



The Cam Valley Wildlife Group Newsletter

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SUMMER 2023



Bioblitz at Haydon Batch

Haydon Batch is a large coal spoil tip on the hillside south of Radstock. In 2018 it was bought by Radstock Town Council to be maintained as an open space for the benefit of wildlife and people. Cam Valley Wildlife Group has held several events at this site over the years, building up a database of records and encouraging others to appreciate the site. On Sunday 30th April, Somer Valley Rediscovered held a bioblitz at Haydon Batch, as a contribution to the worldwide City Nature Challenge. With guided walks led by ecologists Rupert Higgins and Dawn Lawrence, this event attracted about sixty participants including many families and was thus a great success.

All day, a Green Woodpecker could be heard, while a Skylark sang overhead and Chiffchaffs were evident. I was pleased to hear a Willow Warbler, once Rupert reminded me of its call. Enthusiastic bug-hunts by children turned up a Bishop's Mitre Shieldbug (*Aelia acuminata*) and the micro-moth *Elachista rufocinerea* (which is relatively uncommon) as well as lots of Alder Leaf Beetles (*Agelastica alni*). These blue-green beetles are suddenly becoming common and can defoliate both native and alien species of Alder. St Mark's Flies (*Bibio marci*) were also on the wing, so called because they emerge around St Mark's Day, 25th April.

My focus for the day though was plants. Fred Rumsey and I spent the day recording all the plants we could find on the site. Altogether we recorded 198 species of flowering plants and ferns and a short list of bryophytes. One of the first species we spotted was Green-winged Orchid (*Anacamptis morio*), first found here in 2022. The two flowering plants were much admired by visitors throughout the day and I even whistled about them to Debbie Chatting of Somer Valley FM. Green-winged Orchid is a declining species, Vulnerable on the England Red List, but like all orchids it produces copious dust-like seeds which can colonise new sites if conditions are suitable.

Coal batches are acidic and low in nutrients. Unlike most other spoil heaps in this area, Haydon Batch has not been planted with trees and remains a very special site. It is the best local site for Broom, which was flowering abundantly along with Gorse – both are important nectar sources for early insects. Around some small seasonal pools we re-found clumps of Oval Sedge (*Carex leporina*) and Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*) and also discovered Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*)



new to the site. Oval Sedge is only known from one other site in the CVWG area, Lesser Spearwort from three others.



The south-facing slope is particularly species-rich and supports the largest population of Viper's-bugloss (*Echium vulgare*) in the CVWG area, and also many rosettes of Small Scabious (*Scabiosa columbaria*). Both species flower for a long time in summer and are very attractive to bees and other insects. There were also many clumps of uncommon Silvery Hair-grass (*Aira caryophyllea*) and surprisingly an abundance of pretty Field Pansies (*Viola arvensis*) in flower.

The north side of the batch is wooded. Here we found five different species of fern, Wood Speedwell (*Veronica montana*), Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) and Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*). There are areas of scrub around the edges of the batch, but most of summit remains species-rich open grassland, with

an abundance of anthills (hence the Green Woodpeckers). To my immense excitement, on one anthill, Rupert Higgins found a species completely new to the CVWG area: many rosettes of Common Cudweed (*Filago germanica*). This species of heaths and dry pastures is Scarce in Somerset and is Near Threatened on the England Red List, which means it is recognised to be in decline. In Somerset it has only one recent record north of the Mendips: it appeared briefly on some cobbles in Bath in 2007. This was almost certainly the most significant find of the day.

By its nature, a bioblitz gives only a small snapshot of the species present at a site and is not a substitute for detailed surveys by specialists in different taxonomic groups. The bioblitz at Haydon Batch was very modest, but attracted many participants who engaged with interest, so was clearly a worthwhile event. Knowing that others treasure the site for its wildlife, as Cam Valley Wildlife Group does, is reassuring, and also made the event worthwhile. To find a Red-Listed native species completely new to the CVWG area rendered it a very special day indeed!



Helena Crouch

Deer Me

At mid-morning on 1st March, I looked out of my 3' square kitchen window to behold a deer benefiting from the apple segments I had thrown out for the Blackbirds. Because it displayed no antlers or tusks, had a humpy back and shortish front legs, I assumed it to be a Muntjac girl.

Miss Muntjac enjoyed herself by throwing an apple into the air to catch on the way back down, but she missed!

Identity could be confused with the Chinese water deer who never has antlers and is of a similar size to a Muntjac.

Fergus Callander

Nature notes from Summer 2022

Each day I make a nature note. Here are some favourites from summer last year.

3rd June 2022



We did one of our otter survey walks. As well as finding otter spraint with crayfish remains (antennae and a gastrolith) in it, we met someone who has seen an otter earlier in the day. We also saw lots of Beautiful Demoiselles near our first survey site. There was Monkshood in flower near another site. Then we finishing off with a Dipper in the river at Ham.

29th June 2022

I was photographing some insects in our garden today. This is a Hairy Shieldbug nymph. Shieldbugs pass through five nymphal instars before moulting into fully winged adults. I think that this is at the first stage. It is on Viper's Bugloss leaves which are also hairy.



9th July 2022



We visited Badbury Rings during a short break in Dorset. We saw quite a few Dark Green Fritillaries and plenty of chalk-grassland plants including Greater Knapweed, Pyramidal Orchids, Field Scabious, Small Scabious. We also saw Squinancywort, a member of the bedstraw family, which got its name from being a herb used, prior to antibiotics, to treat a throat infection called Squinancy (now called Quinsy or *peritonsillar abscess*).

17th July 2022

The Wool-carder Bees are back in the garden. Their hovering flight interspersed with darting attacks makes them easy to spot. As last year, it is the Wall Germander and Betony that they are keen to defend from other males and from other species of bee. This mating strategy is called 'resource defence polygyny'. They are defending territories where there are plenty of food plants or plants with 'woolly' leaves for the females to make nests with.

5th August 2022

I came across a remarkable Ash tree today on a walk in the Batcombe – Westcombe area. The tree has regrown after losing its crown. It has a hollow trunk with a large crack more or less from top to bottom. However despite the threat of Ash Dieback, there was a lot of strong growth on the branches that have sprouted from the damaged trunk.



17th August 2022

Today I found 'little yellow grains of rice' wrapped in a fuzzy web on a radish leaf. After a bit of research, I decided they were the cocoons of a wasp, probably *Cotesia glomerata*, which parasitises large white butterfly caterpillars. I'm including a brief summary of the process, so you can decide whether or not to watch the video I found on YouTube.

The wasp larvae develop inside the living caterpillar, which survives, swells and eats 50% more food. Then the larvae cut their way out of the caterpillar and weave fuzzy cocoons. If the caterpillar is still alive, it helps the wasp larvae by weaving additional protection and fending off would-be predators.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMG-LWYncAs>

Veryan Conn

Members' photos

Photos from Swell Wood by Maggie Edwards

Maggie reports that those of you who went on the trip to see woodland birds and Herons at Swell Wood near the Somerset Levels on 16th April had a wonderful rain-free day. The party watched herons feeding their young high up in the trees in Swell Wood's heronry, which also had a few Little Egrets nesting alongside them. Maggie took a photo of the nesting activity. Other birds seen included Greater Spotted Woodpecker and a Nuthatch. The party had a relaxing time sitting in the heronry viewing hide watching not only the activity high in the trees but also many other birds passing by, including wrens, blue tits, great tits, marsh tits and robins. Maggie notes that a squirrel kept popping up and that voles and a Blue Tit came into the hide, perhaps looking for tit-bits!

The Wood Anemone is a perennial in the buttercup family. This slow-growing species is a good Ancient Woodland Indicator, but is not found exclusively in Ancient Woodlands. Swell Wood is a mix of Ancient Woodland and an abandoned Oak plantation which is over 100 years old. It has good ground flora, which includes Yellow Archangel and Herb Paris scattered among the carpets of Dog Mercury and Bluebells. The wood anemone is favoured by hoverflies.



It is also known as Windflower, Thimbleweed and Smell Fox because it has a musky foxy smell. The name Windflower has an interesting connection with its name. The Greek, anemone, is often translated as windflower, literally 'daughter of the wind'.

It is said that in Greek mythology that Anemone was the name of the favourite nymph of Zephyros, god of the west wind, of spring breezes and of spring. Zephyros was thought to bring the west winds that heralded the end of winter and start of spring. Zephyros has been depicted scattering flowers. The four gods of the wind are called the Anemoi, the wind gods. Anemos translates as 'winds'. Some versions of the myths say that Anemone was transformed into a flower bearing her name by the wife of Zephyros, known as Chloris or Flora.



Bluebells are one of the last Spring flowers to bloom and also an indicator of Ancient Woodland. They are also known as English Harebell, Cuckoos Boots, Witches Thimbles, Fairy Flower and Wild Hyacinth due to the beautiful smell.

Maggie notes that unfortunately our English Bluebells can cross pollinate with Spanish Bluebells, which are invasive.

Deborah Porter

Blue Spaces Programme

Cam Valley Wildlife Group's area spans covers the catchments of the Cam and Wellow Brooks, which lie within an area that connects the Mendip Hills and Cotswolds Areas of Natural Beauty (AONBs), the Limestone Link. It also falls within the Somer Valley Rediscovered project area, which provides opportunities for funding initiatives in the area.

Under the Water Framework Directive, both the Cam and the Wellow are at poor ecological status and considered to be failing. The Bristol Avon Rivers Trust (BART) reports the reasons as a combination of physical modification and pollution (particularly from livestock and sewage). This not only impacts biodiversity of these rivers, but also the Bristol Avon, which they flow into.

The Bristol Avon Rivers Trust launched their Blue Spaces programme in our area last year with support and funding for the project work from Bath and North East Somerset Council and the Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership. The first event involved BART hosting a community river dip event in Midsomer Norton along the Wellow Brook, where attendees learned how to kick sample and identify a range of freshwater invertebrates. The team also covered water quality issues and threats to the Wellow as well as how their behaviour at home can impact river health. Riverfly nymphs can be used as indicators of river health because species-sensitivity to change in their environment results in some species not being present if a local pollution event has occurred.

BART envisages the project as delivering opportunities for upskilling through environmental training and will be involved in promoting community Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) rain planters, which should not only look good but also help to educate people on the importance of SUDS and helping to slow the flow to the rivers.

It hopes that 'Our Blue Spaces' will, together with Somer Valley Rediscovered and B&NES' regeneration initiatives,

“create a new appreciation and passion for the natural environment through a programme of community engagement and citizen science that provide exciting ways in which local communities can engage with their blue spaces”.



Contacts: To register interest in the SUDS event - Molly: molly@bristolavonrivertrust.org

For more information about the project – Rozy: Rozy@bristolavonrivertrust.org

Deborah Porter

Next Coordinating Team meeting dates

The next meetings are on Tuesday, 8th August and Tuesday, 10th October. All members are welcome to attend. Please ring Judy on 07460 278311 for details.

Deborah Porter

Weekend wildlife recording event in Paulton

Saturday 22nd July and Sunday 23rd July - daytime and evening sessions

We will be looking at the wildlife of a private location in Paulton from 3pm on Saturday. We will also visit Paulton Basin. This will be followed around/after sunset by bat roost emergence and moth trapping at this private home location. The moth trap will be running all night and we will go back on Sunday morning to examine the contents.

Refreshments will be provided for a small charge to cover costs - tea, coffee, squash, cans, biscuits - but if you are planning on being there for the whole event, please do bring food and drink to keep yourself going!

Parking space will be provided and we will also have use of a first-floor loo, accessed by stairs. This is a 'no dogs' event. Guardians are asked to closely watch children as there is a brook with steep banks, nettles, brambles and so on. It is important that when you arrive you speak to Deborah for risk assessment/insurance purposes.

Please contact Deborah Porter for further details and directions at camvalleywildlife@gmail.com or on 01761 435563

Deborah



Early purple orchid - by Phil Gait



Green winged orchid - by Phil Gait



Wildlife garden - by Phil Gait

(Note: Orchid image on front page by Phil Gait.)



Water Avens– by Phil Gait

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Next Newsletter: The final copy date for the next Newsletter is **15th August 2023**

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:

Elizabeth Brimmell at liz@ebrimmell.co.uk or telephone: 01761 453926.

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