



The Cam Valley Wildlife Group Newsletter



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Rare Fungi on Haydon Batch

We had such a wonderful morning on Haydon Batch identifying fungi with local enthusiast Dan Nicholas.

CHEGD is a term used to group together five categories of grassland fungi: *Clavarioid* (club and coral), *Hygrocybe* (waxcaps), *Entoloma* (pinkgills), *Geoglossum* (earth tongues) and *Dermoloma* (crazed caps), which are internationally recognised as indicators of high-quality, unimproved grassland.

Haydon Batch supports a total of 13 CHEGD species, a level of diversity that comfortably places it within the 'regionally important' category.



C. calabrica: Diana Walker

In very exciting news, we sent off a species for DNA testing, which confirmed it to be *Clavaria calabrica*, the first UK record of this species!

Big thanks are due to Dan Nicholas for leading the training workshop and identifying the species and to David Mitchel for DNA sequencing and confirming the identifications.

In addition to the *C. calabrica*, the following species were identified. **Waxcaps:** Blackening (*H. conica*), Butter (*H. ceracea*), Snowy (*C. virgineus*), Earthy (*C. fornicatus*), Parrot (*G. psittacinus*), Persistent (*H. acutoconica*), Bitter (*H. mucronella*), Spangle (*H. insipida*) and Golden (*H. chlorophana*). **Club and Coral:** Meadow Coral (*C. corniculata*), Golden spindles (*C. fusiformis*)- and White Meadow coral (*C. coralloides*).



Parrot Waxcap:
Diana Walker



Spangled Waxcap: Diana Walker

This richness shows that the grassland at Haydon Batch is ecologically valuable, relatively undisturbed, and worthy of continued sensitive management and conservation.

Stephanie Sharkey

Volunteer Coordinator

Somer Valley Rediscovered

André Fournier



André helping to put up an aviary for Barn Owl release in 2016.

Towards the end of the year, we heard the sad news of André's passing. André was Chair of the group for many years, probably for even longer than he wanted to be, and this included the time before the group became independent of the Avon Wildlife Trust in July 1994. A passionate commitment to wildlife conservation drove him on and he participated in a wide range of activities, from bat and Dormouse surveys to land use planning matters, group policies and procedures. He is perhaps best remembered for the Barn Owl Project, which he started up and ran until ill health prevented him from continuing after 2020. It is fair to say that without André's drive, vision, and leadership there would not be a Cam Valley Wildlife Group. Our condolences go out to his wife and family following his passing after a long and difficult illness.

Deborah Porter

Nature Notes from Winter 2024-2025

Each day I make a nature note. This may be recording something unusual or looking for more information about a species I know well.

14th December 2024 We were walking near Wells, when we heard a real racket coming from a nearby woodland. As we approached, we could see a group of very excited Jackdaws clustered round one particular tree trunk. They were trying to drive off a squirrel. When they eventually succeeded, we could see that they were in dispute over a hole in the tree.



20th December 2024 Walking through Blackpool Wood in Holcombe, we saw these fungi on a broken tree branch. They looked like pale brown oysterlings with a woolly upper surface. Their common name is Bitter Oysterling. However, the scientific name is *Panellus stipticus*. So, it is in a different genus to other oysterlings. Stipticus refers to styptic properties, as it was thought to be able to stem bleeding from wounds.

9th January 2025 It was a lovely sunny day after snow and frost. On our walk in the Edford – Stoke St Michael area, we spotted deer, fox and rabbit tracks. In a valley that was only just getting the sun, there were Hogweed seedheads with snow pom-poms on them.



25th January 2025 There were birds close to the hide at Catcott Lows today. As well as the Widgeon pictured here, there was a lone Lapwing. We were told that this Lapwing, which had a deformed beak, regularly stayed close to the ducks and did not seem to mix with the rest of the Lapwing flock that we could see in the distance.

14th February 2025 After much cold grey weather, the sun shone on this tiny moss on top of a wall. I think that it is *Tortula muralis*, also known as Wall Screw-moss. Given that all mosses need water to reproduce and most grow in damp shady place, I wondered how those in sunny situations on stone or tiles survive.



26th February 2025 We saw these Grey Seals on the Great Orme in North Wales. I think the two dark ones are males, the larger grey one is a female and the pale grey is a youngster. It is unlikely to be with its parents, as mothers do not stay with their young for more than a couple of weeks.

Veryan Conn

Himalayan Balsam: a most invasive species

Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is highly invasive in the UK, particularly in damp soil near rivers. Despite only living for one year, it grows large and fast, often ending up taller than a person. It blooms with large, pink flowers abundant with nectar, outcompeting native plants for pollinator attention. Late in summer, it produces seed pods that literally explode to scatter seeds, which often end up in rivers, floating downstream to colonise elsewhere. In winter, it dies, and since it bullied out other plant species, there are no more roots holding soil together.

However, this highly specialised lifestyle also creates glaring weaknesses. The plants are fragile - their stems easily break and their shallow roots make them easy to pull out of the ground by hand. They are easy for balsam-bashers to spot with their distinctive flowers and seed pods, whorls of leaves and ridged stems with red joints.



Himalayan Balsam in flower: Max Flagg

Being an annual species, if you cut it down it likely will not have a chance to regrow and set seed before the season is over. This makes it one of the easiest invasive plants for a group of volunteers to destroy large swathes of in just a few hours.



Uprooted plants: Max Flagg

Here, we were plucking it out of the ground by hand, piling up hundreds of individuals to rot in the woods. In another part of the reserve, we discovered an extensive monoculture of it, and I set on it with a billhook, chopping head after head in large swoops of the tool. I felt like some fantasy hero faced with a horde of monsters, trampling on their fallen bodies as I slashed deeper and deeper into the stand. The smell of their watery sap hung in the air, and my hook glistened with it. This method is far more efficient but carries the risk of collateral damage to other plants if done in inappropriate locations - and to people if you are not keeping aware of your surroundings.

If you notice Himalayan balsam taking over in your local area, now is the best time to do something about it while it is easy to see and not yet seeding. Bring it up with whoever owns the land or see if any local groups are looking to do something about it. Officially, I would caution against vigilante balsam-bashing since it can be dangerous near rivers.

Also, do not get balsams mixed up with native/naturalised willowherbs! These plants are also tall and bloom with pink flowers around this time of year.

Max Flagg

Volunteer

Somer Valley Rediscovered

Editor's note: *I saw the full horror of how Himalayan Balsam can spread and choke water courses when walking on Saddleworth Moor a few years ago. The line of all the streams could clearly be seen into the far distance because they appeared pink from all the balsam flowers.*

New Community Orchard for Paulton



Paulton residents, and members of Paulton on the Wild Side, came together to plant the village's first Community Orchard at the Miners Welfare Recreational Ground in partnership with Paulton Parish Council - an initiative powered by volunteers, community spirit, and a steady circulation of biscuits.

The planting coincided with National Tree Week, celebrated by organisations such as the Avon Wildlife Trust, who highlight how community

orchards bring people together, boost wellbeing, reconnect us with food and nature, support wildlife, and create valuable green spaces in our neighbourhoods.

Paulton's new orchard aims to do exactly that. Volunteers of all ages helped plant a variety of fruit trees that will, in time, provide free, locally grown produce for everyone to enjoy. Residents will be able to choose from apples, pears, gages, plums, cherries, quinces, and damsons. Local varieties were included, such as Morgan Sweet and Beauty of Bath apples, along with more popular varieties such as Bramley Seedling apple and Conference pear.

Chairman of Paulton Parish Council, Grant Johnson, who originally proposed the project from redistributed S106 monies, said: 'The turnout has been incredible. This orchard is a true community effort - people dug, carried, watered and supported each other all morning. Despite the soggy weather, spirits remained high, and the tea and biscuit supply certainly played a critical role. We're hugely grateful to everyone who gave their time to make this happen.'

Jane Stephenson from Paulton on the Wild Side said: 'since retiring, I'd been looking for opportunities to get involved in a project that combines environmental improvement with community benefit. This new orchard does just that. In the spring we'll be progressing the nature trail we devised last year.' If you would like to get involved email:

paultononthewildside@gmail.com

The orchard will continue to grow and develop over the coming months, with more community involvement planned. The hope is that it becomes a long-term asset for Paulton—a space where nature and community thrive.

Grant Johnson

Bat surveys

As many members will know, some time ago the group used to participate in bat surveys under the expert guidance of Jacquie Billington. More recently, we have put on a few bat events, some of them combined with moth trapping. CVWG bat events took place in 2025 in July, September and October in Radstock, Paulton Basin and Wellow. The species we recorded included both species of Horseshoe Bat, Myotis species including Daubenton's Bat, Common and Soprano Pipistrelles and Serotines.

Whitelands, Woodborough and Braysdown, Radstock, 19th July: A small group of members and non-members went on this bat walk, taking a pleasant 'circular' route from just east of Lower Whitelands, Radstock up to Woodborough and the Braysdown area and then back round to the starting point. We expected to see and hear Serotines and other bats, weather permitting. The weather held well enough to record Myotis bats, including what appeared to be Daubenton's, Common and Soprano Pipistrelle, and Serotine. Some of the files have yet to be analysed further but Myotis bat species are very difficult to separate reliably, especially if the number of passes is small. The list may not expand!

Paulton Basin, 20th September: This was to be a moth and bat night, and a number of people turned out for it. The weather forecast had been encouraging, and we were expecting rain during the day and then a mild, warm evening and night – perfect for moths and bats. But, as things do, it all changed when a large circulating low-pressure area did not stick to its expected course! The wind got up on the way over and by the start time it was very windy, playing havoc with bat detecting due to wind noise and ruling out moths. We tried sheltered areas, but the near-constant noise from crickets was not what we were looking for! We had more luck by the open water of the Paulton Basin, formerly the terminus of the Somersetshire Coal Canal and part of the restoration project spearheaded by the Somersetshire Coal Canal Society. There we recorded Daubenton's (*Myotis Daubentonii*) and, using a large torch, viewed at least one bat flying very low over the water and skimming the surface to grab insects – this is a typical behaviour for this bat and a way of distinguishing it from other Myotis species. We also recorded Soprano Pipistrelle, Greater Horseshoe Bat and Serotine. Given the probability of the high winds continuing through the night and the possibility of rain, we abandoned early and went on our way. Many thanks to Brian, the landowner, for giving his permission and making a welcome visit on the night.

Species recorded at Paulton Basin:

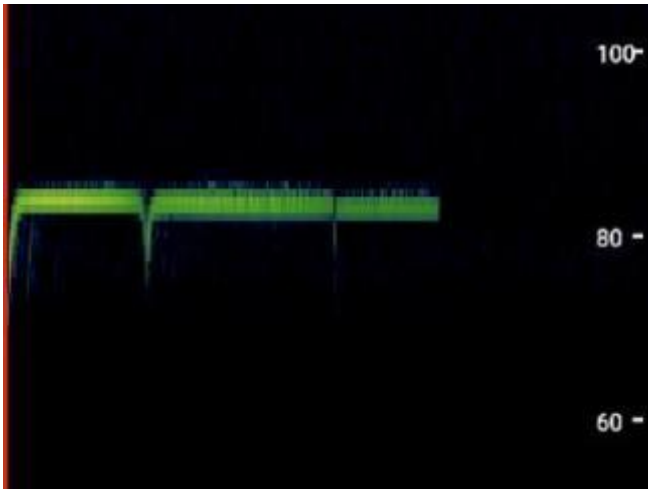
Soprano Pipistrelle at 7.48 - 8.22 pm

Greater Horseshoe Bat at 7.53 pm

Serotine at 7.54 pm

Daubenton's bat feeding over the pond at 8.13 – 8.17 pm.

Church Farm, Wellow, 11th October: Frank and I visited Church Farm, Wellow to record bats, Frank using his new phone app and me using an Anabat SD1 with a memory card to store the calls. There we were met by Jo McKerr, who kindly took us to a spot where we hoped to record emerging bats on her property and coming over from the nearby church. The weather



was good and the bats duly showed. We were treated to a number of calls by both Lesser and Greater Horseshoe bat, Common and Soprano Pipistrelle, Daubenton's bat and Serotine. Both the Lesser and Greater Horseshoe bat recordings included social calls. Horseshoe bats are the easiest bats to detect from sonogram images because of their distinct angular shape and almost constant frequency calls at around 82kHz for the Lesser and 110kHz for the Greater.

Sonogram of Lesser Horseshoe bat recorded at Church Farm

Many thanks to Jo for hosting.

Species recorded to the memory card in the Anabat detector at Wellow:

Lesser Horseshoe, 14 files at 18.27 – 18.51 pm
Common Pipistrelle, 8 files at 18.29 – 19.25 pm
Daubenton's, 3 files at 18.43 – 19.13 pm
Greater Horseshoe, 5 files at 18.48 – 19.11 pm
Soprano Pipistrelle, 3 files at 18.54 – 19.08 pm
Serotine, 1 file* at 19.29 pm

* Some other files had short calls that also appear to be Serotines'.

Deborah Porter

Members' Photos



Thistle Gall, whole and cut open: Phil Gait

Phil Gait has sent in photos of a thistle gall showing both the outside and the inside of each – fascinating. Fortunately, it can be identified without too much trouble. Galls are a plant's reaction to a 'foreign' organism within them, mainly fungi and invertebrates but also bacteria, viruses and phytoplasmas (microparasites that can reproduce inside the host's cells).

Phil's thistle gall is caused by *Urophora cardui*, a rather striking and attractive fruit fly which lays up to 30 eggs on the stem of a creeping thistle. The larva burrows into the stem upon hatching and grows to nearly full size within the gall before over-wintering as a third stage larva from late summer before pupating in early spring. By now, the gall and stems are no longer a lovely fresh green but rather old. Upon emerging in early summer, the adult fly chews its way out of the gall. It looks like this has already taken place in Phil's photo of the cut gall. You may have heard it called the Canada thistle gall fly, but the name is somewhat misleading. The fly is widespread in the south of England and indigenous to Central Europe but was introduced to North America to control Creeping or Canada Thistle, an invasive introduced weed over there.

Maggie has sent in a photo taken in a Devon meadow in the summer of what looks like a young Parasol mushroom, (*Macrolepiota procera*), with its egg-shaped developing fruiting body. This is an edible late summer grassland mushroom that does not seem to be particularly prone to maggots. Although in the UK it is sometimes confused with other similar mushrooms that can cause gastric upsets, including the Shaggy Parasol, but there are a number of features that, in combination, set it apart. One of these is its large size. The mature umbrella-like cap often has a 'nipple' in its middle and measures from 10cm to 25cm across – up to dinner-plate size! Stem features are very important in identifying these mushrooms, which involves getting down to ground level to look at the area at the base of the stem, examining the stem shaft and seeing how well attached the ring is – the ring should slide up and down the stem fairly easily. These features do not on their own set it apart from the species you would not want to eat. Gill colour is important, including noting the differences that happen as the cap ages. There is, crucially, a very obvious snake-skin effect on the stem, which can be seen in Maggie's photo. This effect is the result of the very fast growth of this species, resulting in the skin breaking as it grows. The Shaggy Parasol has a smooth stem. Spore-prints can be useful if there is any doubt of identification.



Parasol mushroom: Maggie Edwards



Phil was clearing brambles off a pile of branches stacked in the hedge for cutting up sometime and this striking female orbweb spider was sitting on the top of the branches. The species is *Araneus marmoreus*, one of the larger orbweb spiders (also known as Orb-weavers), with females ranging from 5 to 14 mm in body length. It is the variety *pyramidatus*, the other variety of this species being var. *marmoreus*, which is rare and closely resembles the Four-Spotted Orbweb Spider, *A. quadratus*. Of the two varieties, it is the least variable and the more often seen, sporting a reddish-brown marking on the rear half of its abdomen that is described as wedge-like and with the rest of the abdominal dorsal area usually yellow, although some have been spotted with that area very pale indeed - almost white. The species name comes from the marking of variety *marmoreus*, the Latin name meaning 'marble-like'. To confuse

matters, there are also intermediate forms! Images of different colour forms can be found at Eakringbirds:

<https://www.eakringbirds.com/eakringbirds3/arachnidsinfocusaraneusmarmoreus.htm>

It is a spider of damp woodland and heathland where it is generally found on tall plants and the lower branches of trees, where it spins its web usually at heights above 1.5 m. The variety *marmoreus* is found mostly on heathland and in fens rather than woodland, but the variety Phil has photographed has been found spinning webs quite low down in rank grass patches at Wicken Fen! It is uncommon but widespread in south-east England, but its range does extend to about where we are. There appears to be no sign that its range is extending presently.

Phil reports that it was somewhat reluctant to move but was eventually persuaded to go down into the stack. It is a nice find. Phil felt fortunate to have his mobile handy!



Fox in the snow - Sharon Wilson

Sharon took this photo of one of our top predators in her garden at Hallatrow. The fox is showing its sharp, teeth, but this time it was not after prey but the sultanas that had been put out for the birds. The diet of rural foxes is almost entirely meat, mainly small mammals and birds and occasionally worms and insects. Rarely, they will also eat fruit – as in this instance. Urban foxes are far more omnivorous, with just over half of their diet being hunted or scavenged meat. Insects and worms are estimated to make up a fifth of their intake, with household leftovers (both human and pet) and some fruit accounting for most of the remainder.

Deborah Porter

Clearance work at Goosard Batch

When we identify large jobs at Goosard Batch we can ask Wessex Water to send in contractors. Here's one of our volunteers inspecting the work done to cut down Ash trees suffering from Ash-dieback.



The felling and the further clearance work that has been undertaken by our volunteers has opened up space, which should encourage the growth of a greater variety of plant species.

Volunteers work at the batch on the first Saturday of every month. More help is always welcome! Please contact Jim on 01761-410731 or by email: jim.crouch@macegroup.com if you would like to join in.

Jim Crouch

Cam Valley Wildlife Group Events Programme

January 2026 to April 2026

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



Wednesday 4th March 2026 – Talk: The Swans on The Bishop Palace Moat

Moir Anderson will be giving a lighthearted look at the history of the Swans on the moat. See 'Other Information' below for talk location and entry details.

Saturday 7th March 2026 – Goosard Batch Nature Reserve work morning

Please contact Jim on 01761-410731 or by email: jim.crouch@macegroup.com to let him know who is coming so he can plan activities. Anyone is welcome to attend.

Thursday 2nd April 2026 at 10 .30am - Woodland Birds & Herons at RSPB Swell Wood

Parking is limited so please car share, if possible, meet on Grovewood Road, Haydon, BA3 3QZ at 9.30am for car share. The RSPB reserve is on the A378 near Langport, TA3 6PX. Afterwards we may stop off at Grey Lake for a short visit on our way home depending on the weather. Please contact Diana Walker for more information on 07581-451805 or wish to car share.

Saturday 4th April 2026 – Goosard Batch Nature Reserve work morning

Please contact Jim on 01761-410731 or by email: jim.crouch@macegroup.com to let him know who is coming so he can plan activities. Anyone is welcome to attend.

Wednesday 8th April 2026 – Botany Walks 😊 🌿

The Wednesday evening botany walks with Helena will commence on 8th April; watch out for further details and a programme for the summer walks in the spring.

Other Information:

Venue for our Talks: Radstock Working Men's Club, On the 1st Wednesday of the month during the Winter (October/November/February/March) 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. Entrance fee is £3 for members and £5 for non-members

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.

Wildlife Photography

Please contact Diana on 07581-451805 or dianawalker4@gmail.com if you would like to accompany her on any of her days out photographing local wildlife.

CVWG Stalls

If your village would like to have the CVWG stall at your village fete this summer, then please contact Diana at: dianawalker4@gmail.com. **Help is needed to put up and take down the stall and gazebo. Please contact Diana if you could offer much needed assistance.**

The next Co-ordinating Team meetings are:

Tuesday 17th March 2026, and

Tuesday 19th May 2026.

All members are welcome to attend and contribute, please contact Jim Crouch on his email (jim.crouch@macegroup.com) for further details.

Next Newsletter: The final copy date for the next Newsletter is 20th March 2026

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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: Frank Loughran: frank.loughran7@gmail.com / 07981-788547

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