

## Ryburgh Wildlife Group May Newsletter

Membership news in May. We've a new member just joined. Welcome Mark, Laura and family. Mark is keen on bats and moths, and I know he and his son have already made several visits to the scrape too. Welcome on board. We have a handful of members whose membership fees are due this month. I shall write to you separately.

Well we might have had a wet winter but will we have a dry summer? The folklore goes along the lines of "*Oak before Ash, we're in for a splash. Ash before Oak, we're in for a soak.*" It seems that Oak trees have been in flower ahead of Ash so here's for a dry summer, but don't hold me to that.

As we come to the end of April Plantlife would like you to put your mower away in the shed for a few weeks and give wildflowers a bit of a chance to flower and set seed as part of their now familiar No Mow May. <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/campaigns/nomowmay/>. What will you do with all that time you've saved?

Following on from No Mo May, one of our members shared the link to article in a recent Guardian newspaper about long grass and flowering ivy boosts butterfly numbers.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/apr/19/letting-grass-grow-long-boosts-butterfly-numbers-uk-study-proves>

One plant that is important to allow to set its seed is Garlic Mustard, also known as Jack by the Hedge. It's not a particularly pretty flower, and if you crush the leaves it gives off a garlic smell but it is a foodplant for the Orange Tip butterflies. The butterfly lays its eggs on the plant and the hungry caterpillars then feed on the seeds. Cuckoo Flower, also known as Milkmaids, is another foodplant for Orange Tips.



Photo by David Cooling

The Orange Tip is very distinctive and easy to identify but what about those other “cabbage whites”? First of all, there is no such thing as a cabbage white, but we do have Large White, Small White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip. These are common butterflies we should all see locally and, hopefully, identify. If you haven’t got a field guide here are some tips to help identify them.

**Orange Tip** (*Anthocharis cardamines*)

Both males and female have mottled green underwings.

Males have orange tips to the top upperwings. Females have small black or grey smudge on the top corner of their upperwings.

**Large White** (*Pieris brassicae*)

As the name suggests, quite large, roughly the same size as a Brimstone. Both males and females have a black tip to the top wings that stretch down the wings. Females also have two large black spots on the upperwing.

Beware female Brimstones also look very large and pale off-white, but they have pointed wings compared to the rounded wings of Large Whites.

**Small White** (*Pieris rapae*)

Small butterfly that has a small black mark on the extreme tip of the top wings. Females have one or two small black spots in the upperwings. Males may (or may not) have these spots. The underwings can be pale yellow.

**Green-veined White** (*Pieris napi*)

This where the fun begins. They are small weak fluttery fliers that prefer damper places. Look for obvious coloured veins in all the wings. They will also often have a couple of faint black spots on the upperwings. In the summer the females have larger darker spots and a black tip to their upperwings.

I hope that helps. It might seem tricky at first but with a bit practice and patience I’m sure you’ll be able to tell one from the other over the coming weeks.

To complete the picture the UK does have some much rarer white butterflies, Wood White and Cryptic Wood White but you won’t find these anywhere near Norfolk. Confusingly the black and white coloured Marbled White is not a white but is part of the brown butterfly family which includes old favourites like Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Specked Wood.

As the sun is coming out and temperatures are rising slowly keep your eyes open and downward for reptiles. Adders basking to warm up might be seen but walk lightly, they can sense the vibration as we walk. Look also for common lizards. I always forget how small they are. I found one at Cley Marshes on the edging of the boardwalk to the hides there.



Photo by Julie Bunker

Talking about which way to look, we had an extended weekend in the New Forest to celebrate our wedding anniversary. It wasn't an area we knew well but we (I) had set my hopes on seeing basking adders and Dartford Warblers. So; do we look up or down? We chose to look down as we thought we might hear a warbler and then we could look up for it. There's looking down, and then there's getting on your hands and knees to looking at plants and even a tree.

I've seen and identified Milkwort previously, but my brain was rather slow on the recall. Lousewort and Creeping Willow were both new to me (thank you PlantNet) and proved themselves to be rather common. Lousewort is rare in East Anglia but one of its near relatives, Red Bartsia can definitely be seen in Ryburgh. PlantNet did let me down a little though on an umbellifer that we found. It said it was either Hemlock Water-Dropwort or Wild Celery. The former highly poisonous the latter not. Looking at the field guide, I think it was the former. Thankfully we hadn't touched it.



Lousewort top left, Milkwort top right, Creeping Willow bottom. Photos by Julie Bunker

## Dates for diary

### **Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May – National Dawn Chorus Day.**

We again are holding a walk on this day starting from Ryburgh village hall at 4.00am. Jane and Mike Rundle have kindly offered to provide breakfast afterwards. Suggested £7.50 donation for breakfast.

Please let me know if you plan to join the walk; and have breakfast. Most dietary needs can be accommodated so please say if you require Gluten Free or vegetarian etc.

### **Ryburgh Nature Watch from Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> June to Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> June**

We plan to hold a series of family-focussed mini events over the weekend and during the week to discover and record what wildlife is in and around Ryburgh. We hope to have a bat walk and a moth trap event. Who knows there might even be prizes for the most extraordinary sighting or photo.

The Nature Watch will be brought to a close with a talk in the village hall on **Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> by Nick Acheson on our local wildlife.** The talk is open to all and is free to members and £5.00 to non-members. We plan to collate and map all the wildlife sightings prior to the talk. I'm sure it will be a great event and hopefully surprise people with just what wildlife is on our local patch.

**Farm walk at Highfield** – Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> June at 10.00am – provisional. To be confirmed.  
**Sennowe walk** –autumn walk. Date to be decided.

## Tail piece

I've been continuing my tour of natural history museums. The latest was in Oxford. The ornate building itself is worth a trip in itself. I found the theme of mass extinctions, apparently the Earth has had five to date, alongside human activities and the future in our hand fascinating.



Photos by David Cooling

Always good to end on a cute note. Perhaps we should call him Oliver.

**David**  
Membership Secretary