



What to look out for in June

The first month of meteorological Summer, June brings the promise of longer days and – hopefully – sunshine and warmth. Nature is perhaps at its most prolific in this month: birds will be busy raising their young, wild flowers and trees will be at their best, and insects will, in spite of all the pressures on them, be at their most numerous. There should be much to see and enjoy.

BIRDS

All of our summer visitors should be with us in June and, with territories settled and pairings sorted, most will be busily engaged in rearing this year's young, in some cases rearing more than just one brood.



Look out for family groups of Great, Blue, Coal and Long-tailed Tits as newly-fledged youngsters badger their increasingly careworn-looking parents for food. A walk in the woods could be punctuated by the sound of extremely noisy young Greater Spotted Woodpeckers (*left*) demanding food. Rivers and lakes will have Mute Swan families aplenty, with attentive parents carefully protecting their cygnets.

Look out also for Black-headed Gulls (*right*) in their full livery; contrary to the name, their caps are a beautiful chocolate brown, and in spite of being fairly common, they remain a spectacular bird. If you do go near rivers or lakes, keep an eye out for Egrets. Whilst Little Egrets, with their yellow feet and flowing crest feathers, have become relatively common in recent years, their larger cousin, the Great White Egret, is slowly increasing in number, as is the Cattle Egret.



The tuneful sounds associated with setting up territories and attracting mates in early Spring will become subdued, and will be supplemented by the sounds of Swifts screaming as groups tear through the air seemingly proclaiming the fact that they can fly, and are enjoying it!

TREES AND FLOWERS



As we move from spring into summer look out for the Ox Eye Daisy (*left with poppies at Skylarks*), a magnificent plant looking like a giant daisy. It can be found all over Rushcliffe, often in swathes on roundabouts, in verges, gardens and nature reserves. It is perhaps the archetypal wildflower - attractive, no-nonsense and a joy to see waving in the breeze in clusters. It is also much appreciated by pollinating insects.

When you see 'wort' in a wildflower's title, you know that according to the *Medieval Doctrine of Signatures* it is purported to have medicinal purposes. Although often a counsel of desperation in the absence of anything better, in some cases it is grounded in reality. For example, compounds from St John's Wort form the basis of mainstream anti-depressants in countries like Germany.

Hedge Woundwort (*right*) is aptly named, as its leaves have mild antiseptic properties, and it is usually found along hedgerows or woodland rides in denser vegetation. Part of the mint family, it has the distinctive leaf shape and arrangement of spear shaped leaves alternating in pairs up the stem, and the characteristic twin-lipped flowers of that family. Similar to White Dead Nettle, but with a beautiful deep red flower, it is widespread in Rushcliffe in June.



The Hop Trefoil is a family of tiny grassland plants. Look for tiny balls of yellow, with an associated trefoil leaf structure. Each of those balls is a cluster of minute flowers (think Clovers but much smaller). Lesser Hop Trefoil tends to be a smaller cluster than Hop Trefoil, and Large Hop Trefoil contains more flowers. Once you get your eye in you can usually judge which is which, but in some books the flowers in each type overlap, just to complicate things.

However, there is a version of the Hop Trefoil that can be easily identified and that is Black Medick (*left*), common and widespread in grass - it may even be prettifying your lawn. Looking very much the same as the other Hop Trefoils, it has one easily distinguishing feature - pluck a leaf and hold it up to the sky. If it has a little point at the end of the leaf it is Black Medick; if not, it is one of the other Hop Trefoils. A neat party trick to impress your companions!

Orchids will continue to flower in June. Common Spotted, Bee, Fragrant and Pyramidal Orchids can be found across Rushcliffe, together with the much less spectacular Common Twayblade. The striking Orange Hawkweed (aka 'Fox and Cubs') will appear, as will Ragged Robin (*right*) and, as the Hawthorn blossom fades, it will be followed in hedgerows by Brambles and wild Roses.



INSECTS

With suitable weather, June is a peak month for insects. Look out for, and closely at, the many Ladybirds: are they native or an invading Harlequin, and how many spots are there? The white flower of Cow Parsley,

Hogweed and similar umbellifers provide food for the insects and an excellent background against which to see them. Look for Thick-legged Flower Beetles (*below left*), Scorpion Flies, Noon Flies (*below right*) and Lacewings.



Sawflies should also be visible. Part of the insect order *Hymenoptera*, together with bees, wasps and ants, they are considered to be the most primitive group and form the sub-order *Symphyla*. They differ from bees, wasps and ants in not having a 'waist' and in their wing venation. Most female sawflies possess 'saw-like' genitalia which they use to cut through plant tissue in order to lay their eggs – this is where the name 'sawfly' originates.



All sawflies are harmless and cannot sting. In Britain there are about 500 species of varying shapes, sizes and colour; some are really quite spectacular, like this mating pair in Cotgrave Forest (*right*).



Although generally disliked by gardeners because of the damage done by their larvae (*above left*), sawflies are beneficial as pollinators and predators.

Butterfly numbers should increase towards the end of the month as Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Gatekeeper emerge, and keep your eyes open for migrant Painted Lady butterflies (*below*).



And don't forget about two of the biggest and most beautiful butterflies, the Purple Emperor and Silver-washed Fritillary; although they are most likely to be seen at Cotgrave Forest, recent years have seen records elsewhere in Rushcliffe (and if you are fortunate enough to see them, please let us know).



Keep an eye out for day-flying moths, particularly two of the most striking. The first is Mother Shipton (*right*), named after a prophetess who died in 1561. Legend says she was ugly, and the dark markings on each forewing are said to resemble a profile of her head, with a long nose and beady eye.



The second is the Yellow-barred Long-horn Moth (*left*), a small moth with a wingspan of 16 to 23 mm. The antennae of the male, however, are incredibly long, perhaps four times its body length. It is quite a spectacle to see male Long-horns display to a perched female (recognisable by her much shorter antennae); they appear to dance up and down in front of her, with their erect antennae making them resemble puppets on strings.

Large Red Damselflies will have started to emerge in May, and increase in number in June, to be joined by several species of blue damselflies – Common Blue, Azure and Blue-tailed – as well as the distinctive green banded Demoiselle. Look for damselflies in their 'mating wheel' (*right*).



Dragonflies will also become more evident; try to watch one hunting, and marvel at its aerial capability. Helicopters are good, but they have nothing on dragons!



Hoverflies should increase in variety and number; look out for them and appreciate the wide range of shapes, sizes and colours – there are some 285 species in the UK – and keep a special eye out for the Hornet mimics, including the truly magnificent *Volucella zonaria* (*left*).

So, let's hope we get decent weather in June so we can get outside and enjoy all the wonders Nature has in store for us!

Credits: Text by Gordon Dyne and Chris Overton Images by Chris Overton except Hedge Woundwort and Black Medic