



## **Wildlife News from Rushcliffe April 2024**

*April is the month nature really wakes up after winter: bird migration is in full swing, trees and wild flowers are bursting forth, and insect numbers grow by the day. There is so much to see!*

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

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

#### **Sun 7th April            Wilwell Farm Cutting in Spring**

Join Gordon the Warden to look at the first signs of spring, including the early flowers of the season. **Meet 10 am** at the Wilwell car park on the B680 between Ruddington and Wilford, on the left just before the ring road bridge (look out for reserve sign). Postcode for approx. location is NG2 7UT. what3words = *home news fuzzy*.

For more information, please contact [gordon.dyne@gmail.com](mailto:gordon.dyne@gmail.com)

#### **Sun 21st April            Bunny Wood Open Day**

See the Bluebells in bloom and learn about the woodland's history. There's a guided walk at 11am, plus children's activities. **10.30 am - 3.30 pm** Car park is on the left of the A60 climbing up out of Bunny village towards Costock. what3words = *deflect corrode helped*.

For more information, please contact [Christopher.terrell-nield@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:Christopher.terrell-nield@ntu.ac.uk) or ring 0115 9374906.

#### **Sun 21st April            Bingham Linear Park**

Wildlife walk looking for butterflies, birds, flowers and insects with Jenny Craig. **Meet 10 am** at the Tithby Bridge entrance on Tithby Road, Bingham.

For more information, please contact [jenny@ifcraig.com](mailto:jenny@ifcraig.com).

#### **Sat 27th April            Dawn Chorus at Sharphill Wood**

Join John Elwell to see, and hear, a range of spring birds; please bring binoculars. **Meet 6 am**

Please contact John Elwell on 07794 052672 for details and to reserve a place.

#### **Sat 13<sup>th</sup> April            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.



## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The South Notts Local Group Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> April, starting at 7.00 pm. The meeting will be followed at 7.30 pm by a free talk: *Attenborough Nature Reserve - A whistle stop tour of six decades of conservation at this much loved nature reserve plus a look at how the reserve is managed today and exciting plans for the future*, by Erin McDaid, NWT's Head of Communications and Marketing.

Both the meeting and talk will be online, via Zoom. Joining details and supporting documents will be circulated shortly to everyone on our circulation list. If you are not on the list, and wish to receive them, please email [southnottswildlife@gmail.com](mailto:southnottswildlife@gmail.com). We look forward to seeing you there.

## **WINTER WILDLIFE TALKS**

This month saw the last of our Winter Wildlife Talks. As ever, the Programme was diverse, informative and entertaining, and we are hoping the next one, currently being prepared, will be as rewarding: details will follow in the coming months.

We started in October far away from home, in the Falkland Islands with David Chapman, who brought to life the rugged scenery of the islands, home to all manner of wonderful flora and fauna, with excellent images of albatrosses, penguins and more.

The next talk, by Doug Kennedy, was the polar opposite, exchanging the rugged scenery and wild weather of the Southern Oceans for England's tranquil and beautiful chalk streams, and their no less varied and interesting wildlife. England is home to around 30% of the planet's chalk streams, and Doug left us in no doubt as to their importance, and described some of the efforts being made to ensure their continued existence.

In December, we were privileged to share with Tom Mabbett of Naturetrek some of his favourite locations in Scotland and England, and his obvious passion for wildlife. Supported by a host of beautiful images, Tom took us from Ardnamurchan to the Somerset Levels, via the Forest of Dean, and reminded us of just how much wonderful wildlife there is out there.

Staying in the UK, we joined Jenny Conor, and re-lived with her a journey from a high-level medical career to a farmer (and so much more) who, over a period of ten years or so, has completely transformed her small farm in Durham through her own approach to rewilding, an approach she continues to champion with great enthusiasm.

February took us far away from our winter, when Nick Martin – as usual – gave an excellent talk on Sydney and the Blue Mountains, recounting experiences with local wildlife, accompanied by superb images of beautiful landscapes and animals, including the inevitable kangaroos and wallabies, delightful Fairy Wrens and even a pelican sitting on top of a street lamp!

Our final talk was by Louise Bentley of Lancashire Wildlife Trust, who gave us a fascinating insight into the many different bee species we have, their lives and the threats facing them. Her talk was full of fascinating facts, which spurred me on to finding out a little more about these creatures.



## A BEE MISCELLANY

There are some 20,000 separate species of bees worldwide, all of which provide a greater or lesser pollination service on which we depend for food. In the UK, there are around 270 species, which may come as a surprise to some, for whom Honey and Bumblebees comprise 'our' bee population: in fact, there is one species of Honey Bee, 24 species of bumblebees and around 250 species of solitary bees, many of which, in spite of their name, live in colonies. There are mason bees, mud bees, plasterer bees, leafcutter bees (*below left*), mining bees, scissor bees and more, including the wonderfully-named Pantaloon Bee (*below right*).



Some bee species are more abundant and widespread than others, with Honey Bees and the more common bumblebees most numerous; the Shril Carder bee and Giant Yellow bumblebee the rarest.

Bees exhibit the most extraordinary behaviours, perhaps none more so than the Red-tailed Mason Bee *Osmia bicolor*, the female of which uses empty snail shells for nesting. Having found a suitable shell she will turn it to a position that prevents rain getting in (quite something, given their relative sizes) and lay up to five eggs in it, each in a separate brood chamber partitioned with chewed grass and soil, each chamber stocked with pollen and nectar. She then seals the shell nest with this paste, and camouflages the nest, carrying in long pieces of grass and twig and pieces of dead leaf. She will repeat this five or six times. The eggs hatch and pupate in the shell, emerging in the following spring. You can find out more about this incredible insect, and watch a video of its amazing behaviour [here](#) at BuzzAboutBees.net.



Bumblebees were given the generic name *Bombus* in 1802, based on the Latin word for buzzing or humming. The name 'bumblebee' is itself a compound of 'bumble' and 'bee', where 'bumble' means to hum or buzz. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) tells us the first use of 'bumblebee' was recorded in 1530, but that it was predated by the word 'humblebee', which was first recorded in 1450, and which clearly remained in common use for centuries; even Charles Darwin in *On the origin of*



*species* (1859), like many of his scientific contemporaries, called them ‘humblebees’. Writing in the *Guardian* in 2010, Richard Jones suggested that “Darwin would have called them humblebees because, as they fly, they hum.”

Writing on the Bumblebee Conservation Trust website, Katy Malone says: “So, when did we even start calling them bumblebees? It’s probably much more recent than you think. Up until around 1910 they were known as humblebees. By the 1950s we called them bumblebees, possibly thanks to a story by Beatrix Potter who wrote a story which included Babbity Bumble who caused trouble by making mossy nests in the back garden of Mrs Tittlemouse. Naughty Bumble!”

Incidentally, back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century a bumblebee was known as a ‘dumbledor’, thought to be the inspiration for J K Rowling’s Professor Dumbledore. (“dumble” probably imitating the sound of these insects, while “dor” meant “beetle”. *Webster Dictionary 1913*).

Bumblebees are much-researched insects, with the latest revelation being that they “can teach others to master complex tasks, and display a level of social learning traditionally thought exclusive to humans”. An article on the BBC News website [here](#) describes the latest research from Queen Mary University London which saw Buff-tailed bumblebees *Bombus terrestris* (*rightt*) learn to solve problems and pass their knowledge onto others.



The article states “It is the first time scientists have seen this behaviour in insects” and that “Researchers say this reveals evidence of a kind of bee ‘culture’”. It can be found [here](#), and the research paper published by Nature is available [here](#).

Queen Mary University London clearly has an affinity with bumblebees. In 2017, BBC News reported that “a species of bumblebee is proving that, despite having a brain the size of a poppy seed, they can also play football...” A link to the article is available [here](#).

### **A BEE ... OR NOT A BEE?**

As Louise pointed out, there are plenty of other insects that can quite easily be mistaken for bees: hoverflies, wasps, sawflies, and more. One particular example, described by the Natural History Museum as “a tiny, fluffy, flying narwhale” can be found flying now: the Bee-Fly. Although it resembles a bee, it is in fact a fly (it has only one pair of wings, unlike bees which have two). What it does have though, and what makes it look so distinctive, is a long lance-like appendage carried out permanently in front. To some this resembles a sting, but it is actually a proboscis which it uses to probe deeply into flowers for nectar, flowers that many other bees cannot reach.

Like the Mason Bee described earlier, a female Bee-Fly has its own idiosyncratic approach to egg-laying.





She moves her abdomen to coat her eggs in sand and gravel before flying over a solitary bee's nest where she hovers and flicks out the eggs, hoping they will land and hatch near or, ideally, in the nest. On hatching, Bee-Fly larvae parasitise the bee's nest, eating both bee grubs and the pollen left for them; as part of this process, they go through a second metamorphosis, which is very rare in insects.

You can find out more about these fascinating creatures [here](#) .

### **ONE FOR THE FUTURE?**



Many species are expanding their ranges - Ivy Bee and Beewolf are two recent examples locally - as part of their move up the country northwards from their traditional locations, so it is perhaps reasonable to speculate what may be next?

One possible contender is one of our rarest and most striking dragonflies, the Norfolk Hawker. As its name suggest, this was once found only in the Broads of Norfolk and Suffolk but, as Bird Guides reports, it is expanding its range; since 2013 it has been found in Lincolnshire, Lancashire, Sussex, Dorset and Devon.

It would be great to see this striking creature flying here, with its distinctive yellow triangular marking (hence its Latin name *Aeshna isosceles*) and mesmerising green eyes. So, keep looking and do please report any sightings via *Nature Counts*. The Bird Guides report is [here](#).



## **BUTTERFLIES ARE GOOD FOR YOU**

If, like me, you take part in the annual Big Butterfly Count organised by Butterfly Conservation, not only do you contribute valuable data for helping conserve these lovely insects, you also benefit personally. That's the conclusion from a study conducted by the University of Derby into participants in the 2022 count, reported in *The Times*. It found "anxiety levels among volunteers falling by about 9 per cent, on average." and that "Taking part ... also boosted how connected participants felt to nature."



Richard Fox, head of science at Butterfly Conservation said "This study is the first to prove that the simple act of looking for and counting butterflies leads to a measurable decrease in anxiety. The results suggest that citizen science projects such as the Big Butterfly Count can play a part in improving people's mental health, as well as gathering important data on how butterflies are faring."

Whilst I think that most of us who value and delight in nature might suggest this is stating the obvious, it is good to see it confirmed. So, keep watching and counting!

## **WHO'S NOT SUCH A BIG BOY THEN?**

An article on the *Scientific American* website [here](#) states that "In *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin posits that in most species of mammals, males are larger than females. Although Darwin did not cite evidence to back up this claim, his view on sexual size dimorphism was readily accepted as fact, and it still dominates today. But Darwin, in this case, seems to have been wrong."

It goes on to describe a new analysis of 429 mammalian species led by Kaia Tombak of Princeton University which shows "that just 45 percent feature males that are larger than females. Nearly an equal number of species, 39 percent, have sexes that are about the same size. And in 16 percent of species, females are larger than males."

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

## **BIRD SKULLS AND BEAKS**

*Birdfact* has published a series of fascinating insights into bird skulls and beaks; click on the appropriate link below to read more:

[Skull Structure and Adaptations](#)

[The Evolution of Bird Beaks](#)



[Beak Shapes and Function](#)

**ANTS AND US**

In a recent long-read article in *The Guardian* entitled 'Empire of the ants: what insect supercolonies can teach us', John Whitfield asserts that "People have long drawn comparisons between ant societies and human ones – but in fact they are a reminder of how limited our influence on the world really is."

You can read how he reached this conclusion, and how ants sabotaged "a grand experiment and model for long-distance space travel and colonisation" by following this [link](#).

**SLUGS, SNAILS AND GARDENERS**

As a keen gardener, I have over the years had to contend with slugs and snails, and watch helplessly when they decimate overnight my much-loved dahlias, and I am sure I am not alone. I am also sure that I am not alone, as a nature lover, in feeling conflicted in how to deal with them, and over time have mellowed towards them in adopting a 'pick them up and move them elsewhere' approach, but retaining the right to use small quantities of targeted metaldehyde-free pellets for the few days it takes for the new dahlia shoots to emerge.



So, I was interested to see that The Wildlife Trusts and Royal Horticultural Society have launched a campaign to give slugs and snails an "image makeover" wanting gardeners to reconsider the role of the much-maligned creatures. Campaign organisers hope that by learning to "appreciate and co-exist" with snails and slugs, gardeners can adopt a more environmentally friendly approach. Only a small fraction of about 150 species of molluscs in the UK pose problems for gardeners, with the majority contributing positively to the ecosystem (*Source BBC News*).



If you would like to learn even more about slugs and snails in their new booklet, packed with facts, identification guides, and tips on how to protect your plants in a slug-friendly way, or pledge to make a slug and snail safari, go to the Wild About Gardens website [here](#).

I will now reflect on my actions, and try to do better.

### **IS THAT A HEDGEHOG?**

March 25<sup>th</sup> brought a piece on Radio 4's Today programme, and at least one national newspaper article about a new citizen science project; *The National Hedgehog Monitoring Programme (NHMP)*, "... an exciting new pilot project, that will, for the first time, produce robust hedgehog population estimates."

The project, which is a joint venture between a number of organisations and institutions, including Nottingham Trent University, has installed camera traps in various locations which are taking thousands of photographs of passing 'things'. An AI algorithm filters these photographs using image recognition weeding out shots of people or vegetation blowing in the wind.



*A hedgehog captured on camera by NHMP (Image: NHMP)*

We are all being invited to join in as citizen scientists to scroll through the remaining images to identify the animals, producing data to feed a computer model to estimate hedgehog population density, something not previously known, but vital to future protection of the species.

You can read more about the project in this BBC News piece [here](#), and to register your interest as a citizen scientist, counting hedgehogs, click [here](#).

### **IT'S TIME FOR NO MOW MAY AGAIN**

Plantlife are once again running *No Mow May*, their annual campaign calling on all garden owners and green space managers not to mow during May – liberating lawns and providing a space for nature.

To find out more, why this is so important, and how you can participate, click [here](#).

To understand better what is happening locally, here's Gordon Dyne:





“Rushcliffe BC will again be leaving the grass to grow long on a series of locations around the Borough. Most of the sites are in West Bridgford, where they own land, although they have bits in various villages as well. It is pretty much the same locations as last year and because the sites also have local amenity uses only selected areas will be left to grow. Hopefully parish councils will also be doing similar things on land they own, if not try asking why not.

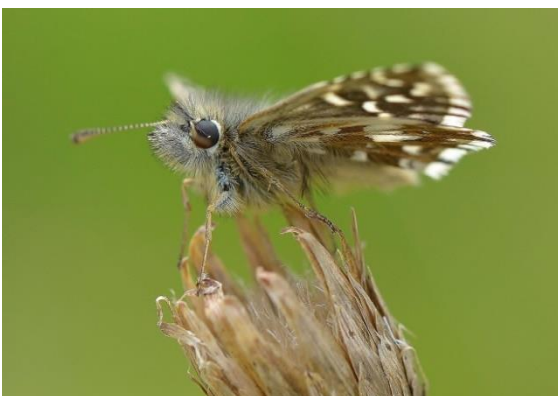


As I understand it, Notts County Council will also be continuing with their rural road verge management programme: they will only cut a two metre verge edge along the road twice a year, EXCEPT at road junctions for visibility, but each year one third of the network will receive a single full width verge cut to prevent scrub establishing. In addition some selected locations (Notified Road Verges) will just receive a single annual cut and removal of arisings to help encourage the particularly diverse flora found in these locations. (Image: Plantlife)

I assume that Highways England will continue with their mowing programme on the trunk roads (A52/A563/A46), which is quite complicated, but does seem to leave a lot of verge uncut.

It is worth restating the results of a study of one public site in Carlisle, where they found that leaving just one third of an area’s grass uncut over the spring & summer doubled the amount of insects found on that site. There was a caveat that the grassland in question contained quiet a variety of different grasses, the implication being that an area of grass consisting primarily of say Perennial Ryegrass might not be so productive. Biodiversity breeds biodiversity.”

### **RIZZLED SKIPPER**



We regularly carry details of Grizzled Skipper Work Parties during the winter months, with volunteers led by Notts BAG carrying out work to help conserve this delightful little insect, one of Rushcliffe’s rarest butterflies.

Click on this [link](#) to read Mark Searle’s beautifully-illustrated article about the life cycle of the Grizzled Skipper

### **AMPHIBIANS AHoy!**

Last month we looked at the wonderful work carried out by volunteer Toad Patrols, both nationally and locally by the Notts Amphibian Rescue Group (NARG), who tell us that



“Although they are known as ‘toad patrols’, we also help frogs and newts to cross the road when we come across them whilst patrolling. This past week in particular we seem to have had an increase in the number of newts making their way to the breeding ponds.

In Nottinghamshire we have Smooth Newts and Great Crested Newts (there are no confirmed records of Palmate Newts though we are always on the lookout!). Smooth Newts can get to 7-11cm in size and are grey-brown in colour with a yellow-orange belly, whilst Great Crested Newts can get to 17cm and are black in colour, with an orange belly and warty skin. Great Crested Newts are protected by law and usually require a license in order to survey/handle but toad patrols are the exception to this and we are allowed to move GCNs that are in danger of road mortality.” (Image: NARG)



NARG is asking if there are any areas in Rushcliffe where significant numbers of Toads (or, presumably, other amphibians) are having problems with road crossings. If you know of any, could you please let them know; their Facebook page is [here](#).

### **BATS**

Bats are often one of the less visible creatures, coming out as they do mostly at dusk and through the night. The Bat Conservation Trust reminds us that “These small and fascinating creatures often live in close proximity to us, using our gardens as an important source of food, water and shelter. As their natural habitats become more scarce, our gardens are playing a more important role in securing a future for bats. Bats are a sign of a green and healthy environment, so creating a garden that's good for bats will also be good for people.”

For more tips and ideas on how we can all support bats in our gardens and green spaces, visit the Bat Conservation Trust website [here](#).

### **CONNECTING WITH NATURE**

Nottinghamshire in general, and Rushcliffe in particular have many wonderful sites to visit and connect with nature. 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 April are as follows:

Sat 6th            Wilwell Farm Cutting



Sat 13th	Wilford Claypit	Meadow Park
Sat 27th	Springdale Wood	
Sun 28th	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 28<sup>th</sup> March 2024*

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