

**Birmingham
Natural History
Society**

Founded 1858

Registered Charity No 500819

President: Mr Bryan Wood

Internet address: <http://freespace.virgin.net/clare.h/bnhs.htm>

NEWSLETTER No 98 – September 2012

Lecture Programme 2012-2013

Friends Meeting House, Selly Oak, starting at 7.30 pm

19 October 2012

Dr Chris Young – Tracking large carnivores in the Polish-Slovakian Tatras

Chris is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Biology and the Environment at the University of Wolverhampton, and is the Award leader for Animal Behaviour and Wildlife Conservation. Interests include conservation biology, landscape ecology, animal movement and fieldwork methods.

16 November 2012

Dr Daniel Allen – The global history of otters

Otters have had a remarkable revival in both numbers and distribution, and there are now recent records from every English county. Daniel is an Affiliate Member of the IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group. After his first book, *Otter* (Reaktion Books, 2010), he became editor of the *Earth* series (Reaktion Books, 2012), and a columnist for magazines dealing with pet mammals and reptiles. Books due for release in 2013 include *The Nature Magpie* (Icon Books) and *Squirrel* (Reaktion Books). See: <http://www.drdanielallen.co.uk/>

18 January 2013

Roy Ledbury – title to be announced

15 February 2013

Simon Atkinson – The Birmingham and Black Country Living Landscape Nature Improvement Area

Simon is the Conservation Projects Manager of our local Wildlife Trust. The only urban NIA has been chosen as one of the first twelve Nature Improvement Areas in England. The vision is to achieve long-term environmental gains for the wildlife and people of the region by delivering targeted, on-the-ground, biodiversity projects at a landscape scale. See: <http://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/NIA>

15 March 2013

Mike Slater - Trends in the landscape conservation of butterflies

Many members will already know Mike as a major player in Butterfly Conservation Warwickshire, the organisation's media contact for conservation, and co-editor (for example) of the *2011 Annual Report – The Butterflies and Moths of VC 38*.

19 April 2013

AGM followed by:

Dr Peter Jarvis – From porcupines to big cats: escaped mammals in the British countryside

Blue Tit
in porch



They flutter close to the window frames where spiders' webs collect – the spiders hoping for flies. The Robins, I've noticed, can hover for longer than the Blue Tits.

Except for the very first occasion, when the windows were probably cleaner, the birds do not seem unduly bothered by my sudden appearance by beating themselves against the glass trying to escape. Birds' eyes registering greater detail perhaps don't view the glass as space. On one occasion a Robin flew out over my head when I came in from the garden. I usually retreat to the kitchen and allow them to continue foraging in peace.

I occasionally have bird visitors to one of my 'wildlife habitats': Robins and Blue Tits inspect the inside of the porch at the back of my house, the door of which is open most of the time.

Margaret Kingsbury

The RSPB's Make Your Nature Count survey

Back in June the RSPB asked respondents to count the wildlife in their gardens, and 78,000 people took part in this survey. The RSPB reports that *Make Your Nature Count* was really useful as a snapshot of how UK wildlife fared this summer, and a number of species may have had a tough time in the cold and wet weather.

Mixed news for thrushes

Last year was a good year for breeding Song Thrushes and this year's results continued this trend, with sightings of adult Song Thrushes up by 12 per cent on last year. Adult Blackbirds were the most widespread bird across the UK, recorded in more than 90 per cent of the gardens surveyed.

In contrast, sightings of young Blackbirds, Robins and Song Thrushes were down compared to last year. The drop may be a result of wet and cold weather in the early part of the breeding season, making it harder for adult birds to find enough food for their chicks. With adults spending longer away from the nest searching for food, chicks would also have been more exposed to the cold.

House Martin numbers were down by almost a quarter and Swifts were down by around 10 per cent compared to last year. Swifts are already on the amber-list of conservation concern and there is a worry that it has been a devastating breeding season for them in the UK this year.

Squirrels, Hedgehogs and Slow Worms

Grey Squirrels were the most common wild mammal seen and were reported from more than two thirds of gardens, with Hedgehogs in almost half of gardens.

Slow Worms were recorded in the survey for the first time: ten per cent of gardens were recorded as having these reptiles in them at some point, but only four per cent of participants' gardens have them regularly.

A breakdown of results by county and country is given at: <http://www.rspb.org.uk/naturecount/results2012.aspx>

Winter Thrush Survey

Over the next two winters the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) will be asking people across the UK to record where and when they encounter any of our six species of thrush, either found here on migration or during the winter months.

Populations of all six species have shown signs of decline over the last 40 years. **Blackbird**, **Song Thrush** and **Mistle Thrush** have largely sedentary populations in the UK but the Blackbird population is heavily augmented each winter by huge arrivals of immigrants from Scandinavia and continental Europe, along with a sometimes massive influx of **Redwing** and **Fieldfare** from Scandinavia and Iceland. It's clear that these birds find something to their liking in the British countryside during the winter months. The aim of BTO's survey is to discover what this is, and to determine seasonal and geographical patterns of how thrushes use the countryside.

Thrushes show a strong liking for berries such as Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Ivy and Holly in the first part of winter, and then forage extensively for earthworms, snails and other invertebrates later in the season. An important part of the survey will be to record which food sources the birds are using at different times and places. It will also look at how changes in

the countryside have affected thrush populations, and how important food resources provided by gardens, orchards, hedgerows and woodlands are to their winter survival.

To take part in the survey and help find answers to these questions, all you have to do is map the thrushes you see in your garden or neighbourhood, or on a favourite winter walk, observe their habitat and behaviour, and provide details to the survey using a simple online recording system. The survey runs from 12 September 2012 to early April 2013, and again in winter 2013-14.

A parallel survey, launching on 30 September and running over this winter, will examine how wintering thrushes use the berries and other fruits available in gardens. This **Birds and Garden Berries Study** will identify which fruits (both native and non-native) are used at different points throughout the winter. It will also establish whether birds show preferences for particular types or colours of berry.

Further details on both surveys are available from the BTO website, www.bto.org.

Rowley Hills Nature Reserve

Our Society has donated £4,250 to the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust for survey work at Rowley Hills, Dudley, where the Trust has acquired some land as a nature reserve (see <http://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/node/3416>). Phase 1 and Phase 2 surveys have been completed, as has a survey of breeding birds, while a butterfly survey is continuing into the autumn. The Trust will find this useful baseline information for future monitoring, and data will feed into EcoRecord. Full reports will be provided for the Society, and it is anticipated that results will be written up with a view to publication in our *Proceedings*.

Average number of Dingy Skipper seen on transects between April and October across UK sites. The blue line gives average counts over the full BMS series (1976 to date); the red line gives the average for 2011



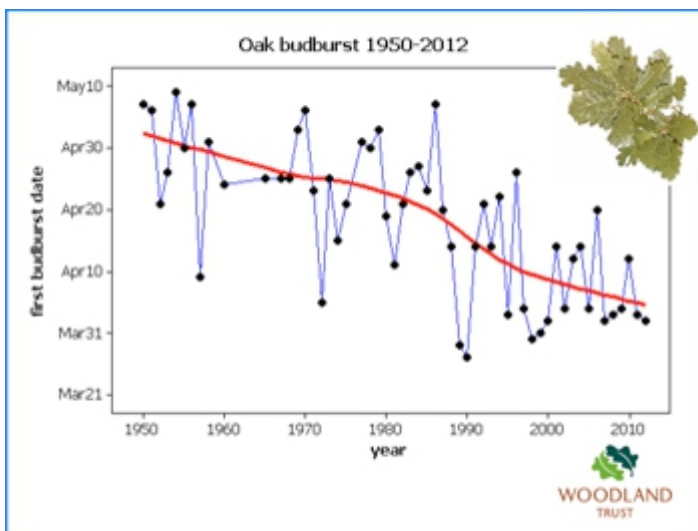
UK phenology needs YOU !

The Woodland Trust is concerned that a decline in the number of people recording plant and wildlife behaviour could jeopardise long-running data sets, some of which date back to 1736 when Robert Marsham, the 'father of phenology' (see photo above left) began recording seasonal events. Phenology observes the key moments in the annual cycle of plants and animals, such as when plants come into leaf or flower, and offers insight into how seasons shift in time.

The UK's record, Nature's Calendar, is co-ordinated by the Woodland Trust. As reported on the BBC website (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-19596981>), Nature Calendar's project manager, Dr Kate Lewthwaite, said that while recorder numbers as a whole are 'not bad . . . what we are finding is that people with really good wildlife skills is the group that is nose-diving at the moment'. She added that the 'expert recorder' group, those who submit 100 or more individual observations, had fallen from the high hundreds to about 200 people, largely as age takes its toll.

Dr Lewthwaite said they now had in the region of two million records in total, dating back to the 1700s. Hundreds of thousands of these records had been recorded since Nature's Calendar, also known as the UK Phenology Network, was established in 2000.

The recorded data was a key resource for academic researchers, she added, with requests for data being received on an almost daily basis. While spring events such as bud burst are generally occurring earlier, and autumn events such as leaf fall later, timings along the food chain often get out of sync, for example leaves emerging earlier than leaf-eating caterpillars, and caterpillars active before birds lay or their chicks hatch.

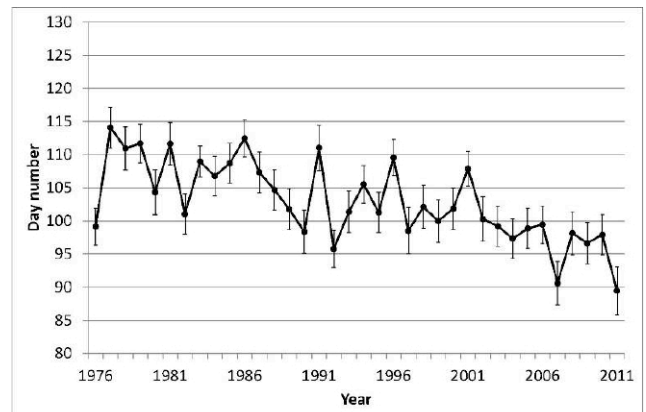


Further details on Nature's Calendar, including how you can contribute to phenological records, are given at <http://www.naturescalendar.org.uk/>

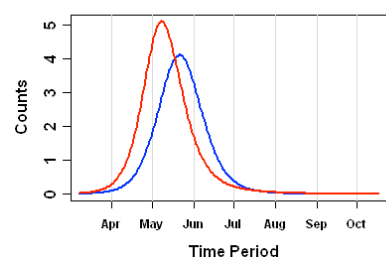
A summary of how autumn 2011 compared to autumn 2007 includes the information that

- Departing bird migrants left one day earlier
- Winter arrivals were six days later
- Events leading up to leaf fall were confusing: leaf first tint was four days earlier, full tint one day later, leaf fall four days earlier, and bare trees three days later
- Fruit ripening was three days earlier. Early flowering in spring is likely to lead to earlier fruiting in late summer and autumn, so the warm weather experienced in spring 2011 could have accounted for early fruit ripening.

Results for leaf colour and fall are difficult to interpret. Warm temperatures in September-November might lead to later leaf tint and fall, but it is possible that drought could have led to earlier tinting and leaf fall. It's also possible that the very variable weather conditions across the country may have accounted for high levels of variation within the data. It's also possible that some records are being skewed by an increasing number of trees such as Horse Chestnut showing signs of disease.



Trends towards earlier appearance averaged across all UK butterfly species (UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, BMS)



To contact the Hon Secretary or to provide copy for the next Newsletter:

Dr Peter Jarvis
23 Croshie Road
Harborne
Big Butterfly Count
Birmingham B17 9BG

During the official Big Butterfly Count period (14 July to 3 August) – see Newsletter 97 – over 223,000 individuals of the 21 butterfly and moth target species were counted and logged on the website. You can see what was recorded in your area, or view by habitat or individual species, by going to <http://www.bigbutterflycount.org/Results>. The web site provides the following national summary:

The awful weather and its impact on butterflies is the big story from **Big Butterfly Count 2012**. After a terrible spring, we and the butterflies suffered the wettest summer for over 100 years. As well as the rain, temperatures and sunshine levels were well below average in almost all parts of the UK. Many common butterfly species were much less abundant this summer. Almost three quarters of species (15 of the 21 target species) showed year on year declines and 11 of them decreased by more than one third compared with 2011.

Common Blues decreased substantially (50% decrease) for the second year running, as did the three common 'whites' (each by at least 33%), Brimstone (53% down) and Holly Blue (42% down). Numbers of Speckled Wood and Red Admiral, both of which had done well in the summer of 2011, fell back sharply, with numbers down by 65% and 72% respectively on Big Butterfly Count 2011.

Peacock numbers were substantially down in Big Butterfly Count 2012 (by 89% compared with 2011), but this may be overly pessimistic because of their delayed emergence this year and possible immigration into eastern England from continental Europe.

The biggest winners were among the 'browns'. Meadow Brown counts were up by 186% on 2011 and the Ringlet and Marbled White also did very well. Ringlet numbers increased by 354%, seeing the species climb from 11th position in 2011 to 3rd this year, while Marbled White counts increased by a staggering 503%, rising from 17th position last year to 7th. Each of these species is single-brooded and may have benefited from a change to somewhat better weather during their flight periods in the latter half of the summer. They are also all species whose caterpillars feed on long grasses and so may also have benefited from the lush growth of their foodplants in this damp year.

The Six-spot Burnet moth did well for the second year in succession, reaching 6th place overall. Its numbers were up by 55%. It was a mixed summer for migrant species, with Painted Lady butterflies reported down on 2011 but an increase in counts of the Silver Y moth.

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SAVE paper, printing and postage costs: could members let the Big Butterfly Count know if they would be happy to receive the Newsletter by email?

Almost twice as many Meadow Browns were counted as any other species in this year's survey. The 2012 results for all 21 of **Count** target butterfly and moth species are shown below:

	Species	Grand total
1	Meadow Brown	63670
2	Gatekeeper	32432
3	Ringlet	31437
4	Small White	18122
5	Large White	15240
6	Six-spot Burnet	11728
7	Marbled White	10218
8	Green-veined White	5996
9	Large Skipper	5165
10	Small Tortoiseshell	4900
11	Red Admiral	4865
12	Comma	4144
13	Speckled Wood	3953
14	Common Blue	3155
15	Small Copper	1999
16	Peacock	1739
17	Holly Blue	1677
18	Painted Lady	795
19	Wall	777
20	Brimstone	758
21	Silver Y	751