

Ryburgh Wildlife Group September Newsletter

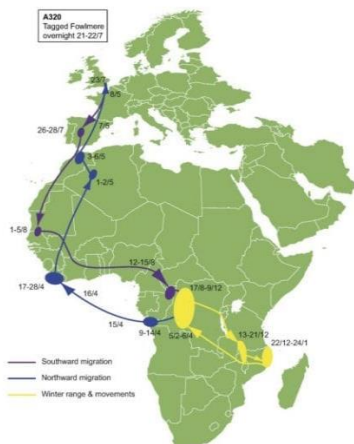
1st September heralds the meteorological start of autumn. It may not have been the warmest of summers but it feels like it has been quite dry. Perhaps the “oak v ash” saying I’ve mentioned before really is quite accurate.

One thing I have noticed as we head into autumn is the lack of fruit, (hips, haws, sloes), in some of the village hedgerows. If we get an influx of winter visitors: Redwing, Fieldfare, Waxwing to name a few, you might have to be quick off the mark to see them before they head off for places with more copious fruits. On the other hand, the Oak trees along Highfield Lane, like the one in the photo, were loaded with acorns.



Acorn laden Oak. Photo by David Cooling.

Bird migration is well under way now so it is good to keep an eye out for odd things that might appear. I think we’d all agree that’s Swifts are fast fliers but this Swift, tagged and tracked by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), clearly wasn’t hanging around. It travelled 5,000km (3,125 miles) from West Africa to the UK in just five days. That’s some feat.



From BTO website.

More details can be found at <https://www.bto.org/our-science/topics/tracking/tracking-studies/swifts>

We are familiar with stories of decline bird populations and now experts are concerned about gulls, citing a 72% drop in their population numbers over the past 55 years. This is a link to the BBC news website article. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gevqv3zxlo>. Have they been to Wells-next-the-Sea recently?

We think of insects as pollinators but there are some birds, like hummingbirds and sunbirds, that also act as pollinators. There are at least 74 different bird families that visit flowers. A new book by Jeff Ollerton called "Birds and Flowers" has all the details. There's clearly more to birds than we think. There is an exhibition at the Natural History museum in London that sounds interesting.

Birds are the soundtrack to our mornings, they soar through our skies and swoop around our streets, but how well do we really know our feathered friends? Go to the Natural History museum to find out. <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/visit/exhibitions/birds-brilliant-bizarre.html>.

Listening to BBC Radio 4 in August I found out that in Australia it was now the "Magpie swooping season". It seems that in parts of Australia, Magpies swoop down on unsuspecting humans on a regular basis for no obvious reasons. This article has some more details. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-66920781> I've walked through an area of breeding Arctic Terns and been dive bombed by them – that was an interesting experience.

During August I had some time to take a wander round some bits of the village looking for late Summer butterflies in particular. On one of the walks I found a fairly fresh Wall brown butterfly, in the field adjacent to the community woodland. This was really exciting as they tend to be found around the coastal fringe, so one this far inland was great. I also saw a Small Skipper and Common Blue amongst the flowers in a set aside area. The pink hued Yarrow in the set aside area also made a lovely change compared to the more common white version.

While I walked round the village, I looked carefully at the top of all the Oak trees in case I could see some Purple Hairstreak butterflies. Last year I saw some in the treetops around St Andrew's church. Many things these days, are happening earlier than they used to, and I think I was just too late in the year to see them. They might be small, but they can easily be seen even with the naked eye flying around the tops of Oak trees in the late afternoon and evening sun. They feed on honeydew on the leaves so rarely make a visit to ground level. Make a note for your diaries next July – look out for Purple Hairstreaks.

Walking up Highfield Lane, several species of dragonflies checked me out. Most of them didn't stop but this little fellow obligingly sat for a while. It is not the best photo in the world, but I wanted to show you an insect you've probably seen flying but not had the chance to have a good look at. I think it is a Ruddy Darter as it has a slightly bulging club tail. Common Darter do not have a club end to their tail. Red-veined Darter, has unsurprisingly, red veins in its wings. Any experts out there who can identify the species?



Darter dragonfly. Photo by David Cooling.

At the end of August I had a lovely warm sunny walk in the Chilterns. Two things struck me. First was the white carpet of Eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis*, which is a herb that was used extensively for helping support healthy eyes. The second was a blizzard of Dandelion seed flying through the air – it really did look like flakes of snow blowing in the glorious sunshine. I also had a glimpse of a Brown Argus butterfly. Silvery spotted underwings and chocolate brown top wings. They are part of the blue butterfly family. The pattern of the spots on the underwings is a way of distinguishing them from female Common Blues, that also have brown top wings but have varying amounts of blue especially near the body.



Eyebright. Photo by Julie Bunker.

You may have heard about “ghost ponds”; ponds that have dried up, become overgrown, or simply just filled in. The importance of ponds is now more widely recognised and people all over the country are working to restore some of these “ghost ponds”. We in Ryburgh are fortunate to have at least one ghost pond, and we have gained permission to restore one of them. Do watch this space while we discuss and agree with the Sennowe estate, and the

Norfolk Wildlife Trust, how and when, we can restore this pond. We may well be looking for volunteers.

Before I close, a little plea. As you know we've had to introduce a system of keys to get access to the hide overlooking the scrape. If you do use the hide, please double check that the gates are locked when you leave. Thank you.

Dates for your diary

Farm Stewardship for Food and Conservation walk at Highfield take two – Date to be confirmed but is likely to be a Sunday afternoon in October.

Local history walk – led by Peter Trent. Likely to be a morning in November.

Winter celebration for 10 years of the community woodland. Likely to be early 2025.

Sennowe walks –September 8th ,see below.

Walk #1 - Riverine walk

The Group has been given permission, thank you Tom Cook, to have a short walk along the River Wensum. Mike and Barley have done a test walk and they both said it was difficult as the vegetation (including nettles) is quite tall and luxuriant, and there is no obvious path to follow. That being said, it is a lovely opportunity to see the Wensum close up. There may even be the opportunity to watch some water quality testing as part of The Rivers Trust's Big River Watch which is a scheme to identify the health of rivers.

This walk will start at 9.00am. Please assemble in Mill Road at the field gate in immediately after the entrance to the bird hide. Parking along Mill Road can be difficult, so do please be environmentally good, and consider car sharing. If you do park in Mill Road, please do not damage the verge by parking on them.

The walk will end up back here in sufficient time to allow you to then drive to Sennowe for the second walk of the day.

Walk #2 - Sennowe estate walk

These walks have now become an integral part of the RWG's calendar so it is fantastic to hold another walk here, this time in the autumn. Please park and assemble by the bridge at 10.30am. The bridge is reached by using the entrance to the estate from the Gateley Road.

Tail piece – “Reasons for Hope”

One of the features of the English countryside is boundary trees. Trees planted years ago to mark the parish or other boundaries. Many of these trees are now very old and generally there appear to be no young trees to replace them when they die. That’s not true along Highfield Lane where there are many young Oak trees jostling to be the top dog tree. They may not be planted as boundary trees as such, but there is the potential for some large Oak trees for future generations to enjoy in the 22nd century.



Photo by David Cooling.

Veteran Oaks just starting out. You can't rush these things!

David
Membership Secretary