

# Bealeswood Common Wildlife

## as reported by the Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group (BWRG), March 2024

### Wildflowers (DB)

Following a very mild (and very wet!) winter we might expect our spring flowers to bloom early, and indeed, some have. The Lesser Celandine was early to bloom and was even reported flowering in the last week of December (2023), the earliest flowering we have recorded for this species in over 15 years.

But how have the other spring flowers fared? In mid-March (the 14<sup>th</sup>) the 9 native species (i.e excluding non-natives such as Daffodils, pink Primroses, Snowdrops and Lesser Periwinkle) listed in the table below were recorded in flower. The week in the year when they were first recorded flowering is in the middle column and the right-hand column gives the average week of first flowering for each species over the previous 15 years (2009-2023). Whilst two species (Barren Strawberry and Dog-violet) are flowering at same time as their average, the majority of these species are flowering earlier than their recorded average first flowering date over the last 15 years. Some, like the Celandine and Bittercress, by over a month.

Spring Flowers (excl. non-natives)	2024 Week in year	Av. 2009-23 of 1st flower
Wood Anemone	11	12
Lesser Celandine	1	7
Barren Strawberry	9	9
Wavy Bittercress	4	12
Dog's Mercury	7	9
Common Dog-violet	10	10
Greater Stitchwort	11	14
Primrose	4	7
Dandelion	10	11

	Earlier flowering than average
	Same week of flowering

These records are in line with national figures for first flowering dates for our wildflowers. A paper published in 2022 gave results of longer-term studies of the UK flora which indicated that the first flowering dates of our spring flowers are now one month earlier than they were in 1950.



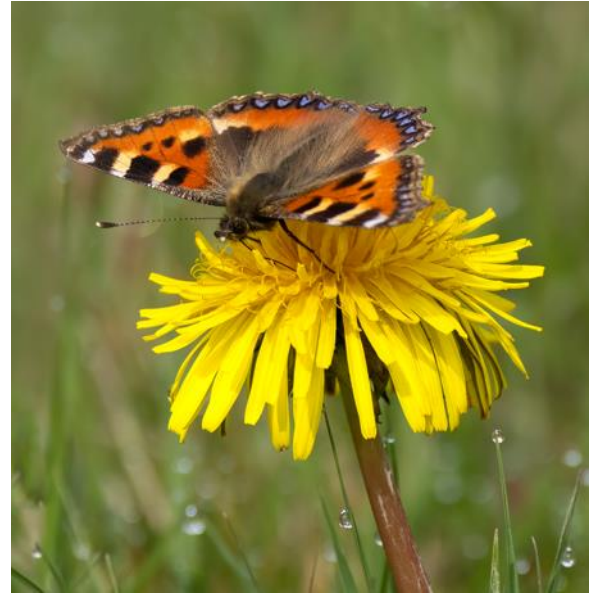
Lesser Celandine (14<sup>th</sup> March) (photos Alan Cox) Wood Anemone (23<sup>rd</sup> March)

## Butterflies (PH)

Early in the year Brimstone, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and Peacock butterflies are often sighted on sunny, warm days. All of these over winter as adults, so an early spell of good weather may wake them up when there are few flowers about. However, if they find a safe cool space they will go back to sleep and wait for longer-term warmth when the food plant for their larvae will be available.

On Bealeswood Common, the first butterflies of the year to emerge from their over-wintering chrysalises are likely to be Orange Tip, Speckled Wood and Holly Blue.

They can be seen as early as March but, in our records going back to 2012, the more usual date is in the first, or second week of April.



Small Tortoiseshell on Dandelion  
(photo Alex Potts)

## Bees (AP)

Buff-tailed bumble bee queens, and a few workers have been recorded on the Common throughout the winter and early spring. During this time they are probably finding nectar from adjoining gardens whilst hunkering down in the grasses on the Common. Since February they have been seen foraging on Dandelion and Gorse on the Common.

Also recorded this month are Southern Cuckoo Bumblebee Queens that find and enter the nests of the Buff-taileds, killing the queen, and taking over the nest. She then lays her own eggs to be reared by the unsuspecting Buff-tailed workers. The solitary-living Hairy-footed Flower bee is one of the earliest solitary bees to appear in the spring. They are small, very fast in flight and emit a high-pitched, shrill buzz. Nesting on the areas of exposed clay soils on the Common, they can be seen visiting Primroses and flowering Gorse.



Queen Buff-tailed bumblebee on gorse  
(left). Hairy-Footed Flower Bee on primrose  
(below). This is the first record of this  
species on Bealeswood Common.  
(photos Alex Potts).



## Birds (AC)

There are three annual events on the bird calendar for the month of March:

*Winter Bird Departures*- Our most obvious winter visitors were the Redwings and, although becoming more occasional in the late winter, a small flock roosted each evening on the main common in the first ten days of the month. The roost was high in the tree belt on the south-east edge of the common. Later, they will have commenced their migration, first, north to Norfolk/Lincolnshire before crossing the North Sea to Fenno-Scandinavia and some east into Russia to breed.

*Passage*- Siskins are uncommon on garden feeders in winter instead assembling in large flocks and feeding in Alder woodland. But by early March they disperse and make regular use of garden food supplies and numbers swell over a two-week period – a stopover on their journey north. Redpolls are often their companions in winter and this year a flock of five made a brief stopover in a garden bordering the Common.



Redpoll feeding on grass seeds (photos Alex Potts) Chiffchaff in full song on Blackthorn

*Spring Arrivals*- Typical for March are the Chiffchaff and Blackcap. Both winter in the Mediterranean region and usually Chiffchaffs can be heard in song from the third week onwards. This year was typical as one was seen on March 14<sup>th</sup>. Normally a dull olive grey, this individual had a green sheen to its flight feathers. Another was heard on March 15<sup>th</sup> but it wasn't until March 21<sup>st</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup> that they were widespread with several song territories on both the Main and Lower Common. Also, on Mar 22<sup>nd</sup> there was an arrival of Blackcaps with males singing in several locations. Annoyingly, the Merlin birdsong App has been suggesting Blackcaps have been present all year but I think this is a false call. Britain has two distinctive populations of Blackcap; winterers that arrive from mid European breeding territories and our summer birds from southern Europe; no one has reported wintering Blackcaps in Dockenfield, but they are regular as close by as Winchester.

*Round and about*- The renovated pond and inflow ditch was visited by a splendid male Grey Wagtail after rainfall and a pair of Mallard are trying to set up home there. Other ducks visiting the Common are the spectacular, but introduced, Mandarin ducks. Ravens can be heard calling on the ridge above Dockenfield, suggesting they are breeding nearby. Skylarks are trying to re-establish territories just off the bridlepath to the east of the Lower Common. Firecrests are nesting in two localities on the Main Common and a female Bullfinch is setting up home in one of the Main Common "islands".



Male Firecrest (photos Alex Potts)



Male mandarin Duck in spring sunshine

## Fungi (AA)

The cool, wet month that we've had has been a little disappointing on the fungi front on Bealeswood, yet still our winter stalwarts are still to be seen.

Reliably, the perennial Hoof Fungus, (*Fomes fomentarius*) is still showing down by the pond although it now has a thick covering of green algae.

There are still some Bitter Oysterling (*Panellus stipticus*) clusters in the Main Common deciduous woodland and a few groups of Turkey Tail (*Trametes versicolor*) and Hairy Curtain Crust (*Stereum hirsutum*) are clinging on in the woodpiles lower down the Common.

There was a brief showing of Orange Peel fungus in mid March and the rather beautiful Tawney Funnel (*Lepista flaccida*) is looking good just left of the lower compost heap on the Main Common.



Tawny Funnel (*Lepista flaccida*) (photos A. Adolph) Winter Polypore (*Polyporus brumalis*)

The highlight of the month though, has been two species new to the Common, the Winter Polypore (*Polyporus brumalis*) which first peeked out of the surrounding oak leaves at the end of February, but with the tenacity of most polypores, has hung on throughout March and finally the spectacularly gelatinous and wonderfully named Witches' Butter (*Exidia glandulosa*) which almost escaped my notice but for tripping over a stick in the woodland.

## **2024 Nature Walks Programme**

Informal, family-friendly events for which there is no charge. If you are interested let the leaders know so they have numbers and can contact you in case of cancellation. For all events meet at the notice board on Bealeswood Common (follow the track down from the Bluebell pub to the end and its on your right)

**Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May; 05:00 – 06:30.** Dawn Chorus. Contact Colin Hall [CHall3422@aol.com](mailto:CHall3422@aol.com)

**Friday 7<sup>th</sup> June; 20.45 – 22.30.** Nightjar & Woodcock walk to Abbots Wood Inclosure. Contact Alan Cox: [alanfjcox@gmail.com](mailto:alanfjcox@gmail.com)

**Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> June; 10:00 – 12.00.** Wildflowers of Bealeswood. Contact Dan Bosence [dwjbosence@btinternet.com](mailto:dwjbosence@btinternet.com)

**Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> June; 09:30.** Butterfly Walk- Purple Emperor and others. Noticeboard, or, at 10.00 at Abbots Wood Inclosure carpark – GU10 4AH. Contact Philippa Hall [phall3422@aol.com](mailto:phall3422@aol.com)

**Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> September; 09:30-11:00.** Small mammals of Bealeswood Common. Contact Roger and Jill Trout [Jill Trout troutdpc@gmail.com](mailto:jilltrout@troutdpc@gmail.com)

**Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October; 11:00-12:30.** Fungi of Bealeswood Common, adjourn to the Bluebell. Contact Manda Adolph [amandaadolph@gmail.com](mailto:amandaadolph@gmail.com)

For online versions of our monthly notices (with additional text and photos) see

[www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife](http://www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife)

*Manda Adolph, Dan & Alison Bosence, Alan & Pauline Cox, Philippa & Colin Hall, Alex Potts, Roger & Jill Trout and Anne Tutt. 27<sup>th</sup> March, 2024.*

**Additional photos that we didn't have room for on the notice board are on the following pages**

**Bees, flies and birds from Alex Potts:**

Dark Edged Beefly



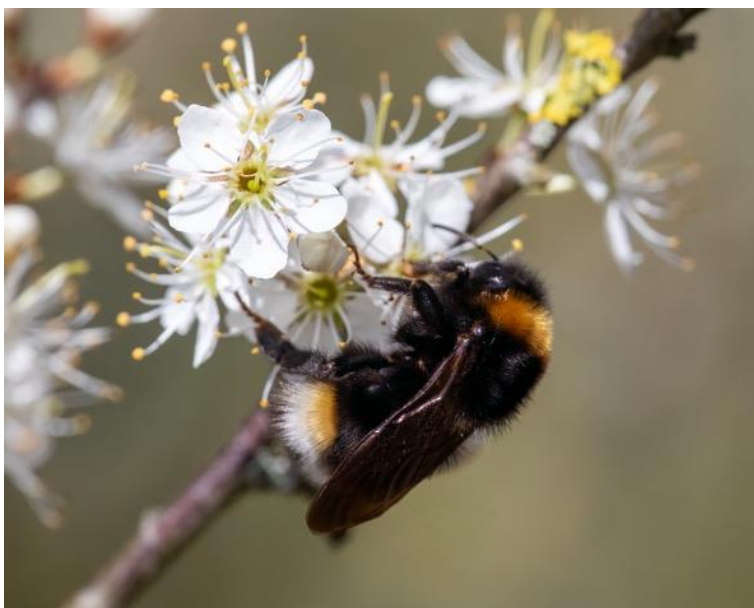
Gwynne's Mining Bee



Ladderbacked Hoverfly



Vestal Cuckoo bee



Male Firecrest



Male mandarin Duck in spring sunshine





**Birds and a mammal from Alan Cox:**

Longtailed Tit x3



Bank Vole (22<sup>nd</sup> March) in Blackthorn and wild rose

