

WYCOMBE and SOUTH BUCKS WILDLIFE NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2020



The picture I have chosen for the front cover of this issue shows the late-Summer flowering native Goldenrod (*Solidago virgaurea*).

This species is quite small compared with the tall introduced Canadian Goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) which is widely grown in parks and gardens and has become widespread on waste ground in the wild.

The native species is one of my favourite plants in my wildflower garden.

Editor

Issue 93

Contents include:

Update on AGM	26
Update on WWG activities	27
Butterflies, moths and foraging	
Unusual Bellflower seen in Bradenham	28
A very unusual plant to find in the wild	29
Invertebrates seen in members' gardens	
Interesting news from a former WWG member	30
Unusual bird incidents in the Cookham area	31
Origin and development of Yoesden Bank and Wood BBOWT Nature Reserve	32
Garden tweets	35
Garden wildlife sightings mid May - Aug 2020	
Opportunity to visit Cores End Church meadow	36

Wycombe Wildlife News is published 3 times a year to promote the Group and wildlife issues, and inform members and the public of its activities.

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Watercolour of Clouded Yellow by Amanda Green.

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Illustration of Devil's-bit Scabious by Frances Wilding.

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Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Group.

For the purposes of management of the Group, membership information is held on computer.

Editorial

It's newsletter time again, and on this occasion I wondered if I would be able to produce a normal 12 page version, not having any indoor members' meetings or outdoor events to report on.

I needn't have worried, as I received a number of interesting sightings and associated photographs, together with sufficient other contributions from both members and non-members, to produce a usual size newsletter. I am very grateful to all those who have contributed to this issue, as without those items and in the absence of reports on WWG events, I would have found it very difficult, if not impossible, to have produced an interesting September newsletter. None of us know how long it will be before we can resume our normal activities, but with your help we can continue to keep each other informed of what is happening in our local and not too distant countryside. Finding sufficient material for the January newsletter will be even more challenging, so I will be pleased to receive contributions for that issue from now until around mid December.

Wycombe Wildlife Group is a registered charity No.1075175 with the following objects:

To conserve the environment, mainly using volunteers, for the benefit of the public.

To educate the public in the principles and practice of conservation.

Within and around Wycombe District the Group :

Surveys wildlife habitats and their associated flora and fauna, giving those taking part plenty of opportunities to increase their knowledge and identification skills.

Resources permitting, helps manage local wildlife sites by undertaking practical conservation work. Resources permitting, provides advice to schools, other bodies and individuals on all aspects of wildlife.

Stimulates public interest in wildlife and its conservation, organising walks, talks and other activities covering a wide range of wildlife topics.

Provides advice on and encourages wildlife gardening.

Co-operates with other groups with similar aims.

New member

We are pleased to welcome Mrs Loretta Homes, who lives in High Wycombe, as a new member. We look forward to meeting her when we are able to recommence our members' meetings and outdoor events.

Obituary

I am sad to report that my sister Evelyn (Eva) Wilding passed away on 21 July 2020 aged 95. Like me, my sister lived all her life in High Wycombe and led an active life. She was a member of the Girl Guides from the age of 8, and served as a Guide and Ranger leader, District Commissioner and Division Commissioner. In her later years she was very involved in the activities of the local Trefoil Guild including serving as its Chairman. Having an older sister with an interest in hiking, camping and the countryside certainly influenced my own interests in such activities at an early age.

Eva was one of our valued members that we affectionally refer to as our "armchair members", who continue to take an interest in our Group and support us by remaining members when they are no longer able to attend our events.

Update on AGM

In the June newsletter, I announced our plans for meeting the Charity Commission's deadline for submission of our annual income and expenditure report. We said that, in the absence of any comments from members to the contrary, we would assume that they were happy with the content of the draft financial statement circulated with the June newsletter. No comments have been received, so it is becoming more likely that the financial information will be submitted to the Charity Commission in advance of the AGM. There remains a need for the income and expenditure accounts to be independently examined but this action has also been adversely affected by Covid-19 restrictions.

Update on WWG activities

Whilst Trinity URC, our High Wycombe venue for members' meetings, remains unavailable for our use, we have been notified that St Thomas' Church Hall, the venue for our Holtspur meetings, is now available for bookings. The maximum number of permitted attendees is below the attendance level at our most recent meetings, which would impose a need to introduce an advance booking system. The safety precautions we would need to adopt to ensure compliance with the measures that the hall has introduced are quite complex and would require a number of members to act as supervisors to ensure the measures were being adhered to. The usual refreshment break could not take place and a record of attendees would need to be kept so that contact tracing procedures could be implemented if an attendee reported that he or she had developed Covid-19 symptoms. Taking these matters into account, together with the demographic of our

membership, the Vice Chairman and I decided that the time to recommence our indoor meetings had not yet arrived.

Although WWG has been unable to organise a programme of events, this has not prevented many of our members from enjoying what nature has offered during the past few months. We have experienced very hot dry weather, strong winds and excessive amounts of rainfall, but it has been an excellent year for much of our fauna and flora. In our garden there has been plenty of bird activity, lots of butterflies and one of the best wildflower displays in recent years. From telephone conversations and exchanges of emails, it is clear that many of our members and non-members have had similar experiences.

Butterflies, moths and foraging (Some lockdown thoughts submitted by Amanda Green)

Soon after the lockdown began, my students were busy telephoning me to help with butterfly identification. They had seen Brimstones, Clouded Yellows, Small Tortoiseshells, Red Admirals and Peacocks, and one lady saw a tiger moth in her Marlow garden. Last year a friend in Potters Bar saw a Jersey Tiger Moth (although she insisted it was a butterfly until a knowledgeable neighbour told her it was a moth). I have explained to a number of people that in the rest of Europe there is far less differentiation between moths and butterflies.

When I was teaching in Croatia, I was mesmerised by the Hummingbird Hawkmoth. I know that some Wycombe Wildlife Group members have spotted these in this area, so do keep your eyes peeled. Another observation on the Istrian Peninsular, which blew my breath away, was seeing a number of Red Admirals settled on a path with their wings closed in a slightly staggered row. When I described this to my friend Rosemary Cropper, she informed me that, by resting in this way, it ensured that they did not create a shadow. They obviously had found an excellent way to hide from predators.

During the period of the lockdown, I reduced my food shopping like many other people. I tend to favour a small quiet shop that keeps its door open. The problem was I couldn't find any Lambs Lettuce so I had to settle for an Iceberg. I must say that, even with my tasty homemade dressing, there was a whole lot

of chewing with little flavour. (I have chewed grass that has been tastier.) This led to foraging, veering towards hedgerows away from traffic and dog walkers (well at least their dogs).

I found Goosegrass which is full of minerals and goes well in homemade soup. I picked wild violets in my garden, lightly washed them in salted water, soaked them in groundnut oil (having failed to find olive oil in the shops) and eaten them with my next salad.

I used my gardening gloves to collect young nettle tops to make nettle tea, especially as this reduces hay fever. Ground-elder is also edible but I prefer eating it in soup. It is thought that the Romans brought this plant to Britain. I bravely tried a leaf of Herb Bennet, which, as a gardener, I have always regarded as an enemy. It always thrives in a position where I do not want it.

I did not make my usual elderflower cordial this year and, as I had spare time, I made some elderflower champagne. It seems very drinkable to me - usually a couple of sips of alcohol has a horrible heating affect on my throat (probably the result of my tonsils being guillotined at the age of two). The alcohol content of the elderflower champagne must be very low which suits me. I also make herb vinegars including elderflower vinegar and I am looking forward to foraging for chutneys and jams later this year.

I have also been making herb sachets for drawers and for foot baths, although the latter feel rather decadent.

Whilst mugging up in my herb books, I have discovered that a Ribwort Plantain leaf can be better than a Dock leaf for reducing the effects of a nettle or insect sting. I have also learnt that rat catchers in days of old knew that rats hate the smell of peppermint.

A couple of years ago I visited a roof garden in Reading where even Amaranth is grown. The guide inspired me to make jam from Rowan berries, pointing out that the berries need to be very ripe. I made the jam in early September when the berries were very ripe, but the jam was sour and inedible. If anyone can advise me on what might have gone wrong, please do.

As I was brought up in the 1960s, I was given rosehip syrup. On the rare occasions that I make this, it tastes like nectar. I do wait until it is a bumper year for rosehips, however.

Amanda

Editorial footnote: When Frances proof read the newsletter she said that her mother used to make Rowan and Geranium (Pelargonium) jellies, but in both cases Apple jelly was made and flavoured with the unusual ingredients.

Below: Amanda's watercolour of a Clouded Yellow



Unusual Bellflower spotted at Bradenham

This photograph was sent to me by WWG member Sue Longman, asking me if I could identify the white bellflower she had seen in a field at Bradenham.

I identified it as *Campanula persicifolia* (Peach-leaved Bellflower). I was hoping to go and see it for myself and take a photograph, but other commitments prevented me from doing so.

The field concerned is one our group has visited on butterfly walks led by Paul Bowyer to see the Small Blue which can be seen there in large numbers in May and June on or near Kidney Vetch, its larval food plant.



A very unusual plant to find in the wild!



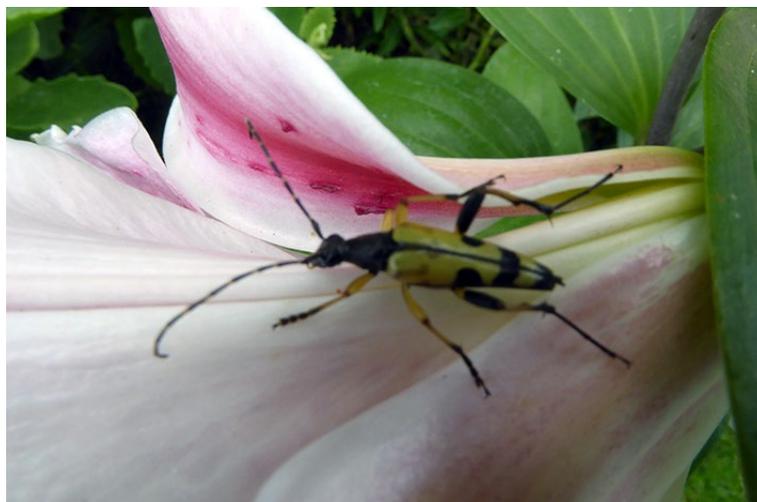
The sighting of this plant by Chris and Mary Woodman in woodland-edge grassland during a visit to Penn Wood certainly provided me with a challenging follow-up identification request.

There is no British or European native plant anything like this, so further research was needed. I came to the conclusion that it was almost certainly *Tradescantia* (syn. *Setreasia*) *pallida* var. *purpurea* which grows in Mexico. This plant is likely to have been a cultivar named Purple Heart which can be purchased from specialist nurseries in the UK.

It is highly unlikely that the plant reached Penn Wood by natural means, so perhaps someone who had purchased one before they realised that it is a poisonous species, decided to plant it there. It is unlikely to survive for long in the wild, however.

Invertebrates seen in members' gardens

WWG member Irénke York sent me this photograph of an insect seen in her garden for identification. I identified it as *Rutpela maculata*, a longhorn beetle species which does come to gardens.



WWG member Lisa Dodd sent me this photo of a tiger moth (which I identified as a Jersey Tiger) seen on a neighbour's house in Bassetsbury Lane. I was notified of a sighting of the same species in a Tylers Green garden, and a Scarlet Tiger moth has been reported on two occasions in a Downley garden (see page 35).



Interesting news from a former WWG member

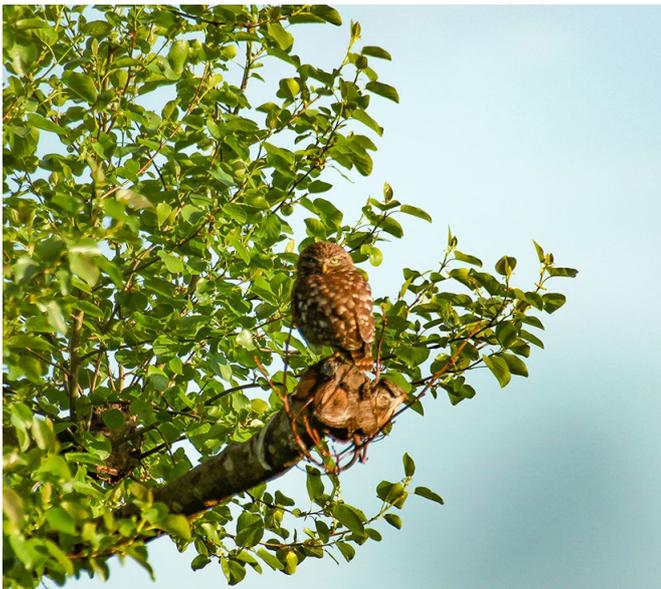
Celia Judge was a WWG member until she moved from her house in Sands (close to Sands Bank Local Nature Reserve) to Marston Moretaine in Bedfordshire where she is a volunteer at the Forest Centre, an interesting huge nature reserve, with large lakes, woodland, grassland and rough open ground, that was created on the site of a former brickworks. Frances and I visited the Forest Centre recently, where we met up with Celia and went for a long walk around the reserve in the morning, enjoyed a midday meal in the visitor centre and went for another long walk in the afternoon.

Marston Moretaine is the village where Captain, now Colonel, Sir Tom Moore lives. Celia told us that a group of the villagers had become concerned that few Swifts had been sighted locally in recent years, so a local ornithologist, Bob Hook, ordered a couple of Swift nest boxes from a friend and climbed into the church tower in late March this year to install them. Imagine everyone's surprise when several Swifts were seen around the tower soon after he had finished his work. They stayed in the area and two pairs nested. Unfortunately they did not occupy the nest boxes provided at the church, deciding to use holes in the masonry instead. So there are two unused desirable residences at the church available for future use! Bob has arranged for nest boxes to be installed in several other local church towers, so there are great hopes in Bedfordshire for a recovery in the population of these fascinating birds.

Unusual garden bird incidents in the Cookham area

Just before we cancelled our events programme when the Coronavirus lockdown began, I received an email from WWG member Dr John Lloyd-Parry apologising that he would not be able to attend any of our forthcoming members' meetings due to a knee injury which needed lots of rest to enable it to mend. Having emailed him recently to enquire how he was, he told me about some unusual wildlife incidents in his garden involving a Little Owl and a Great Spotted Woodpecker, and kindly agreed to send me the details so that I could mention the events in the newsletter.

John informed me that he thinks that the Little Owl, which is regularly seen in his garden, nested successfully in the clematis-clad old dovecot at the end of the garden. It likes to perch in the adjacent Alder tree.



There was much alarm in late June when John's only neighbour came round in great distress as the Little Owl had got caught in her little boy's toy in the garden. They placed the bird in a carrier box, thinking a trip to Tigglywinkles was inevitable, but leaving it alone, with a saucer of water and protected from predators, it flew off an hour or so later. Following an anxious wait for a day, it was back on its usual perch.

John's other unusual bird experience was when a female Great Spotted Woodpecker chased a Meadow Brown into the conservatory and collided with a side window. It sat dazed on

the large table in the conservatory and a few minutes later flew a few feet into the garden and hid hanging on to the side of a planter.



The Woodpecker also flew off and after an anxious wait, she was seen back in the Ash tree the next day and on the accustomed feeder a few days later when she left a feather as a calling card.



John's house is adjacent to a National Trust common and the White Brook that runs through it. The Commoners have not grazed cows on it this year so the grass is waist high (making it difficult for John to find his border terriers). Consequently he has never seen so many Meadow Browns and Mayflies. The damselflies have also been numerous and, in the first week of July he saw five Emperor Dragonflies and a Brown Hawker Dragonfly tearing around hunting in the high wind.

Origins and development of Yoesden Bank and Wood BBOWT Nature Reserve

This Reserve was originally part of Church Farm, Radnage and owned by Mrs Doris Piercy. The hurricane of 1987 felled many mature beech trees in Yoesden Wood, and the Chiltern Woodland Project under the auspices of John Morris was enrolled to organise clearance and replanting with a mix of deciduous trees. A photograph of John Morris sitting among wind-blown beech trees, is shown below. Part of the woodland above the main bank had been planted with conifers, possibly more than a century ago, and was in a poor state at this time. Consequently part of this plantation was cleared and re-planted at the same time.



Yoesden Wood following the 1987 hurricane

Mrs Piercy died on 24.11.1994, and her nephews inherited the farm. Shortly afterwards the land was dismembered and sold off piecemeal. Yoesden Bank, Yoesden Wood, a small paddock and an access track adjacent to the water pumping station in Bottom Road were purchased by a neighbour Mrs Victoria Paterson. Victoria and her husband were very keen to maintain the land for the benefit of wildlife, and the land was entered into a Stewardship scheme. New fencing was erected to continue the tradition of cattle-grazing on the bank and the clearing in the wood. This woodland clearing had been ploughed during the Second World War, and planted with cereal or potatoes. An aerial photograph showing the extent of the clearing is shown in an article published by the Geographic Society (Coppock, 1962).

The owners received help in maintaining the open nature of the woodland clearing, and the Chiltern Conservation Board held the South Chilterns scrub-bash there in December 2005 and on an earlier occasion. The clearing is continually invaded by hawthorn, dogwood and ash seedlings, and needs constant work to keep this scrub at bay. Other contactors were employed in later years, and owing to my concern, I became involved in organising some voluntary labour. Friends from the Ruislip and District Natural History Society and from a group known as 'Earthworks Conservation Volunteers', and even Roger Wilding from the Wycombe Wildlife Group in later sessions lent a hand. Extensive work was performed in the early part of 2011, and required the use of a chainsaw to fell Ash up to 15 feet high as well as the Dogwood and Hawthorn: the chainsaw operator was Mark Morgan, warden of the Ruislip LNR.

Mrs Paterson decided to sell the bank in 2014, and interest was shown by BBOWT, Butterfly Conservation and the Chiltern Society. Indeed, BBOWT had hoped to buy the site when the farm was originally on the market, but funds were not available. BBOWT signed contracts on 17 June 2014. The Trust requested that I stay on as warden and help care for the new reserve. A Woodland Management plan was written by John Morris of the Chiltern Woodland Project, to cover the years from 2007 – 2027.

An opportunity arose in late 2015 to purchase land adjacent to the reserve amounting to 8.7 acres and three separate plots. These comprised a relatively unimproved grass paddock adjoining the southern end of the main bank, an additional piece of Yoesden Wood owned by the Radnage Poor Land Charity, and an adjoining steep, unimproved grassy slope just south-east of the wood. These were bought, and increased the size of the reserve by nearly 30%. The extended reserve now supports a large badger colony.

The Trust has constructed a new permissive footpath entrance at the south-east corner of the reserve. New fencing will allow grazing by cattle from an additional farm to supplement the cattle grazing of the main bank which has been undertaken for many years by Richard Stevens who owns the farm to the north. His cattle can graze the new paddock too, but another neighbour owning land nearer to the church sometimes grazes his cattle there.

I had been recording the butterflies on the site since 1991, and in that year I found 2 Silver-spotted Skippers. These were early forerunners of their expansion northwards. It was a number of years before more of that species were seen, but Nick Bowles requested me to search for them in the autumn of 1998. To my great surprise, I located 4 male and 2 female Adonis Blues on 1 September: it had been many years since there had been any confirmed records. Both species were present in 1999 and 2000, but only the skipper was seen again until 2004 when 2 Adonis Blues were found on 26 August.

First brood Adonis Blues were recorded in 2005 and became abundant for a few seasons. Both species eventually died out for a few years, but today we have a strong colony of Adonis Blues but no Silver-spotted Skippers. Dark Green Fritillaries were seen occasionally with sightings in 2003, 2006 and 2008 and becoming more regular in recent years. Never as many Silver-washed Fritillaries have arrived since that time despite the species' great expansion across the country, but they can be seen every year. In total, 37 species of butterfly have been recorded on the reserve, although a few may have been vagrants or releases. The Trust set up a transect route in 2015.

Botanically, we have recorded 7 species of orchid on the reserve; but Bird's-nest Orchid has not been seen since the sighting by John Morris circa 2000. I have not found Broad-leaved Helleborine for a number of years, and only since the clearance work of 2011 did we become aware of the colony of Twayblade in the clearing. The clearing (referred to locally as the panhandle) is known for its large quantity of Devil's-bit Scabious, which is also present on the main bank.



Devil's-bit Scabious
(*Succisa pratensis*)

Roger Kemp alerted me to the presence of Small Teasel in the wayleave, but I could find no evidence of its presence and feared its demise following the erection of new fencing. However, we found a colony when some was accidentally cut during footpath clearance in 2018. The main bank supports the usual chalk downland flora, and was once known as a site for Early Gentian. There have been a number of sporadic sightings since the last accepted record in 1994, and there was great enthusiasm this year when Inge Beck believed she had discovered nearly 20 plants of Early-flowering Gentians. However, these were not accepted as anything more than early-flowering Autumn Gentians.

The lower woodland had been open to cattle during the farmland years and is relatively poor in ground flora, being dominated by Common Nettle and Dog's Mercury. However, there is a scattering of Nettle-leaved Bellflower and a good colony of Primrose along the northern edge. These primroses give a great display in the spring and extend through the wayleave and the western edge of both ends of the remaining woodland. A large quantity of Wild Garlic is present in the south-east part. On 26.6.2014, I located some poor specimens of Yellow Bird's-nest in the centre of the conifer plantation, but I have not seen the species since. Over 100 White Helleborines can be counted at

the northern end of the woodland and north hedge in most years.

A number of folk have been recording insects on the site, and I have been busy with hymenoptera and diptera etc. We have a colony of Great Green Bush Cricket at Yoesden and on 10.9.2017 I recorded Long-winged Conehead, which I think is the first sighting. In very recent years we have found the Large Scabious Mining Bee, the females of which collect pollen from the scabious flowers and consequently have bright purple pollen "baskets" on their hind legs. I have also discovered the Bryony Bee which collects pollen from White Bryony which grows predominantly along the fence-line of the entrance trackway below the wood. Macromoths were recorded extensively in 1994 by Martin Albertini and Peter Hall. The micro-moths have been recorded piecemeal, and a proper survey is still required. Although the Striped Lychnis breeds on site, I cannot recall any great rarities in the database. The Hornet Robber-fly (*Asilus crabroniformis*) was conspicuous in 2019 and the Downland Robber-flies I found that year were only the second Bucks records.

A. M. (Ched) George

Our thanks go to Ched for his interesting and informative article about the history and development of the Yoesden Nature Reserve. WWG has visited the reserve on several occasions to look for butterflies and wild flowers and I am sure we will want to pay another visit when we can. In the meantime, there is nothing to prevent individual members visiting the reserve, which has plenty of room for social distancing.

Roger

Garden Tweets

On 23rd May there was a Starling 'takeover' as they clung to branches and perched 5 or 6 at a time on the feeders. They also bathed communally in our three bird baths.

On 30th June a Herring Gull perched on the top of our tall Leyland Cypress tree, a most unusual stance for a seagull. It balanced by holding out its wings.

Early one morning in July, young Blue Tits, Coal Tits and one Great Tit were all bathing in the cool dew on the lawn.

Whilst busy gardening in July, I heard the wavering call of a young Red Kite in the tree above me. A click and a whistle gave it away: it was a Starling.

I am sad to report that we have lost our entire population of House Sparrows in the last few years. I have no idea why, as feeding has not stopped and there are plenty of suitable nesting sites. I still hear their chatter when I am out walking, so I hope they will come back, as I miss them.

Unusually, for August, 2 Robins, a Song Thrush and a Mistle Thrush have been singing their full song. Perhaps they were welcoming the rain after the long drought.

We have had a family of Greenfinches, and I was watching them one day when I noticed that one youngster had got separated from its family. It flew erratically across the sky, calling frantically rather like a lost dog. I am pleased to say that they were soon reunited.

More tweets in the next newsletter, I hope.

Frances Wilding

Garden wildlife sightings mid May - Sep 2020

Bassetsbury Lane garden

21st July - Jersey Tiger moth

Deeds Grove garden

16th May - First brood of baby Robins
18th May - First brood of baby Starlings
20th May - Second brood of baby Starlings
30th May - Reed Warbler in hedge
28th July - 2 young Greater Spotted Woodpeckers on feeder

Downley Garden

14th June - Brown Argus butterfly (male)
19th June - Scarlet Tiger moth
12th July - Scarlet Tiger moth

Holmer Green garden

11th July - *Rutpela maculata* (a Longhorn Beetle)

Tylers Green garden

1st August - 2 Old Lady moths
4th August - Silver washed Fritillary butterfly
5th August - Box tree moth
6th and 9th August - Scalloped Oak moth
9th August - Jersey Tiger moth
10th August - Old Lady moth

Opportunity to visit Cores End Church meadow

I have recently exchanged emails with Terry Hinks, the minister of both Trinity and Cores End churches. He sent me two photographs of caterpillars seen in the meadow which Cores End Church plan to develop as a wildflower meadow and orchard. Having identified the caterpillars as the larvae of Peacock butterfly and Cinnabar moth, I mentioned the legislation relating to the control of Ragwort, the foodplant of the latter species.

Terry Hinks has said he would be delighted to show any of our members round the church's meadow. Members who would like to take advantage of this offer should let me know and I will make the necessary arrangements. Obviously the number of persons visiting would need to comply with the relevant Covid-19 restrictions and social distancing rules. It will probably now be too late in the year to see the meadow at its best so perhaps it might be better to arrange a visit in the Spring or Summer next year.

Roger

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Joining Wycombe Wildlife Group

To join our Group, please complete a copy of the form on the right and send to

The Membership Secretary,
15 Cherrywood Gardens,
Flackwell Heath, HP10 9AX

Subscription £6 per annum, if paid by Standing Order, or £7 per annum, if paid by cash or cheque.

Please enrol me as a member of Wycombe Wildlife Group

Name

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EITHER Payment by bank standing order

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NEW standing order instruction:

Account to be debited (your account details)

Sort code

Account number

Account name

Beneficiary bank and payee details

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Sort Code: 402417 Account number: 92116685

Account name: Wycombe Wildlife Group

Payment details

Amount of payment: £6.00 Six pounds

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Number of payments:

Until further notice

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Date

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I enclose cheque/cash for £7.00,

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