

Ryburgh Wildlife Group March 2026 Newsletter

February might have been short but it's been interesting. Rain, snow and then a really warm couple of days which resulted in the first sightings of spring including gloriously yellow male Brimstone butterflies.

The 1st March is the start of meteorological spring – hurrah. I know it feels like it's been a wet winter and the start of this year particularly so, but the statistics would show otherwise. For East Anglia it looks like just an average winter. I also heard that some places have only recently had their hosepipe ban lifted and that Bewl Water reservoir in Kent is still less than 90% full. Can you believe it or is it a case of *"lies, damned lies, and statistics"* ?

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/articles/c1e9d20pg2lo>

My first Brimstone sighting this year was alongside the busy A40 at RAF Northolt in London while I know others saw them in places like Wells-next-Sea. They truly are unmistakable. The females are much paler, almost white in colour, and could potentially be mistaken for a Large White but the curved wing shape and slightly pointed wing are key points to look out for.

Brimstone as a word is one of the conundrums. What came first, the chemical, the butterfly or the moth? They are all called Brimstone.

Brimstone is an old word for the sulphur which is yellow in colour.

The term "butterflies" is thought to have come from Brimstones because it was thought their yellow colour came about from eating butter.

There is also a Brimstone moth which is also yellow in colour. It is generally a night-time flyer that will readily come to garden lights or moth traps.

At least Dulux don't have Brimstone in their range of yellows – or do they?

Talking of night time and houses, a few evenings ago, the log burner had worked overtime so the door from the lounge to the garden was slightly open to let in some cooler air. Julie and I heard a strange noise and we both looked at each other quizzically wondering what it was. It wasn't that long before we found the culprit. A rather large glossy frog was hopping around the lounge. Fortunately, I managed to grab our dog before it had found the frog while Julie successfully returned the frog to the garden.

I mentioned previously that I wrote an article about hunting for hairstreaks in Ryburgh for the Butterfly Conservation Norfolk branch newsletter, and that a Butterfly Conservation member (Martin) from Acle had offered to come and visit Ryburgh to search for White-letter Hairstreak eggs on Elm trees. It was a bit of a grey day, but Barley and Ian Wilson guided us to an Elm close to the old railway line. Martin was quite excited as he could see that the tree was sufficiently large and in bud and was a good candidate for eggs.

Martin explained that we were looking for flying saucers up to 1mm in size on the underside of trigs, particularly at the junction of the current year's growth and the previous year's growth. Not quite a needle in a haystack but....



Photo by David Cooling



White-letter Hairstreak egg. Butterfly Conservation

Unfortunately the egg search proved fruitless. Let's hope some White-letter Hairstreaks from nearby sites do some exploring and lay some eggs on the tree this summer.

I think we often overlook things that are common or under our nose. Dunnocks. Lovely little songbirds with beautiful brown and grey plumage. They were once referred to a Hedge Sparrows, however, they are not related to sparrows at all but are the UK's only

resident member of the Accentor family of birds, although occasionally we get an Alpine Accentor turn up as a rare visitor to the UK. The reason I mentioned Dunnocks is because I've been watching one patrol up and down our garden fence with lots of flicking of its wings, something I'd never witnessed before. I thought it might be courtship related but the RSPB website explains that when a male encounters a rival male, there is a lot of wing-flicking and loud calling. I can vouch for lots of wing-flicking. It was almost mesmerising to watch.

Taking advantage of one of dry days we went to Holkham and wandered through the woods and out to the dunes. When we came back into the woodland what struck me was this tree. Pretty much all the trees around it were near vertical with a single trunk with no lateral branches. Then there was this one. It reminded me of the cactus plants that were always on set in the old western films. The big question is, why? What caused this tree, unlike its near neighbours to grow so many lateral branches? I'm sure someone in the group will have an idea.



Photo by Julie Bunker



This was widespread over the dunes at Holkham. Obsidentify identifies it as Dog Lichen Photo by Julie Bunker.

In one of the BBC Winter Watch programmes there was a recap about the debate of over the pros and cons of bird feeders. The pros are well understood. The negative points are that feeders harbour diseases and whether feeding, what are currently common birds, is having an impact on rarer species. The unanswered questions here were: Great Spotted Woodpeckers have benefited from feeders, and with increased numbers, are they predating the much rarer Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers and taking over their nest holes? Likewise, are increased number of Blue Tits and Great Tits taking the nest holes of rare species like Willow Tits and Marsh Tits? The RSPB is currently conducting research and should pronounce on their findings during the spring. It will be interesting to read.

I had a family birthday event at the end of February near the New Forest. Having arrived on Friday in pouring rain, it was lovely to be able to go out for a walk in warm sunshine on Saturday. While we were out these mining bees caught my eye. The various identification apps suggest either Clarke's Mining Bee or Tawny Mining Bee. Either way, they were a mining bee, doing what mining bees do.



Mining bees and nest. Photos by David Cooling

Dates and events for your diary

Sunday 26th April – Spring walk in Sennowe

We have another opportunity to enjoy Spring within Sennowe, courtesy of Tom Cook. The walk starts from Sennowe bridge at 10.00am. Please register for the walk by emailing to info.ryburghwildlife@gmail.com.

David

Membership Secretary