

Ryburgh Wildlife Group

May & June 2025 Newsletter

It is full steam ahead into Spring and the breeding season for many species.

Looking back at folklore March should have “come in like a lion and gone out like a lamb” and we should have had some April showers. I don’t remember any particularly stormy weather at the start of March. Likewise, I haven’t been caught out in any rain recently. Will there be any May flowers? Forget the tongue in cheek bit but, folklore is based many years of history and repeating weather patterns. I wonder what the folklore people at the turn of the century, less than 75 years away, will look back on. Will they still be “not casting a clout till May be out”?

It would be fascinating to know. I might even be tempted to jump into a blue police telephone box and time travel with Dr Who but they never seem to end up in the right place. I have to admit to watching last Saturday’s episode and there was a sobering thought moment when the civilisation on some far away planet the Doctor had landed on said they had heard of neither the Earth nor humans.

Birdsong is hopefully all around where you are, even if it is the slightly monotonous ChiffChaff or just sparring Sparrows. Stewart Copeland, of the late 1970s/1980s band Police, has taken the idea of using natural sounds and weaving them with music. I heard a short clip on BBC R4 recently and I also found this link. The CD (Wild Concerto) has been launched. If anyone buys one and wants to send me a review, I’ll happily include in a newsletter.

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/feb/14/the-synergy-is-amazing-stewart-copeland-album-fuses-nature-and-music>

A question for you. My neighbour drives to work very early in the morning and regularly sees Tawny Owls sitting in the road locally. I too have experienced this once. Can anyone share any thoughts on why they might do this?

Toads don’t sit on roads they merely waddle across them to get to their breeding ponds. Many places across the UK have introduced toad patrols at this time of the year to scoop up toads and carry them across a road to safety. Mike Rundle came across an article that was covered by both the BBC and Guardian.

Bath | *A toad patrol group near Bath is celebrating after helping 50,000 amphibians reach their breeding grounds over the past three decades. During this year’s migration season alone, the Charlcombe toad rescue group assisted nearly 4,000 toads, frogs and newts as they crossed Charlcombe Lane to reach a breeding lake. The 0.5 mile stretch of road has been closed for six weeks each year since 2003, allowing around 50 volunteers to patrol each night: it is one of only five closures of its kind in the country. Chris Melbourne, who manages data collection for the group, said the closure had been a ‘game changer’ for the local amphibian population, with the casualty rate during mating season dropping from 62% to only 3%.*

[Bath toad patrol group helps 50,000 to breeding grounds - BBC News](#)

On Easter Saturday a number of us had a lovely walk around part of the Sennowe Estate courtesy of our Patron, Tom Cook. Tom talked passionately and very knowledgeably about his woodland and the various species of trees within in. His knowledge of scientific Latin names was impressive. We learnt that things like Spanish Chestnut (also known as Sweet Chestnut) was a good amenity tree and produced excellent timber.



Photo by Julie Bunker.

It is quite widely known that trees often have quite a shallow root plate. Interestingly Tom explained that some North American trees in particular grow close to each other, enabling their roots to intertwine with each other and so protect the trees from storm damage.



Close living trees with intertwined roots. Photo by Julie Bunker.

Tom also explained about various management aspects, such as removing Rhododendron and, from the shore of the lake, Willows. He also gave us a tips like; leaving windblow trees that are leaning against others – they provide additional support for the standing tree. Also

when felling a tree, they try and fell it such that it will strike and knock off the dead branches of adjoining trees which again improves the quality of the standing timber.

Other things we saw included a Great Crested Grebe sitting on a nest, and recently emerged Green Veined White and Orange Tip butterflies. While we were close to the lake a number of us became temporary hosts for a large black fly with very patterned wings. Back home I researched it and confirmed Barley Wilson's thought that these were Alder flies.

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/invertebrates/other-insects/alder-fly>

The Alder fly (*Sialis lutaria*) is a blackish invertebrate, with delicately veined wings that it folds over its body like a tent. It can be found near ponds and slow-flowing rivers; the larvae living in the silt at the bottom.



Alder Fly. Photo from the Wildlife Trusts.

While on the walk in Sennowe, I was asked if our UK butterflies migrate like birds. Species like Painted Ladies, and Monarchs in America, do migrate but generally not the case with UK butterflies. Indeed, many of our butterfly species expand their territories very slowly. Over 30 years ago I spent many hours undertaking management work at Aldbury Nowers for Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust with the aim of restoring the chalk grassland habitat for Duke of Burgundy Fritillaries butterflies (*it's not a Fritillary at all but a Metalmark but that's another matter*) that had become extinct in Hertfordshire. There were "Duke" strongholds at sites in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire both 4-5 miles away and the hope was that the "Dukes" would naturally move back to the site in Hertfordshire. 30+ years later and they still remain extinct in Hertfordshire.

One of the unfortunate things to have happened over the past few years is the appearance of Sudden Ash Dieback (SAD), and the consequential management that Tom and all other woodland owners have had to do around affected trees. In my recent trip to Ebernoe Common in Sussex, I asked the Sussex Wildlife Trust western reserves manager about SAD and its impact. He felt that Sussex might be turning a corner and he was very cautiously optimistic about the situation improving. Let's hope that that is true of the rest of the UK too.



Ash sapling that hopefully will make it to old age. Photo by Julie Bunker.

While I've been writing this newsletter I have seen nature's housecleaner in action. A little faint buzzing alerted me to a blue-bottle like fly being cocooned in a house spider's web. Ten minutes later and all evidence of the spider, web and fly has gone.

Just prior to Easter, I attended a lovely Lent lunch at St Andrew's in Great Ryburgh where, Jenny Lonsdale OBE, and member of the wildlife group, gave an interesting presentation on the economic benefits of wildlife and the natural environment. I thought I would reiterate just a couple of points Jenny made. *There are over 20,000 different species of bee, but only seven species of honey bees. Bees, and other insects, are critical to the global food production system. Every season, pollination from honey bees, native bees, and flies deliver billions of US dollars in economic value. Between US \$235- US \$577 billion worth of annual global food production relies on their contribution. Almonds, for example, are almost entirely dependent upon honey bee pollination.*

Jenny also mentioned parts of China, where the lack of natural pollinators, means that pear orchards are being pollinated by hand using a paint brush. Let's hope we never reach that point.

At the end April I had a brief visit to Gloucestershire and Slimbridge where I spotted my "new flower of the month" - Black Mustard. A member of the brassica family. The colouring of the plant stem and leaf stalks looked very much like the small cabbage plants my uncle used to grow. At this time of the year the abundance of flowering plants might put you off trying to learn what the various species are. My suggestion would be to learn a few key plant species or plant families each month, and when you find something unfamiliar, you can narrow down the choices by eliminating your "known" species. The PlantNet app can also help. It is a free phone app. Simon Harrap's Wild Flower field guide is also a very handy field guide to have with you.

Dates for your diary

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.

To register for this walk please contact me (David Cooling) by email at info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com .

Thursday 15th. Sennowe walk with Adrian Howes.

Meet in farmyard of Home Farm NR20 5PG, just beyond the Ordnance Arms, at 4pm for saw demonstration. There is ample parking here. You will need a car to navigate around the estate.

Get to silt traps at 4.30pm back of yard

Get to woodland at 5.15pm main drive

Finish 6.30pm approx.

To register for this walk please send an email to info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com . Either myself or Gill Waldron will reply. This walk is being arranged courtesy of the Wensum Farmers Group.

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.

Sunday 27th - Members afternoon and BBQ. £10 per head. Details to follow.

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 .

Tail Piece

You just never know when you might see something new. Despite many Spring walks I've never knowingly see Beech flowers, until now. Easily overlooked.



Beech flowers. Photo by Julie Bunker.

David

Membership Secretary