

Ryburgh Wildlife Group

April 2025 Newsletter

Spring is upon us and even the clocks have joined in by springing forward. How many of you got caught out?

Some of our most cheery flowers are now in bloom such as Daffodils, Lesser Celandines and Primroses. I wonder why they are so uplifting? Is it simply their flowering marks the end of winter and the coming of spring and summer? Many of early spring plants have flat open flowers that are white or yellow. I asked Mr Google (other search engines are available) why that might be the case. Google found a New Scientist article that explained that the early flowers are pollinated by a broad range of insects including flies. Flies do not have colour perception, so they are attracted to contrast, and lighter colours, white and yellow, stand out better against green foliage.

One spring flower that I enjoy seeing is Wood Anemone which you can see around some of the hedgerows around the village. The white really does stand out like a lighthouse against the grass.



Wood Anemone. Photo by Julie Bunker.

While you are out, look carefully at the Primroses. There are two types of flowers look almost identical but are slightly different. Look carefully at the centre of the flowers pictured below and you will see that in one type, there is a greenish disc (pin-eyed), while in the other (thrum), there is instead a cluster of bright yellow anthers



Pin (left), Thrum (right).

These images are from a Devon biodiversity action plan website but the link below will take you to a webpage where there is more scientific explanation around “pin & thrum”.

<https://plantscientist.wordpress.com/2013/04/27/organism-of-the-week-primrose-primula-vulgaris/>

Another yellow flower to look out for is Coltsfoot. You can usually find it on disturbed land. It looks like a Dandelion that is drooping a bit. The flower stalk is the give-away as it is “scaly”. At this time of the year you will not see any leaves (the shape of a horse’s foot – hence the name) as they are produced after the plant has flowered.

Another spring flower we must not overlook or take for granted is the Violet family. These are small plants but five of the UK’s eight species of fritillary butterflies use violets as their foodplant in their caterpillar stage. Later this year we hope to have a walk round Foxley Wood, and we should see Silver-washed Fritillaries. They are large, graceful butterflies. It is hard to imagine that they are dependent on violets.



Photo by Julie Bunker

As an aside, I had a family related commitment with the Sussex Wildlife Trust which involved a guided walk around Ebernoe Common, and an adjoining new reserve called Willand Wood. We saw all the usual early Spring woodland flowers and (the reason for the aside) one of my favourites Spring flowers, Moschatel. I just love some of its vernacular names. Among others, Town Hall Clock and Good Friday plant. It is often associated with

ancient woodland. It can be easily overlooked but with once seen it is easily recognised by a small flower stalk with a flower on the four sides of the stalk, and one on top. Have a look for it on your woodland walks.



Photo by Jeremy Roberts

Talking of flowers and as we head into April, it might be time to have a brief relationship with your lawn mower before we start No Mow May. Yes, No Mow May is only four weeks away. Do try and leave your lawn or even parts of your lawn uncut during May, and even longer is possible. Wildlife will really benefit. Also, you will be saving energy; electricity, petrol or even good old muscle power.

In the past month the committee has been busy meeting the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, other local groups which have an interest in wildlife and the environment, and the Wensum Farmers group. The meeting with the Wensum Farmers Group was particularly interesting and, Dani, the Group Facilitator, shared with us a number of excellent wildlife related activities that our local farmers have been, and are, undertaking. These include the re-meandering of part of the river Wensum, and a pond restoration between Little Ryburgh and the A1067. There was much common thinking, like baselining what wildlife we have currently so we can monitor change over time. We have our bird, butterfly and moths list for 2024 so that's a great start. I think (hope) our relationship with the Wensum Farmers Group will be a positive one for our local wildlife.

At the last committee meeting we discussed holding some different walks this year. Two of the walks we discussed relate to Hairstreak butterflies, so I thought that it might be good to give a little more insight into these wonderful little butterflies, so here goes.

Hairstreak butterflies get their name from a thin band of white that "streaks" across their wings. There are five species of Hairstreak butterflies in the UK but currently in Norfolk we have just three species. They can be tricky to spot but can be easy to identify once you've spotted one.

In Norfolk we have the Green Hairstreak, White-letter Hairstreak and Purple Hairstreak. The Black Hairstreak is the most restricted of the species and is found only on the heavy clay of the Midlands. The Brown Hairstreak is the last butterfly to fly in the UK. It doesn't emerge until August. It is restricted to southern England and parts of Wales. Interestingly there have been sightings of new locations in London and the Middlesex. What isn't clear is whether the species is expanding or whether people are becoming more observant.

Green Hairstreak is small, wingspan about 2cm. The upper side of the wings are brown, and only the underside is green, with a faint line of white dots. They like scrubby land and live quite happily in challenging places like Dartmoor, and I even found them on a mountain top in Finland. In Norfolk good places to see them are Brancaster Staithe and Holt Lowes. The best time to look for them is early to mid-May. Currently they are recorded in less than 5% of the county.

White-letter Hairstreaks are marginally larger and have a white streak that looks like a "W", hence the name. Their foodplant is Elm trees. As a result their range has been hit by Dutch Elm disease but they do breed on Elm suckers that have persisted. Look for them in late June and early July on quite often on Bramble flowers. Currently recorded in less than 2% of the county. Our nearest recorded sighting is in Foxley Wood.

Purple Hairstreaks are the largest of our local Hairstreaks. Only their upper wings are purple. The underside wings are silvery-grey. Their foodplant is Oak trees. They have been recorded in around 6% of the county. Oak trees are widespread and it is very likely that the population in the county is much larger but is under recorded. They rarely descend from the very tops of the trees they live in. The best way to see them is to use binoculars and scan the tops of Oak trees on late afternoons (from 4pm till around 7pm) that are warm, sunny and with little breeze. Look out for silvery insects buzzing around. You might even be lucky to see them perched on tree-top leaf.

Dates for your diary

April

Saturday 19th - 10.00am Sennowe walk.

May

Saturday 10th – 11.00am. Wander around Ryburgh Common looking for early butterflies - hopefully Green Hairstreak. Access to the common is challenging – do consider this before registering for the walk. This date is provisional and weather dependent.

Thursday 15th. Sennowe walk with Adrian Howes. Details to follow.

July

Date to be decided. Morning walk round Foxley Wood reserve looking for high-summer butterflies, notably Purple Emperor, White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary.

Date to be decided. Late afternoon walk around oak trees in Great Ryburgh looking for Purple Hairstreak butterflies. Binoculars essential.

August

Thursday 14th - 10.00am to 12.30pm Ryburgh community wildlife projects - this is a Norfolk Wildlife Trust event. Booking is via their website

<https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/events/2025-08-14-wilder-communities-community-focus-ryburgh-community-wildlife-projects>

Sunday 24th afternoon visit to Warham Camp to admire the flowers and Chalkhill Blue butterflies. There will also be a short talk on the archaeology and history of the site.

To register for any of these events please contact Gill Waldron by email at info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com .

Ryburgh Nature Watch – dates and details to be decided

Tail Piece

Just a gentle reminder to send in any photos for the 2026 calendar and sightings of wildlife to info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com .

David

Membership Secretary