

Nature's News. RNHS. Mid May 2020

Dear Members

As this year progresses it looks increasingly unlikely that the way of life is going to return to anything approaching normal in the near future. We have put together another newsletter in order to pass on some snippets from members about the activities they have been up to and observations they have made. It's so good to hear from anyone and to know how members are occupying themselves at this time. We can then inform others. I think that knowing what others are doing is a little silver lining to this cloud. Please contact either Linda Biddle or Linda Clark if you feel you would like to contribute to the next issue. Thank you.

Hendrina's notes May 2020.

I've been able to visit the Hudds Mill meadows most days, and Burghley House Wood other times, and as usual there is a great delight in seeing the season unfold. Last week I saw flycatchers/wagtails at two different sites (High Bridge and the Hudds Mill weir), got home and realised I'd far more probably seen wagtails than flycatchers. Next day I went back to the weir and saw a family of grey wagtails doing their thing. I noticed a grey bird hunched over near the bottom of the weir on a concrete 'wall'. Eventually it got up, shook itself and did a bit of wag tailing, then went back to its sulk. Later a parent flew alongside and showed it what to do - jump down onto a flat damp piece of weir - three times. Came back with food several times, no response.

I gave up watching but returned five minutes later, and of course it had disappeared. I hope not lost in the rush of water but I expect/hope to join the rest of the family.

The flycatching wagtail reminded me of the fantails you see in New Zealand. Not such a wide tail but still eye-catching with its white edges and black/white inside, all employed in chasing insects. There were plenty of those, including St Mark's flies and what I call a mayfly (but Gill may have something to say about that).

Also, I do lazy dawn chorusing - get up, open window and lean out. No traffic. Sounds move up the river, quite lovely. And I remember dawn choruses at Burley Wood, before the traffic got too much, and including cuckoos (no sign of those here). Happy days!

This is what Jane and Duncan Ball have written. They certainly put the information gained on the visit to Vine House Farm to good use.

We have been attempting to make our garden, particularly the lower half, more attractive to wildlife, and here's an update:-

In March, following an idea we saw on the RNHS trip to Vine House Farm, we decided to build a bug hotel out of a variety of useless rubbish. The bottom layer is a mixture of stones and blocks and has 2 compartments for nests, while there is an old woodpecker nestbox in the 'apex'. We wait with baited breath for whatever decides to take up residence. While on the subject, we also have a small bug house and were pleased and surprised in



early May to see a load of bees (a good 25) buzzing around it (the picture didn't come out so well). We're going to have to familiarize ourselves with bee species.

Also in May we did our own dawn chorus, clocking up 25 bird species by breakfast. Apart from the usual suspects, we had Heron, Moorhen and Greylag Goose (our neighbour has a large pond), along with Great Spotted Woodpecker, Red-legged Partridge. Willow Warbler and Whitethroat. And Curlew, from a distance.

We have also made a 2nd 'brushwood fence' and another wood pile, and planted a few more wild flowers (birdsfoot trefoil, bugle, lady's smock, devil's bit scabious). Speckled Wood butterflies are common, and there are a variety of other common species including Brimstone - but where is the Alder Buckthorn that the larvae feed on?!

Since we have been here, we have planted Rowan, Field Maple, Walnut and Spindle, taking our tally of tree (as opposed to bush) species to, we think, 27.

We have had plans to line our pond but last year it never dried out. Maybe this year?

Jane & Duncan Ball

[Mary Nourish e - mailed with this interesting piece about orchids in Wardley Wood.](#)

Joe and I first saw Early Purple Orchids in Wardley Wood about 15 years ago. Then there were only around 5 flower spikes. We have been monitoring the site since then and the number of flowers has increased slowly as has the spread. This year we were amazed at how many flowers there were when we went recently and Joe stopped counting at 200! They have also spread to a much more extensive area. Quite a success story.



Early Purple Orchids.

Peter Scott our Vice Chairman has written a little piece about himself. He said he was more of 'a background person' and tends to shy away from the limelight. However he does sterling work managing the Society's website, leads outdoor meetings and is full of knowledge about all things related to Natural History and the Society. Peter is a very valuable member of the committee.

Having emailed the last newsletter put together by Linda Clark and Linda Biddle I was sat reflecting on the piece written by Linda Biddle about her background when my phone rings and Linda Clark asks if I could say a bit about myself for the next issue.

After agreeing to do this I then wondered where to start and what would be of interest to anyone. Anyway here we go, by birth I come from Sheffield which when I was young was quite an industrial city with very little wildlife near where I lived, which was within earshot of Sheffield United's Bramall Lane Ground, although I was brought up as an Owl's fan as my father's family came from the other side of Sheffield.

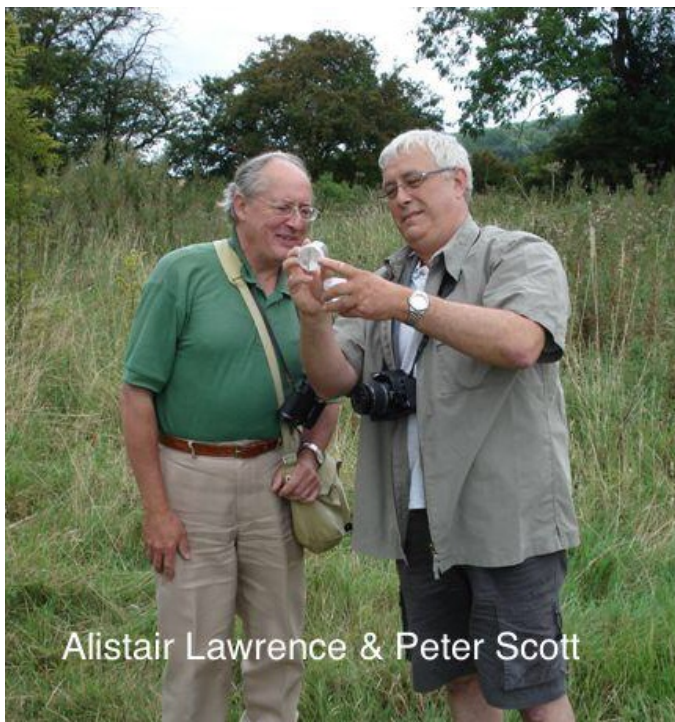
One of the benefits of Sheffield is that it is built on numerous hills and valleys, hence the fact it is often referred to as the Rome of England. As part of its history the city had many small firms manufacturing cutlery and these were located around many small mill ponds up and down the valleys. As these businesses contracted the ponds became havens for wildlife and could be accessed with ease on foot. I suppose it was here I started to take an interest in nature as Kingfisher, Dipper and Grey Wagtail found their way down these valleys until coming up against the main industrial areas on the Don and Sheaf Rivers which for many years were sterile areas.

However, many of the upper valleys were converted into parks and by following them upstream you were soon out onto the moors. The upper reaches of the valleys being wooded had Redstart, Pied Flycatcher then out onto the moors for Red Grouse and Curlew.

A wonderful start to birdwatching which was where I started, this interest developed through the YOC at school and through my parents love of the outdoor especially Derbyshire both the Dark and White Peaks.

I also undertook voluntary work at RSPB Leighton Moss and on Havergate Island.

As I moved back and forth between Sheffield and Lincolnshire for work my birdwatching often took me further afield with day trips to the Welsh coast to take in Red Kites, a real rarity in those days, Norfolk and Suffolk for their specialist birds.



Alistair Lawrence & Peter Scott

Finally, I ended up in Rutland and joined LROS and I have been a regular on their monthly field trips ever since. It was on one of these trips that someone new turned up, Alistair Lawrence, of course we got chatting and he introduced me to RNHS and a broader range of subjects, the rest is history as they say.

I know from chatting to the likes of Phil Rudkin how much effort has gone into making RNHS what it is today and we should all be grateful to the founder members and those who have followed in their shoes for leaving us such a legacy. Under the current circumstances we need to protect it and support it so that we can continue to benefit from the friendship it brings.

Batty News.

Jenny Harris, our bat recorder, has suddenly become very busy taking in grounded bats. Over the lockdown all operations ceased but now that we can once again hit the roads, the little mammals are coming out of the woodwork so to speak.

The latest and fantastic news is that there has been a confirmed sighting of a Greater Horseshoe Bat in NW Leicestershire. Previous sightings in the county were at Ashby-de-la-Zouch in 1996 and Holwell Nature Reserve in September 1991.

This species is rare in Britain and now confined to south-west England and south Wales, with an estimated decline of 98% in the last 100 years. To learn more and hear their extraordinary echo-location calls go to www.warksbats.co.uk.

The organization 'Bats in Churches' is giving talks using ZOOM every Wednesday in May. The sessions feature short talks from a range of expert and celebrity guests, with the opportunity to ask questions and take part in the lively discussion.

The link to last week's session on **Britain's Bat Story** with guests from the Bat Conservation Trust, Lisa Worledge and Philip Briggs is below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYLLGEs0EXA&t=20s>

The session taking place on May 20th, will be '**Understanding Bats Through their DNA**'. All are encouraged to tune in and the information on the session topics as well as registration details can be found on the [Bats in Churches LIVE event page](#) the link for which is below.

<https://batsinchurches.org.uk/events/bats-in-churches-live/>

If you haven't used ZOOM before give it a try as there are so many good things out there to be tapped into.