

**Birmingham
Natural History
Society**

Founded 1858

Registered Charity No 500819

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NEWSLETTER No 116 – May 2019

Reports on recent talks – early 2019

Dr Peter Coxhead – Introduction to spiders

- (18 January 2019). Eight-legged invertebrates are placed in the class Arachnida, and include spiders (in the order Araneae), harvestmen, ticks/mites and scorpions. Peter outlined the key morphological differences between these groups, then looked in greater detail at spiders themselves. Spiders possess a cephalothorax (in contrast to insects which have a head separate from a thorax) and abdomen, which are joined by a small, cylindrical pedicel. Legs are in seven parts. The mouthparts involve the chelicerae, a pair of appendages in the front which contain venom glands, modified as pincer-like claws. Behind the mouth are a pair of pedipalps which act as an extension of the mouth, and those of males are also used for the transfer of sperm to the female. Spiders generally have four pairs of eyes on the top-front part of the cephalothorax, arranged in patterns that vary between families. The abdomen contains appendages that form pairs of short, movable spinnerets which produce silk. Prey capture can involve active hunting, sit-and-wait predation, and the use of sticky webs. Webs vary in shape and size, but are generally orb, web or sheet. As well as illustrating these features and explaining their various functions, Peter then showed photographs of a number of particularly interesting species that had been recorded in Sutton Park. (16 members present)

Hein van Grouw – Not every white bird is an albino: some black-and-white facts about colour aberration in birds

- (15 February 2019). A number of 'new' species identified in the 19th century turn out to have been hybrids, sex-change plumage (degeneration of the ovary caused by age, injury or illness, and therefore lower oestrogen levels, resulting in females growing male plumage), or aberrantly-coloured individuals. The last can result from dietary imbalance, with temporary loss of melanin pigments caused by 'junk food', common in crows. Colour aberrations take seven forms: **melanism** (abnormal deposition of the 'darkening' pigment melanin); **albinism** (total lack of progressive greying melanin in feathers, eyes and skin, resulting in bright white plumage and pink eyes); **leucism** (partial or total lack of melanin in feathers and skin, resulting in all-white or bilaterally-symmetrical patchy white plumage, but normal-coloured eyes); **browning** (a change of appearance of the eumelanin granules, the commonest but also the most diverse mutation); **dilution** and **progressive greying** (reduction of the melanin granules, often through age); and **ino** (a strong change of appearance of the melanin granules resulting in pale, but not white, plumage). Melanins take two forms, eumelanin (black, grey and dark brown) and phaeomelanin (reddish brown to a pale buff). Albinos usually die soon after fledging, a consequence of poor eyesight, not because they are 'different' or more visible to predators. Other colour aberrant individuals generally survive well and are commonly accepted by their conspecifics, partners, parents and offspring. (18 members present)

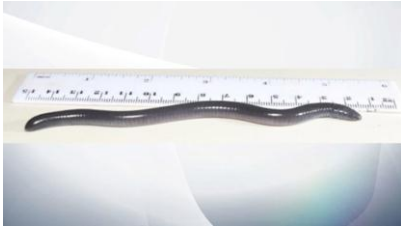
Rosemary Winnall – The nature of Wyre

- (15 March 2019). Rosemary provided an account of the natural history of the Wyre Forest, focusing on the work of the Wyre Forest Study Group since its inception in 1991 (see <https://wyreforest.net>). Wyre Forest is a patchwork of nearly 200 km² that includes ancient woodland, open glades, river valleys, farmland and old orchards straddling an area west of Bewdley, Worcestershire, mostly on acidic soil overlying Upper Carboniferous Coal Measures. By April 2018 the Study Group, generally recording twice a month, had noted 35 species of mammals, 133 birds, 9 amphibians/reptiles, 29 fish, 23 dragonflies/damselflies, 80 caddisflies, 12 grasshoppers/crickets, 240 bugs, 36 butterflies, 1142 moths, 410 wasps/bees/ants, 690 beetles, 1347 flies, 280 spiders/harvestmen, 99 molluscs, 1226 vascular plants, 406 mosses/liverworts, 237 lichens, and 2172 fungi. Many of these species and their habitats were superbly illustrated by Rosemary, who also emphasised the importance of conservation management. Many sites, perhaps surprisingly including traditional orchards, have tremendous importance for both individual rarities and overall biodiversity. Rosemary brought along copies of *The Nature of Wyre*, which she co-edited with Brett Westwood, Peter Shirley and Harry Green (see Newsletter 106), together with copies of the Study Group's annual full-colour review of its work. (14 members present)

Further details are on our web site at <http://bnhsoc.org.uk/bnhsProg.htm>

Notes from the web and elsewhere

Blind amphibian named after US President



© Envirobuild 2018

An almost blind underground caecilian which burrows its head in the ground, and can at best see things in black and white, has been named after Donald Trump in reference to his comments over climate change. The newly discovered worm-like creature will be called *Dermophis donaldtrumpi*, after a sustainable building company, London-based EnviroBuild, paid US\$25,000 (£19,700) in a December 2018 auction by the Rainforest Trust UK for the honour of naming it.

Furthermore, this Panamanian species grows an extra layer of skin which their young peel off and eat - known as dermatophy - which has been likened to Mr Trump handing some of his children White House positions.

www.independent.ie/world-news/and-finally/blind-wormlike-amphibian-named-after-donald-trump-37640957.html

Choked

Choke *Epichloë* is an endophytic symbiotic ascomycete fungus that forms a 'collar' round the stem of some grass species, effectively sterilising the plant by reducing the production of flowers and, in turn, seeds. Grass choke disease can alter the composition of plant communities by restricting the reproduction of the host plants.

There are several different species of *Epichloë* in the UK, each one affecting a specific grass species or closely-related group of species.

The Birmingham and Black Country Botanical Society discovered choke during surveys in the Woodgate Valley in 2018, growing on red fescue and creeping soft-grass. The group has now recorded it on three separate grass species in The region, suggesting that at least three different types could be involved.

BBCBS 2018 Newsletter



Choke on stems of red fescue

Wiki Commons © Walter Obermeyer 2015

The Chiswick flyover

The Chiswick Flyover, opened in 1964, is part of the M4 in West London. It's also a nickname used by some birders for the pied wagtail because of its distinctive, two-note "chis-ick" call.

Noted inter alia in Susie Dent's *Dent's Modern Tribes* (2016).

Its other names include Polly washdish, Nanny washtail and washerwoman, from its habit of feeding along the edge of ponds and streams.

Pied wagtails are a peculiarly British bird. Throughout the rest of its range, from Scandinavia to Kamchatka in the Russian Far East, and across the Bering Strait to Alaska, this species is known as the 'white wagtail'. The British race, the pied wagtail, has a much darker back: almost black in the male, compared with pale grey in the white wagtail.



Pied wagtail © Mdgee 2017



White wagtail © Neil Pomeroy 2018

New Order for the British Isles

The webspinner *Aposthonia ceylonica* (Oligotomidae), length 8–10 mm, mainly found in Thailand, was noted on the hanging roots of greenhouse orchids at the RHS garden at Wisley, Surrey, in summer 2018, and represents an order, Embioptera, previously unknown to Britain.



Wiki Commons © Sebastian Büsse 2012

This is a colonial insect that live in tunnels constructed from silk webbing. The females, which don't fly, feed on fungi, algae, lichens and rotting plant material. Males leave the home colony as soon as they become adults to find a mate, and never eat.

Since webspinners are unlikely to survive outdoors but may be found elsewhere as hitch-hikers in plant collections inside glasshouses, their arrival is 'neither good nor bad news, but 'interesting', said Wisley entomologist, Dr Andy Salisbury.

This finding represents the first new insect order to be found in the British Isles since stick insects (Phasmatodea) were recognised in Paignton, Devon, in 1909.

www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-47335931

UK is missing most of its 2020 targets for nature conservation

The Government has designated 2019 the 'Year of Green Action' as part of its 25-year Environment Plan. This, as Peter Shirley wrote in one of his columns for the Birmingham Post, 'has produced a flurry of warm words and exhortations'.

Yet the UK is likely to miss most of the targets set in 2010 by the global Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1365), with a report published in March by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee concluding that insufficient progress had been and was being made on 14 of the 19 targets (jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-7731).

There is an overall picture of continuing species decline, and while this has perhaps not been going on at the rate seen in previous decades, conservation groups comment on wildlife and habitats being in 'deep crisis'.

A key CBD target was to improve the conservation status of threatened species but there has been widespread and significant ongoing declines across many species, for example farmland birds and pollinating insects.

Another target was to cut the rate of loss and degradation of habitats to 'close to zero', but overall there have been continuing 'losses of natural and semi-natural habitat, for example through neglect or development'. The target to cut fertiliser runoff and other kinds of pollution to non-harmful levels is being missed.

Only about half of fish stocks are sustainably caught. The goal to prevent new invasive species entering the UK is also being missed. The report says there are 'ongoing declines of woodland, farmland and marine biodiversity, and some recent reductions in areas under agri-environment schemes'.

Also, 'more than half of the UK public report no awareness of the threats to biodiversity'.

The report does identify areas where progress is being made:

- Expanding the area of our protected sites network. Protected sites, including National Parks currently cover 28% of UK land area and 24% of our seas.
- Ecosystem restoration, particularly of peat ecosystems as a contribution to climate change mitigation.
- Integration of biodiversity into other sectors of the economy. A number of major infrastructure projects such as Crossrail and Thameslink are said to operate a biodiversity net-gain approach.
- *Ex-situ* management of plant genetic diversity. The UK holds world-renowned facilities such as Kew's Millennium Seed Bank which contains 75% of the UK's total native and ancient non-native plant species.
- Funding for international biodiversity conservation. The UK's contribution increased from a baseline of £77.4m per annum between 2006 and 2010 to over £180m in 2015.

However, Kate Jennings, Head of Site Conservation Policy at RSPB (quoted in *The Guardian*, 23 March 2019), says 'We are going to fail to meet the vast majority of our international commitments. Some of the things presented as positive are where places are getting worse more slowly – if that's the best achievement we've got, it's a pretty sorry state of affairs.' Martin Harper (Conservation Officer, RSPB) adds, 'After decades of fudged targets and false promises on the environment, it's crucial that we secure binding targets in new national legislation and a robust watchdog.'



The Birmingham and Black Country
Botanical Society

The latest BBCBS Newsletter reviews the work of the society during 2018, with lengthy reports on field recording in Woodgate Valley Country Park (with over 2,900 botanical records collected on 23 dates); Boldmere Golf Course, Sutton Coldfield, in August; Balaam's Wood, Rubery, in April; and Pelsall North Common, Walsall, in August. There is also a report on drone surveys of Sutton Park, and updates on work being undertaken on the lichen, bryophyte and fungus floras in Sutton Park. There are also comments on the Leasowes, just east of Halesowen, with its waxcap-rich grasslands (28 species), and recently afforded Site of Special Scientific Interest status, its 63 ha now becoming Dudley's largest biological SSSI. A report on a grasses ID course held in June, is followed by a list of grasses recorded from the region. Finally, Professor Ian Trueman reviews the 4th edition of *The New Flora of the British Isles* by Clive Stace, which almost inevitably includes further changes in nomenclature, for the most part reflecting DNA analysis, 'splitting' of groups, and the 'lumping' of previously separate(d) taxa. The merging of closely-related genera often leads to the reappearance of old but still familiar names. For example, scarlet pimpernel is now *Anagallis arvensis*; bugloss is *Lycopsis arvensis* and Welsh poppy is *Papaver cambrica*.

To get a copy of the Newsletter, or find out more about the society including information on upcoming events and how to get involved, please email enquiries@ecorecord.org.uk

LIBRARY

Books and book cases have now been moved to the Library's new location at the Moseley All-Services Club, Church Road, Moseley, but the books at the time of writing have yet to be re-shelved. Borrowing will probably be possible from some time in summer. A list of library holdings will be made available to members by email and via the Society's web pages (with a printout for those wanting one). Among other options, books can of course be brought to meetings from October onwards.

WARWICKSHIRE FUNGUS SURVEY - Foray programme for 2019

Sunday 28 April 2019

10.30 am Compton Verney, VC 38, Landranger 151, SP313527. Postcode CV35 9HZ. Park in the nearest visitors' car park on the right. Admission is free for the purpose of fungus "survey and recording".
Contact: Dave Champion. (☎ 07799947291)

Sunday 18 August 2019

10.30 am Pooley Fields VC 38, Landranger sheet 140. Postcode B78 1JA. Turn off the B5000 at SK258023 into Pooley Lane and follow the signs to the Heritage Centre at SK259033. Parking: £1.50 up to 1 hour, £2.50 over 1 hour/all day. The pay machine is located by the Visitor Centre, not in the car park, and correct change is needed £2, £1, 50p, 20p, 10p coins.
Contact: John Williams. (☎ 0121 745 6395)

Sunday 1 September 2019

10.30 am Clowes Wood, VC 38, Landranger sheet 139. Postcode B94 5JP. Park at the boys' club at the end of the lane, at grid ref. SP104743.
Contact: John Williams. (☎ 0121 745 6395)

Sunday 15 September 2019

10.30 am Old Nun Wood, VC 38, OS sheet 140. Postcode CV23 9QA. Park at the sharp bend in Burnthurst Lane at grid reference SP383709.
Contact: Kay Reeve. (☎ 01926 632400)

Sunday 29 September 2019

10.30 am Ryton Wood, VC 38, OS sheet 140. Postcode CV8 3EP. Meet at the track to the wood on the A423(T) at grid reference SP 386 729. Park at the end of the track.
Contact: Dave Champion. (☎ 07799947291)

Sunday 6 October 2019

10.30 am May's Wood, VC 38, Landranger 151. Postcode B95 5NB approx. Meet in the car park at grid reference SP145646 on the minor road linking the A3400 and the A4189. The entrance is adjacent to the two ex Forestry Commission cottages on the brow of the hill. Take care!
Contact: Bert Brand. (☎ 01789 267402)

Sunday 13 October 2019

10.30 am Edge Hill near Ratley, VC 38, OS sheet 151. Postcode OX15 6DL. Meet at the lay-by beyond the junction where the minor road from the A422 meets the B4086 at grid reference SP 381 483.
Contact: Dave Champion. (☎ 07799947291)

Sunday 20 October 2019

10.30 am Grendon Heath, VC 38, OS Landranger 140 or Explorer 232. Postcode CV9 2EJ. Park on the roadside in Folly Lane at grid reference SP280979.
Contact: John & Val Roberts. (☎ 01926 421544)

Sunday 27 October 2019

10.30 am Rough Hill Wood VC 38, Landranger sheet 150. Postcode B80 7EN. Meet at the car park at the entrance to the wood on the A448 Crabbs Cross to Spernal Ash road at grid reference SP052637.
Contact: John Williams. (☎ 0121 745 6395)

Sunday 3 November 2019

10.30 am Kenilworth Common Nature Reserve, VC 38, Landranger 140, SP300731. Postcode CV8 2HR. Park considerably in Highland Road off Common Lane.
Contact: John & Val Roberts. (☎ 01926 421544)

Sunday 17 November 2019

10.30 am Coventry War Memorial Park, VC 38, Landranger sheet 140. Postcode CV3 6PG. Meet in (free) Park and Ride near entrance at SP322773.
Contact: John & Val Roberts. (☎ 01926 421544)

Sunday 24 November 2019

10.30 am Hay Wood, VC 38, Landranger 139, SP 204712. Postcode B93 0DG. Park on roadside verge.
Contact: Dave Champion. (☎ 07799947291)

Sunday 5 January 2020

10.30 am AGM.
Contact: John & Val Roberts. (☎ 01926 421544)

If you want to attend a foray, please inform the contact person a few days beforehand. This will ensure that you do not arrive at a foray that has been cancelled or moved to a different location. The contact person will send a reminder by email to group members two days before a meeting. Please reply stating your intention to attend the meeting or not. If the contact person decides to cancel a meeting, he will notify group members by email.

After a foray, please check *A Fungus Flora of Warwickshire* and the additions to the Flora or the contact person to confirm that any of the less-common species that you have collected have already been recorded for the County. If they have not, PLEASE KEEP DRIED MATERIAL for the herbarium.

Please send lists of species that you have found on the forays in Warwickshire to John Sells, 57 Craven Avenue, Binley Woods, Coventry CV3 2JS or David Antrobus. Where possible, please state the habitat and associated trees and plants for each record.

If you find an interesting fruiting of fungi, and think that others would be interested, please ring John Williams at the number below. It may be possible to arrange a foray at short notice. Permission has been obtained from landowners to collect for scientific purposes. In the interests of conservation, please do not collect more specimens than necessary for your personal use. We do not encourage collection for culinary purposes on our forays.

The Warwickshire Fungus Survey is affiliated to the British Mycological Society. Our web address is:
<http://wfs.bnhsoc.org.uk/>

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To contact the Hon Secretary... or to provide copy for the next Newsletter (notes or comments on what you've seen would be very welcome)

Dr Peter Jarvis: 23 Crosbie Road, Harborne, Birmingham B17 9BG 0121 427 1010 peterjarvis668@gmail.com

SAVE paper, printing and postage costs: could members let me know if they would be happy to receive the Newsletter by email.

Many thanks to the majority of members who have now done this