



## **Wildlife News from Rushcliffe February 2024**

*January almost gone, and days are now starting to feel a little longer, albeit very damp and windy! Some colour and life is starting to show, giving us hope that spring is not too far away.*

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

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

We are delighted to launch our **2024 Out and About with Wildlife Programme for 2024**, a series of guided walks at various locations across Rushcliffe, currently from March until September (more may be added). Full details can be found in our website Diary [here](#), and you can download a PDF version of the whole programme if you click [here](#).

We would be delighted to see you.

#### **Sat 10th February – 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 February 1<sup>st</sup> : Wildlife of Sydney and the Blue Mountains - Nick Martin**



We are delighted to welcome back Nick as he regales us with his experiences of Sydney's wildlife, from vibrant fairy wrens to noisy cockatoos, frogmouths to fruit bats. Across four visits, Nick has accumulated many images to illustrate his exploration of the wide variety of wildlife that enchants visitors to this wonderful antipodean destination. *(Image: Nick Martin)*

*Nick works for Warwickshire Wildlife Trust as well as being a regular on the speaker circuit entertaining groups with his varied wildlife talks. He also founded the website [www.allthingswildlife.co.uk](http://www.allthingswildlife.co.uk)*

The talk will be available online through Zoom, and costs £4 per device (including booking fee). To book, please follow this [link](#) (which also provides details of technical requirements and the remaining talks in the Programme).

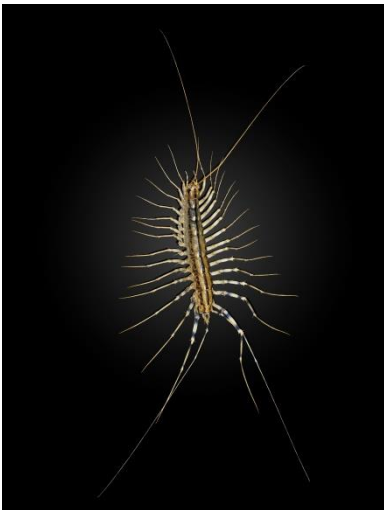


## **WE STILL NEED YOUR HELP**

A gentle reminder that South Notts Local Group is looking for new Committee Members, to help us promote nature conservation in Rushcliffe so, if you are interested, please email us at [southnottswildlife@gmail.com](mailto:southnottswildlife@gmail.com); we will be delighted to welcome you, or provide more information about what's involved.

## **KEEP LOOKING – YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT'S OUT THERE**

More new species have been found in the County.



The BBC News website reports that “A rare, venomous centipede has been discovered in Nottinghamshire for the first time”.

Dr Richard Jones, a history professor at the University of Leicester, discovered the House Centipede *Scutigera coleoptrata* at his home near Newark. (Image: Wikipedia).

Indigenous to the Mediterranean, it remains extremely rare in the UK, with fewer than 50 confirmed sightings since 1883 but the number was rising with 10 new verified sightings in 2023. It uses its long front legs to lasso its prey and its fangs to inject them with venom. The University of Leicester said “Their bite is non-fatal to humans and is described as akin to a bee sting.”

Dr Jones, who has reported the finding to Notts Wildlife Trust (presumably through *Nature Counts*), said: "I really encourage people to keep an eye out for the unusual and report their findings. Encounters such as this are a reminder that we should expect the unexpected as the world warms. This centipede has brought that home to me, literally."

Notts Biodiversity Action Group's website tells us that “a 2023 survey at Clumber Park, undertaken by Adrian Dutton (County Beetle Recorder and entomologist at EMEC Ecology), revealed 149 species of saproxylic beetle including three species that have not previously been recorded in Nottinghamshire. Saproxylic beetles are species that make use of dead and decaying wood. They provide essential ecosystem services, contributing to nutrient cycling and pollination.”

Click [here](#) for more information.

## **GUANO, PART 2**

In last month's *Wildlife News*, I included a piece on the beneficial effects of seabird guano on adjacent coral reefs. Two days later, Ed Conway writing in the *Sunday Times* offered another view of seabird guano. (*Blame penny-pinching and guano for our stinker of a sewage system. Sunday Times 31.12.23*).

We are all aware of the impact on our rivers and coastal waters, and therefore our wildlife, of what seems to be a never-ending torrent of sewage from sewer overflows. Ideally sewage would



be carried in one pipe to the treatment works for eventual return to the environment, cleaned, and surface water in another pipe to be discharged safely; this is known as a 'separate' system. However, the vast majority of our sewers are 'combined': they carry both foul water and surface water in the same pipe, and at times of heavy rainfall have insufficient capacity, and so discharge into streams, rivers and the sea (a position exacerbated by regularly-reported failures during normal and low flows resulting in much less diluted discharges going into the environment).

Ed Conway takes us back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century: in the 1840s cholera outbreaks and an increasingly putrid River Thames outside Parliament stimulated debate on what was to be done, and "a separate system was right at the top of the list".

Historically, "people had done their business in cesspits under their houses, which were emptied every so often, with the ordure carted off to be used as fertiliser." A new sewage system was envisaged by Edwin Chadwick et al "that would send the sewage down one pipe and rainwater down another. The rainwater could go into the river; the sewage could be turned into fertiliser and sold off. The system would pay for itself."



Sadly, it was not to be, thanks to 22 small islands off the coast of Peru. For centuries, these islands had been home for millions of seabirds (estimated around 53 million), including cormorants, pelicans and boobies, who had deposited their droppings there. This image shows a large colony of guanay cormorants on South Chincha Island in 1907 (*Image: Wikipedia*).

When the Peruvians started mining the guano, it was said to be over 200 feet thick. From 1840 to 1870 twelve million tons were mined to be used in the production of gunpowder and, more importantly, as a cheap but very effective fertiliser. The islands became so important geopolitically that two wars were fought over their ownership.

British farmers soon realised the value of guano as a cheap nitrogen-rich fertiliser, which meant that "the sums behind Chadwick's separate system of pipes no longer added up", and so the planned separate system was replaced by a more cost-beneficial combined system by Joseph Bazalgette in the sewage system he built for London which addressed the problems and which became a benchmark for future designs.

Back at the islands, by the early 20th century, the supply of guano had been almost completely depleted, so in 1908, the Peruvian government established *The Guano Administration* to manage the resource. Today Peruvians continue to harvest guano – in a much more controlled and sustainable way - on about 30 islands and coastal headlands. Destined primarily for domestic markets, the guano is removed the traditional way - by hand, using buckets and shovels. Labourers live in tents on the islands during harvest season, which occurs approximately every 7 years. When they leave, these places are once again deserted except for millions of seabirds. (Source: <https://www.perunorth.com/news/2017/8/21/guano-white-gold>).



To discover more about the islands and their history, the article *Holy Crap! A Trip to the World's Largest Guano-Producing Islands* can be found [here](#).

### **MORE CRAFTY CORVIDS**

In the recent *BBC TV Winterwatch* series, Iolo Williams presented a piece on Corvids, identifying some characteristics of the various members of the family found in the UK: Raven, Carrion Crow, Rook, Chough, Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay and Hooded Crow (and it was interesting to hear that there seems to be no scientific explanation for the relative distribution in the UK of Carrion and Hooded Crows). He did say that Corvids, particularly Crows, are highly intelligent birds but, disappointingly, did not elaborate, so following on from earlier pieces in our *Wildlife News* about 'crafty corvids' I thought I would see what's available to support his claim.

The answer is clearly a lot: a quick web search found a plethora of articles and research which appear to draw similar conclusions. An article on the NPR website [here](#) reported the following, which are broadly similar to conclusions reported in other sources:

1. Crows create and use tools; for example, New Caledonian Crows have been observed creating hooked tools from twigs to extract buried insects.
2. Crows hold 'funerals' for their dead: American Crows were observed marking the death of another with alarm calls and mobbing, which researchers believed was about identifying cause of death and warning others about potential dangers.
3. Crows can remember human faces. Researchers wearing a rubber caveman mask (a 'dangerous' mask) trapped, ringed and released crows and later returned to the area. A person wearing the 'dangerous' mask provoked alarm calls and dive-bombing by the crows, while another wearing a 'neutral' mask (a Dick Cheney mask!) was mostly ignored. If the dangerous mask was worn upside down a crow, after a moment of apparent confusion, tilted its head upside down and started alarm calling.
4. Crows learn from other crows: even crows that had not been ringed attacked the wearer of the dangerous mask, leading scientists to believe this was behaviour learned from crows that had been ringed. Another article ([here](#)) suggests that crows can remember faces for a number of years, passing information through the generations.

And finally, Bird Guides reports [here](#) on a newly-published study into the varying behaviour of corvids around food when other birds are present. The crows were found to be much more selective than jays, leading researchers to speculate it "demonstrated the ability for self control."

So that's some more attributes to add to the list.

### **CHANGING SPOTS**

According to Patrick Barkham writing in *The Guardian*, newly-published research on Meadow Brown butterflies "may challenge lepidopterists' long-held views about why butterflies have varying numbers of spots."

(The Guardian article can be found [here](#), and the full research paper [here](#).)



He goes on to say “The meadow brown, a common midsummer butterfly found on grasslands across Europe, has large eyespots on its forewings that are believed to startle and alarm predators. The eyespots also encourage potential predators to home in on the wing-edge where the spots are positioned, well away from the butterfly’s vulnerable body, enabling the insect to escape attacks with no more damage than tatty wings. Meadow browns also have smaller spots on their hind wings, which probably serve as camouflage when the butterfly is resting in grass.”

The butterfly has been studied for many years, identifying variations in number and size of underwing spots found across the insect’s range. *The Butterflies of Britain and Ireland* (Thomas and Lewington, BWP) suggests that initially scientists ascribed this to chance until pioneering research on animal genetics by Ford and Dowdeswell on the Isles of Scilly and elsewhere identified the cause as natural selection exploiting differing local conditions. Subsequent research has focussed on this ‘genetic polymorphism’.

This new research used a similar method to Ford, and focused on the role of temperature (‘thermal plasticity’), which had been overlooked previously. It found that “fewer of these hindwing spots appear when females experience higher temperatures during their pupal stage (in a chrysalis before emerging as a butterfly). This suggests the butterflies adapt their camouflage based on the conditions. For example, with fewer spots they may be harder to spot on dry, brown grass that would be more common in hot weather. We did not observe such a strong effect in males, possibly because their spots are important for sexual selection.”

The researchers predict that the spots on female Meadow Browns will decrease as the British climate heats up.

Professor Ffrench-Constant of Exeter University, co-author of the study said: “This is an unexpected consequence of climate change. We tend to think about species moving north, rather than changing appearance.”

### **BUTTERFLIES – HERE THEY COME**

A new year and thoughts turn to anticipating nature’s sights, sounds and colours of spring and summer. Some of the most colourful and eagerly-awaited arrivals are butterflies, but some of them may already be here. Five butterfly species born last year (Brimstone, Comma, Peacock, Red Admiral and Small Tortoiseshell) hibernate overwinter, sometimes being found in our homes and outbuildings, ready to emerge when light and temperature are right for them.

In fact, the first Brimstone, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshells have already been spotted in southern counties, and a Red Admiral at Long Eaton.



So, even in February, on bright sunny and warmer days, as you look for the first snowdrops and daffodils, you may find butterflies feeding on them.

You can follow the first sightings of butterflies across the UK at Butterfly Conservation's website [here](#).

### **AND DON'T FORGET THE MOTHS**

About 2,500 moth species have been recorded in the UK, compared to around 60 butterfly species. However, perhaps because most of them are nocturnal, moths are often overlooked in favour of day-flying butterflies, which is a shame as some of the day-flying moths (around 130 species recorded), like Burnets and Mother Shipton are equally beautiful.



Butterfly Conservation has reminded us this month that moths do really matter: they are very important pollinators, and with their caterpillars play a vital role in the ecosystem, providing food for other insects, spiders, amphibians, lizards, birds, bats and other mammals.

You can read more about moths, and get a free moth calendar, on the Butterfly Conservation website [here](#).



## **BRINGING BACK THE AUROCH**

One of the key elements of rewilding is creating the right conditions to help nature take care of itself, and one way of supporting this - ideally – would be to reintroduce species that have disappeared as a result of our actions. We have heard how Longhorn cattle are helping change the landscape on the Idle Reserve, and about the reintroduction of Bison in Kent for a similar purpose, but these are proxies for the ‘real thing’: animals such as the Auroch.

Aurochs were a type of wild cattle that roamed and grazed in small herds across plains, wetlands and open woodland. They were much larger than modern domesticated cattle, with huge curved horns, each horn almost 1 m long; when standing, bulls could reach 1.8 m shoulder height, taller than many people. Widespread for millennia throughout Europe, North Africa and Asia, they were domesticated and through selective breeding became today’s domesticated cattle. As a result of habitat loss and overhunting, they became extinct around 400 years ago.



So, much as the advocates of rewilding would love to see its return, the Auroch has gone, but a successor is at hand: the Tauros, which is the result of ‘back-breeding’ from six breeds of primitive domestic cattle from Italy, Portugal and Spain to produce an animal that was as close in appearance to the original aurochs as possible. (Image: *Rewilding Europe*). And, according to the website *DiscoverWildlife*, they could be coming back to the UK.

To discover more about the Auroch and its successors, its place in the rewilding movement, and some fancy footwork to deter predators, click on this [link](#).

## **BIRDWATCHING, THE GATEWAY DRUG**

You may already be a birdwatcher, or you may like to become one in the future. Whichever one, this article *Birdwatching changes the way you look at the world – it truly is the gateway drug to environmental awareness* by Georgia Angus in *The Guardian* makes for interesting reading. Click [here](#).

## **‘THUGGING’ HEDGEROWS**

Last year, on Facebook, I was introduced to the concept of ‘thugging’ defined on the Hedgerow Defenders website as “The practice of slashing back hedgerows to unsustainable levels is a method that involves hugging the hedge closely with tractor blades and cutting deep into its body, or ‘thugging’”, which generated a large amount of - at times – sensible comment, almost entirely against the practice. (Click [here](#) for the Hedgerow Defenders website).



It is pleasing therefore to report that ‘thugging’ is not universal locally, as Rushcliffe Borough Council reports on the work of their Park Rangers and Friends of Rushcliffe Country Park using traditional hedge laying techniques to provide more valuable habitats for wildlife. Manual hedge laying has been used for decades in certain places of the park and passed on to volunteers, creating a more manageable hedge compared with mechanical techniques.

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

On the subject of hedgerows in general, BBC News has just announced that “England's hedges would go around Earth ten times”, headlining a report on a new survey by the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. Using airborne laser-based scanning technology, they have surveyed the whole of England and found a total of 390,000 kilometres of hedgerow.

For a fuller report, including a distribution map, click [here](#).

### **A LITTLE WINTER COLOUR**



Here in the depth of winter we look forward to spring when trees and flowers bring back colour to the landscape. As Gordon Dyne reported this month, winter does have some colour of its own, in this case a beautiful little fungus, the Scarlet Elf Cap, which he found at Wilwell earlier in the month. (Image: Martin Price).

Further evidence of fungi providing winter colour came from Friends of Sharpill Wood, who posted some lovely images of fungi found in the Wood, which can be found [here](#).

Staying with ‘winter colour’, the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland has just published the results of their New Year Plant Hunt. The BSBI’s thirteenth New Year Plant Hunt (NYPH 2024) took place between Saturday 30th December 2023 and Tuesday 2nd January 2024. Volunteers submitted lists of native and non-native plants they found in bloom in the wild during a three hour walk at locations throughout Britain and Ireland. In summary:

- 3,336 recorders took part, almost double the number of participants in 2023.
- They submitted 22,212 plant records on 2,205 lists including 40 hunts that yielded no records of plants in flower.
- 629 plant species were recorded in bloom, a 30% increase compared to 2023 and the third highest total in the history of the New Year Plant Hunt.
- The three species most frequently recorded in flower in 2024 were, as in previous years, Daisy (*Bellis perennis*), Dandelion (*Taraxacum agg.*) and Groundsel (*Senecio vulgaris*).





- In 2024, as in previous years, more species were flowering late (53%) than early (27%) whereas 30% of species were flowering as expected at New Year, including species that flower all-year round.

You can find more details, including a full analysis of the results, on the BSBI website [here](#).

**A REVIEW OF 2023: WINS FOR NATURE IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**

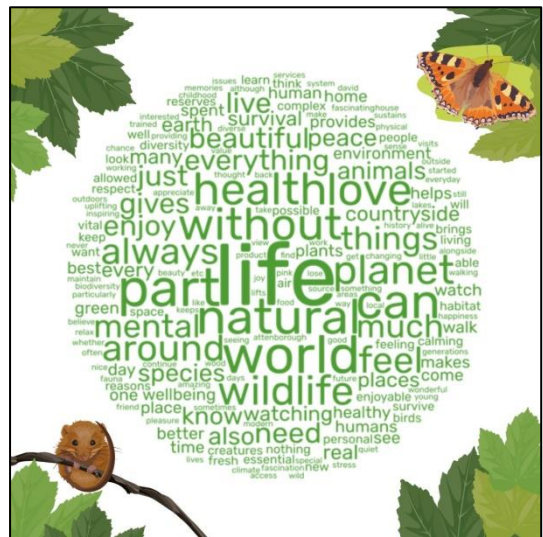
Join NWT’s Head of Communications and Marketing, Erin McDaid, as he looks back on how Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust has made the county a little wilder over the past 12 months thanks to our members, donors, and volunteers, and looks forward to a successful 2024.

Read more [here](#).

**WHY IS NATURE IMPORTANT TO YOU?**

Erin concludes by saying “As the year drew to a close, December was a time to reflect on the success of the past 60 years and plan for the future. We are asking people why nature is important to them and what their greatest aspiration for nature in our county is. We’ve received a heart-warming response, and we’re keen to hear from as many people as possible.”

From the responses to date, the Trust has produced this word map. If you have not already done so, you can add your thoughts by completing the simple survey.



**KEEPING IT WILD**

Over the last couple of years or so, South Notts Local Group has taken a good deal of interest, and financial support, to *Keeping it Wild*, NWT’s youth-led group, so we are delighted to offer you the chance to see them in action, via this video they have produced which can be found on the NWT website.

**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 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 February are as follows:

Sat 3rd	Wilwell Farm Cutting
Sun 4th	Grizzled Skipper – Newstead & Annesley Country Park
Sat 10th	Wilford Claypit                      Meadow Park
Tue 20th	Grizzled Skipper – GCRN East Leake (Rushcliffe Halt)
Sat 24th	Springdale Wood
Sun 25 <sup>th</sup>	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 2024, 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)

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 30<sup>th</sup> January 2024*

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