

## Ryburgh Wildlife Group

### August 2025 Newsletter

I have just started to read a book given to me as a present a while ago. I'm only a few pages in and already it is very interesting and insightful, and quite timely. The book is called *Meadows* by George Peterken and is book number two in the British Wildlife Collection.

Nowadays we use terms like meadow and pasture without necessarily realising the historical differences and significance of the words. Meadow has a historic meaning of land that during part of the year went ungrazed and instead was allowed to grow grass and flowering plants before being cut for hay. After the hay was collected the land was allowed to be grazed; this was often referred to as *aftermath grazing*. Pasture on the other hand is land that is left uncut and is grazed all year.

Over many years the ungrazed meadow land has turned into flower filled spaces that we all hanker after as a rural idyllic vision. Mechanisation and modern trends for silage and haylage means that flower filled meadows are on the decline. One farm in Northern Ireland that I saw on BBC's Countryfile recently had taken the concept of dairy farming into very new territory. Their cows live under cover all year round with creature comforts of soft bedding, as well as water and salt licks and the like. The milking was all done automatically with no human intervention. The milking device cleaned itself before latching on to the udders and when milked, the cow would simply walk away. Their fodder was grown in the local area and was delivered into the cows living space by trailer three to four times a day.

In 1975, the then Nature Conservancy Council, commissioned the National Vegetation Classification (NVC). The original project aimed to produce a comprehensive classification and description of the plant communities of Britain, each systematically named and arranged and with standardised descriptions for each. This standardised classification is still used today by all nature conservation agencies. The Peterken book goes into some detail how the categorisation of a site of meadow and pasture grassland would change through over grazing, under grazing or reseeded and so forth. There are over 27 categories of grassland communities, largely determined by the acidity or otherwise of the underlying bedrock and soil.

Lammas Day, which falls on August 1st, is traditionally associated with the start of the grain harvest and the end of the period when grazing animals were excluded from meadows. This particular grazing system was (is) known as Lammas grazing. It was significant for commoners who had grazing rights, as it allowed them communal grazing on the land after the hay harvest until Lady Day, March 25<sup>th</sup> the following year.

I think you'd agree that, unless we have a job that is in some way linked to the land, modern life is largely disconnected with the land, and the old traditions that went with it. I spent my childhood living on Epsom Common and I can remember men and women that had commoners rights, particularly furze cutting and the collection of wood. I can't imagine many of us doing that nowadays.

Thinking of modern living, a short while ago our toilet cistern decided not to fill in, so we resorted to using a five litre (imperial – one gallon) watering can to fill it up. Julie and I both realised very quickly quite how much fresh drinking water was simply flushed away. It was especially pertinent as we were enduring one of this year's heat waves. Apparently, a plastic bottle with some pebbles in it placed inside the cistern can reduce the amount of water used by up to ten gallons a day.



Photo by Lucy Spink

This picture was sent in from one of our members. It's a leucistic juvenile Great Spotted Woodpecker that has been frequenting her garden in Kettlestone for a while. Leucistic means that lacks the pigmentation in part, or all, of the skin but has eye pigmentation. An albino lacks pigmentation throughout, including the eyes, which are generally pink. Lovely picture. Thank you Lucy.

Another lovely picture from another of our members is of a Hummingbird Hawk-Moth. Several of these have been seen around the village. This one was nabbed on Valerian by Ruth Paterson. Thank you Ruth.



Photo by Ruth Paterson.

On the last Sunday of July, 20 of us gathered for a summer social and BBQ on the playing field in Great Ryburgh. The committee were busy: Mike was auditioning for the role of burger flipper at the proposed McDonalds in Fakenham; Gill was on serving duties; Neil built a safety fence around the BBQ; and Ian and I erected a gazebo that was spurned by everyone. The weather threatened but remained dry and we all had a great time chatting to one another. A couple of hardy souls did join me for the search for the elusive Purple Hairstreak butterflies on the Oak trees up Westwood Lane. No luck but I, and others like Linda and Kevin, will keep looking. This is a montage of photos of the BBQ from Frank Bruce. Thank you Frank.



Photos by Frank Bruce.



If you were at our BBQ on Sunday this is old news, but for others this is breaking news. We now have a baseline record for butterflies and birds in the village and the committee feels the next focus should be on recording and mapping the trees in our village. Trees are slow growing but long-lasting. I find it difficult to comprehend that some oak and yew trees are so old, they were growing when Henry VIII was on the throne or during the English Civil War, and they are still in the same position today as they were then.

The committee are still mulling over some of the finer points of the project, but we would love to hear from you about the local trees that are special to you, and why they are special. In my childhood there was a Silver Birch tree on Epsom Common that had grown with a kink in its trunk that made it look a bit like a question mark. When I may the rare trip back to the common I always go search out my childhood tree. Details of where your special tree is along with pictures and words would be great. Please send your tree details to [info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com](mailto:info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com). Even a modest fruit tree might be special.

The Worcestershire Rifle Volunteers of 1859 used the pear tree as their emblem and central motif on their badges. The use of the pear tree was linked to the Worcester coat of arms which had black pears added to them in 1634. Tradition has it that it was during the visit of Queen Elizabeth I to Worcester in 1575 that the city acquired its second coat of arms featuring the black pears. It is said that during her procession through the streets of Worcester the then Queen saw a pear tree which had been planted in Foregate in her honour. She was so pleased at the appropriateness of the tree growing in the heart of a fruit growing region, that she bade the city add the emblem of pears to its coat of arms. Today's coat of arms still retains three pears and the morris dancing side from Worcester, "Faithful City", continue the linkage with pear by having three black pears on their tabards



Robin from Faithful City Morris Men.

While we were in Foxley wood recently Mike thought he'd try and ascertain the age of this Oak tree by hugging it. The rough estimate was that if you could put your arms right around the tree, that equated to about 100 years of growth. We reckoned that this tree may well have been nearer 200 years old.



Photo by David Cooling

I've mentioned in the past about phone apps that can aid identification. Plantnet and Merlin are two examples. Another app that has grabbed my attention is Obsidentify. This certainly works on an Android phone and I sure will work on an iPhone. It seems to cover all types of organism from plant to fungi to mammals. It's free so give it a whirl. I like it.

If you are interested in music and bird song this might appeal to you. Miranda Rutter in collaboration with Rob Harbron and Sam Sweeney has written some new folk music tunes inspired by and interspersed with bird song.

<https://mirandarutter.com/album/2808980/bird-tunes> . I'm off to the Sidmouth Folk Festival at the start of August where I'm hoping to see Miranda, Rob and Sam perform this live. An interesting mix.

Rivers and sewage pollution are back in the headlines again. The link below will take you to the Rivers Trust that has launched a petition (Making Space for Water) calling on the UK Government to provide more funding for farmers and landowners to create and maintain a network of nature-rich river corridors. Have a browse and maybe sign the petition.

<https://mailchi.mp/therivertrust.org/brw-spring-2025-data-8821961?e=e2471383dd>

## **Dates and events for your diary in August**

**Until Sunday 10<sup>th</sup>** - Butterfly Conservation's – Big Butterfly Count 2025

Look on their website for more details and how to submit your count.

<https://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org/>

**Thursday 14<sup>th</sup>** - 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 24<sup>th</sup>** - visit to Warham Camp to admire the flowers and Chalkhill Blue butterflies. There will also be a short talk 11.30am till 12.00noon by Pat Day on the archaeology and history of the site. Please consider car sharing and assemble by the entrance gate at 11.00am. To register for this event please contact Gill Waldron by email at [info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com](mailto:info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com) .

## **Tail Piece**



Photo by David Cooling

Goatsbeard or, Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon, seeds just waiting for the right moment to take to the wind to start their journey to flowering next year. I just loved its perfect shape and form.

**David**

Membership Secretary