



## **Wildlife News from Rushcliffe October 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 14th Oct – Wilwell Farm Cutting in Autumn**

Join Gordon the Warden looking at the reserve's woodland and human history as the seasons wind down into winter. 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 approx. location is NG2 7UT; Just Three Words = home, news, fuzzy. For more info contact [gordon.dyne@gmail.com](mailto:gordon.dyne@gmail.com)

#### **Sat 14th October – 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**

#### **Thursday October 5<sup>th</sup>: The Falkland Islands – David Chapman**



Following last season's excellent talk on The Birds of Cornwall, David returns to share his experiences travelling to The Falkland Islands in 2019/2020, where he recorded the wildlife and landscapes of this British overseas territory. Join us to hear about and see the amazing wildlife he encountered, including penguins and elephant seals.

*David is a professional photographer and writer living in Cornwall. In his photography he specialises in landscapes and wildlife whilst in his writing he features wildlife, travel and conservation.*

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](#).



## STATE OF THE NATION REPORT 2023

September 27<sup>th</sup> saw the publication of *State of the Nation 2023* compiled by experts from over 60 of the top research and conservation organisations in the UK.

To read a summary of the report, click [here](#). The full report can be downloaded [here](#).

## CATOOS



In June 2017 National Geographic reported on research which found that male palm cockatoos use a custom-made tool to tap out a percussive beat. (While other animals, such as chimpanzees, enjoy drumming on sticks and logs, they don't make their own musical implements to do it). *Image: Wikipedia*

Robert Heinsohn, a conservation biologist at Australia National University leading the research, first witnessed the behaviour in male birds in northern Australia in 1997, and said "The cockatoo was clutching what looked like a stick and banging it on the trunk, and every so often he would pause, erect his amazing crest, and let out either a piping whistle or a harsh screech."

Researchers spent the next two decades videotaping the birds to find out if their drumming is truly music, and by analysing the sequences of the beats, found the sounds were highly predictable, just like human music, and that each male had a unique, yet discrete, musical style.

The original article can be found [here](#).

In September this year, The Times reported that a further study led by the Australian National University has now revealed another side to the parrots. It found that each bird methodically designs and decorates its musical tools according to individual taste. What is more, they teach their design and decorations to their male offspring and do not tend to copy each other's designs.

Heinsohn said his team "patiently stalked" the birds and examined the birds' discarded tools, finding that while some males preferred seed pods to drum with, others opted for long sticks or short, fat ones. He said the female birds took a close interest in the tools used by the males: "The females watch every move ... the males demonstrate their bill strength while they snip through up to 3cm of hardwood."

The latest research paper, published by The Royal Society, can be found [here](#).



## **BIRDS: BILLS AND COLOURS**



Birds use their bills for many purposes, including foraging and feeding, singing, nest material gathering and nest building, and in the case of palm cockatoos, making musical instruments to aid the mating process. But, why are they the shape they are, and why do the shapes vary between species?

Bird Guides reports on a research by a team from the Universities of Bristol and St Andrews which shows that "the material a bird selects for its nest depends on the shape of its bill." This, one could suggest, is probably self-evident, but given the multiple uses a bird's bill is put to, do we really understand how, and why, they are as they are?

Dr Shoko Sugawara, senior author of the study said "We've very excited about the potential applications of our findings, to further explore how beak shape may have co-evolved with other aspects of nest building or other functions" and added "Most animals, including birds, do not have hands like ours, but manipulating objects like nest material and food is such a crucial part of their lives. Our finding is the first step to reveal possible interactions between the evolution of beaks and manipulation, like nest building, and helps us better understand how animals evolved to interact with the world with or without hands."

More details can be found in the Birds Guide report [here](#), and the research paper [here](#).

Bird Guides also describes some new research that shows that urban great tits have paler plumage compared to their countryside-dwelling counterparts. The study, published in *Journal of Animal Ecology*, explains how, as the yellow pigment of the breast feathers of great tits comes from the food they eat, the paler yellow plumage of urban birds indicates that the urban environment affects the entire food chain. *Image: Wikipedia*



Hannah Watson, biology researcher at Lund University, and one of the authors behind the study said "Our findings suggest that birds in the city are not getting the right diet. This can help us understand how to create urban environments that are more beneficial for biodiversity. By planting more native trees and plants in our gardens and parks we can help small birds, such as great tits, by providing them with a healthy diet of insects and spiders for themselves and their chicks."

More details can be found in the Birds Guide report [here](#), and the research paper [here](#).

## **IVY: FRIEND OR FOE?**

A recent post on Face Book from Wild Things Keyworth caught my eye:



*“It is infuriating to read people still write that ivy ‘strangles trees’ and as such I will be contacting the heliotropic daily paper...Talking about invasive when ivy is a native plant and not invasive!...And they talk about all the ways to remove it. Oh my goodness, how many thousands of people have been influenced to destroy it now.”*

As a fan of ivy – in the right place - and intrigued at such a strong reaction, I thought a little investigation might be in order.

Although I couldn’t locate the article alluded to, I did find several more in UK papers: one of the usual suspects took time off from forecasting, yet again, with absolute certainty, the imminent arrival of another once-in-a-lifetime weather event to tell us “How to get rid of English Ivy”, and one (slightly) more upmarket paper’s headline told us “Invasive and ubiquitous, English ivy can hurt trees and plants. Removing it isn’t easy” (with – interestingly - the same byline and, by the look of it, much of the same content as the earlier AP article described below).

I also found several articles in North American papers and websites, published before the UK articles appeared, which appear to carry a similar message. In fact, the Toronto Star and the Enterprise-Star of McComb Missouri both carried the headline “Invasive and ubiquitous, English ivy can hurt trees and plants. Removing it isn’t easy”. The same headline appeared on the AP website (“The Associated Press is an independent global news organization dedicated to factual reporting.”)

These articles refer to the way Ivy is viewed as an “invasive species” in parts of the United States; for example, in 2010 the Oregon Department of Agriculture banned the “propagation, transport or sale of English and Irish Ivy”.

I think that probably explains the ill-advised definition of Ivy as ‘invasive’ in the UK, and wonder whether the series of UK articles appearing after the North American ones suggests a bandwagon being jumped on?

So, building on other points in the Wild Things Keyworth posts, I’ve drawn on two authoritative organisations’ websites (click on links to read more) in an attempt at a more objective, and – hopefully – factual picture:

1. Ivy is extremely beneficial for wildlife, and it does not kill trees. Source: [The Woodland Trust](#)
2. Ivy can cause problems to buildings, so an appropriate degree of control is advisable, but sound masonry is not affected. Source: [Royal Horticultural Society](#).

And, courtesy of Wild Things Keyworth, a warden at RSPB Otmoor, talks about the benefits of ivy:

“Ivy as food - at this time of year ivy is flowering, it is one of the latest flowering native plants and a vital source of food for bees, butterflies and other late flying insects. Later in the winter the berries will form and provide food for birds and mammals when most other berries and fruit have



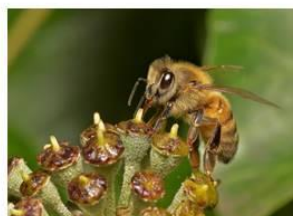
been consumed. The foliage in the spring and summer may also be taken by many insect larvae including the holly blue.”

“Ivy as shelter - the tangled branches of ivy and evergreen leaves provide an attractive nesting and roosting site for many species of bird. You may also find butterflies and moths hidden amongst the dense growth. In a garden, an ivy covered wall could be the home of your local flock of red listed sparrows, your favourite tame robin or the more elusive wrens, dunnocks and song thrushes. Killing it before winter arrives is basically destroying the potential shelter for favourite garden species at a time of year where they need it!”

“Ivy as an insulator - an ivy covered wall is a much better insulated wall than an exposed one.”

“Busting myths and management - ivy is a native species, it is not invasive nor is it a strangling plant. It does not kill the tree it grows on and it does not pull walls down. However, as with any other climber, it does need managing. It should be cut back to the required level, ideally sections that are in need of a trim should be taken off in the autumn but always try to leave at least some parts to flower and fruit. If ivy is growing into any gaps where its expansion could cause damage cut it away from these areas, if this is done then the ivy shouldn't pose any problems.”

For me, this is the best time of year to see ivy. Find a patch of flowering ivy, particularly on a sunny day, and watch as they come and go. And, because they are so intent on feeding, you can, with care, get very close up and personal with them. The images below were all taken on a patch of ivy at Skylarks on one such occasion, and were only a few of the insects seen.







## **BUTTERFLIES**



The results of this year's Big Butterfly Count have been published, with a mixture of good and bad news about the state of these beautiful creatures, and can be found at Butterfly Conservation's website [here](#). The most numerous species recorded was the Red Admiral, which appeared in enormous numbers across the UK towards the end of summer, in a mass migration from the European mainland.

I found the first half of the season disappointing, with what seemed like lower than usual numbers of Whites, Orange Tips and Commas, a local picture reflected in a week in Suffolk, lifted only by good numbers of Silver-studded Blues (*right*). Skippers, Meadow Browns, Ringlets and Gatekeepers also appeared to be in smaller numbers than usual. Then the Red Admirals came, followed by Peacocks, to rescue what at one point looked as if it might be a bad year for butterflies.



## **WILWELL SLOW WORMS**



The good news on Wilwell's slow worms keeps coming. Last month we reported a growing number of sightings on the reserve; this month Gordon the Warden found this youngster under one of the mats, which seems to confirm successful breeding at the site. At about 10 cm long, it should double in length over the next two years, reaching 30-40 cm ultimately (and possibly even 50cm) and could live for up to 30 years, assuming it avoids predators such as badgers and hedgehogs! *Image: Gordon Dyne*

## **RUSHCLIFFE NATURE CONSERVATION VOLUNTEER FORUM**

This year's Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Volunteer Forum is scheduled for Sat 7th Oct at Upper Saxondale Community Hall from 11.15 am to 4 pm, with lunch provided. The overall theme for the day will be Community Action for Wildlife, and there will be an update on the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy, followed by a visit to the Saxondale Nature Reserve and Orchard.

The event is open to anyone engaged with wildlife and nature conservation in Rushcliffe, and places can be booked via Eventbrite [here](#).

Visit our website at [www.southnottswildlife.org.uk](http://www.southnottswildlife.org.uk)

Follow us on Facebook at [Southnottswildlife](#)

Email: [southnottswildlife@gmail.com](mailto:southnottswildlife@gmail.com)



### **CELEBRATING RUSHCLIFFE AWARDS**

Nominations are now open for the 2023 Celebrating Rushcliffe Awards, which celebrates the Borough's wonderful volunteers, including an award for **Environmental Group or Project of the Year**.

Acknowledging individuals, organisations or projects that have an impact in making Rushcliffe a 'greener' place, this could include promoting nature conservation, reducing waste, improving energy efficiency, water conservation or improving quality of life for the people of the Borough.

You can make nominations via this [link](#) or by phone on 0115 914 8555, Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm. Please note the deadline for nominations is 11pm on Sunday 15th October.

### **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 October are as follows:

Sun 1st	Skylarks	The Hook Reserve
Fri 6th	Skylarks	
Sat 7th	Wilwell Farm Cutting	
Sat 14th	Wilford Claypits	Meadow Park
Fri 20th	Skylarks	
Sun 22nd	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.**



**Nottinghamshire**  
Wildlife Trust

*South Notts Local Group*

**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)

Follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/SouthNottsWildlifeGroup](https://www.facebook.com/SouthNottsWildlifeGroup).

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

*Chris Overton South Notts Local Group 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023*

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