



# The Cam Valley Wildlife Group Newsletter



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## A Big Thankyou to Liz Brimmell



Liz Brimmell lives in Hinton Blewett in a delightful stone-built home that she converted from a cowshed, with a beautiful garden. Being in Hinton Blewett she is the CVWG member that lives nearest to the source of the Cam Brook.

Liz took over as editor in 2011, adding to her already heavy involvement in community activities: Chair of the Parish Council, Chair of the village hall committee, and running a local history group. If you need a job doing well, you should always look for a busy person! Her first issue was number 60, the summer edition – and still in black and white.

In her first editorial she modestly said: 'I have some background in copywriting and proofreading'. In fact, one of the many roles in her long career with Wills/Imperial was to oversee the production of the million Embassy catalogues that were produced every year!

Liz's last Newsletter was issue number 114, Spring 2025, so she had edited nearly half of all the Newsletters. We must all thank her for her dedication, gently 'persuading' members to contribute articles when very few were available, coping with all the frustrating IT issues and all the hard work involved in getting the Newsletter to the printers on time.

We welcome Frank Loughran as the new editor, a keen wildlife gardener from Hallatrow.

### ***Phil Gait***

**And a message from Liz:** I have so enjoyed compiling the 55 editions over the last 14 years. The hours, days and weeks spent working on the next newsletter helped build a strong sense and vision about the Cam Valley where I live and walk every day along Cam Brook with my dog.

With best wishes, Liz

## Field Trip to Chew Valley and Blagdon Lakes



Green-winged Orchid – Diana Walker

Five CVWG members gathered at the Woodford Lodge on Friday 11th April to collect the necessary bird hide permits. From the lodge we drove to Nunnery Point where, in a nearby field, we came across a good number of Green-winged Orchids (*Anacamptis morio*). It was still early days but the further we advanced into the field the more we saw. Also in the field were Cuckoo Flower (*Cardamine pratensis*) or Lady's Smock. Heading to the hide overlooking Villice Bay we encountered native Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), and Cowslips also caught our eye. In Villice Bay there were several birds like Cormorant, Great Crested Grebe, Great White and Little Egrets. There were a lot more birds such as Chiffchaff, Treecreeper and Blackcap that were heard but not seen. We had our 'picnic' in the second hide before heading on.

At Herons' Green Peter spotted a Lesser Scaup with his telescope, which was surrounded by Tufted Ducks. A Common Sandpiper also put in an appearance. Our third stop was Blagdon Lake. We entered from the Top End and made our way to Rainbow Point. The lake looked wonderful in the glorious sunshine. However, with there being more fishermen than birds our stay was brief! From there we headed back to Chew Valley Lake going to the Stratford Hide - without stopping at the Blue Bowl pub! On the way down the walkway a Reed Warbler was heard. From the hide a Greater Scaup was seen amongst a group of Tufted Ducks. Two Great Crested Grebe got close together, shook their heads a few times then went their separate ways.

Our final stop was at Herriot's Bridge. After some delicious Marshfield ice-cream Peter came up trumps again with his telescope spotting a couple of Avocets. I was delighted to photograph a female Orange-tip butterfly whilst Diana took a wonderful picture of a Grey Heron and a gull having an argument. We did also see two Mute Swans doing what consenting adults are allowed to do. The final highlight was the appearance of a Marsh Harrier.



Marsh Harrier – Diana Walker

Thanks must go to Peter Watson for leading us, and on a personal note to the photographic advice Diana gave me. It was a delightful day. Hopefully we will see more members on future field trips.

**Andrew Harrison**

## Habitat Management at Haydon Batch



Habitat management at Haydon Batch has been undertaken by Volunteers from Somer Valley Rediscovered in consultation with the CVWG. The volunteers were hard at work over the winter, managing the encroaching scrub and protecting this important grassland habitat. They were also out at the end of April doing a spring cut of part of the grassland, using scythes rather than machinery as this method is far less disruptive to wildlife and minimises the environmental impact. Vitrally, scything gives many small creatures, such as voles, time to escape.

Cutting back the long grass encourages the growth of wildflowers, which in turn will provide nectar for a wide range of insects including bees, beetles, butterflies and moths.

It also promotes the growth of fungi, including

*Scything at Haydon Batch- Phoebe Webster*

the colourful and sometimes rare Waxcaps, several species of which have been recorded at Haydon Batch.

Areas of longer grass have been left as tussocky grass is another important habitat. Skylarks have been recorded at Haydon Batch. They nest in long grass that is some distance from hedges and trees that can harbour predators. Some types of longer grass are the larval food plants of several butterfly species, including Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Ringlet, Small Heath and Skippers.

The SVR volunteers also cut back some of the scrub surrounding and growing on the grassland. Their hard work has not only kept the paths open but helped protect and develop the grassland habitats. There are several invasive species to be contained, especially Bramble, Blackthorn, Dog Rose, Gorse and Broom. Bramble, perhaps the worse 'culprit' can grow at 7cm a day in the summer, and the arching branches will root wherever they touch the ground. These shrubs would take over the grassland if left unchecked. They can form impenetrable thickets, which shade out any other plants.

However, a careful balance needs to be kept between meadow and scrub as the hedges and thickets are also vital habitats. They provide shelter and nesting sites for birds and small mammals and their flowers are a valuable nectar source for bees, butterflies and moths and their ripe fruit is also an important food source for many creatures. Two Hairstreak butterflies have been recorded at the Batch. The Brown Hairstreak only uses Blackthorn to lay eggs, and the Green Hairstreak will use Bramble, Broom and Gorse.

**Frank Loughran**



## Plant Identification Walk at Haydon Batch



Fifteen people including families and children attended a Plant Identification Walk at Haydon Batch, led by Dr Helena Crouch, to celebrate the City Nature Challenge. The event was organised by Somer Valley Rediscovered and the Natural History Consortium and was also supported by the Cam Valley Wildlife Group. Plants recorded included Birds Foot Trefoil, Common Mouse-ear, Bugle and the exciting Green-winged Orchid was spotted for the fourth year in a row. Over 225 different species of plants have been recorded on Haydon Batch, which really does show what an important site this is for its grassland and associated wildlife.

*Plant Identification Walk – Phoebe Webster*



*Green-veined Orchid – Phoebe Webster*



*Bugle – Phoebe Webster*

Participants were encouraged to download the iNaturalist app and upload any pictures of wildlife spotted. The app gives suggestions of what it thinks you have seen so you don't need to be a wildlife expert to use it. Once the record has been verified by a team of online scientists and wildlife enthusiasts it can be used to inform local and national wildlife conservation work. For more information and to download the app: <https://uk.inaturalist.org/>

***Phoebe Webster***

## An Amazing Creature

Starting to descend the Gorge Walk at Cheddar last week, my friend came to a sudden halt and whispered, "Snake!" Wriggling across our path there was indeed a beautiful, shiny, copper-coloured reptile. In the few precious seconds we had, I noticed the flicking tongue and thought, "Yes, it *is* a snake!" Could it be a juvenile adder or perhaps a rare smooth snake? No, it was neither of these. The flicking tongue was in fact notched rather than forked. The creature was about 20cm long and the head joined seamlessly to the body. We didn't see it blink, but this would have confirmed that this was no snake but, instead, a young Slow Worm (*Anguis fragilis*).



Slow Worm – stock image

This native, legless lizard is an amazing creature which can be found all over mainland Britain, particularly in southwest England and Wales. One interesting fact is that while most reptiles lay eggs, the female slow-worm is ovoviviparous: producing up to 12 hatchlings inside her body and giving birth to live young, 4-9cm long, in late summer. Researching the Slow Worm further, I was surprised to discover its longevity as the average lifespan is 20-30 years. During this time, the reptile

can achieve a length of 50cm and to manage this growth, their skin is shed in patches about four times a year, unlike snakes, which slough all their skin in one go.

Having had this lucky encounter at Cheddar, I could hardly believe it when just two days later, again on a hot day, we were able to witness another side of the slow-worm's life. My friend and I were following the River Frome towards Freshford when, suddenly, he stopped dead in his tracks and asked, "Is that a tail?" Bending down, we were able to inspect a 12cm dark, speckled blue/grey tail – the colour of an older Slow Worm. There was no sign of its owner, which we took to be a good sign. The tail wasn't damaged in any way and as I carefully placed it on the side of the path, it contorted slightly, still doing its job of distracting any potential predator, such as a bird, rat, cat, badger, hedgehog or snake. In fact, all lizards can detach their tails, a defence mechanism known as autotomy. It is thought that up to 70% of Slow Worms have experienced this process and while a stubby tail re-grows, it cannot be detached again. It is best, therefore, not to handle Slow Worms in case they feel threatened and shed their tails, as this could compromise their future safety.

These docile lizards are no threat whatsoever to people and are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Furthermore, due to their penchant for slugs and snails, Slow Worms are a gardener's friend. Gardens, allotments, woodland glades, pastures and scrubland all provide a good habitat, especially when there are compost heaps, warm stones and logs to hide under. Between



October and March, Slow Worms hibernate underground or in a hollow, while it is late spring or early autumn when they are most likely to be seen.

Although Slow Worm numbers remain unknown, there is some concern for them due to habitat depletion. Our gardens and allotments, therefore, could provide just the safe refuge that this very special lizard is looking for.

**Christine Pither**

**Sources:** Natural History Museum website: [nhm.ac.uk](http://nhm.ac.uk) and Abbot G. and Holden P. (2023) *RSPB Handbook of Garden Wildlife*.

## A Tale of Two Toothworts

Botany walks have got off to a good start this year, with a few new members joining the regular attendees. Our first few meetings focused on churchyards, all of which we have visited before, many times. It was therefore a matter of great excitement that Tony spotted a huge patch of Toothwort (*Lathraea squamaria*) in a corner of the churchyard of Holcombe Old Church, a new site for this interesting plant.



*Toothwort in Camerton churchyard -  
Helena Crouch*

Toothwort is a wholly parasitic plant in the family Orobanchaceae. This large family is represented in Britain by the parasitic Broomrapes (*Orobanche* and *Phelipanche*) and Toothworts (*Lathraea*) and now also includes several genera of hemiparasitic plants: Yellow-rattles (*Rhinanthus*), Eyebrights (*Euphrasia*), Red Bartsia (*Odontites vernus*), Cow-wheats (*Melampyrum*), Louseworts (*Pedicularis*), Yellow Bartsia (*Parentucellia viscosa*) and Alpine Bartsia (*Bartsia alpina*).

World-wide there are only seven species of Toothwort; in Britain we have one native species and one which is introduced. Toothwort has a perennial rhizome, parasitic on various woody plants, particularly Hazel and Elms, but also Sycamore, Laurel, Alder and other species. Only the flower-spike emerges above ground, bearing white or pink flowers on one side of a stem which is typically 10-20cm tall. Toothwort flowers early, usually in March or April. The flowers, which resemble molar teeth, are pollinated by bumble bees and capsules develop, each containing many seeds. The whole spike soon withers, and the plant disappears from view.

In the CVWG area, the only other records for the hectad (10km x 10km square) ST65 are in Camerton churchyard, where it has been known for over 25 years. Further east there are several sites around Combe Hay and Wellow. This species has a scattered distribution within Somerset.



Purple Toothwort (*Lathraea clandestina*) is native to France, Belgium, Spain and Italy. It was introduced to Britain in 1888 as a garden curiosity and has escaped in a few places. There are no sites in the CVWG area, but about ten years ago I bought a chunk of rhizome for £10 at a Rare Plant Fair and planted it, as directed, against a root of Hazel, which I excavated and wilfully damaged to encourage parasitism by the Purple Toothwort. Nothing was ever seen again until this year, when some stunning purple flowers appeared beneath that same Hazel, around which I have since created a stumpery for ferns. Flowers of Purple Toothwort are not borne on a spike but appear to grow directly from the soil in a cluster. They are a majestic deep purple, or more rarely pink or white. In the same bed, under another Hazel, I also have a few spikes of our native Toothwort where I must have sown some seed many years ago: both add interest to a border created primarily for ferns!

*Purple Toothwort – Helena Crouch*

**Helena Crouch**

## Nature Notes from Summer 2024

Each day I make a nature note. Here are some for last summer. There seems to be a theme of wildlife in unexpected places.



**11<sup>th</sup> June 2024** Today, I listed the native grasses in our garden. Crested Dog's-tail, False Brome, False Oatgrass, Rough Meadow-grass, Smooth Meadow-grass and Yorkshire Fog came in a seed mix or of their own accord. We have added Quaking Grass, Sweet Vernal Grass, Wood Melick and Haretail Cotton-grass, which grows by our pond. We grow Wood Melick in the shady part of the garden with Welsh Poppies.



**15<sup>th</sup> June 2024** Today I saw two cases of birds thriving in our habitat. Firstly, Grey Wagtails, a parent and fledgling on the pavement near the river in the middle of Midsomer Norton. They seemed totally at home amongst Saturday morning shoppers. Then at the plant nursery in Chilcompton, a Swallow flew out of a building. We went to see if it was nesting. There were four fledglings perched on a roof beam, near a nest in the roof apex.

**9<sup>th</sup> July 2024** Normally I expect to see Kidney Vetch on chalk grassland or sea cliffs, but it has found different niches around here. I found it growing in one of the disused limestone quarries a few years ago. Today I found it in the Holcombe playing field car park.



**19<sup>th</sup> July 2024** The Norfolk Hawker dragonfly is an endangered species that I thought was confined to the Broadlands in East Anglia. Today I took a photo of a brown dragonfly with green eyes at the RSPB reserve at Radipole and realised that I had just seen one in Weymouth. The British Dragonfly Society says that in the past couple of decades it has spread to other areas including Dorset.

**4<sup>th</sup> August 2024** Just over 4 years ago we saw a White Stork flying over Coleford. Today we saw a lot more. Visiting family in London, we were treated to a trip to the rewilding project at Knepp, where White Storks are now breeding. This one is probably a juvenile. The brown / black beaks of young storks gradually turn red starting at the base.







**10<sup>th</sup> August 2024** Today I noticed a spider suspended over our pond on a line of web. I worked out that it was a Long-jawed Orbweb (*Tetragnatha* species). After a short spell with its body and legs stretched out along a stalk sticking out of the water, it returned to the line over the pond and was hanging from it upside down.

**Veryan Conn**

## Members' Photos



*Owl Chick at Ham Wall – Terry Goodall*

It is rare to see a Tawny Owl chick. These owls are more often heard than seen. The distinctive hooting of the males and the 'keewick' calls of females are familiar sounds during the breeding season (males make this 'keewick' call mainly outside the breeding season). Even though the species appears to be reasonably common and widespread in the UK little is known about the fluctuations in its population, mainly because this requires night-time surveys. The British Trust for Ornithology addressed this with two large-scale citizen science surveys of over 9,000 sites in 2005-6 and 2018-19. and was published in 2022. The report\* generated a better understanding of calling behaviour and the types of sites in which they are found; they were

found to be more vocal in autumn when juveniles were dispersing and again in spring when breeding began. The two strongest factors governing the presence of Tawny Owls at a site were the extent of broadleaved tree cover locally and the degree of urbanisation/artificial light at night. The data generated is useful for shaping the design of further surveys.

\*Hanmer, H, Boothby, C., Toms, M, Noble, D. & Balmer, D. (2022) 'Large-scale citizen science survey of a common nocturnal raptor: urbanization and weather conditions influence the occupancy and detectability of the Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*.' *Bird Study*, 68(2).

Picture taken in your new editor's pond by the previous owner. It was most likely looking for amphibians to eat. This can be rather a drawn-out process depending on the size of the amphibian, and not one for the squeamish - a grass snake will tackle a surprisingly large frog, taking the best part of 15 minutes to ingest it. Another primary food source is fish.



*Grass Snake – Terry Goodall*



*Grey Heron and gull – Diana Walker*

An unusual, and tasty, garden escape recently seen growing in the hedgerow between Hallatrow and High Littleton. Purple Salsify is grown for its roots, which are supposed to taste of oysters.



*Purple Salsify - Frank Loughran*

**Deborah Porter**



## Look out for the survey!

During the summer we intend to send out a survey by email to gather information on what our membership wants from the Cam Valley Wildlife Group, and what activities might draw in those who we do not see at the talks, walks and events. If you would rather have the survey in paper form let Jim know ([jim.crouch@macegroup.com](mailto:jim.crouch@macegroup.com)) and he'll arrange a form to be posted to you.

Of course, if you have any suggestions for future talks, walks and events you don't have to wait for the survey! Just send them through to us and we will be in touch to discuss your ideas.

**Jim Crouch**

07399-921607

## Cam Valley Wildlife Group Events Programme

### July to September 2025

Please contact Judy on 07460-278311 with any general queries or Diana on 07581-451805

**Venue for our talks: Radstock Working Mens' Club**, On the 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of the month during the Winter at 7.30 pm for an 8 pm start. A bar is available in the main part of the club, serving hot and cold drinks. **Please park in the town car park next door** (behind the library). There is a side entrance into the club from the car park.



### **Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> July – Goosard Batch Nature Reserve work morning**

Please contact Jim Crouch 07399-921607 or by email: [jim.crouch@macegroup.com](mailto:jim.crouch@macegroup.com) to let him know who is coming so he can plan activities. Anyone is welcome to attend.

### **Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> July – Walk around Haydon Batch**

Meet at 2pm in the carpark behind the Que Club BA3 3QR to see what wildlife we might find after the clearance work that took place during the winter months

### **Saturday 19 July, Bat Walk, Woodborough and Braysdown, Radstock**

A circular route from Radstock to Woodborough and Braysdown. We will have a few bat detectors, but feel free to bring your own! The walk starts from ST700553 on the cycle path just east of Lower Whitelands at 9.15 pm. Please bring a torch and suitable clothing/footwear. Parking is difficult so please contact Deborah at [camvalleywildlife@gmail.com](mailto:camvalleywildlife@gmail.com) or 01761-435563 for further details

### **Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> July - Butterfly Trip to Alners Gorse at Hazelbury Bryan, Sturminster Newton, DT10 2AU, Dorset**

The Butterfly Conservation's flagship Reserve. The last time we visited in 2009, 21 species of butterflies were spotted. Meet at Diana's by 9.30am for car share as there is not much space for parking on the road. Bring a picnic, and stout footwear is also needed. If the weather forecast is poor, please ring Diana the night before on 07581-451805

### **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> August – Goosard Batch Nature Reserve work morning**

Please contact Jim Crouch 07399-921607 or by email: [jim.crouch@macegroup.com](mailto:jim.crouch@macegroup.com) to let him know who is coming so he can plan activities. Anyone is welcome to attend.

### **Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> September - Moth & Bat Night, Paulton & Timsbury Basin**

We will set up the moth trap at 7.15 pm and will have bat detectors with us. We expect several species of bat to be present from dusk onward. If it is a good moth night we may keep the trap running until morning, going back early on Sunday to see which moths we have caught. Please contact Deborah at [camvalleywildlife@gmail.com](mailto:camvalleywildlife@gmail.com) or 01761-435563 (leave a clear message if you get no answer) if you wish to attend or want to know about parking. Please car share if possible.

### **Insect/invertebrate events**

If you would like to attend insect/invertebrate events and/or surveys or if you wish to be notified of upcoming insect/invertebrate walks or surveys please send your details to Deborah via our website contact page or to [camvalleywildlife@gmail.com](mailto:camvalleywildlife@gmail.com)

### **Wildlife Photography**

Please contact Diana on 07581-451805 [dianawalker4@gmail.com](mailto:dianawalker4@gmail.com) if you would like to accompany her on any of her days out photographing local wildlife.

### **CVWG Stalls**

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> July - Paulton Party in The Park**

**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> July – Midsomer Norton Town Fayre**

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> September – Stratton Village Day**

## **Next Co-ordinating Team meeting dates**

The dates for the next meetings are Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> July and Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September.

Any personal data you provide in submitted articles (e.g. names, images, contact details) that is not otherwise held by us will be used for the purposes of newsletter publication only and will not be shared without your consent. Please be sure that you have the permission of any person who can be identified from your article, or the permission of a parent/guardian in the case of a minor. Our Data Protection Policy is published on our website. A paper copy is available on request.

**Next Newsletter:** The final copy date for the next Newsletter is **15th August 2025**

**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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