

Bealeswood Common Wildlife – Review of 2023

February 2024

Perhaps knowing one place intimately is to have a way of knowing all places. [Richard Mabey](#)

In those uncertain days of the first Covid lockdown local naturalists initiated a monthly recording scheme to explore all wildlife across the nine acres of public space that is Bealeswood Common. This is the fourth annual report of the recording group (BWRG). From a target of recording 100 species during lockdown the list has advanced to 674, including 181 newly registered in 2023. The advances have come through many hours of fieldwork studying the breadth of life forms, particularly: insects (88), plants (20) and fungi (67). The year was remarkable for many very exciting discoveries.

Why is Bealeswood Common so special?

Despite modern pressures on all green space both Waverley and Dockenfield councils have sought to preserve the wildlife here but we have become increasingly aware of the importance of the historical legacy in creating this wildlife haven. The name Beales Woode dates back at least to the 16th century and as Bealeswood on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps 150 years ago, where it is marked as rough pasture. Such woodland cattle grazing pastures date back to the Neolithic age. Bealeswood hence may never have been ploughed, nor its nitrogen content increased through agrochemicals.

Both the floral and fungal diversity here are testament to this preservation. A total of 232 trees, grasses and wildflower species have been listed by Dan & Alison Bosence and Colin Hall since 2020 - 10% of the botanical list of the British and Irish Atlas (2000-2017) covering 75 million acres. Pepper Saxifrage, known only from undisturbed grassland habitats, flowers less than annually here but did so in 2023 (photo).



Fungal studies by Manda Adolph have produced a list of 106 species including a truly amazing day of discovery described here in her own words: *[When I joined BWRG in October 2022 I](#)*



[quickly realised that Bealeswood Common was anything but 'common'. The proliferation and variety of those early fungi finds, particularly my first Witch's Hat waxcap fungi, filled me with hope that we had something extra special in our meadow grasslands and I began the search for more waxcaps, hoping to add one or two more. Well, Bealeswood outstripped all expectation, to my utter excitement and delight we finished 2023 with a massive total of 11 species of Waxcaps, many discovered on the same day, including my personal favourite the colourful, enigmatic Parrot Waxcap \(opposite\). I felt like the mycological equivalent of the proverbial "kid in a sweet shop".](#)

National studies of waxcaps have introduced a metric for conservation awareness and Manda's nine species in one visit makes Bealeswood an ancient grassland of regional, close to national priority for conservation. This rich biodiversity of plants and fungi stems from their interdependence enabled perhaps by centuries of undisturbed evolution.

There are an equally diverse host of insect pollinators in support of this community and in 2023 Alex Potts focussed on the most well-known group – bees – making a total of 25 new finds, the highlight, best described by Alex: *During an afternoon's walk looking for the Wood White butterfly in Oaken Wood near Chiddingfold, I encountered an extremely striking bee with very long antennae busily foraging along the verges which I sat and watched for a while. When I looked it up later and identified it to be the Long-horned bee, I found that they have declined significantly across Britain and are now considered to be a UK priority species. In fact, Oaken Wood has the only record for this species in Surrey. A few days later I was amazed to discover a small colony on Bealeswood, enjoying a variety of legumes such as bird foot trefoil, vetches (opposite) and clover. Several were nesting in burrows on a bare section of path, I have high hopes for a good-sized colony this year.*



Long-horned Bee is particularly vulnerable to overgrazing and poor management of grassland, so Bealeswood is an important conservation area for its protection.

Further mining bee finds included a ground-nesting colony of delightful Green-eyed Flower Bees but it was another insect parasitising this warren that provided a discovery new to science for Alex. It resembled a bee but in fact was a fly in disguise - a Villa Bee-fly. The sighting was remarkable as we believe the species to be a Downland Villa, considered extinct until 2015 but there have been widespread scattered sightings since, including now here. Villa Bee-flies are "cuckoos" laying their eggs in other insect's nests (in the act of doing so opposite). But no one knew the host for the



Downland Villa but we do now – Green-Eyed Flower Bee. Philippa Hall carried out four moth night trapping studies between June and September and registered 106 species of which 58 were new in 2023. Continental migrants seen by day included several Silver Y.

Other notable records included the first confirmed breeding of Firecrest, seven

youngsters successfully fledged (above). New BWRG registrations included:

- Pygmy Shrew - trapped and released by Roger Trout at his September mammal day.
- Palmate Newt – Gardener’s Cottage pond. Found by Steve Lockett, February, before he left for a new post in the Midlands – his fieldwork and knowledge is much missed by BWRG.
- Dark Bush Cricket, female (opposite). Bealeswood is rich in grasshopper species but requires systematic audio recording to confirm the full range of species present.
- Brown Hairstreak, the female opposite was observed laying eggs by Alex. One of Britain’s rarest butterflies, a top find of 2023. The eggs are under protection.



A full 2023 checklist will appear on the Dockenfield Parish Council website. *Alan Cox Photos-Alex Potts, Alan Cox & Manda Adolph.*

Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group (BWRG): *Manda Adolph, Dan & Alison Bosence, Alan & Pauline Cox, Philippa & Colin Hall, Alex Potts and Anne Tutt. 01/02/2024*

Toad Watch February/March 2024. Volunteers are required to safeguard Toads crossing Boundary Road from Woodhill Lane to West End Lane. If anyone wants to help, please contact Philippa phall3422@aol.com or Colin Hall CHall3422@aol.com.

2024 Nature Walks Programme



Informal, family friendly events for which there is no charge. If you are interested let the leaders know so they can plan numbers and have your contact details in case of cancellation.

Sunday 7th May 05:00-06:30 Dawn Chorus. Leaders; Alan and Colin CHall3422@aol.com

Date tba Nightjar walk to Abbots Wood Inc. Leader: Alan Cox.

Sunday 16th June. 10:00 am. Wildflowers of Bealeswood: Leaders Dan & Alison Bosence dwbosence@btinternet.com

Saturday 29th June 09:30 Butterfly Walk. Noticeboard or 10.00 at Abbots Wood Inclosure carpark – GU10 4AH. Good Paths. Target: Purple Emperor and others along the way. Leaders: Philippa Hall phall3422@aol.com and Claire Jackson .

Saturday 28th September 09:30-11:00. Small mammals of Bealeswood Common. Leader: Roger Trout (Contact: Jill Trout troutdpc@gmail.com).

Saturday 26th October 11:00-12:30. Fungi of Bealeswood Common, adjourn to the Bluebell. Leader: Manda Adolph amandaadolph@gmail.com.

If you have any special requests to become better acquainted with local wildlife at Dockenfield please contact Friends of Bealeswood Common at: albosence@yahoo.com.