



## What to look out for in July

*July, a month of relative inactivity amongst our birds as they are busy raising young or moulting, still has plenty to see in terms of flowers and trees, and – hopefully, given weather conditions last summer and in recent months – insects, with some of our showiest butterflies on the wing.*

### BIRDS

There is little doubt that July is the worst month in which to see birds, with the lack of birds lasting until at least mid-August. This is why birdwatchers turn their focus to butterflies and dragonflies at this time of year!

Most wildfowl will be moulting and thus trying to hide. Ducks on the waterways of South Notts will be moulting into what's called 'eclipse' plumage, where the males lose their bright colours to look more like the dowdy females. They also try and hide while undergoing moult. Similarly, most birds will now be feeding young and trying to keep out of the way of predators while they raise their brood. Songbirds mostly fall silent during July and August but you should be able to hear some strange squeaks and tweets as the young try to learn their songs and calls. Gardens will be the focus of attention during summer, as your feeders may be visited by an array of growing youngsters (**Robins, Blackbirds, House Sparrows**, etc). If you are lucky enough to have a nest nearby, look out for young **Swallows** (*right*).



Places such as Holme Pierrepont will start to attract failed breeding waders on their way back south from the Arctic Circle. Classic late July into August species include **Green and Wood Sandpipers**, so scan any muddy or rocky shoreline around the lakes and pools of our region. Raptors may be in the air, using the hot thermals to soar in search of prey. **Common Buzzard** is our most numerous raptor but also keep an eye open for **Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Peregrine and Red Kite**.

Appreciate your **Swifts** while they are here: they will be mostly gone by mid-August, quickly followed by our **Sand Martins** and **Common Terns**. Autumn is on its way!

If you want to travel further afield in the county, then Sherwood Forest should still produce sightings of **Nightjar** and **Woodcock** at dusk, with **Honey Buzzard** and **Goshawk** sometimes seen over the forests on fine days.

Whatever you are in search of during July, try getting out early or late in the day, as small birds will be keeping out of the sun during the hot days of summer.



*TREES AND FLOWERS*

Although July heralds the start of the end of the wildflower season, there is still plenty to see.

**Self Heal** (*pictured with Green-veined White butterfly*) is a member of the very varied mint family, with signature "twin lipped" flowers (like Dead Nettle). In Self Heal they are usually a deepish

purple, but can be pinkish, and are mounted in a curious "square" shaped head. It is widespread and found in all sorts of environments - grassland, woodland and even lawns. Its ubiquity may in part be due to its very variable nature: plants can vary from 2-3 inches to around knee high, and in mown lawns it is able to flower within the cut sward, tinging the grass with purple. This flexibility seems to be a secret of its success, but



whether it is the product of their DNA or if there are actually different versions of the plant in circulation is an open question.

As we move into July the traditional tall white flowers of the road verge **Cow Parsley** will be going over, although it may not always seem to be the case, as it is often replaced by **Upright Hedge Parsley**. On the face of it the flowers are pretty much the same (there are differences, but you need an eyeglass), but what is clearly different is the form of the leaves, with UHP having a distinctively different leaf pattern. If you want to see the difference, consult an ID book or a trustworthy wild flower site on the internet.

Infamous for its toxic association with horses, as well as cows and sheep, **Ragwort** will be coming into flower. The toxin is designed to make the plant unpalatable to other organisms trying to eat it, not to kill them: it is unlikely that any animal with working taste buds would try more than one or two plants. Far more dangerous is if an unscrupulous supplier supplies fodder containing dead Ragwort. One species that actively seeks out the plant is the day-flying **Cinnabar Moth** caterpillar (*right*) which can quickly strip a Ragwort plant bare, absorbing the toxins to help protect both it and its adult form from bird predation. Both the caterpillar and moth



advertise their toxicity through their striking colouration: the caterpillar has bright black and yellow "Tiger stripes" and the adult is a cheery red and black. This warning is clearly only partly effective – cuckoos are known to eat the caterpillars, and sometimes the caterpillars turn cannibal. Although **Common Ragwort** is the most common form, there are several other species, each with subtle differentiation.

A little-regarded but quite common flower that you will find on farm tracks and the like, growing in the bare hard pressed soil, is a small plant with feathery leaves, with what looks like small green flower heads that have lost their petals. This is **Pineapple Mayweed** in full flower (unlike its close relatives **Scented Mayweed** and **Scentless Mayweed** that do sport white petals). Although you might think the name derives from some vague resemblance of the flower head to a pineapple, rather it is said to smell like a Pineapple. So if you want to lie down on farm tracks sniffing flowers, feel free to invent your own explanation for the passing dog walkers!

#### INSECTS

July should see the maximum numbers of butterflies in flight, with **Gatekeeper** (*right*), **Ringlet**, **Meadow Brown** butterflies, and the **Skippers** - **Large**, **Small** and **Essex** – joining the **Common Blues**, **Speckled Woods** and the like that emerged earlier in the year.



July may also present opportunities to see some of our locally-rare, and most spectacular butterflies: **Silver-washed Fritillary**, and what Matthew Oates describes as 'His Imperial Majesty', the **Purple Emperor**. Pictured below, you might see them in Cotgrave Forest.







Dragonflies and Damselflies should still be plentiful. One of our more engaging dragonflies, the **Common Darter**, (*right*) should be in flight; watch out for them as they settle and perch and, with a little patience and care, you can get really close to them.



A damselfly that you can also get close to is the **Banded Demoiselle** (*below*); both sexes have wonderfully iridescent green bodies, but look out for the differing wing colours in males (*left*) and females (*right*).



Watch out for the many different species of **Hoverfly**, and marvel at the different sizes and colourations, like the *Heliophilus pendulus* (*below*) – if you are really lucky, you may get to see one or more of the largest varieties in the *Volucella* tribe, including the big hornet mimics.



As you walk along hedgerows, or pass time in the garden watch out for **Spiders**. You may see a **Nursery Web Spider** or a **Wolf Spider** carrying their egg sacs, or be lucky enough to watch a spider catch, wrap and eat their prey, which is often much bigger than them (*below*)!



Finally, look out for **Horseflies**. With care you can avoid being bitten by most insects, but these creatures appear to operate by different rules - once bitten, never forgotten! The *Tabanus* species horsefly (*below*), egged on by another fly, took a chunk out of my leg. The moral is: don't wear shorts when rooting around vegetation looking for insects.



*Enjoy all that nature has for you in July!*

*Credits: Text by Neil Glenn, Gordon Dyne and Chris Overton Images by Chris Overton.*