



Wildlife News from Rushcliffe September 2023

Here comes autumn, bringing with it new and different birds, changing colours and fewer insects. But, all is not lost: there should still be plenty to see out and about in Rushcliffe.

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

GET CLOSER TO NATURE THROUGH ORGANISED EVENTS

Sat 9th September – 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.

WINTER WILDLIFE TALKS PROGRAMME

Our next Winter Wildlife Talks Programme is nearly here. Starting on Thursday 5th October, it 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](#).

MORE CRAFTY CORVIDS



Corvids are some of the most intelligent birds. Last month we described ways in which crows and magpies have been observed using human-made materials in their nests and, on 2 August, *The Times* reported that German rooks have developed an (apparently) new approach to feeding on cereal crops. "They walk into the field and push over the stalks," said Matthias Heitmayr, district chairman of the Bavarian Farmers' Federation. "Then the grains are lying on the ground and they can comfortably eat them." So far, the report goes on to say, the phenomenon has only



been observed in fields around Olching, near Munich. “But the birds are clever - if one of them has worked it out the others will learn it soon,” Heitmayr said. Almost an entire field had fallen victim to the rooks in this way shortly before this year’s harvest, he added.

Previously, the rooks employed the age-old method of swooping down on freshly sown fields. “They smell it and when the seedlings come out they tear them out and eat the seeds,” Heitmayr told the Münchner Merkur newspaper. Farmers then had no choice but to clear the field and replant it, which cost money and lost them two to three weeks each time. The birds have a particular fondness for cereals and fast-growing “catch crops” that are planted to improve the health of the soil by absorbing nutrients from the ground.

The rook population in the southern region of Upper Bavaria has risen fivefold in the past 15 years to an estimated 8,000 pairs. The populations are particularly dense outside cities, some of which use falcons to chase them off. “Where are the birds supposed to go then? They escape to fields that are at the edges of woods or groups of trees where they can settle,” Heitmayr said.

Sadly – but perhaps inevitably - the Farmers’ Federation, fearful of the potential costs to farmers has called on the government to lift Germany’s ban on hunting rooks. However, one more enlightened farmer in the district has come up with a solution: he hired a pensioner to drive around his maize field once an hour to scare them off.

Although the reported behaviour is said to be new, a letter to *The Times* on 3 Aug suggests German rooks must have friends or relatives in Somerset, where Jeremy Hall reports “he has been watching a couple of hundred rooks using precisely the same methodology to feed themselves and their young for the past six or eight weeks”; subsequent letters confirmed this observation across various parts of the UK.

So, is this new behaviour or another example of extraordinary behaviour being viewed – and thus neglected – as ordinary? And does it offer employment opportunities for the over-50s?

SHARPHILL WOOD SPRING BIRD REPORT

Every spring between March and June, over the course of 6 visits, John Elwell, with other volunteers, looks and listens to identify what birds are present. You can find this year’s report [here](#).

ANIMALS TO THE RESCUE!

For millennia humankind has used animals in many different ways for work, support and company. In recent years, rewilding has become a hot topic as some of us look to repair centuries of damage to the environment, and animals once again play a major role.

Knepp Estate in Sussex is perhaps the highest-profile rewilding site in the country, which in twenty years has seen significant population growth of many common species of mammals, birds, insects and more; particular successes are critically-endangered birds such as nightingale and turtle dove,



now breeding in good numbers, and the growth of the largest population of purple emperor butterflies in the UK.



Key to all of this is habitat management. Following principles developed in the Netherlands by Dr Frans Vera, based on the historical impact on European landscape and ecology of huge numbers of herbivores including European bison, elk, auroch, beaver, wild boar and deer, habitat management at Knepp is largely down to grazing animals: longhorn cattle, Tamworth pigs, Exmoor ponies and fallow deer, present day proxies for their ancient forerunners.

Their different grazing techniques and methods of physical disturbance and their ability to transfer nutrients and disperse seeds over wide areas stimulates a complex mosaic of habitats, with a consequent hugely positive impact on nature.

For more information on the Knepp project, click [here](#).

Animals are also, increasingly, being used to help in the fight against the ever-growing risk of wildfire.

In 2017, the southern Chilean city of Santa Juana was hit hard by wildfires, so the locals set up a new task force to help reduce fire risk in the local woodlands of Bosques de Chacay – a herd of goats. The original herd of 16 goats has now grown to 150, and they enthusiastically eat vegetation, reducing the amount of fuel available for the flames.

A measure of their success was seen in February 2023 when forest fires, fuelled by heatwaves and drought left dozens dead, thousands injured and almost 440,000 hectares destroyed in south-central Chile. "The park was surrounded by fires but it ended up being the only green spot left," said Rocio Cruces, co-founder of the 16-hectare park, and Buena Cabra, a project that uses goats to build firebreaks. "The fire reached our forest but only the first line of trees was really affected, less than 10 per cent of the park," Ms Cruces said, adding that small fires broke out but did not advance due to minimal brush.

She added "Maintaining the vegetation eliminates the use of herbicides, and that's very important for us. It's an ecological way of preventing fires without using deadly chemicals." And as an added benefit, goat droppings also help enrich the soil and prevent further erosion.

Various news outlets have reported this story, but I particularly like the one from The Washington Post – it has a video of the goats! Click [here](#) to see it. It reports that goats are increasingly popular



partners for safeguarding land from fire. Private firms move herds throughout the U.S. Pacific Northwest, California has deployed them since 2014, and Ireland, Spain and Portugal have used goats for years.



Adding to the list of firefighting animals, *Rewilding Europe* reports that a herd of 10 Przewalski's horses – the last truly wild horse – has been released in the Iberian Highlands rewilding landscape in Spain. They arrived last May and will soon roam free across an extensive area, where the animals will help to reduce the risk of wildfire, enhance biodiversity, boost nature-based tourism and environmental education, and improve the conservation status of this endangered subspecies. (Image: Wikipedia).

The report can be found [here](#).

“Grazing herbivores remove a lot of biomass and reduce the continuity of the vegetation layer, and that’s really significant in fire risk,” explains Christopher Johnson, professor of wildlife conservation at the University of Tasmania, Australia, and the lead author of [a 2018 paper](#) on rewilding for wildfire mitigation. “It’s a good way of localising fire and reducing its impact.”

REWILDING MERE MEADOW

A local exercise in rewilding can be found at Mere Meadow in Bradmore, where local residents Graeme and Eileen Radcliffe have begun rewilding Mere Meadow as part of a longer-term project that will eventually include a pond as well as meadow, shrubs and trees.

The meadow is on a public footpath and visitors are welcome. For more information, click [here](#). (Image: Graeme Radcliffe)



And while we are talking about rewilding, don't forget, our talk on (re)Wilding, on 4th January 2024, when Jenny Conor describes what rewilding means at Dalton Moor Farm, a small farm in East Durham, as she tells us of her experiences over the last ten or so years of supporting nature to regenerate the natural environment, bringing new (or long forgotten) plants and animals back onto the land.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLOTMENTS

Allotments provide fertile ground – in more ways than one. In our July Wildlife News we looked at recent research carried out in a number of Leeds allotments, which concluded that moths should be valued as pollinators as highly as bees. This month allotments in the Brighton and Hove area come under the spotlight, courtesy of new research by the University of Sussex.

Elizabeth Nicholls writing in *Inside Ecology* [here](#) says that “Accessing affordable fruit and vegetables is a significant challenge for the 1.2 million UK residents living in what are known as

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‘food deserts’. People in these neighbourhoods are unable to purchase fresh food within walking distance or via a quick trip on public transport. Instead, they have to choose between shopping at convenience stores with scarce fresh food in stock or spending some of their food budget on transportation.”

One possible effective and sustainable solution could be to grow more fruit and vegetables in urban areas. But while there is a large body of evidence on pollination in rural areas (FOR EXAMPLE, a paper in 2011 by J. Ollerton *et al* suggested that approximately 75% of the world’s leading food crops depend on insects for pollination), Ms Nicholls reminds us that “... our understanding of which insects pollinate specific crops in urban areas, and whether there are even enough insects in our cities to sustain fruit and vegetable production, remains limited.”

In their research, published on the *New Phytologist Foundation* website [here](#), the researchers conducted over 1,000 surveys in allotments across the city of Brighton & Hove recording the number of pollinators visiting crop flowers. Their main conclusions include:

- Most crops are visited by a broad range of insects with bumblebees and hoverflies two of the most important pollinators.
- Pollinator populations in urban farms are likely sufficiently large and diverse enough to support the production of insect pollinated fruit and vegetables in the study area, or even a potential expansion.
- Diversity of insects may be key for crop pollination in cities.
- We need to improve the quality of insect pollination that some crops receive in cities.
- Improving crop pollination in cities could be achieved by increasing the availability of food and nesting habitat for insects.



BRING OUT YOUR DEAD

Hopefully you are never too old to learn, and I have just come across a new word: *necrophoresis*. This describes another fascinating behaviour, to maintain the health of their colony, found in social insects like ants, bees and wasps. In order to stop the spread of disease in the nest, corpses of dead nestmates, and occasionally non-nestmates and alien species, are carried out from the site to a designated ‘cemetery’ area. With some black ant colonies, for example, containing 14,000 workers, a few cemeteries are needed.



Whilst it is possible for any colony member to carry out a corpse, disposal is normally carried out by designated 'undertakers'. This is particularly the case with ants, where undertakers have a slightly altered development cycle, so are much more likely to handle corpse removal, in addition to their more normal duties.

Although the term was first introduced in 1958 by E O Wilson, Pliny the Elder, in the first century AD wrote of ants "They are the only living creatures beside man that bury their dead" (Book XI *Naturalis Historiae*).

BREEDING GLOW WORMS

Responding to our last month's Wildlife News, Jan Williamson, who produces and circulates a newsletter for the North Notts Local Group, commented "Pity about the demise of Purple Emperors in Sherwood but there are the glow worms to compensate."

A small population of breeding glow worms has been discovered living in a Nottinghamshire heathland at Sherwood Heath, a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) in Ollerton.

Sherwood Forest Trust has worked hard to create an environment suitable for the creatures. Katie Doull, a community conservation officer at the trust, said: "It's pretty exciting because glow worms in general are declining as a species throughout the UK. There's about 2,000 species worldwide and only two known in the UK." She said they prefer heathland sites that were dry and sandy - an environment that had severely declined in recent years.

The glow worms are actually beetles and only survive for a few weeks in June and July during which time a female can lay up to 100 eggs on the ground.

Only one glow worm was seen at the site in 2021, but this summer the trust saw 25 female glow worms at Sherwood Heath. It was hoped there were also a similar amount of males, which do not glow. As it takes two years for the hatched larvae to fully mature, the glow worms will not be seen glowing again at Sherwood Heath until June 2025.

A full report can be found [here](#).

FROM GLOW WORMS TO SLOW WORMS



Over the course of the year, Gordon Dyne (Warden at Wilwell Farm Cutting reserve) has reported on his increasing stock of relatively-recently discovered slow worms at the reserve. His latest survey has revealed a new record count – nine. Further encouragement comes from the fact that they were found in a number of locations, which suggests a population rather than one or two peripatetic individuals. Here's hoping the good news continues in future years. (Image: Tim Williams)



A SEED BONANZA

If, like me, you have a silver birch tree growing nearby, now is the time that garden paths and the like become covered in their seeds. Carried by the wind, they can travel up to 360 metres (and even further in very strong winds), and can quickly colonise new ground. In a good year, a mature silver birch can produce 6.5 million seeds. No wonder I have to sweep the paths regularly!

GARDEN PLANNING FOR OUR BUTTERFLIES

Sadly, butterflies are becoming less evident in our gardens as summer moves into autumn, but there is always next year. Autumn though is a good time to start planning next year's gardens, and with that in mind, Butterfly Conservation have published *If you plant it, they will come*, where writer and gardener Arthur Parkinson shares his top tips on planting a garden that will attract butterflies.

You can find it [here](#).



WHAT'S THAT PLANT?

If you have a smart phone, and want to start using a wildflower identification app, but don't know where to start, Plantlife tested 10 popular apps out in the field to put them through their paces, and picked their 3 favourites. You can find out more [here](#).

HEDGES AND HEDGEROWS

The People's Trust for Endangered Species is encouraging us all to resist the urge to tidy up the summer growth on our garden bushes and hedges. They say "Hedges are nature's larder, providing fruit to help wildlife fatten up before winter. So, the longer you delay that tidy-up trim, the better they will be at feeding your garden birds and other wildlife."

To help us help hedges and hedgerows, they have produced a series of documents, including a guide to managing them, available [here](#).

KEEPING IT WILD

Keeping it Wild (KIW) is NWT's Youth Team, a group of like-minded 13 – 25 year olds who are passionate about nature, conservation and adventure. South Notts Local Group has been happy to provide them with financial support, and you could go to their webpage [here](#) to find out more about them or, better still, read what they have written about themselves, in what we hope is the first of a regular feature about KIW:



Did you know that Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust has a Youth team of over 25 members ?



All our members are between 13-25 and from the wider Nottingham area. As a group we manage the only two inner city nature reserves owned by NWT, Woodthorpe Meadow and Little Holly Corner. Woodthorpe Meadow is a small reserve with a wildflower meadow and a small section of mixed deciduous woodland that has a magical carpet of Bluebells in the spring. Little Holly Corner is, as it sounds, a very small patch of land that offers connectivity to inner city gardens and is home to a mini beast hotel and a small pond.

Management of the sites differs throughout the year, ranging from coppicing and scrub control in autumn and winter to monitoring and community events in spring and summer.

As a group we are involved in fundraising and raising awareness about topics and campaigns that are close to our heart.

We also meet weekly at the NWT's HQ, where we also manage the small attached wildlife. These sessions are when we do event planning, share ideas and do species training, as well as having others come along and give specialist talks in nature conservation.

One of the best things that we do each year with Keeping it Wild, is we head out on an annual residential in search of amazing wildlife, meeting local people that do great things for nature and give back to the community. So far we have ventured to North and South Wales, Norfolk, Cumbria, Devon, Cornwall and Rutland Water. We always want to connect with Wildlife Trusts and other young people doing great things in green or blue spaces.





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 September are as follows:

Sat 2nd	Wilwell Farm Cutting	
Sun 3rd	Skylarks	The Hook Reserve
Fri 8th	Skylarks	
Sat 9th	Wilford Claypits	Meadow Park
Fri 22nd	Skylarks	
Sun 24 th	Sharphill Wood	

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

Follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SouthNottsWildlifeGroup.

If you want to contact us please email southnottswildlife@gmail.com

Chris Overton South Notts Local Group 28th August 2023