

Bealeswood Common, Wildlife Records

August 2022

Flowers (DB)

The view downhill from the noticeboard gives a stark reminder of the hot weather of the last three months. A brown sward with very few flowers out and many flowers that went to seed earlier in the month. In the damper areas in the wooded fringes, ditches and of the lower Common (around Bealeswood Lane) plants have fared better and 33 species are currently recorded flowering. However, this compares with 42 species at the same time last year. The flowers are recorded weekly so we can compare flowering times over the years. 10 summer flowering species have been chosen (Red Clover, Wood Dock, Nipplewort, Selfheal, Harebell, Lesser Stitchwort, Meadow Buttercup, Bush Vetch, Red Campion and Pig (or Earth) nut) and this year's flowering times have been compared with those of the previous 10 years. For our 10 species *the length of flowering this year was 6 weeks shorter, on average, than the previous 10 years*. This short flowering season is also reflected in the last flowering date recorded this year, compared with previous years. This was 5 weeks earlier, on average, for our ten species than the last flowering date of previous years. This varied from 1 to a full 9 weeks earlier for some species.

This recording backs up our perception of a tough year for our wildflowers that we expect will have a knock-on effect for the insect, bird and mammal populations in subsequent years.

Butterflies (AP)

Last August the discovery of a colony of Purple Hairstreaks inhabiting the Oak and Ash trees immediately behind this notice board caused much excitement in the Group. The Purple Hairstreak is the only British butterfly that relies solely on an Oak tree to complete its life cycle and the Common has many mature Oak trees on its perimeter making it an ideal habitat. Purple Hairstreaks feed on honeydew produced by aphids in the Oak as well as Ash trees, which also occur on the common. They will often come down early in the morning for moisture and occasionally to feed on bramble and if you are lucky enough to spot one nearby you will see that they have a rather striking purple sheen to their wings. The male has an all over bluish/purple sheen and the female a more concentrated deeper purple on her forewings.



Male Purple Hairstreak

Female Purple Hairstreak

Female laying egg

Egg on Oak

The species starts to emerge at the end of June, flying well into August and is most commonly seen as a small brown butterfly zigzagging about high in the canopies. Here, males compete and try to find a good perch to wait for a mate. Once mating has occurred the female will choose a sheltered, sunny spot at the base of a healthy Oak bud where she will lay an egg. The larvae

hatch the following March when the Oak buds break, feeding on the buds and leaves. By the end of May the larvae have made their way down to the base of the tree trunk where they pupate and emerge as butterflies 3 to 4 weeks later. It is thought that in some instances the pupae are taken by ants down into their nests where they tend to them; there are some ants nests at the base of our trees on Bealeswood. This year, despite an encouraging start with early sightings of Purple Hairstreaks in additional trees on the common, numbers quickly tailed off. It maybe that because of the prolonged hot, dry weather, there has been less honeydew available and greater competition from the grassland butterflies seeking out nectar in the trees because the meadow flowers have been dying off early (see above).



Also recorded this month on the Common (L to R); Painted Lady, Clouded Yellow, Humming Bird Hawk Moth and Wasp Spider.

Birds (AC)

The “autumn passage” of southerly migrating birds has started and this gives the opportunity of unusual stopovers in our locality. Posts in adjacent fields are known to attract Whinchats and Stonechats. As we write, a rare sighting of a Yellow Wagtail has been recorded in nearby water meadows (near Frensham Mill) feeding alongside a group of Pied Wagtails. The smaller and distinctively coloured Yellow has summer breeding in East Anglia and overwinters in Iberia and Africa. The Pied is a partial migrant with noticeable passages in March and October and some local towns (Fleet and Alton) are known to have roosts of up to 500 birds.

Mammals (SL)

Recently about 10 of us gathered to listen to and hear bats on the Common. Two species of Pipistrelle were recorded and at least two other bat species use the common to hunt; the Noctule and Brown Long-eared bat. Foxes and Badgers are often seen at night using trails through long grass. Other large mammals are the Roe and Muntjac deer. A young Roe fawn maybe looking for water was photographed in the dried up Bealeswood Pond.



Moles are more common than generally thought with a UK population estimated at 30 million. During the dry weather they burrow deeper into the soil in search of earthworms. In addition to Rabbits at the smallest end of the scale are the rodents: Brown Rat, Wood Mouse, Field and Bank Vole, Common and Pygmy Shrews and Grey Squirrel are regularly seen, to various reactions of delight/despair.