



### **Wildlife News from Rushcliffe August 2023**

*Although meteorological summer draws to a close in August, nature still has much to offer. We should start to see birds begin their autumn migration, offering sightings of waders coming back from the Arctic. Wildflowers may be less numerous, but those that remain continue to offer beauty and colour. There should still be a good variety of insects to see, including increasingly bored male wasps!*

Read our guide 'What to look out for in August' by following this [link](#).

### **GET CLOSER TO NATURE THROUGH ORGANISED EVENTS**

#### **Wed 2<sup>nd</sup> August – Lark in the Park, West Bridgford**

Free event at Bridgford Park in West Bridgford from 10am to 4pm. For more information, click [here](#).

#### **Sat 5th August – Wilwell Farm Cutting in Late Summer**

A stroll round the reserve to look at the site's natural history with Gordon the Warden. **Meet 10 am** at the Wilwell car park on the left, just before the ring road bridge on the B680 between Ruddington and Wilford (look out for reserve sign). Post Code for approximate location NG2 7UT, Just Three Words = home, news, fuzzy.

For more info contact [gordon.dyne@gmail.com](mailto:gordon.dyne@gmail.com)

#### **Tues 8<sup>th</sup> August – Pond dipping at Cotgrave Country Park**

Pond dipping for all ages, with all materials provided. Meet at the Hollygate Lane Car Park. 10.00 am - 12.00pm. Book here: <https://www.cotgravecountrypark.co.uk/whats-on/events/>

#### **Sat 12th August – Rushcliffe Wildlife WATCH GROUP**

11:00 am - 1:00 pm. Meet at Rushcliffe Country Park Visitor Centre.

For young people between 8 and 12 years old who are interested in wildlife-related activities. Meets monthly, on every second Saturday. Charge £3 per session.

#### **Sun 20<sup>th</sup> August – Cotgrave Country Park Family Fun Day**

11:00 am – 3:00 pm. Full details are available [here](#).

### **WINTER WILDLIFE TALKS PROGRAMME**

Our next Winter Wildlife Talks Programme starts in October and promises to be as diverse, informative and enjoyable as ever:

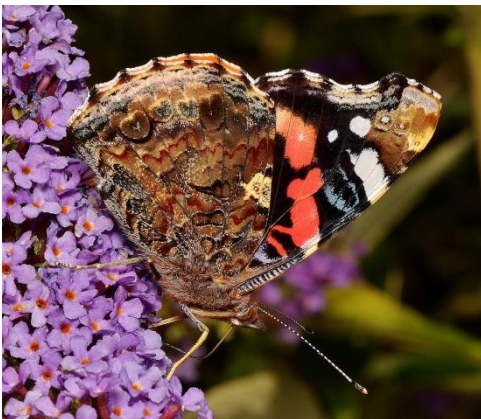


- See the incredible wildlife and landscapes of the Falkland Islands and Australia's Blue Mountains.
- Enjoy the best of British wildlife from Ardnamurchan to the Forest of Dean.
- Visit England's chalk streams and delve into the fascinating world of the wide range of honey, bumble and solitary bees found in the UK.
- Hear about rewilding in practice, as regeneration of the natural environment brings plants and animals back to the land.

Each talk will be available online through Zoom (some may be available as recordings). Each talk costs £4 per device; subscribe to all six for £20 (both include booking fee). For dates, full details, including technical requirements and how to book, please follow this [link](#).

### **A BUTTERFLY SUMMER?**

Locally, in spring and early summer, butterfly numbers appeared to be down significantly compared to previous years. Weeks on holiday in Norfolk and Suffolk were similar, and butterfly sites on social media were reporting a similar situation across the country. Earlier predictions of low numbers due to last year's extreme heat and drought and this year's wet spring appeared to be fulfilled.



But, once again nature has bounced back. The last two weeks or so have seen increased numbers, both locally and nationally. Butterflies have returned to our garden and elsewhere in the county, as evidenced by postings on the Nottinghamshire Moths and Butterflies Facebook page, and Matthew Oates writing in the Times believes the Purple Emperor 'has enjoyed an *annus mirabilis*' (there certainly have been sightings in Cotgrave Forest, but it would appear numbers may be down in Sherwood).

Not all species appear to be plentiful – yet – with Peacocks less evident than usual, but one species that is very evident is the Red Admiral which Matthew Oates reports has 'arrived here in immense numbers', as a result of favourable weather conditions and wind direction.

### **DATA AND NATURE**

In writing about butterfly numbers, I am conscious that my evidence is anecdotal, which I suspect is the same for most of us. Whilst anecdotal evidence is preferable to no evidence, more data-based evidence is needed to better understand and protect nature.

The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Trust is a small charity which for more than 20 years has been making biodiversity data – information about what species are found where - accessible to support better decisions about the natural world and to connect people with nature.



Working in partnership with more than 200 organisations, large and small, NBN has set up and manages the NBN Atlas, the UK's largest repository of publicly available biodiversity data, with more than 200 million records of over 46,000 UK species.

Wildlife organisations routinely collect data, supported by individual efforts e.g. monthly butterfly transects. Equally, there are ways in which all of us can add to the data record on a much more ad hoc basis. Facebook groups such as UK Hoverflies welcome posts from anyone; not only does this help people with identification, sightings are routinely recorded and added to the data record.

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's **Nature Counts**, accessed through an easy to use website, allows anyone to record what they see and where, whether in their garden, or on a country walk, and on a casual or regular basis. Data collected is added to the NBN Atlas which, with its easy-to-use web-based access open to all, provides valuable information about, and better understanding of, our nature.

So, please consider whether you can add your encounters with wildlife to knowledge about our nature: every record counts.

- To read more about NBN click [here](#).
- To access the NBN Atlas click [here](#).
- To access Nature Counts click [here](#).

### **WASTEFUL HUMANS AND RESOURCEFUL BIRDS**

We have all seen, sadly, reports and images of how wasteful we are as a race, how so much of what we make and use is discarded carelessly and the potentially damaging impacts it all has on the environment and nature.

Mid-July saw the publication of two pieces of research into how birds use human-made materials in nest building.



The first piece, on The Conversation website, described how a team of academics investigated how birds have adapted to live alongside such materials. They searched more than a century of peer-reviewed scientific literature using terms such as "anthropogenic" or "artificial material" and "nest," identifying 2,771 relevant papers. Retaining only those studies that described the use of human-made materials by nesting birds, they found evidence of this behaviour in almost 35,000 nests of 176 bird species, on all continents except Antarctica.

The evidence suggests that such behaviour is widespread among birds, including ducks, birds of prey, gulls, cormorants and many songbirds, and materials used include plastic, cloth, paper, metal and more, with plastic being the most used.



They also found that plastic and other human-made products were more likely to be found in nests of species with larger differences in body size between males and females, and in those that build complex domed nests. This supports the (intriguing) idea that nest materials signal the quality of breeding adults, implying that human-made materials are being included in nests intentionally: could the birds be showing off? This is perhaps not as fanciful as it sounds: male bowerbirds of New Guinea and Australia now use human-made items in their bowers to court females by demonstrating their "quality" as potential mates.

More details of this research can be found [here](#)

The day after this was published, various news outlets reported on another, similar piece of research on birds' nest-building activities.

Nests recovered from trees in Rotterdam in the Netherlands and Antwerp in Belgium were found to be constructed almost entirely from strips of long metal spikes that are often attached to buildings to deter birds from setting up home on the structures.

The discovery prompted researchers at the Natural History Museum in Rotterdam and the Naturalis Biodiversity Center in Leiden to scour the internet for further examples, leading to the identification of another anti-bird spike nest in Glasgow. One of the reviewers of the study then flagged a fourth nest in Enschede in the Netherlands.

While the Rotterdam nest was made by crows, the other three were built by magpies, which construct large dome-like nests. The crows used the anti-bird spikes as a sturdy construction material, but the magpies may have appreciated their intended use: they placed most of the spikes on the nest's roof where they could deter predators, including other birds and weasels.

Dr Jim Reynolds, an ornithologist at the University of Birmingham, who took part in the first research project said he was "amazed" at the anti-bird spike nests, but added that if any group of birds was going to do it, it would be the corvids, who are known for their cognitive skills.

"I was really struck by the irony, to take anti-bird devices and use them to their own ends," Reynolds said. "They are even more amazing than I think they are." As well as helping to protect the nests, the spikes may also serve as a display to impress potential mates, he said.

A fuller article from The Guardian can be found [here](#).

### **WILD FLOWERS – JEKYLL AND HIDE?**

Wild flowers in their many forms and colours bring great pleasure but, as reported by BBC Suffolk recently, they can also be "The dangerous plants lurking in plain sight".

It emerged children's lives were "at stake" in a Suffolk village after hemlock was found along their normal walk into school. The local parish council has pledged to close the road and remove the offending plant, and the council chairman says delays to the plant's removal "put children's lives at stake", with them needing to go into the road to avoid it.



The article went on to describe five plants that pose risks to health:

- Hemlock: the alkaloids in hemlock cause violent vomiting and paralysis of the nervous system, with death usually due to respiratory failure.
- Giant hogweed; the toxic sap of the giant hogweed, which grows near canals and rivers, can cause burns, blisters and scarring to those who come into contact with it.
- Foxglove: a source of digitoxin, a glycoside in the drug digitalis, which has been used as a heart stimulant since 1785 is also well-known for its toxicity in all parts of the plant. Consuming the leaves can cause oral and abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. In severe cases, symptoms can include visual disturbances, plus heart and kidney problems.
- Deadly nightshade: one of the UK's most poisonous plants and just a couple of berries, which contain tropane alkaloids, would be enough to kill a person
- Hemlock water dropwort: toxic to humans and animals if ingested.



Prof Iain Barr, of the University of East Anglia said "The majority of the UK's native toxic plants evolved their toxins to deter huge creatures like woolly mammoths or 2m (6ft 6in) tall aurochs, rather than us humans. If an auroch or mammoth overgrazed, then the plant alkaloids would make it not feel very well. It was not designed to kill them, just to make them unwell and to stop eating."

The RHS website [here](#) has a list of 100 toxic plants found in the UK (a mix of garden and wild) listed as potentially harmful by the Royal Horticultural Society.

On a lighter note, I am reading *Wild Fell* by Lee Schofield, Site Manager at RSPB Haweswater, described as 'a call to recognise that the solutions for a richer world lie at our feet; by focusing on flowers, we can rebuild landscapes ...'

Flowers he says, 'are really adaptations to attract pollinators', and goes on to describe the fascinating – and, certainly in my case – not much thought about 'magic of seeds', and the ways different species have evolved to disperse seeds away from the parent plant, to avoid competition:

- Wood and meadow crane's-bill use a spring-like mechanism to shoot their seeds to all points of the compass;
- Ragged robin and red campion seeds develop in capsules at the top of their tall stems; when ripe, lids fall off the capsules and the seeds are blown in all directions;
- Species in the pea family, including gorse and broom grow their seeds in pods which burst and send the seeds flying away;
- Plants that grow seed as berries rely on animals to eat them, carry them away and spread them as they defecate (with the added bonus of added nutrients);
- The spiky seeds of the avens family hitch a ride on passing animals,



- Seeds of many plant species, such as thistles, have their own umbrellas attached, allowing them to float away on the breeze, travelling large distances when the wind is strong.

These wonderful and highly-varied mechanisms evolved over millennia all help to sustain wild flowers. As the author says 'A landscape of flowers is a landscape of hope.'

### **ASH DIE BACK – FUTURE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Ash Die Back is an ongoing major issue with the potential for a lot of trees dying or becoming a serious safety risk (writes Gordon Dyne). Managers, particularly in public access sites, will need to think about trees up to 20 metres back from the path, which in smaller sites will be especially problematic. The implications in ash-dominated woodland are likely to be significant both in terms of costs and also the resulting changes to the woods look and feel.

However I had not fully appreciated the potential for some ecological gains, arising from this problem. The effects of ash die back could in some cases create additional open glades to encourage greater species diversity – the edge effect. Away from the paths there is the option for leaving more standing dead wood - good for a range of invertebrates.



But if die back bites as severely as expected, with climate change also in the mix, significant replanting will occur. I had not appreciated that ash-dominated woodland is in part an artefact of past management choices, often to the exclusion of other native species, so post die back choices could enable a more diverse range of suitable native tree species in the woodscape, which to some extent will future proof woodlands against some future epidemic, and benefit a range of animal species that use those tree species.

So, it may be very much a case of the proverbial silver lining, unless you are an ash tree or a species that uses them. Although of course, you can absolutely bet that some bright spark will want to plant giant redwood because they look nice!

### **CONGRATULATIONS!**

Two of our local wildlife sites are amongst 2,216 places in the UK to receive a 2023/24 Green Flag Award. The Green Flag Award® scheme recognises and rewards well managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for the management of recreational outdoor spaces across the United Kingdom and around the world.

It was good to see Rushcliffe Country Park retain the award, winning for the 17<sup>th</sup> consecutive time. It was particularly pleasing to see Sharphill Wood in Edwalton winning its first, and hopefully not last – award.



## **A SURFEIT OF SYRPHIDAE**



Recent days have produced more insects in our Ruddington garden than in previous weeks (although possibly not as many as in previous years). Hoverfly numbers have increased: Marmalade hoverflies (*Episyrphus balteatus*) have been particularly numerous, with good numbers of 'Batman hoverflies' (*Myathropa florea*). The star of the show has been a male *Chrysotoxum verralli*, classified as rare in Rushcliffe, with no recorded sightings on NBN Atlas.

Needless to say, a record has been entered on Nature Counts!

## **BIG GREEN BOOK**

The *Rushcliffe Big Green Book* has just been launched. A directory of nature-based activities and Green Spaces in Rushcliffe, it is for social prescribers and healthcare workers who want to find activities for their patients, as well as individuals and families looking for an activity to get involved in.

It is available at <https://www.rushcliffehealth.org/green-book>

If you know of any local group or activity that would seem to fit the bill please encourage them to put themselves forward for inclusion: the more the merrier.

## **WILDLIFE WATCH**



We regularly include Rushcliffe Wildlife Watch in our Organised Events listing. Normally based at Rushcliffe Country Park, July's meeting involved a visit to Wilwell Farm Cutting. Gordon the Warden was on hand to show the group of 8 to 13 year olds around the reserve, and even the rain was not enough to dampen their enthusiasm. It was lovely to see a new generation's enthusiasm for nature, and if you would like to know more about the Group, click [here](#).



### **WETLANDS FOR WILDLIFE**

90% of the UK's wetlands have been lost in the last 100 years. Rising temperatures coupled with the potential loss of coastal habitats mean that inland wetlands are more important for wildlife than ever. Notts Wildlife Trust need your help to carry out our important habitat work at four of our largest nature reserves; Skylarks, Attenborough, Idle Valley and Besthorpe. These wonderful wetlands are home to some of our county's most iconic species, but without careful habitat work, they're at risk of drying out.

Help reverse the decline of Nottinghamshire's vital wetlands by donating to our Wetlands for Wildlife Appeal: <https://www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org/>

### **CONNECTING WITH NATURE**

Nottinghamshire in general, and Rushcliffe in particular have many wonderful sites to visit and connect with nature, even in the dark days of winter ... or, perhaps, especially in the dark days of winter!

You can find a full list of NWT reserves [here](#), and a list of sites in Rushcliffe [here](#).

### **WORK PARTIES**

Our local nature reserves rely on volunteers to help maintain them, and organise regular work parties. Planned parties for August are as follows:

Sat 5th	Wilwell Farm Cutting	
Sun 6th	Skylarks	
Fri 11th	Skylarks	
Sat 12th	Wilford Claypits	Meadow Park
Fri 25th	Skylarks	

Details of times, etc. can be found in the Diary section of our website [here](#), so if you have some spare time and energy please feel free to join in – you will be very welcome!

**PLEASE NOTE: All of these dates and details are based on the current entries in the Diary. Could work part organisers please let me have planned dates for 2023, as and when they are available, so I can keep the entries as accurate as possible. Thank you.**

### **And finally...**

Don't forget that you can find more news, events and items of interest from SNG, Notts Wildlife Trust and other local Friends of Groups etc. by visiting our website at [www.southnottswildlife.org.uk](http://www.southnottswildlife.org.uk)





**Nottinghamshire**  
Wildlife Trust

*South Notts Local Group*

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If you want to contact us please email [southnottswildlife@gmail.com](mailto:southnottswildlife@gmail.com)

*Chris Overton South Notts Local Group 29<sup>th</sup> July 2023*

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