

RNHS. Newsletter #3. June 2020.

Welcome to another bulletin from RNHS. Number 3. It's hard to believe the longest day will soon be here. Hopefully, with the relaxed rules, more of us will be able to meet and enjoy the countryside in larger groups. Margaret Conner has already been on a walk with her U3A group, adhering to the rules of course and says it worked well. Margaret has written a little autobiography for this newsletter as Treasurer and Membership Secretary.

Terry Mitcham has kindly sent a piece about his sightings at Quarry Farm you may have seen his piece in the June issue of 'Birdwatching' magazine.

There is an article about Glow worms from Linda Worrall. Linda was previously the RNHS Secretary and Glow worm recorder for many years. These creatures are rarely seen nowadays and we would love to have any records, so if anybody is out on a calm night.....

Phil Rudkin is still as enthusiastic and knowledgeable as ever has also contributed.

Thank you to everyone who has helped with this newsletter.

Wildlife dangers.

I have been spending a lot of time on my allotment recently, open air and socially distanced, but able to chat to my neighbours. I'd like to pass on several little incidents.



I commended one lady on the ladders she had in her water butts to provide an escape route for any unfortunate creatures which fall in. She told me that on her previous allotment she went one day to find a drowned owl and that picture, understandably she has never been able to erase from her memory.

A hedgehog was found in the garden next to mine obviously very stressed and dehydrated. On closer examination the spines around its neck area seemed disrupted. A strimmer injury, the hedgehog later died.

A dead hedgehog was found on an allotment adjoining my own. The poor thing was splayed out. No entanglement in netting, another hazard for hogs, and not a badger kill. The only thing my friend and I can think of as the cause of death is poison either for rats or slugs. I found a dead rat on my patch a couple of days ago

Bird feeders. I do feed the birds and lately they have been eating me out of house and home. Probably because of all the fledglings. I clean my feeders regularly as over the past and recently I have had cases of birds with the Trichomonosis parasite. I've had chaffinch with 'warty' legs caused by either mites or a virus and transmitted by contact. (ZSL Institute of Zoology) Although not a fatal as the Trich. It's quite distressing to observe.

I know that if you are reading this you will probably be aware of all the above dangers to our wildlife and take measures to avoid tragedies. However, I was talking to someone who was unaware of the transmission of disease through feeders and about the danger of strimming without first checking for sleepy hedgehogs.

So I think we would do well to take any opportunity to pass on information like this.

Linda Clark.

Quarry Farm Birds - Terry Mitcham

My lockdown walks have been mainly around the former Williamson Cliffe brickworks (Quarry Farm) on the edge of Stamford but wholly in Rutland. The site is a classic 'edgeland' between the town and surrounding arable farmland, a good example of Richard Mabey's unofficial countryside and only ten minutes from home. It is made up of a range of habitats which attract a variety of birds to nest, feed or just pass over on migration.

Walking through the gap in the hedge on Casterton Road the first of many Skylarks will be heard over the grass field. This is an excellent site for the species with over fifteen territories across the site – a greater density than on adjacent farmland. Three or four pairs of Meadow Pipits breed on the areas of rough grassland beyond the wood and were watched carrying food for their young.



Willow Warbler (Peter Scott)

Green Woodpeckers and Magpies feed on the Rabbit grazed turf to the north of the wood, their yaffling and chattering calls a feature of every visit. Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers breed in the wood along with Stock Dove, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and other common woodland birds. Just once, a Tawny Owl was heard, so they may also breed.

Much of the site is covered by Hawthorn and willow scrub of varying density and here it has been interesting to chart the arrival of warblers from early April – Willow Warbler followed by Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat and Garden

Warbler. After two or three weeks the volume of song seemed to diminish as the birds concentrated on rearing their first broods.

Two small ponds with reed beds attracted a passing Sedge Warbler for two days in late April. After he had moved on, Reed Warblers arrived with three singing in this small area – how do they find such tiny sites? A section of the old clay pit attracted Wheatears on three days; smart birds which remained for only one day before heading north. The grassy areas and the clay pit attract birds of prey (lots of Rabbits!) with Red Kite, Buzzard and Kestrel all seen regularly.

Small field with well grown hedges bordering Little Casterton Road have been good for Linnets, Greenfinches and Yellowhammers, whilst House Sparrows from nearby housing areas have collected insects for their growing young. The highlight here has been a pair of Grey Partridges, usually seen on early morning walks as they fed in the young cereal crops.

In addition to the Wheatears already mentioned other interesting migrants have been seen – Hobby and Whimbrel and, especially exciting, a female-type Black Redstart. Quarry Farm has extensive views to the north and east with Crowland Abbey, fourteen miles away, easily visible through binoculars. It should be a rewarding site to watch autumn migration and having made regular visits this spring I will certainly be going back.

Margaret Conner bio for RNHS

I was born and brought up in Glossop, North Derbyshire. My parents were keen naturalists and the family regularly went for walks in the Peak District and the Derbyshire Dales. My Mum loved flowers and would encourage us to identify what we found, though I am ashamed to say I can't remember many of them. My preference is for things that move – birds, butterflies, bees and such like. I have always liked going out into the countryside and looking at wildlife.

When an adult I qualified as an accountant and eventually moved to Leicester for work. I worked in various private companies, but the latter part of my career was with various charities. We lived in Leicester for 18 years, before deciding to move out to the country for the peace and quiet and



Margaret enjoying the garden & lockdown.

also dark skies (some of you may know my husband is a keen astronomer). We ended up in Somerby in 2003 and have never regretted it.

I met Anne Tomlinson through volunteering with the LRWT and she told me about the RNHS. It sounded interesting and so I joined. I remember the first outdoor meeting at Clipsham Park, listening to nuthatches with Phil and looking at scarlet elf cap fungi that I would never have noticed on my own. Everyone was very welcoming and I love the way there is an interest in all of nature, not just the rarities or exotic wildlife.

I joined the committee about 7 years ago, and soon afterwards took on the role of membership secretary, a couple of years later became Treasurer as well. The two roles have a lot of synergy, so it made sense to combine them. My experience of charity finance helps with this.

Since lockdown I have really come to appreciate the nature on my doorstep. The RNHS wildlife challenge has encouraged me to keep track of everything that visits the garden. I have a number of regular bird species and have now been trying to sort out all the bumblebees, sitting down with the books and websites. My next challenge is to decide whether it is common blue or azure damselflies which are emerging in my pond. I have been shown how to distinguish them several times, but still struggle with this, so need to get it fixed in my brain. There have been lots of young starlings and sparrows on my feeders which are a delight to watch. We have red kites and buzzards flying overhead, and larks and song thrushes singing in the field behind the house.

Unlocking the Lock-Down

As Boris eases the visiting mileage, Angela and I ventured out to Wing village on the morning of Thursday 21 May. This was the first time I had the chance to monitor the birds. The weather conditions were hot, sunny and dry. Therefore, we had both the front windows open: and we motored through Edithweston, along the Manton Road, and I started my survey; listening to the Whitethroats singing in the hedgerows. We then turned left; and down the minor road to Lyndon village. More Whitethroats holding territory! It was here that I heard two male Chaffinches singing, as a Buzzard flew lazily over the field. From here, on to the Pilton Road, turning right at the bottom of the hill; upwards to the Railway Bridge, on the Lyndon Lane to Wing: I noted four singing Whitethroats, and three singing Chaffinches; all in the mature hedgerows.

Arriving at the entrance to Wing: two more Chaffinches, and three Whitethroats, in the trees and hedges. We were here to spend the morning with Angela's brother and his partner (thank you Boris)! Two more Chaffinches were holding territory in the trees next to Wing Maze; and later, three more were singing in the Churchyard. I was particularly interested in the number of Chaffinch in this area: because this species is in a steep-decline. There are virtually none in our suburban gardens in Stamford. The Whitethroat numbers on our journey were expected: I have monitored these over many years, in this habitat. Later, when we arrived back home, I felt a warm-glow; in finally getting out to listen to the bird songs.

On Sunday morning, 31st May, at 11.30am, I cycled to Perth Road in Stamford, and crossed over the road, through the hole in the hedge, and over the field to Quarry Farm, where Dave Needham and I studied the Green Woodpeckers. I had only a pair of binoculars, and my mission was to find out if the Reed Warblers had arrived from Africa, and settled in the reed- bed of the large pond: I was thrilled to hear them in residence: a bonus was the two Reed Buntings; that were singing alongside the Reed Warblers; Fabulous sounds! Our Green Woodpecker pair yaffled quietly, but no calls were heard from their young: which would be sitting deep in the nest-chamber, and not yet old enough to be looking out of the hole. One Song Thrush was belting out his song-phrases, and he was in the spinney (exactly the same spot) as in 2019.

As I stood on the edge of the pond, a male Broad-bodied chaser patrolled its territory; then an amazing event happened; when suddenly a female came close, and right in front of me, the pair locked together (shoulder height), and mated 'on the wing'. They were in Tandem less than a minute! What a performance!

On my way back over the field, a Juvenile Great Spotted Woodpecker flew in to the trees, Willow Warblers were singing, families of fledged Blue Tit and Great Tit noisily worked the hedgerows, and two more Song Thrushes were singing; not far from the hole in the hedge. Another warm- glow!

Phil Rudkin. 11.6.2020. Rutland Natural History Society



Glow-worms

20th June is the summer solstice, the longest day of the year. The sun rises at about 4.45am and sets around 9.30pm. Adult female glow-worms climb up grass stalks to display themselves in deep dusk by around 10.30pm and the ends of their tails continue to glow with bright neon-green light for some 3 hours, to attract a male. He can fly but hardly glows, and she has no wings. If he finds her, she switches off her cold chemical light, together they climb down the stalk, eggs are laid and both adults quickly die - they put all their effort into the next generation - as adults, they cannot eat. If they don't find a mate, they shine and fly for about 10 nights and then die. Hopefully, the eggs will hatch and the larvae then survive undisturbed for 2 years (their food is snails) and pupate in summer 2022. Meanwhile the larvae which were hatched last year will still be eating snails, getting ready to pupate in 2021. It's a useful strategy to overlap the ages in this way, so if there should be a disaster one year, hopefully remnants are still able to keep the colony going and slowly rebuild.

But the insecticide DDT used after WW2 was a national disaster for glow-worms. From being everywhere along local verges, railway lines, hedgerows and fields, it was 1984 before a Barrowden resident rediscovered a few glow-worms on Luffenham Road and specifically hunting for them in our two parishes, Fineshade and other local areas became remarkably successful. When British Gas was laying Barrowden's first gas pipelines a few years later, they willingly took great care to shield the Luffenham Road verges from any damage by digging, parked machinery or lorries, and laid pipes across a field to Back Lane instead. In Wakerley, too, water mains by the old railway bridge on the Duddington lane were relaid down the roadway rather than the verges, to avoid disturbing them. Glow-worms were included in the Red Data Book in the 1990s for Insects in Leicestershire and Rutland as "a declining species" and other counties have also recognised them, but nationally they have not received more recognition as "a protected species". Maybe this is because the way to protect them is to leave them alone. Trying to relocate them has not so far proved effective. They are in utter jeopardy and much more ought to be done for them.



GLOW WORM BEETLE. (PETER SCOTT)

Meeting a glow-worm on your doorstep is not what you expect to happen, but a few years ago one was indeed discovered climbing a wall in Drift Close and some were on a lawn in Back Road. Last year one was at a gate in Luffenham Road, and it, regrettably, was the only one found. Back in the 1990s they could be in double figures. It would have been great to do some glow-worm hunting together in a group one night this year, especially at the summer solstice on Saturday 20th June. But as I write in mid-May, regulations state that only people from one household, or just one person from one household and one from a different house can meet like that. However, if you can manage do a bit of personal hunting I hope you will not be disappointed and see lots – please share the info and let me know too! In Barrowden, walk slowly along both sides of Back Road and the bottom part of Luffenham Road (particularly opposite the "Barrowden" sign) up to the footpath sign on the right. Take care with traffic and wear something light, take a torch but don't keep it on or you won't see those neon-green lights. In Wakerley check just after the old railway bridge on the Duddington lane and on the verges of the lane from Wakerley Wood down to the A43. Or look elsewhere. The glowing season is mainly 2 weeks before the summer solstice to 2 weeks after it, but they can be a bit earlier or later.

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