifting of the Government's legal restrictions in February, it was back on. We started to check the boxes for occupancy and were disappointed to find that the Norton Down site was not used this year, for the first time in



over 14 years. But by August we were very pleased to have recorded 17 Breeding pairs. This matched the number in 2017, one of our higher breeding pair years. Two owls found dead, both male, were brought to our attention. 58 chicks were recorded, including two in a new box erected in January by a local farmer on the end of a new building and occupied in late March.

The interest in boxes from farmers and local groups has been strong and the demand for Barn Owl talks has been very encouraging. Information has been coming in steadily and all in all it has been a very good year.

Gary Kingman

If you are interested in joining our small team, contact Gary Kingman (Project Leader) on 07960269022 or at camvalleywildlife@gmail.com

AGM Announcement and Committee Dates

This year's Annual General Meeting will be on 7th December at 7.30pm for an 8.00 pm start. The venue is the Working Men's Club, Radstock. There will be mince pies and a bar with hot and cold drinks.

We will start with a brief round-up of the CVWG year followed by reports from the Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Project Leaders for the Barn Owl, Flora and Goosard Reserve projects.

The Coordinating Team (our Management Committee) will propose team members for 2023 and there will be a vote.

This will be followed by an opportunity for members to consider a couple of proposed minor changes to our Constitution and to put forward any queries they have or proposals of their own for discussion, plus a vote on any issue that needs one. The changes are to paragraphs 6.1: Decision-making, and 8.3: Notification of the dates of meetings. The proposed additional text in para 6.1 is shown below, in blue and underlined. The proposed additional text in para 8.3 is shown below, in blue and underlined. The text proposed for removal has been struck through.

6.1: Decision-making

Each of the Group's Committees/Teams shall aim to take its decisions by consensus among its members. Where this is not possible, decisions shall be taken by simple majority vote of those members present at a meeting or by a majority vote by more than half of the Coordinating Team in the case of a decision taken online. In the event of a tie then the committee/team will discuss the issue further until a majority decision can be reached. Where a major issue or controversial subject is under consideration, every effort will be made to consider the matter in question in a meeting. If any Coordinating Team member is absent from a meeting where a major issue or controversial subject is under consideration, the Coordinating Team shall have a duty to defer a decision until a subsequent meeting, before which all members of the Coordinating Team must be informed about the matter in question.

8.3: Notification of dates of meetings

The Group shall aim to notify all members ~~in writing~~ of the dates of Committee meetings ~~meetings of all Committees/Teams~~; however, there may occasionally be a need for impromptu meetings, for which this may not be possible.

After this group business Diana will treat us to a slide show, Diana's Wildlife Year 2022.

Please contact Judy on 07460 278311 with any queries.

Committee meetings November 2022 and January 2023

The Coordinating Team will be meeting in Paulton on Tuesday 22nd November and Tuesday 17th January at 7.30 pm. All members are welcome to attend. If you wish to come, please contact Jim.crouch@macegroup.com or Deborah on 01761 435563. Minutes of committee meetings are available on request.

Night visitors



Some weeks ago we saw this on our drive and thought (probably wrongly) that it might be hedgehog poo.

We've been putting out food and water, in the hope that it was a hedgehog, and set up an infrared camera. As a result we have seen a lot of night visitors - three cats, a dog, a grey squirrel, a toad, several deer, several badgers, several magpies but no hedgehog!

Phil Gait

Moths in the garden

I was recently privileged to host a moth trapping event in the garden for Bath Natural History Society. Two traps were run overnight, in different parts of the garden. Due to the forecast for rain, both traps were placed under cover in corners, one near the herbaceous border and the other in the vegetable garden. Fourteen members assembled early the next morning, greeted with coffee, croissants and biscuits, to examine the contents of the two traps.

The first trap contained a Hornet! Once that was liberated, the following moths were recorded:

Angle Shades
Barred Sallow
Black Rustic
Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing
Brown Plume
Burnished Brass
Clifden Nonpareil
Common Marbled Carpet
Cypress Pug
Eudonia angustea
European Corn Borer
Frosted Orange
Garden Carpet
Golden Triangle

Large Yellow Underwing
Lesser Yellow Underwing
Light Brown Apple Moth
Light Emerald
Lunar Underwing
Oak Hook-tip (male)
Rusty-dot Pearl
Sallow
Setaceous Hebrew Character
Straw Dot
Shuttle-shaped Dart
Square-spot Rustic
Vine's Rustic



Clifden Nonpareil showing blue underwings



Clifden Nonpareil on Silver Birch

The most numerous species was the Large Yellow Underwing – there were 52 in the traps! Great excitement was caused by the discovery of three Clifden Nonpareils. These large and impressively beautiful moths were once considered to be extinct but have recolonised since 2007 and are now considered to be breeding in southern England. As the photos show, when resting on the trunk of a tree, this moth is perfectly camouflaged; however the underwings bear stunning blue strips.

Cam Valley Wildlife Group used to hold regular moth trapping events, but the moth trap has not worked for many years. Following successful events led by Neale Mellersh, a new moth trap and battery have been purchased, with a view to holding more CVWG moth events.

Helena Crouch



Roesel's Bush Cricket – Phil Gait

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Next Newsletter: The copy date for the next Newsletter is **1st December 2022**

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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For further information contact Deborah Porter at camvalleywildlife@gmail.com or visit our website: <https://cvwg.org.uk>