

Ryburgh Wildlife Group October Newsletter

During September Butterfly Conservation declared a national 'Butterfly Emergency', with results of this summer's Big Butterfly Count showing a marked and hugely concerning decline in numbers. Overall, participants spotted just seven butterflies on average per 15-minute Count, a reduction of almost 50% on last year's average of 12, and the lowest in the 14-year history of the Big Butterfly Count.

It was the worst summer in the Count's history for Common Blue, Holly Blue, Green-veined White, Small White, Small Tortoiseshell, Painted Lady and Scotch Argus. And the majority of species (81%) showed declines in the number seen this year compared with 2023.

In total, just over 935,000 butterflies and day-flying moths were recorded across the UK from 12 July - 4 August, down almost 600,000. 9,000 Counts were logged as seeing zero butterflies, the highest in the citizen science programme's history.

More details can be found via this link:

<https://www.butterfly-conservation.org/news-and-blog/uk-butterfly-emergency-declared>

I'm sorry to start on such a depressing note but the Big Butterfly Count does demonstrate the value of citizen scientists, that is, you and me, recording what wildlife we see and more importantly sharing the data.

In readiness for the AGM the committee is working on compiling a Ryburgh bird list for 2024. I've also started compiling a similar butterfly list for 2024. From what I've seen or sightings I've had shared with me by some of you, echoes the almost total absence of Small Tortoiseshell butterflies. For decades this species was the one that almost everyone would have seen and been able to identify. Its foodplant is our dear friend the stinging nettle. Are we tidying up our gardens too much or is climate change causing problems or both? We'll have to wait and see what the formal scientists think.

Following on from last month's comments about hedgerow fruits, or lack of, I thought I would compile a small montage of fruits that I came across while out walking recently. The initial idea stemmed from a neighbour giving us a tub of cultivated blackberries from their allotment – they did taste lovely. I then saw the price of blackberries in the supermarket (£3 a box) and thought about free food in the countryside. When I was a child, we lived on Epsom Common and my mum would give me and my brother a plastic tub each, the dog, and a rusty golf club. We were told "don't come back home until you've filled these". The rusty golf club wasn't to protect us from strangers but to help beat the bramble bush back so we get the biggest and juiciest berries. The dog just needed a walk, so she killed two birds with one stone.

I then thought about it a bit more while we were out walking initialling near Kelling Heath and then later Harpley.



Photos by Julie Bunker and David Cooling
 Clockwise from top left: Spindle, Guelder Rose, Blackberries, Elderberries, Ivy

Julie and I were having a spot of late tea one Sunday and surfing the television channels. We thought we'd watch watching Countryfile on the BBC. The topic being discussed when we joined, was a worming treatment for sheep that didn't affect dung beetles, before going on to talk about dung beetles in more detail. One species of dung beetle digs a little tunnel into the soil and so creates a little mole hill of soil adjoining a patch of sheep poo. Clearly this is a specialist subject and just in case it's of interest to you, here's where you can find out more. <https://www.ukbeetles.co.uk/dung>

Talking of dung (poo), one of our members showed me a picture of some poo and asked me if it was badger poo. I ducked the question as I'm expert in poo, however, I've done a bit of internet research and below is the result from "wildlifetrusts.org". *Badgers poo in shallow pits called 'latrines'. Their droppings vary from firm and sausage-shaped, to softer, slimier and darker if they've been eating lots of worms! Badger droppings have a sweet, musky smell.*

Comparing this to the picture I was shown, I'm pretty certain it wasn't badger poo. (Hannah – do you agree?)



image from Wildlifetrusts.org

Last month we had two walks courtesy of the Sennowe estate. One was a walk out to the Wensum and the other was a woodland walk. For those who couldn't make these walks here are a couple of pictures. The woodland walk through the cathedral-like Redwoods was apparently fantastic.



photos by Barley Wilson

As we move into October we are well and truly in the fungi season especially with the recent rainy weather too. Keep your eyes peeled. If you find something interesting or colourful, do send me a picture and I can include it in the next newsletter. Something else to look out for are our winter visitors. I saw (and heard) five skeins of Pink-Footed Geese while I was having a picnic tea at the Burnham Deepdale music festival last weekend. I understand that the first geese arrivals were actually seen at the end of August, earlier than usual. Perhaps

there's been some cold weather in Iceland. Keep your eyes peeled for the Fieldfare, Redwing, Waxwings and other winter visitors. Let me know if you see them during the month. Apparently Waxwings have been seen in Kings Lynn this month already!

To boost our local pollinators the committee would like to build some further bug hotels. If you have any dry pine cones we could use that would be really helpful. Please let me know if you have any or if you'd like to help make the hotels.

2026 might seem a long way away but the Wildlife Group has been talking to the village shop about producing a Ryburgh Wildlife calendar for 2026. To make this work we need pictures of wildlife from you that relate to each month of the year starting with October. We are happy to receive both new and existing pictures. We will put all pictures received on the Group's website. Next year we will agree a small selection team that will pick the pictures that will be used for each month on the calendar. Please send your pictures to info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com. The Wildlife Group will own the copyright of all pictures. The photographers will be credited though. Please do not send images that are subject to copyright.

Dates for your diary

Saturday 26th October 10.30am or Sunday 27th October 10.30am - Farm Stewardship for Food and Conservation walk at Highfield take two.

Meet at concrete beet pad in Highfield Lane. Date to be confirmed very shortly.

Saturday 23rd November 10.30am - Local history walk – led by Peter Trent.

More details next month.

2025 - Winter celebration for 10 years of the community woodland. This is likely to be one of the following Saturday dates: 18th January, or 15th February or 22nd February. Details to follow.

May 2025 – Big River Watch and water quality testing. Details to follow.

Tail piece

At the committee meeting in August we were discussing the fact that we had been trying to meet with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, at that time, without success, when I suggested perhaps we should take the X29 bus to Norwich (environmentally friendly) to meet the Wildlife Trust there. After a few laughs about the length of time it might take to get there, the conversation moved on. But.....

Public transport, particularly buses, has been a passion of mine since I was a young boy. I had some wonderful experiences in the 1970s with my £2.97 "National Wanderbus" ticket (*actually three 99p tickets as the ticket machines then couldn't sell tickets over 99p – rather*

different nowadays). With the recently introduced bus service through Ryburgh I wondered if we might a short series of environmentally friend day trips by bus. So here goes....

Lunch at the White Swan at Gressenhall, a community run pub with three Norfolk brewed beers, is eminently “do-able” by bus. The number 21 bus leaves Great Ryburgh at 1211 and gets to Gressenhall at 1240. You have an hour and a half for lunch ready to catch bus back from Gressenhall at 1411, arriving back in Great Ryburgh at 1439.

David

Membership Secretary