



Newsletter

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Silver Linings

One of the good things that came out of this extraordinary summer was the discovery of the yellow loosestrife bee at YACWAG's Stowey Reserve. The inability to travel further afield gave more time to visit YACWAG's fields and keep an eye on things there.



Stowey Reserve has a lot of the rare wild flower yellow loosestrife and, with time to look, we found the even rarer yellow loosestrife bee - a first record for this area. The associated media attention was good for the cause of nature conservation. We had been excited by the discovery of the rare four-lined horsefly on Congresbury Moor last year, but horseflies turned out not to be popular enough to make it into the local papers. Bees have a much better PR agent!

Thanks to Higgy we have some excellent photos of the bee. The yellow brushes on its legs are very noticeable as it buzzes about collecting pollen.



IN THIS ISSUE: Silver Linings (to lockdown) * Bird News from Trevor Riddle * Kenn Moor * YACWAGger profile * Fungi at Littlewood * Orchard projects ... etc

Right from the start when YACWAG bought Stowey Reserve in 2004 we knew it was special for its flora. The abundance of yellow and purple loosestrife on ditch edges and the remnant group of marsh marigolds in the grips (foot drains) was a rare sight in the locality. However, last year we were advised that the uncommon and rare plants of the two fields were more than merely a collection but should be seen as a distinct community - an important rare assemblage of plants which has now been entered on a national register.

The discovery in late July of the yellow loosestrife bee had further unlocked the door of our understanding of the historic importance of the fields as part of a wetland landscape. The bee is only found with yellow loosestrife and collects its pollen in order to make an oil to waterproof its nest burrows. It is a true wetland species and makes its nests in damp ground and ditch edges. In the same way we had found we had a distinct plant community, could we have an interdependent insect colony?

In early August Westmead (the northern field of Stowey Reserve) was visited to find the yellow loosestrife bee on several occasions. On a photographic excursion Higgy discovered the larvae of the loosestrife sawfly *monostegia abdominalis*. This was another rare record. The adult is a small orange-bodied wasp-like fly. It is the only sawfly to feed on loosestrife species. It is probably under-recorded but nonetheless its presence was encouragement to look further.

It was a warm and sunny afternoon when I visited the field: the best conditions to observe insects, especially those nectaring on umbellifers. We came across a small jewel of an insect which at first sight could be mistaken for a green bottle fly. The bright metallic colour and slightly squared body indicated it was a soldier fly - so named by entomologists of their time because of the similarity to the brightly coloured uniforms worn by soldiers.



A loosestrife sawfly larva - monostegia abdominalis



A soldier fly - chloromyia formosa

Chloromyia formosa frequents fens, marshes and meadows. The larvae feed on cow dung and in compost. It was another first record for the reserve.

More was to follow. A pause at the bridge joining the two fields led to the spotting of one of the two largest UK species of damselflies perched on vegetation in the Middle Rhyne. The Beautiful Demoiselle is found by fast-flowing gravel-bottomed water courses and there are only a few places locally with that kind of habitat so we knew that was very unlikely.

Our spot was the similar Banded Demoiselle. Its metallic bronze and green sheen complemented that of the soldier fly we had just seen and photographed. The Banded Demoiselle is again not a common species, although it is the one more frequently found in the YACWAG area because its habitat is the stiller unpolluted waters of the muddy-bottomed rhine systems. The metallic green wings indicated it was the female of the species. The male, strikingly blue with dark bands on its wings, was not seen on this occasion.



Banded demoiselle (female) at Stowey Reserve

The reserve was truly revealing its closely guarded secrets. The final spot was an interesting wasp/bee-like insect and it was photographed near to where the colony of yellow loosestrife bees was discovered. The thought crossed my mind that it might again be something special. It kept us guessing about its identity for several days and at first the only confirmation

was that it was not another bee species but a sawfly. There is a lot of information online and a search suggested another first for the area and a rare insect. This was subsequently confirmed by sawfly enthusiasts. It was validated as the plantain sawfly, named after its larval food plant, *tenthredo omissa*. It was again a female and according to the



Plantain sawfly - tenthredo omissa

national records previously unknown from our region. Plantain is not an uncommon plant and this sawfly may be under-recorded. Not a lot of people go out looking for sawflies! What was significant, however, was that the hot spots for this insect were the fen habitats of Norfolk, Suffolk, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Kent and Sussex. This exactly matched the areas for the national distribution of the yellow loosestrife bee. These two insects do indeed form part of an insect community, albeit in a fragile remnant of a wider wetland landscape. A shared habitat, a shared history and, hopefully, a shared secure future.

I am already looking forward to next summer, visiting Stowey Reserve on a sunny day to search for the males of the species and find other 'firsts'. Watch this space!

Tony Moulin

Bird News from Trevor Riddle

The spring and summer of 2020 must have been the strangest for wildlife and its human recorders, certainly since the Foot and Mouth year of 2001. Surveys weren't possible until the easing of restrictions in mid May and one consequence was that many people spent much more time in their gardens: the weather was lovely. There is a suggestion that this may have disturbed nesting birds but scientific evidence is still awaited.

The unusual situation certainly didn't deter our house sparrows which enjoyed a successful season and have nested in new areas. Breeding starlings also seem to have increased after years of decline. And 2020 is the year of the wren: they were heard singing from every available territory - recent mild winters have certainly benefited them. Reed warblers along the Strawberry Line were less abundant than usual. Probably they just could not cope with the large volume of pedestrian and cycle traffic and moved to quieter spots.

A returning wheatear was in Wemberham Lane at the end of July and peregrines returned on some days to their pylon perches. Hobbies were seen on Kenn Moor with young being spotted at the end of August. There were one or two sightings of great white egrets from the moors. In mid September a gathering of 100 swallows occurred one evening by Riverside Farm. Swallows have stayed later this year with the last breeding pairs not going until the end of September and migrants being seen until at least the 10th of October.

The most unusual sighting concerned a nuthatch near Crossmans Pond. This is likely to have been a bird from Cadbury Hill but a trip across Yatton constitutes a huge 'migration' for this species. Cadbury Hill had calling green woodpecker and a large mixed tit flock, including a couple of marsh tits, on 10th October.

I am in course of preparing a booklet detailing the birds of the YACWAG patch and details will be provided when it is available. It is not an identification guide but will contain members' photos of the species described and details about the bird and where to spot them. Any profit from the sale of the booklet will go to YACWAG funds.

Trevor Riddle



YEO VALLEY LIONS COMMUNITY ORCHARD PROJECT AT HANGSTONES, YATTON

Thanks to the hard work of volunteers coping with the demands of both lockdown and a dry summer, the fruit trees planted at Hangstones have ALL thrived. The new orchard will be good for wildlife, good for climate action and could provide fruit for the community in the future. Thanks to Brian Winter and Pete Selvey of the Lions Club and to Yatton Parish Council for its support.

Kenn Moor Reserve

No. 2 in a series of articles about YACWAG's fields

In December 2006 YACWAG acquired two fields off Kenn Moor Road. Many local people remember this site as the field lived in by gypsies. They had bought both fields from a local farmer but the larger field to the north is wet and they only lived on the smaller one near the road, bringing in tons of ballast. They had no permission to live there and in the end agreed to sell and move on. Local residents raised the funds for YACWAG to purchase the fields with the support of Natural England and North Somerset Council. Once YACWAG has acquired land it should be safe from development forever, as the YACWAG constitution lawfully demands it is held by the charity, or another organisation with similar aims, in perpetuity.

YACWAG's first task was to remove rubbish from the site and prepare the small field, where the encampment had been, for seed sowing. In spring 2007 native grasses and wild flowers were sown in the small field, thanks to funding from North Somerset Council.

The larger field behind was, and is, managed by cattle grazing. Later these fields were covered by YACWAG's Higher Level Stewardship Agreement and managed according to DEFRA guidelines, for which YACWAG received ten year funding.



Bob Lowman helping clear the site 2006



Volunteers preparing the ground 2007



Wild flowers in the small field 2011



The hedge planted in 2007

Kenn Moor Reserve continued

Unfortunately it ultimately proved too difficult to cut the hay in the small field. We did have a vintage Allen Scythe donated to us and volunteers had great fun for a few years using it and raking up the grass by hand afterwards, but storage, transport and in the end the increasing age of both machine and volunteers proved too much. The small field had to be managed by cattle and their eating, trampling, plus their dung, have caused the wild flowers largely to disappear.

The newly planted hedge was laid in 2014 and continues to do well. Other tasks have included pollarding an ash and a willow tree, putting up bird and bat boxes, making dead hedging and habitat piles with students from Weston College Countryside Management courses, but a bigger project is now on its way.



Volunteers hay-making at Kenn Moor



Bob Young enjoying his work 2011



Hedge laying in 2014. This ancient practice invigorates hedges from the bottom to create a stock-proof barrier and better nesting places for birds and small mammals. We were grateful to Malcolm Dowling for his help and tuition. He and his grandson also laid the established hawthorn hedge on the north of the small field.



The small field, October 2020.

Kenn Moor Reserve continued



The large field at Kenn Moor 2020 - damp and rushy. The cover brings in wintering snipe. Barn owls roost in the nest box sometimes and visit the field from Stowey Reserve to feed.

Kenn Moor Reserve Orchard Project

This project is well on track, with the spots for the trees to be planted marked out on the ground, the contractor engaged to put up the fence, and the fruit bushes and trees on order with the nurseries.

The trees are a mixture of culinary, dessert and cider apples with historic or local significance and all have been sponsored by members. There are still some fruit bushes which need sponsoring at £10 each - a mixed hedge for the fence line will be planted including blackcurrant, redcurrant, gooseberry and raspberry. If you would like to sponsor a fruit bush or with subsequent care, please get in touch with Faith (01934 834282).

YACWAG is delighted to be able to plant this orchard close to the Grange in Moor Road, Yatton, where a housing development is planned. The remnant orchard there is in a dilapidated state but contains a rare fungus which we hope will find its way over the road to the YACWAG trees in due course as they mature.

Thank you to all members who have made donations to cover the cost of this project. It is hoped that it will benefit wildlife and the community for decades to come.

YACWAGger Profile - Chloe Brown

Chloe Brown has become YACWAG's go-to person for additional help with children's education and activities. She has lived in Yatton since 2007 and is experienced at working with young people from tiny tots to teenagers. In the last few years Chloe has provided enthusiasm and ideas for YACWAG's events, including engaging young people to learn more about the natural environment and trees in particular, and to get involved in YACWAG's Tree Dressing through art and craft.



Where did you grow up? I was born in Bristol and lived in Kingswood and Oldland Common until we moved to Surrey when I was ten. I moved back this way when I studied European Studies with French and Russian at Bath University from 1995 -1999 and went on to join the British Army as an Officer in the Educational and Training Services. Since leaving the Army, I have worked in various educational roles including St Brendan's Sixth Form College in Brislington. I now run my own business – Yeo Vale Forest School. Currently we run outdoor groups in both Yatton schools, in Fairfield Primary School in Backwell and three toddler groups (Forest Tots) in Wrington.

When did you become interested in the natural environment? I have always had a love for the outdoors in terms of hill walking, running, skiing, outdoor expeditions etc. My interest in the natural environment, and the positive impact the outdoors can have on young people, developed further when working at St Brendan's. I had classes of rather disengaged teenagers who, on the whole, flourished when away on day hikes and overnight expeditions. For many, this was the first time they had spent any significant time in woodlands and among nature. This led me to retrain as a Forest School leader. I now spend most of my time outdoors with children building dens, cooking on the open fire and discovering the natural world. I also run the Cleeve Claverham and Yatton Scout Troop.

What is your favourite species? During wet, autumn days I cherish finding giant leopard slugs and earthworms with our forest schoolers. Last spring I was transfixed by the blue tits nesting in my back garden, and spent a great deal of time watching the parents flying back and forth with food for their chicks. The jackdaws nesting in our chimney pot weren't quite so attractive with their high volume shrieking. I became fascinated by bats when I led a bat-fact session with Yatton Juniors last year. I am also rather fond of the hazel dormouse after years of asking my college students to research the rare species of animals and plants in Goblin Combe.

Chloe Brown, YACWAGger continued

How did you first hear about YACWAG? I think I learnt about YACWAG through osmosis! I must have attended events in the local area and read about the good work.

What do you like best about being a member? I am drawn to YACWAG because I know I still have so much to learn about the natural environment. YACWAG has some superb nature photographers among its members and I really enjoy seeing the beautiful pictures members share. I probably mostly 'work' with YACWAG in the run-up to Tree Dressing Day. This is such a good opportunity for our young people to think about and participate in their own local environment. Unfortunately our plans for this year's Tree Dressing have had to be shelved, but we will be back in the future.

We



Tree Dressing Day

The first weekend in December is the time for Tree Dressing. This year it will fall on 5th December and we were hoping to celebrate the importance of trees for us and the environment as we have for the last decade or more. We even had a plan. Some of us were doing some knitting to decorate trees not only to show our love for trees but also to recognise the impact of Covid19 on everyone's lives and the amazing community response to the pandemic. Unfortunately that impact hit our plans and we have had to cancel this year's celebration of trees, but we look forward to being able to put on a great display in our communities next year.



Tree Dressing Day, Yatton Library 2009

On the Verge of Something New



Here is the front verge to our house on the left. Unlike other pavement verges, like those in Mendip Road and Stowey Road, these are on the edge of the property rather than the edge of the road and maintained by the residents. For at least five years we have been leaving ours long in the summer, with a sign to tell the neighbours what we are doing and why.

Our verge has given us a great deal of pleasure this year and a surprising autumn discovery was the brightly coloured fungi on the right. These are wax caps and they naturally grow in grassland. This new discovery led us to the North Somerset and Bristol Fungus Group, a voluntary organisation affiliated to the Fungus Conservation Trust and to the British Mycological Society.

This was a contact we have needed to make for some years, as we had suspicions that YACWAG's Littlewood Reserve was a good site for fungi. Littlewood is relatively undisturbed. YACWAG has a non-intervention policy and allows nature to take its course, so there is a lot of dead and decaying wood there. Although the late Justin Smith did visit the site once, no full fungus survey has ever taken place - until now.

Three members of the group have been able to meet three times at Littlewood in September and October, taking suitable Covid19 precautions, and they have been able to find a very good range of fungi. They will complete their survey in November, after which time their report and photos will be on the YACWAG website.

Many of the ash trees in Littlewood, as in most other woods in south west England, are either dead or dying, so one of the unsurprising finds on twigs was the fruiting bodies of the Ash Dieback fungus *Hymnocyphus fraxineus*, a very small cup fungus. However, this was accompanied by another very small fungus which has been described in the UK on very few previous occasions. It has been sent on to several mycologists for their comment.



Waxcaps have a preference for old and unimproved grassland so they are generally in decline. This one (hygrocybe conica) is a common species on unfertilised grassland.



Shaggy parasol (chlorophyllum rhacodes) - Littlewood.

Tony and Faith Moulin

Amazing Autumn Colours



Common Lime



Yew



The unique shape of Tulip Tree



Acer 'Drummondii'



Tulip Tree



Hornbeam



Acer griseum



Guelder rose



Native field maple



Red oak planted by YACWAG 2012



Beech

Autumn Colours - How and Why

Pigments in leaves and flowers perform the same function as the pigments in our skin. They protect the plants from harmful ultra violet radiation. In plants they also help to limit the damage caused by stresses - such as salt and dryness; colourful fruit and flowers also attract the specific animals they need. The pigment that causes leaves to be green is called chlorophyll.

Leaves begin to change colour when the days get shorter at the end of summer. There is no longer enough daylight for the tree to make food for itself through photosynthesis. During the growing season the chlorophyll in the leaves produces food for the plant from the energy of the sun. In autumn the chlorophyll disperses and is reabsorbed by the plant but the other pigments in the leaves remain, giving many leaves their amazing autumn colour. Often the leaves change in a patchy way as the chlorophyll is slowly reabsorbed.

The most common type of pigment in flowers and fruit are called anthocyanins. They can appear as red, purple or blue, and fruits rich in anthocyanin include blueberries,

raspberries, blackberries and things like black rice and soy bean. Some of the purple shades in autumn leaves are derived from anthocyanin.

Yellow and orange pigments called carotenoids and xanthophyll are dominant in autumn leaf colours in many tree species and are also important in colouring the flowers of many species. Another pigment for red and purple is called betalains. This is extracted from beetroot to produce a commercial food dye, but also occurs in spinach and cacti!



Spindle berries and leaves



Michael Grant

It is with sadness that we report the death of YACWAG's founding member, trustee and first treasurer, Mike Grant, after a long illness.

Mike and his wife Sue were living in Congresbury at the time of YACWAG's inception and were enthusiastic shapers of the charity. In particular Mike worked hard on the development of an appropriate constitution for the group and the administration needed for the charity registration.

As a chartered accountant, Mike was meticulous about financial and administrative process and set a course that YACWAG has tried to follow since his move to South Somerset in 2002 and subsequent resignation as Treasurer. Mike and Sue between them had a wealth of experience in voluntary organisations and were dedicated to the cause of wildlife conservation, opening their home to squirrels, hedgehog rescue and injured birds as well as storing tons of art and craft materials for children's environmental activities. Mike was an enthusiastic member of YACWAG's early workparties and volunteered with the Somerset Wildlife Trust at Fyne Court and Hestercombe after his move.

Mike's deep bass gruff voice belied a quiet and gentle man who loved the outdoors. YACWAG will always be in the debt of Mike's sound and steadfast presence in the early days.

Photo below: Wessex Watermark's first Gold Award received in Ten Acres in 1999 by the late Jim Ward, Mike Grant (on right holding up cheque), Tony Moulin in foreground.



PHOTOS, ARTICLES AND ANYTHING ELSE OF INTEREST are always welcome for the YACWAG newsletter, and your feedback is appreciated.

Please contact the editor at yacwag@gmail.com.