

Ryburgh Wildlife Group

October 2025 Newsletter

We are soon heading for October and the seasons seem to have changed quite quickly and very definitely. I've been in Buckinghamshire over the past few days and we've had lovely sunny days but frosty mornings too.

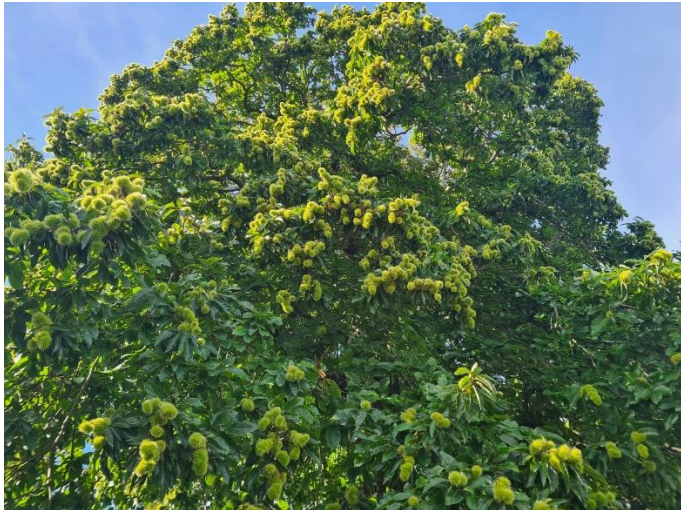
The leaves on the trees are starting to change colour and fall to the ground. It's not uncommon to see Horse-chestnut trees whose leaves are completely brown and withered even during the summer. This is caused by the caterpillars of the Horse-chestnut Leaf-miner moth burrowing into and eating the leaves turning them brown. These leaf miner moths are relatively recent arrivals in the UK, less than 25 years ago. An article I was reading in the British Wildlife magazine about Holm Oaks and their associated moths, reckoned that the spread of the Horse-chestnut Leaf-miner moth has been as much as 200km per year, aided by moths on trees in car parks hitching a ride in parked cars to a new home.

While in Buckinghamshire I've been walking to the local railway station and on the way, I pass a Walnut tree whose nuts are just starting to fall to the ground too. The nut must be very special as it is protected by two layers. First there is a soft green outer shell, then there is the tough nutshell itself. I used never to get the right pressure to crack the shell without smashing the nut to bits. I can now.

I think that the outer shell case of a walnut looks a little like the conker case from a "Red" Horse-chestnut tree. These conker cases lack the spines on the (White) Horse-chestnut. "Red" Horse-chestnut is actually a 19th Century hybrid between Horse-chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) and Red Buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*). The result is the *Aesculus x carnea* hybrid, better known as Red Horse-chestnut. Not only are the conker cases different but if you look at the leaf structure that too is noticeably different. The Collins Tree Guide refers to Red Horse-chestnut as having a rather endearing ugliness.

Horse-chestnut trees are not native to the UK but have been here for hundreds of years. Their origins are the Balkan Peninsula in South-Eastern Europe, that includes countries such as Greece. The name Horse-chestnut is thought to have come from the feeding of conkers to local horses. This might account for the Latin name – "hippocastanum". The Greek word for horse being "hippos": which also gave us "hippodrome" – a place to race horses, and "hippopotamus" – river horses.

Horse Chestnut and Sweet (Spanish) Chestnut might both have spiky fruit, but they are from completely different families. Horse Chestnut belong to the *Sapindaceae* family which is characterised by aromatic flowers and glossy leaves while Sweet Chestnuts belong to the *Fagaceae* family which also contains Oak and Beech. The pictures below are of a Sweet Chestnut festooned in its fruits.



Sweet Chestnut tree in Wareham, Dorset. Photos by Julie Bunker

I was hoping to set a little quiz of images of a variety of autumn fruits and seeds, but time got the better of me. Nevertheless, here's one. Can you guess what the tree is?



???? tree. Photo by David Cooling

We all know that the world in which we live is changing. On a recent cycle ride a field near County School station brought it home to me. For a minute I felt I could have been in the south of France with tall sunflowers bobbing away in the field. Not something that my Ladybird book of farming ever mentioned.



Sunflowers near County School station. Photo by Jule Bunker

Dates and events for your diary

Sunday 26th October – 10.30am walk in Sennowe estate to admire some old trees. To register for this event please contact Gill Waldron by email at info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com . Please note that this is the morning after the clocks will have gone back.

Saturday 31st January 2026 – 4.15pm 2nd annual Wassail! with Holt Ridge Morris. This will take the same format as last year with the celebration in the community woodland followed by morris dancing in the memorial hall. The Pop-up-Pub will also be in attendance.

Advert

With the group starting to plan events for next year you will need a calendar to write them on. The committee decided a while ago that the group should celebrate our local wildlife with a calendar of images from around the village sent in by members and their families. The committee is in the throes of finalising the images to be used and will be going to the printers very soon with a 2026 Ryburgh Wildlife Group calendar.

We plan to sell them in the shop but if you wish to put an order in for several calendars of them to give as presents, please email Gill Waldron at info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com .

Pricing details will follow once we know the printing costs. Form an orderly queue. Don't forget – order early for Christmas.

Tail Piece

We have created a WhatsApp group for RWG Members so that we can share news quickly with each other. A number of you have joined the group. If you haven't joined yet and would like to please let me know.



Photo by David Cooling

I spotted this unusual bug hotel at Rutland Water. Send in any images of other unusual ones you see.

David

Membership Secretary

Answer to the picture quiz – Hornbeam.

A very hard wood often used for butchers' blocks or chopping boards.