



# The Cam Valley Wildlife Group Newsletter



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## Nature Notes from Autumn 2022

Each day Veryan Conn makes a nature note. Here are some favourites from last autumn.

### 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022

We have been concerned about the Ivy Bees. They used to nest in a bare, sunny garden bank. Our Viper's Bugloss had chosen to grow there. However, I can now say that the Ivy Bees are fine. They have solved the problem themselves. Today a large number of males are searching for newly emerged females on bare ground under our lavender and the adjacent path.



### 21<sup>st</sup> September 2022



I found a Harvestman in our kitchen. It had forked pedipalps, which meant it was *Dicranopalpus ramosa*. This species was originally found in Morocco. However, it is gradually spreading northwards, via Portugal, Spain and France to reach the south coast by 1957. Since then it has continued to spread and reached Scotland in 2000.

*Image top right – Holly Blue at Ivy*

**3<sup>rd</sup> October 2022**

A Southern Hawker dragonfly arrived to lay eggs. It was choosing dry land; wood, stone, leaves and even a sock and my camera case. I found out that Southern Hawkers lay on wood and vegetation near water. The eggs don't hatch until the following spring. The larvae then drop into the water, where they stay for up to three years, before emerging.



**23<sup>rd</sup> October 2022**



There seem to be some bumper acorn crops this year. I thought I would collect a few from a couple of my favourite trees. However I found both of these trees, one near Holcombe and the other near Westcombe (pictured) had very few. Apparently a tree produces a similar number of flowers each year, but more are pollinated when we have a warm, dry spring. Spring 2022 was dry but often cold. Also, even oaks in the same wood don't all flower at the same time, so some missed out.

**16<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

I watched two Jays in Leigh Woods today and was thinking that they must be busy collecting and hoarding acorns. Jays have adapted gullets in which they can store three or four acorns as well as an extra one in their bills. An individual Jay may hoard as many as 3,000 acorns each autumn as food for future months. They are excellent at recalling where they have cached acorns, although in summer they may use the presence of newly germinated saplings to find ones they missed earlier.

24<sup>th</sup> November 2022

I noticed a tiny pinkish coral fungus growing around a small Bergamot that was in a plant pot. It seemed much smaller than other coral fungi that I have come across and have not yet managed to put a name to it. The photo is roughly life-size. Has anyone got any idea of what it might be?



*Veryan Conn*

## Cam Valley Wildlife Group outings in 2023

The CVWG outings that Diana Walker has led this year: on the 16th April we visited Swell Wood to see the Heronry where we saw a selection of woodland birds such as this Nuthatch, as well as the Grey herons on their nests with their young. Other birds that I managed to photograph was a Marsh tit, Wren, Robin, Coal tit, Great tit, Blue tit, Jackdaw and Chaffinch.



On the 8th of June we went further afield and visited the Hawk Conservancy Trust near Andover and were entertained with many of their birds flying free above the field display areas and we finished with Owls flying in the wood.



We saw African White-backed vultures feeding their chick and a Hooded Vulture flying over over a lovely flowering meadow.



On the 18th June we visited Collards Hill near Street to try and spot the Large Blue butterfly, but with no luck as it seemed that we were a week too early. We did see Marble White butterflies and a Great Green Bush-cricket.



Finally three of us visited Ham Wall on the 2nd July to look for Dragonflies. Here is a Four-spotted Chaser Dragonfly in flight and a Red-eyed Damselfly, just a couple of the insects that we photographed.



If you would like to see more photographs taken on these visits and other wildlife photographed by Diana during this year, then please come to our AGM on Wednesday evening on the 6th December for her yearly Slideshow.

## Goosard Batch Nature Reserve



CVWG needs a new Project Leader for Goosard Batch Nature Reserve as I am stepping down at the AGM in December. The Reserve which adjoins the Water Recycling Centre at Paulton, is owned by Wessex Water, and managed by our group in accordance with a five year Management Plan. It is a lovely little area, designated as a Local Wildlife Site, containing a variety of habitats ranging from open sunny banks of wild flowers to dense scrub.

One of the main objectives of the management is to maintain and increase biodiversity. During the summer, bramble and scrub regrowth are controlled to keep precious areas open allowing a variety of plants to flourish. During the winter any intruding growth around the edges is cut back and the areas themselves are partly clear cut on a rotational basis to promote fresh growth. The permissive path within the reserve and the public footpaths around three sides are also kept open.

The Project Leader must ensure the work set out in the Management Plan is carried out by leading our volunteers at regular monthly work mornings and arranging extra events if required. Risk



assessments have to be carried out, and the safety of volunteers and passers-by seriously considered. The Leader may need to liaise with Wessex Water and with the group Co-ordinating Team when any problems arise and will want to generally raise the level of interest in the Reserve whenever possible. There is a mower, a strimmer, and a brush cutter together with a number of hand tools to be stored and transported to working events, although this could possibly be shared with other volunteers.

The position of Project Leader at Goosard is a very interesting and rewarding one. Site surveys of plants, insect and birds show a wide variety of species are present, including some uncommon ones. People passing by are generally full of praise and gratitude for our work. Please contact me at [pwatson255@gmail.com](mailto:pwatson255@gmail.com) if you are interested!

**Peter Watson**

## Members' photos

**Comma, *Polytonia c-album* ssp. *C-album*** – Maggie Edwards.

The Comma is an attractive butterfly with a somewhat 'jagged' or 'frilly' wing outline. The sole white mark on the hind wing underside resembles a comma, from which its gets its name. It is well camouflaged at rest or in hibernation with its wings closed. The pupa looks remarkably like a withered leaf, being jagged and including green, brown and black colouring with some silver spots over the ground colour. Some pupae are much more subdued in colouration than others. This camouflage does not stop a proportion of them being used as hosts by parasitic wasps, but the butterfly's pupation only takes 11 – 15 days, depending on temperature, and it is a good strategy nonetheless! The caterpillar with its flecks of brown and white, gives the appearance of a bird dropping. The eggs are green and laid singly.



The Comma was widespread over most of England and Wales and parts of southern Scotland centuries ago, but suffered a severe decline until it was restricted to the Welsh Border Counties by the middle of the 1800s. This was thought to be due to the decline in hop farming, hops being a key food plant for its caterpillars at the time. Thankfully, it has made a very impressive comeback since the 1960s due to its modern preference for Common Nettle as the larval food plant. Now it is found throughout England and Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. There are some Irish records and it has reached Scotland once more.

The Comma is primarily a woodland butterfly. Its main breeding habitats are open woodland and woodland edges, but it is frequently seen in gardens, especially later in the year when it is fattening up on flowers and fruit in preparation for hibernation. Hibernation takes place in woodland on tree trunks and branches and in places such as log piles and hollow trees. It does not emerge from hibernation until March, when it seeks out nectar from spring flowers such as Sallow and Blackthorn blossoms, but it can occasionally be spotted on warm winter days on which it has woken up.

The butterfly comes in two forms, one darker and one lighter, *f. c-album* and *f. hutchinsoni*. The second of these forms is so consistent that there are some who think that it should be ranked as a variety, a rank that lies between subspecies and form. The form that emerges from hibernation has dark undersides to the wings, but its brood produces butterflies of both forms - the dark form, *f. c-album* (the majority) and *f. hutchinsoni*, which has quite light wing undersides and brighter uppersides. This form was first defined in Robson (1981), its defining features being, (a) a paler overall appearance and (b) especially paler undersides that are yellow-brown with darker markings

near the body and with a few green spots and other marks at the wing margins. The original definition described the ground colour of the upper wing and being about the same as the lightest colour of the darker form. It is named after Emma Hutchinson, a comma breeder in Herefordshire who first bred it and who became an authority on the species. She is reputed to have gained knowledge of the species unrivalled to this day.

It is believed that if day length is increasing while the larva develops, the development of the bright form, *f. hutchinsoni*, is triggered, whereas most of the larvae developing while day length is decreasing (after midsummer's day) develop into the dark form. The dark form is a delayed breeder, breeding the following spring, but the bright form is a direct breeder that produces a brood that emerge as dark-form butterflies that pupate from mid-August to the end of September. The adult butterflies of the light form, *f. album*, do not hibernate. It is considered that this breeding strategy allows the species to capitalise on favourable weather conditions and that a good spring with early emergence and rapid larval development favours a larger proportion of the short-lived form, *hutchinsoni*.

**Pyramidal orchid, *Anacamptis pyramidalis* - Maggie Edwards.**

The family Orchidaceae is one of the most highly evolved families of flowering plants on earth. Orchids are usually specific to a type of habitat and have specialised relationships with soil fungi and pollinators. This association with fungi is important for germination of the seed and it is the ability of the seedlings to parasitise soil fungi that allows them to grow. The mature bulbs do not appear to require the soil fungi, but appear to do better when they are present, as do the small bulbs produced by the 'mother' bulb. Some orchids are associated with species of fungus from a single fungal lineage, but others can use a limited selection of distantly related species [Ref: Abstract of 'Germination and seedling establishment in orchids: a complex of requirements', Hanne N. Rasmussen, Kingsley W. Dixon, Jana Jersáková, Tamara Těšitelová, Annals of Botany, Vol 116]. The pyramidal orchid is thought to have relationships with fungi from more than one genus and to act, via its roots, in a protective way towards the fungi that help to provide it with food.



The pyramidal orchid is a small orchid native to southwestern Eurasia that is found in the UK on a diversity of soils in lowlands, generally on dry alkaline grassland, sunny scrubland areas, in dunes and in quarries. It will also tolerate neutral conditions. It has disappeared from 20% of its historical range, but is quite tolerant of human activities and can be found in churchyards, on roadsides and on roundabouts. Elsewhere in the world its decline is partly associated with use as a medicinal and food plant. It produces copious amounts of dust-like seeds, "estimated at 35,000 from a single spike" according to the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, which is a presumed reason why such large colonies of this orchid can develop rapidly in new sites. It is pollinated by butterflies and moths, but is not known specifically as a food plant for any insect in the UK.

**Harlequin ladybird larvae and pupae – Rob Ladd.**

Readers may recall a photograph of Harlequin Ladybird larvae by Phil Gait in our newsletter (Issue 95). Rob Ladd has sent in photographs of both Harlequin larvae and pupae on Hop leaves taken this

year. The set of the four pale spikes to the rear around the midline is a defining feature. Harlequin and 7-spot ladybird pupae are very similar.



As they mature, they change from yellow to their final colouration and pattern, which is quite variable in the Harlequin. In Newsletter 104 (Autumn 2022) I identified a photograph of pupae sent in by Rob in June that year as 7-spot ladybird, but I was wrong.



They too were Harlequin pupae. It turns out that the spiky larval skin at the base of the pupa is a defining feature that distinguishes it from the 7-spot pupa. The 7-spot does have a dark projecting area at its base with some white spots with *small* white spikes on them but these are very subdued compared with the almost ostentatious spikes of the Harlequin's pupa!

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**Deborah Porter**

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**Next Newsletter:** The final copy date for the next Newsletter is **15<sup>th</sup> November 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.**

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