

APRIL 2020

# Bristol Naturalist News



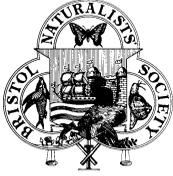
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***Discover Your Natural World***

Bristol Naturalists' Society  
BULLETIN NO. 589 APRIL 2020





Bristol Naturalists' Society  
***Discover Your Natural World***

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**Health & Safety on walks:** Members  
participate at their own risk. They are  
responsible for being properly clothed and shod.  
Dogs may only be brought on a walk with prior  
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Hair Ice

**Cover picture:** Woodpecker damage to a  
small-leaved lime – See final 4 paras on  
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## Diary of events

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**Council** usually meets on the first Wednesday of each month. If you have any matters you wish to be discussed by Council, please contact the Hon. Sec. at least a week in advance.

**Visitors & guests** are welcome, free, at our lectures and field meetings. If contact details are given, please contact the leader beforehand, and make yourself known on arrival. We hope you will enjoy the meeting, and consider joining the Society. To join, visit <https://bristolnats.org.uk> and click on membership. Members are members of ALL sections.

***NB Events may be cancelled at short notice: check before you go!  
For the Library, check with Clive Lovatt or Jim Webster (page 15)***

### MARCH

Weekly: BNS [Library](#) open – Wednesdays 1.15-2.15, Saturdays 10.15-12.15 page 15  
~~Wed 25 Talk: 'St Vincent's Spring' **Cancelled** [Geology](#) 10.30 page 13~~

### APRIL

Weekly: BNS [Library](#) open – Wednesdays 1.15-2.15, Saturdays 10.15-12.15 page 15  
*(except Easter Saturday 11 April)*

Thu 2	Society midweek walk	<a href="#">Society</a>	10.00	page 4
Sat 4	Sand Point	<a href="#">Ornithology</a>	09.00	page 17
Sun 26	Ashton Court Meadows	<a href="#">Botany</a>	14.30	page 8

### MAY

Weekly: BNS [Library](#) open – Wednesdays 1.15-2.15, Saturdays 10.15-12.15 page 15  
Sat 16 Blaise BioBlitz [Society](#) page 13  
Wed 27 Uley Bury [Botany](#) 18.00 page 8  
Sat 30 Stoke Park [Botany](#) 14.30 page 8

### OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

Dates TBA	Ed Drewitt's river trips, bird watching	<a href="#">Bristol</a> Ferry	07.00	page 19
Until 4 May	Wildlife photographer of the year 2019	<a href="#">MShed</a>		page 13
Sat 4 April	Spring on the Prom	<a href="#">Gorge</a> & Downs	14.00	page 20
Fri 10-Mon 13 April	Sculpture festival	<a href="#">Botanic</a> Garden	10-5	page 19
Thu 23 April	Growing Biodynamically	Avon <a href="#">Organic</a> Gp	19.00	page 19
Sat 25 April	Birdsong on the Downs	<a href="#">Gorge</a> & Downs	10.00	page 20
Thu-Sun 7-10 May	Pembrokeshire visit (Geology)	<a href="#">WEGA</a>		page 13

**WE WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:** Mrs Jenny Brookes; Mrs Helen Barratt; Mr John Rossetti.

### Subscription Renewal 2020 FINAL REMINDER

Subscriptions were due on 1<sup>st</sup> January. The current rates are:-

Single Membership	£25-00
'Household'	£35-00
Student	£10-00

Payment options:

- By bank transfer to: **Lloyds TSB, Account number 00697372, Sort code 30-92-13**
  - By cheque to: **The Membership Secretary, 81 Cumberland Road, Bristol BS1 6UG**
- If you do pay by transfer **please quote your name as a reference**, otherwise there is no way of linking the payment with your membership.

***Please note: Members not renewing this month  
will no longer receive BNS publications***

# SOCIETY ITEMS

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## MID-WEEK WALK

### ASHTON COURT

Thursday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April. 10.00am

Leader Beth Yates ([beth.yates333@btinternet.com](mailto:beth.yates333@btinternet.com))

Meet 10am at the Church Lodge car park on the south side of the estate, postcode BS41 9JH. Grid Ref: **ST55937131**. The charge is currently £1.20 per day. The route is 3.7 miles long and covers woods, far reaching views, Justin's Meadow and the mansion with its gardens. There should be some spring blossom, early bees and butterflies, bird song and much more. The paths are good and we aim to finish by 1pm.

*Please notify the leader if you would like to join the walk.*

## Bristol Weather

### February 2020 and Winter Summary

As seems to be the current pattern the winter period, 2019/20 (December to February inclusive), has again predominately been a mild and wet period. With winds driven mainly from a SSW to a WSW direction by a vigorous Jet Stream aloft, rain and storms have hit large areas of the UK. More locally the winter of 2019/20 was the 7<sup>th</sup> wettest on record which is 139 years of continuous data for the city of Bristol. The total rainfall for the 3 months was 372.4 mm which represents 159% of the all-time average. It was the 4<sup>th</sup> warmest winter in 130 years of continuous data for Bristol with an average temperature of 7.5°C for the 3 winter months. The joint warmest were 1988/9 and 2015/16 which both recorded an average temperature of 8.0°C.

A notable feature of February was the passing of three named storms Ciara, Dennis and Jorge. Accompanying the heavy rain and consequent flooding were some strong winds which even penetrated our generally less exposed area. It was in fact the 3<sup>rd</sup> windiest February with respect to the average wind speed and it has been the windiest with respect to the maximum daily wind gust at 34 mph. The average wind speed of 9.9 mph was the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest after 10.5 mph in January 2007 and 10.0 mph in March 2008.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> February the highest average wind speed of 22.5 mph was the highest recorded at this site with data beginning in May 1995. The maximum gust of 51 mph on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February was the highest since 54 mph was recorded on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

It has been the third wettest February in 138 years of continuous records. At 158.1 mm it represents 257% of the 30 average for the site in February.

It has been the 4<sup>th</sup> equal warmest February in 130 years of continuous data. The average temperature of 7.9°C, 2.3°C above the average, was equal with 1961. Warmer February's were 8.8°C in 1990, 8.2°C in 1998 and 8.1°C in 2019. An indication of the mild temperatures can be evidenced by the lowest daily mean temperature of 5.2°C on the 5<sup>th</sup> February which was the highest for the month since this data started in 1994.

Over the longer term it should be pointed out that Bristol has now experienced 7 consecutive months of higher than average rainfall (all over 100 millimetres). Trawling through the data for the city going back to 1853, with some data missing, there has never been seven consecutive months with >100mm before. It is also a record that we have not previously had 7 consecutive months of higher than average rainfall. No wonder the ground is saturated!

Barry Horton. 6<sup>th</sup> March

***The Importance for Wildlife of our Roadside Verges***

Suffolk Naturalists' Society recently organised a conference on this topic, attended by BNS members Bob Buck & Giles Morris, who manage the St George's Flower Bank LNR on the A369 near Pill. Here is a summary of key points raised on a very informative day. Speakers included representatives from Plantlife, Buglife, Butterfly Conservation, Highways England and several local authorities. They listed 28 Local Authorities who "manage" a total of

2,189 protected verges in the UK. Suffolk have had Roadside Nature Reserves for over 40 years. The only authority from our area that merited a mention was Gloucestershire.

A summary of the best practice management regime for both flora and fauna is:

- No cutting between April and late August – until flowering and seed-setting is complete
- Manage most verges with just 1 or 2 cuts per year
- Cut and collect is essential – to reduce soil fertility
- Low soil fertility is key – reduced growth of vigorous species allows more floral diversity
- Aim for a mosaic of sward length – leaving some longer refuges uncut for invertebrate + mammal over-wintering
- Reduce hedge cutting/flailing to once every 3 years or less – improves invertebrate diversity and berry production
- Maintaining a 1m width close-cut strip next to the carriageway is usually sufficient to provide adequate sight-lines for drivers

It was pleasing to find that the management of St George's Flower Bank fulfils most of the criteria. Adopting these basic guidelines not only increases the biodiversity of roadside verges, it is cheaper for local authorities than more regular mowing and also provides excellent carbon sequestration.

***Low fertility > less annual growth > greater biodiversity > less mowing required > money saved. A win-win result!***

**Current Thinking - Future Generation**

*We welcome the return to our pages of a correspondent last heard from in October 2010, when speculating on the relationship (or lack of it) between design and apparent need in insects' wings and antennae. Now he re-emerges from his Yorkshire home with a letter of moment for the current generation – in two senses: **Oliver Milburn writes:***

A calculation occurred to me which I haven't seen anywhere else.

HM Govt recently announced that all new cars must be electric, starting 12 years hence. A decent limo, regardless of technology, runs at about 150kW (1), a small runabout at 50 kW (2). Suppose it is driven for 1 hour a day, 6 days a week, 50 weeks a year which is  $108_{10}4$  seconds (3). So the small runabout takes  $108_{10}4 \times 50\text{kW} = 54_{10}9\text{J}$  a year. This must come from power stations, nuclear, gas, wind or solar. Last year my house consumed, totting up the electric bills,  $48_{10}8\text{J}$ . If each household is to possess one small electric car, the National Grid is going to need  $54_{10}9 \div 48_{10}8 =$  eleven times the present number of power stations, just for motoring. Eleven times. Regrettably, new power stations never get built on the sites of London art galleries, they are greenfield so Bar-tailed Godwits get it in the neck.

Notes

- 1) Maurice A Kelly (2011) Russian Motor Vehicles, Veloce Publishing, ISBN 978 1 845843 00 7
- 2) Brian Long (2013) The Zero Carbon Car, Crowood Press, ISBN 978 1 84797 421 1
- 3) I use handy semilog notation, so  $108_{10}4$  means  $108 \times 10^4 = 1,080,000$ .

*Oliver Milburn, electronics engineer, t/a Tangent Oscillator*

**Hair Ice** is an ice structure that only grows on rotting logs of broadleaf woodlands, usually on Hazel or Beech, and the best chance of seeing it is to walk in these woodlands between the latitudes of 45° and 55° North on a cold, still day following a humid night where the temperature is just below freezing. Bristol, being at the centre of the region covered by the BNS is sited at 51.454514° North. This ice structure first fascinated naturalists over 100 years ago. Alfred Wegener (1880 - 1930) was a geophysicist, meteorologist and polar researcher who first postulated the theory of continental drift and plate tectonics but he was also intrigued by the formation of hair like filaments of approximately 0.01 millimetres emanating from rotting wood and noticed the presence of thin threads of fungus mycelium. He thought the two might be related. In more modern times, Christian Mätzler, Professor of Applied Physics at the University of Bern, Switzerland became gripped by the issue of how this structure is formed. He sampled logs for fungus and found that one species consistently appeared to be associated with the frozen filaments; *Exidiopsis effusa*. Then in the lab he worked out how the fungus produced the ice filaments. He wrote, (the) *driving mechanism responsible for producing ice filaments at the wood surface is 'ice segregation'. Liquid water near the branch surface freezes in contact with the cold air creating an ice front and 'sandwiching' a thin water film between this ice and the wood pores. Suction resulting from repelling intermolecular forces acting at this 'wood-water-ice sandwich' then gets the water inside the wood pores to move toward the ice front where it freezes and adds to the existing ice.* Read the full findings in, **Hofman, Preuss and Mätzler**, 'Evidence for Biological Shaping of Ice' in **Biogeosciences**, Vol 12, Issue 14 (June 2015). See also page [20](#)).

**Badger Cull:** The Government has finally listened to organisations, such as the Avon Wildlife Trust, the Wildlife Trusts in Wales and the Badger Trust (all of which campaigned to vaccinate badgers) and also to the independent, scientific studies carried out and delivered to Parliament in 1997 and 2007. The latter report concludes that, *'Detailed evaluation of the Randomised Badger Culling Trials (RBCT) and other scientific data highlights the limitations of badger culling as a control measure for cattle TB. The overall benefits of proactive culling were modest .... and were realised only after co-ordinated and sustained effort. While many other approaches to culling can be considered, available data suggest that none is likely to generate benefits substantially greater than those recorded in the RBCT and many are likely to cause detrimental effects. Given its high costs and low benefits we therefore conclude that badger culling is unlikely to contribute usefully to the control of cattle TB in Britain and recommend that TB control efforts focus on measures other than badger culling. In contrast with the situation regarding badger culling, our data and modelling suggest that substantial reductions in cattle TB incidence could be achieved by improving cattle-based control measures. Such measures include the introduction of more thorough controls on cattle movement through zoning or herd attestation, strategic use of the IFN test in both routine and pre-movement testing, quarantine of purchased cattle, shorter testing intervals, careful attention to breakdowns in areas that are currently low risk ... and so on.* In effect, the report was suggesting that biosecurity would be a more effective weapon in the fight against bovine TB. The Government will now be entering a five-year vaccination trial period.

**Birds:** The latest assessment of the size of bird populations in the UK has just been published. **The Wren** is the commonest bird. Chaffinch numbers are down by 1.15 million pairs in seven years. There are no waders with more than a 100,000 breeding pairs. More information next month.

**Bumblebees:** A study from the University of California, Davis, by Combes, et al., has demonstrated the ability of bumblebees to carry loads that would equate with 60, 70 or 80% of their body weight (which would be a huge burden for humans) yet these amazing insects become more economical in flight the more heavily loaded they are, which defies any kind of sense in terms of energetics and is reminiscent of the urban myth that bumblebees defied the laws of physics in their ability to fly. When the research team analysed the bees flight they found that bumblebees have two different ways of dealing with increasing loads. 1) By increasing stroke amplitude, or in layman's terms, maximizing the extent of oscillation of the wing which they will typically do when heavily loaded and 2) Increase wingbeat frequency. 1) is insufficient so 2) is employed which generates more lift but should increase the energy cost. The researchers used tethered bumblebees in a flight chamber through which they could measure the amount of carbon dioxide the bee produced and thus the amount of energy used. Yet bumblebees also have a subtly different, alternative, flying mode that enables them to carry heavier loads while expending less energy than when they increase flapping frequency and bees can choose to employ this economy mode or not. So, when the bees are lightly loaded or rested they were more likely to increase wingbeat frequency. However, when they are more heavily loaded they switch to their mysterious economy mode which produces enough force to lift the load but only a small increase, or even a decrease, in flapping frequency. Read more in, 'Kinematic flexibility allows bumblebees to increase energetic efficiency when carrying heavy loads' published in **Science Advances**, Vol 6, No. 6, Feb 2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tl7SpSf3T4&feature=>

**Insects:** I have used anecdotal comparisons of how hard it used to be to clean off the thousands of bug splatters on the windscreen, bonnet and number plate of the family car compared with the absence of insect splats in modern times to illustrate the decline in our insect population but two studies in Denmark and Kent have used the same method to indicate what is being called an 'insect apocalypse'. The survey of insects hitting screens in rural Denmark used data collected every summer from 1997 to 2017 and concluded that there had been an 80% decline in abundance with a parallel decline in insectivorous birds, such as, Swallows and Martins. The results were published in **Ecology and Evolution** last year whilst the study in Kent used a 'Splatometre' fitted over the number plate to count the number of deceased insects over 700 car journeys during June to August in 2019. The bug splats were used to calculate the number of impacts per kilometre. The results showed a 50% reduction on the results gained by the RSPB in 2004 using the same methodology. One interesting factor was that the study found that, despite the less aerodynamic shape, vintage cars killed fewer insects than modern cars. A third study, published in **Conservation Biology** analysed weekly data from 1969 to 2010 on a stream in a German nature reserve where the only human impact had been climate change. It claimed that overall, water temperature had increased by 1.88° C and discharge patterns had significantly altered with an accompanying 81.6% decline in insect abundance. The researchers conclude that climate change had already altered ecosystems, even in protected areas.

**Climate Change:** Last month was the wettest February in the UK since records began in 1862, (the year the BNS was formed). The UK received 209.1mm or 8.23 inches of rain which is 237% above the average for the month in recent times (1981-2010) but some areas got 3 or 4 times more than this average.

*Lesley Cox, 7-8<sup>th</sup> March 2020.*

# BOTANY SECTION

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**HON. SEC:-** David Hawkins [ecoteric@googlemail.com](mailto:ecoteric@googlemail.com)

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## FIELD MEETINGS – the year of limestone grassland

From late March to early October, the BNS Botany Section will organise at least one field meeting a month in or relatively close to Bristol. Many of our own meetings this year will be at special sites on Carboniferous or Oolitic Limestone. More extensive programmes throughout botanical vice-counties 6 and 34 (North Somerset and West Gloucestershire respectively) are organised by the Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG) and the Plant Group of the Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society (GNS). A few of these meetings will be joint meetings or will be advertised as open to BNS members by invitation.

### ASHTON COURT MEADOWS

**Sunday 26 April**

**David Hawkins**

**2.30pm**

To stroll through these wonderfully colourful and species-rich neutral grasslands in spring-time is one of the greatest joys available close to the city. Well known for their colony of Green-winged Orchids (*Anacamptis morio*), which might be beginning to emerge, the meadows are home to many floristic delights. We'll also skirt through woodland edges to seek out some sylvan species. Meet in the golf course car park, via the entrance off the A369 Abbots Leigh Road, at ST553727.

**For your diary: BNS Botany field meetings in May**

### ULEY BURY

**Wednesday 27 May**

**Clive Lovatt**

**6.00 pm**

A joint meeting with the Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society to look at the very species-rich open east-facing Oolitic limestone banks of this Cotswold hill-fort, where the rare *Drabella muralis* (formerly *Draba muralis*) Wall Whitlowgrass, occurs.

### STOKE PARK

**Saturday 30 May**

**David Hawkins and a BNS entomologist**

**2.30 pm**

A joint meeting of BNS Botany and Entomology sections. This Bristol City Council site, so prominent beside the M32, is soon to be subject to cattle-grazing. As well as benefitting from cross-pollination, we should be able to gain a base-line knowledge to allow us to comment on the effects of the new management.

**Please see March 2020 Bulletin for preliminary details of BNS Botany field meetings from June to September.**

## BOTANICAL NOTES

### FIELD MEETING REPORT

**LEIGH WOODS, Sunday 23 February, report by Clive Lovatt**

**B**y good fortune, the afternoon meeting took place during a short interlude in the second successive storm to hit the country in as many weeks. Thirteen of us assembled where the Coronation Avenue (planted 1953) of beech trees beside the old Carriage Drive enters Leigh Woods. As Clive explained, the use of the plural here is deliberate. Looking across the Drive, we have the New Plantation of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, a hornbeam wood. To its north is the old preserves, a coppice wood in Abbots Leigh parish. To the south-east is the National Trust wood pasture mainly in Long Ashton parish;

and between them the Paddock, probably the area of disputed wasteland long ago, enclosed by two walls.

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We spent two hours between the driveway and the wood margin, rarely straying out of site of the parked cars. We started with [very] Early Dog-violet in flower beneath our feet, and the green-twigged Spindle. A young rather spindly shrub with narrow pointed buds confused us until Jenny Greenwood keyed it out: alternate buds, lacking prickles, spines or thorns, buds single, with at least 4 scales protecting the shoots, with stipule scars below the leaf scars, and the lateral buds pressed to the twig. Then, not a poplar, buds about 1 cm, with about 10 slightly hairy scales and dark slender hairy and zig-zagging (of course!) twigs: Hornbeam! As we discovered, you need to know your plant anatomy & terminology.

Nearby some pines: relatively short two-needled, and a reddish trunk: Scots Pine. Libby Houston though not present was 'with us'. Recently asked if you could identify Whitebeams from their twigs, she said, 'Yes, as long as there are leaves on the ground'. So we looked down for leaves and found instead the spiny evidence of Sweet Chestnut, and leaves of Sycamore.

Mark Kitchen ran through the key for planted Lawson's Cypress and made sure we wouldn't mix it up with hedging Leylandii: both are parsley-scented. Yew has two neat ranks of leaves, but Western Hemlock-spruce has multiple rows and the leaves conspicuously vary in length and are white beneath where the stomata aggregate.

Leaving behind sycamores, we reached the remains of the high 'Warren wall' lying outside the ancient woodbank of the coppice wood. Here the vegetation changed. Aside from what may have been the remains of a garden, with snowdrops and the remains of Giant Bellflower, an old low-pollarded oak atop the bank as a boundary tree, Dog's mercury and masses of Ash saplings, and coppiced Small-leaved Lime.

Whilst David Hawkins was looking at liverworts, someone drew attention to a trunk covered with small holes in horizontal bands. Clive remembered seeing a picture in Oliver Rackham's *New Naturalist* book, *Woodlands* (2006, page 51). The British 'Sapsuckers' are Great Spotted Woodpeckers. Rackham wrote that he had only begun to see the holes around 1970, and although continental records went back to the 1930's, he could find no reference to the phenomenon in the UK in bird or forestry books.

One of the group, Heather Clarke, kindly tracked down and sent me a link to a paper by JN Gibbs in *British Birds* for March 1983, pages 109-117 entitled Sap-sucking by woodpeckers in Britain, 'drilling' or 'tree-ringing' and producing 'peck-marks'. The date of attack can be derived from scars in the successive tree-rings. Oaks, Poplars, Sycamore and wild and cultivated Limes are known to be affected, and long-term observations have been made in the Forest of Dean. Indeed, the paper quotes a reference to affected Lime in Leigh Woods published in the same journal in 1933.

Wynne-Edwards' *A Lime tree ringed by Woodpeckers* (*British Birds* 27 (1933): 260-262) includes a photograph, clearly an old Small-leaved Lime, long since last coppiced, and of the form near the edge of the plateau immediately north of Stokeleigh Camp. Likewise he couldn't confirm the bird responsible but stated that Great Spotted Woodpeckers had nested close by in 1930 and whilst Green Woodpeckers were plentiful, he had not seen Lesser-spotted Woodpeckers. The ringing was said to be 'most uncommon' in the woods, though the title suggests it was isolated. Thanks to David Hawkins who went back and confirmed our example was also Small-leaved Lime (see the front cover).

Another well-marked trunk, pointed out by Mark Kitchen, was a battle-scarred Ash, more dead than merely suffering dieback. Mark told us that internal build-up of pressure in the trunk, as well as the fragility of branches, makes felling difficult and potentially

dangerous. Only wealthy landowners can undertake protective felling, but the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust has set aside funds for removing trees around paths in its reserves.

As the air began to chill, we steadily walked on, seeing a lot of Sweet Chestnut leaves, and identifying Wych Elm with small claret-red breaking buds, and Guelder-rose, which Lois Pryce identified afterwards from its smooth grey ridged twigs and pairs of reddish-green buds. Silver Birch and Wild Cherry were identified from bark, but we didn't see the 'sticky-buds' of Horse Chestnut many of us must have dissected at school Biology lessons.

As we left, we agreed it had been a most enjoyable afternoon out, and we thought we could meet again next year, perhaps at Blaise Castle Estate, which will have more open-grown material to investigate and name.

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### **A rose by any other name would smell as sweet: putting order into our wild plants**

Arising from the publication a year ago of the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of Clive Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles* there are some new scientific names for our wild plants. We are still using 'old' names for data entry, so it is something of a transition period as we learn to remember that *Jacobaea vulgaris* (formerly *Senecio jacobaea*\*) is the new name for Common Ragwort, whilst *Senecio vulgaris*, Groundsel, retains its name.

When BSBI established a recommended list of *English Names of Wild Flowers* (yes, it includes grasses and trees as flowers) over 40 years ago they were keen to make it scientifically rigorous and adopted a binomial system. Of course visual and folk-classification differs from the increasingly DNA-based scientific classification. Stace admits that the *Jacobaea* ragworts are not easily distinguishable from the newly-restricted scientific genus *Senecio* – which includes both the perennial ragworts and the annual groundsels. Fortunately, *Myosotis* is still Forget-me-not.

In binomial English names the 'genus' is given last, and the specific 'sort of' name comes first, as in the Bristol Whitebeam, the adjective before the subject, whilst the reverse applies for the scientific name, *Sorbus bristoliensis*. In the recently published *101 Rare Plants of Wales* the plants are sequenced in alphabetical order by *English* name, with the surely un-wanted effect that visually similar plants are scattered throughout the book and not easily compared (though there are sections for Eyebrights and Fragrant Orchids) whilst, for instance Perennial Centaury and Perennial Knawel follow consecutively. It would be better in *Welsh*: the Radyr Hawkweed is *Heboglys Radyr* and the Snowdonia Hawkweed *Heboglys Yryri*.

\*Footnote. We will follow the lead of the Wild Flower Society in introducing the new scientific names in this way.

### **Passing on an interest in botany**

Next, some historical snippets which have as a connecting theme how an interest in botany is passed down through the generations. In my case I wouldn't say my father pressed the subject on me, but maybe the seed was sown. I have the three-volume set of Edward Step's *Wayside and Woodland Blossoms* he gave to his father a few years before I was born. In the first is a note, 'Merry Xmas. Hope you get as much pleasure out of this as I get out of mine. If you like it, perhaps the other two volumes will come later'. If you've got any similar stories, I'd be pleased to put them in a later Bulletin.

### **TB Ryves (1930-2019)**

BSBI News for January 2020 arrived as I was writing the note on plant names above. I didn't know him but in the obituary of **Thomas Bruno Ryves (1930-2019)**; he was always known as Bruno), a nuclear physicist by profession, it reveals that his first taste of botany was 'at the very early age of eight, when he was escorted by an elderly lady botanist in search of *Arabis scabra*, Bristol Rock-cress in Clifton Gorge'. The obituary doesn't mention

whether the lady was a Clifton resident, or had escorted him from London. If the former it would probably have been Mrs Sandwith, who was in her late 60s at the time.

Ryves was born in London but evacuated in 1940 to Cheltenham. His botanical 'claim to fame' was not as a field botanist, but as the principal author of the BSBI Publication, *Alien Grasses of the British Isles* (TB Ryves, EJ Clement and MC Foster, 1996). Eric Clement described himself and the other author as merely Ryves' scribes, so significantly did he upgrade the unpublished section on grasses they omitted from their own *Alien Plants of the British Isles* (1994). Ron Payne, our Botanical President for some years, who was especially keen on alien grasses, is mentioned in the first paragraph of the acknowledgements. [Contents / Diary](#)

### **More on AS Montgomery**

Also in BSBI News for January 2020 is the definitive account of **Archibald Sim Montgomery (1843-1922) and his herbarium**, with a portrait photo, by Beverley Ronalds from Australia. Not realising this was effectively 'in press' I wrote a short account of him and his botanising at Bristol in the November 2019 Bulletin. Interestingly, around 1800, the Ronalds were nurserymen near the Montgomery's sawmill in Middlesex and compiled their own herbarium; a niece married into the Montgomery family in the early 1800s.

### **A botanical lineage and a literary echo**

This sort of indirect transfer of an interest in the subject appears to be quite common. An example with local interest is that two Miss Worsley's provided local plant lists for the botanical geographer HC Watson in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Anna Worsley's was from Bristol before 1835 and her niece Alice Worsley's was from Perth (Scotland), 1872. Anna Worsley married Frederick Russell, another Bristol botanist, but they moved away and had no children, so one can clearly imagine the botanical conversations they had with Mrs Russell's brother's daughter.

Could she be the Aunt Anna who instructs Winifred and Emily Forrester and John, their younger brother, on field botany and the already out-of-date botanical classification of the Linnean system in *Flowers and the Plants they grow on*, by Ursula Ware of Clifton (1876)? The late Mr Nethercott, a long-serving Treasurer of the BNS and a keen botanist wrote a paper (sadly, unpublished) on the thinly disguised local connections in this book. Portishead is re-invented as Bayhead, and Shirehampton loses its shire and becomes Hampton. An extract from the first chapter: 'Aunt Anna, I do not like Botany', said Emily. 'Flowers are very pretty, but Botany is very hard and dry'. Aunt Anna replied by saying, 'The Spring will soon be here; suppose that we determine this summer ... to see how many flowers we can find and keep a list of them'. 'Yes' replied Winifred, 'we will start with the five that we have today'. [Snowdrops, Lichen, Moss, Ferns and Catkins.]

### **'Professor' White**

The British herbarium of Noel Sandwith (1901-1965) and his mother Cecil (1871-1961) was donated to the National Museum in the Netherlands at Leiden. The over 6,000 specimens have been digitised and the labels transcribed (after a fashion). I was browsing through them recently and looked at a sheet of *Epilobium roseum*, Pale Willow-herb, which they collected on 24 July 1912, a few months after the publication of White's *Flora of Bristol*. The locality, written carefully on pencil lines on the sheet reads, 'Found as a weed in the garden of Professor White, Woodland Road, Clifton'. The writing appears to be Mrs Sandwith's.

White (1846-1932) describes himself on the title page of his *Flora* as 'Special Lecturer in Systematic Botany in the University of Bristol' and indeed the occasion of the gathering might have been at a meeting of the Botanical Club, which for reasons I do not understand at present, was affiliated to the University rather than the Bristol Naturalists' Society. (The

minute books are in the Bristol Record Office on semi-permanent loan from BNS and I have never got around to inspecting them.) I read somewhere that White didn't enjoy lecturing to students and only did it once.

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Imagine, over 100 years ago, a doting mother who had come to Bristol after the death of her husband, a young Clifton College schoolboy of 11, who had seen his name in print in White's *Flora*, and the author himself, in his mid-60s and expecting to hand over his successful business to several of his sons, in a big house, with a big family and seemingly knowing everyone and everything connected with their deep interest in botany. It seems to me that 'Professor' was an honorific term of endearment and respect that the Sandwiths might have used in conversation and here committed to posterity.

## Plant records

The wet February was doubly unsuitable for field botany, but I did pay a visit to the top of Vicarage Lane, Olveston, to see the Greater Snowdrop, *Galanthus elwesii* in flower.

David Hawkins has been out looking at mosses again and the other week whilst visiting Tickenham Hill with Jenny Greenwood found a specialist of high-quality calcareous grasslands, Rose-moss *Rhodobryum roseum*. David added that it is new to the hectad and underlines how good a site this is. He thought it may well be responding to the management there but added, 'we don't know if it was simply overlooked before'.

Mrs Appleyard's A Bryophyte Flora of North Somerset (1970) gives 7 then current hectads (including, sorry David, ST47) and Miss Atwood of Clifton's 1853 record from Harptree Combe. I don't have any note of a historical record from the Avon Gorge and in Gloucestershire it was classified as regionally extinct, with no record since 1988 in any of its 17 historical sites (Richard Lansdown in his *Provisional Red Data Book of Gloucestershire Bryophytes* 2014). David helpfully provides an image (left). It looks similar to the common Hart's-tongue Thyme-moss, *Plagiomnium undulatum*, especially in the latter's Spring aspect, but some of the leaves are wider near the tip. Search for it around ant-hills.



Photo © David Hawkins

Your records of Cowslip meadows please. 'I must go seek dewdrops here and hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear' says a fairy, meeting Puck in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

One of the problems with dot distribution maps is that a dot does not tell you anything about the plant's abundance or habitat. It may represent a single specimen on a road verge, plantings outside driveways, or one of those glorious meadows, first filled with cowslips and then with orchids and other native meadow plants. Cowslips can be indicator species and it is generally understood that cowslip meadows are less frequent than once they were in our youth.

Please send us details if you see a good cowslip meadow, to Clive Lovatt ([clivemlovatt@gmail.com](mailto:clivemlovatt@gmail.com)) on the Gloucestershire side of our area or Liz McDonnell ([lizmcdonnell2005@gmail.com](mailto:lizmcdonnell2005@gmail.com)) on the Somerset side. Details should include date, observer, grid reference and/or a description of the site location, abundance of cowslips. Additional information might include a brief description of habitat or an image, other interesting plants you've seen there, and whether the site has public access.

If you've found any interesting plants, please let me know.

Clive Lovatt, Stroud, 7 March 2020

# GEOLOGY SECTION

**PRESIDENT:** Richard Arthur

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**HON. SEC:** Richard Ashley, [richardwashley@gmail.com](mailto:richardwashley@gmail.com) Tel: 01934 838850

## LECTURE MEETINGS

*Lecture meetings take place in the Board Room 1.5, Wills Memorial Building. It is situated on the first floor at the top of the main staircase. Turn right at the top of the staircase and the Boardroom is the second door immediately on the right just before the glass, swipe access, door to the Library Corridor. There is no need to gain access via any secured door. Members are asked, as a matter of courtesy, to identify themselves at Reception as attendees at the BNS meeting before ascending the stairs.*

~~Cancelled~~

~~Wednesday 25 March 2020 7.30pm~~

~~St Vincent's Spring in the Avon Gorge:~~

~~A little known thermal spring with a long history and a cave.~~

~~Talk by Dr Paul Wood~~

~~Paul Wood's talk will cover both the geology and social history aspects of this spring. It is hoped to include some recent research on the spring carried out by Geography students at the University of Bristol.~~

**Saturday 18 April 2020**

**"Bristol Rocks" Bristol City Museum and Art gallery**

Our participation has been cancelled.

## LOOKING AHEAD

**BNS "Blaise BioBlitz"**

**Saturday 16 May**

As part of this event each BNS section is being asked to arrange a field meeting in the area to which members of the public can be invited to attend. This will give us an opportunity to view the almost complete Lower Carboniferous succession exposed in the Trym Gorge.

## WEGA FIELD MEETING

**PEMBROKESHIRE**

**7 - 10 May**

**Leaders Prof. B. Williams and Dr D. George**

Professor Williams and Dr George are co-authors of a new book 'The Red Beds of Pembrokeshire'. The purpose of the meeting is to show all the new research work on the Siluro-Devonian Boundary of Pembrokeshire. For further information please contact John McLellan the WEGA Field Secretary [johnmac201@live.co.uk](mailto:johnmac201@live.co.uk).

# INVERTEBRATE SECTION

**PRESIDENT:** Mike Hutchinson [mike@mikehutchinson.com](mailto:mike@mikehutchinson.com)

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**Hon. SECRETARY:** Moth Broyles [mothbroyles@gmail.com](mailto:mothbroyles@gmail.com) 07809 281421

## INVERTEBRATE NOTES FOR APRIL 2020

Mike Hutchinson reported a Box Bug *Gonocerus acuteangulatus* from his north Bristol garden on 6 March. This once very rare bug appeared in our region first in 2003 as part of an expansion of its distribution across southern England which began in the 1990s. Since that first occurrence it has remained at rather low density in our region and, if the National Biodiversity Network Atlas is correct, it has not really spread further west. The British Bugs website reports that this species has also adapted to utilise hawthorn, buckthorn, yew and plum trees, in addition to box. By contrast, over the last couple of years the Box Tree moth *Cydalima perspectalis* has colonised southern England very quickly and is probably now common in our region – but as yet its larvae have not been confirmed using any other food plant than box. Quite a contrast.

Meanwhile other species continue to expand their distribution. One such is the beetle *Uleiota planatus* which Moth Broyles has recorded from Lower Woods, Near Wickwar last October, under bark in a log pile. Like the Box Bug, this was once very rare but has now become widespread in south east England, with more sporadic records elsewhere. Maybe it will become common in suitable habitat locally; time will tell.

The extremely wet February, which has also continued into early March, has suppressed the usual reports at this time of year of butterflies and other insects appearing out of hibernation on warm sunny days. Hopefully that will change in mid-March and we can get back to a season of interesting insect records. The impact of climate change at the present time seems to be characterised by warmer, wetter winters and that has certainly been the case for 2019-20. Its impact on our insect fauna is continuing and monitoring those changes is important.

The new book *Field Guide to the Caterpillars of Great Britain and Ireland* by Phil Sterling, Barry Henwood and Richard Lewington is due to be published mid-March and should help to an extent in improving identification of larvae, although those all green ones will probably remain a challenge!

## POINT OF INTEREST

***Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2019.*** M Shed from 23 November until 4 May 2020. The ever popular annual exhibition of the world's best wildlife photographs returns.

*Ray Barnett, 05/02/20*

# LIBRARY

**BNS Library** at Bristol City Museum & Art Gallery, BS8 1RL.

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**LIBRARY COMMITTEE CHAIR:** - **Clive Lovatt** [clivemlovatt@gmail.com](mailto:clivemlovatt@gmail.com)

**HON. LIBRARIAN:-** **Jim Webster** [jim.bnslibrarian@gmail.com](mailto:jim.bnslibrarian@gmail.com)

The Library is open: Wednesdays 1.15pm-2.15pm, Saturdays 10.15am-12.15pm.

Tel. (opening hours only): 0117 922 3651. **CLOSED on Saturdays connected with Bank**

**Holiday Mondays, and New Year, Christmas and Easter.**

**LIBRARY CLOSURE** – It is likely that the library will be closed for the foreseeable future, and certainly of course for Saturday 11 April (Easter Saturday)

## **LIBRARY OPENING DAYS AND TIMES**

The BNS Library opening days and times have not changed significantly for over 40 years. In April 1978 (as far back as my own copies of the BNS Bulletin with any mention of it go) the only difference was that it closed at midday on Saturday rather than 12.15 as at present.

The Library Committee is considering changing the mid-week opening day for the Library from Wednesday. 40 years ago indoor meetings might occur on any day of the week but nowadays the Society's indoor meetings – and the monthly meetings of Council – all take place on Wednesday evenings. As a result duty librarians, who mostly live out of town, are sometimes obliged to travel into Bristol twice the same day, or 'hang around', or cry off meetings they would otherwise like to attend. Tuesdays or Thursdays are the obvious alternatives.

We will also be reviewing the Library opening hours. The Wednesday time, 1.15 to 2.15 pm, was clearly intended to allow members studying or working nearby to slip in briefly during their lunch hour, whilst allowing for duty librarians from the Museum or University to get away with the slimmest of a 'late lunch'. Nowadays a more significant factor concerning Wednesday timings might be the avoidance of weekday traffic.

There is no intent to reduce the degree of access to the Library afforded to members. Any preferences or other comments on the subject will be welcome, preferably by email to the Librarian, Jim Webster and Committee Chair Clive Lovatt (email addresses above).

## **BNS PUBLICATIONS – BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS – LAST CALL**

Members are reminded that the Society has a substantial stock of its *Proceedings* (now *Nature in Avon*) dating back to 1868. We also have copies of the Centenary History of Society (1862-1962) and Special Issues on the natural history of our coastline, Urban Bristol and the Mendips available. Copies of all of these publications are available free of charge at the Library on application to the duty librarian or in advance to Clive Lovatt ([clivemlovatt@gmail.com](mailto:clivemlovatt@gmail.com)).

## **AVON BIRD REPORT – BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS**

The Avon Bird Report is produced annually by the Avon Ornithological Group, a joint venture between the Bristol Naturalists' Society and the Bristol Ornithological Club. The BNS Library holds substantial reserves of the Avon Bird Reports on behalf of its own members, going back to 1979, except for 1983-5. For 1979-1982, 1986-1989, and 2010-2011 we have only 'last copies', for any member wanting a substantial run. Copies are

available free of charge to BNS or BOC members at the Library on application to the duty librarian or in advance to Clive Lovatt ([clivemlovatt@gmail.com](mailto:clivemlovatt@gmail.com)).

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

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### Ladies Associates:

#### **The Status of Women in the early life of the Bristol Naturalists' Society**

The section on the foundation of the Society in our Centenary History lists the initial members: in 1862 Adolf Leipner (Provisional Hon. Secretary) and 'six other citizens' formed a provisional committee. All, (dare I say 'of course') were men. Their invitation to the first AGM on 8 May 1862 was addressed 'Dear Sir' and was signed, 'I remain, Dear Sir, Very truly yours'. Many members seem to have requested a field meeting suitable for ladies, and one was arranged on Saturday 13 September 1862 which took in a boat trip from Cumberland Basin to Portishead.

In 1868 (and presumably from inception) Rule 2 of the Society stated, 'That the Society consist of Ordinary and Corresponding Members, and Ladies Associates. In 1870 there were 177 Members and 11 Ladies Associates, of whom five were 'Miss' – seemingly independents as none had the same surname as Ordinary Members. The remaining six were all wives of Members, listed in the usual patriarchal style (e.g. Mrs Herbert Thomas). Rule 9 set the subscription at seven shillings and sixpence per annum – for both Ordinary Members and Ladies Associates, despite, it seems, a limitation on their attendance at indoor meetings making them mere visitors 'whenever the subjects are likely to be of a nature to interest a female audience'. The word *likely* implies a degree of forethought: 'by invitation' perhaps.

In 1872 all this ended as ladies were (according to the author of the Centenary History) 'graciously conceded full membership'. In comparison, the Botanical Society of London (founded 1836) always had open membership, whilst the Linnean Society of London agreed to admit women in 1904, after an application which specifically requested equal rights of attendance at meetings.

*Clive Lovatt, Stroud, 2 March 2020*

# ORNITHOLOGY SECTION

**PRESIDENT:-** Giles Morris, 01275 373917 [danesmorris@btinternet.com](mailto:danesmorris@btinternet.com)

**HON SEC.:-** Lesley Cox 07786 437528 [fledglingnat@icloud.com](mailto:fledglingnat@icloud.com)

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*Our Winter Lecture Programme ended following the talk in March and will recommence in October later this year. We have been privileged to host some fantastic, lively, erudite speakers during this season, which we know from feedback received, members have greatly enjoyed. I would like to thank all our members for their continued support of the Winter Talks as we look forward to next season's eclectic mix of subjects. Meantime, I hope that all members will enjoy the range of field meetings on offer during the spring and summer. The **first Wheatear** of the season was spotted on **Pilning Wetlands** on 5<sup>th</sup> March, **Treecreepers** were seen in **Westonbirt** (in February) **Wrens** have been photographed **nesting** (early March) and, somewhat further away, an **Osprey** chick has been seen in **The Gambia** (in January) after it migrated 4,000 miles from Dorset where it had been introduced as part of a conservation programme. This offers hope that Ospreys will re-colonise **Poole Harbour** and thence the south of England after an absence of 200 years. So, plenty to be looking out for by the time you read this in April.*

Lesley, Section Sec. 7<sup>th</sup> March

## FIELD MEETING

### SAND POINT

Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> April

**Leader: Giles Morris (07712 398903)**

**09:00**

Meet at the NT car park (ST 330659) at the northern end of Sand Bay at 9am. We will walk up to the point and along towards Middle Hope and St Thomas's Head. This is always an interesting spot for migrant passerines and winter visitors in the trees and scrub of the headland. We shall also take the chance to see what waders are in Sand Bay and Woodspring Bay. The terrain is roughish, so suitable footwear is advisable and, being a coastal site, it will be exposed to whatever weather the day throws up, so please dress appropriately. We should finish at about noon.

***Please let the leader know if you intend to join the trip.***

## BREEDING BIRD SURVEY

The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) is the main scheme for monitoring population changes of our common breeding birds both nationally and within Avon. It is organised by the BTO and involves just two early morning visits in the breeding season (April to June) to an allocated 1km square. At present we have over forty squares available - please let me know if you would like a list of the squares currently available. Visits typically take about two hours each plus an extra visit in the first year to set up/check the route.

We also have a **local 'Avon BBS' scheme** which is very similar but a little simpler and which adds considerably to our local knowledge. Observers can select their own squares in the Avon scheme which can be in any habitat including urban/suburban areas, subject to the square not already being allocated.

Anyone can participate who can identify our common birds by sight and sound - and the emphasis really is on our common birds. The Survey has always had strong support in the Avon Region - in 2019 we surveyed 232 1km squares and recorded 74,218 birds. If you would like to take on a square or would like any further information about BBS, please contact **Dave Stoddard - [dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:dave.stoddard@tiscali.co.uk) (0117 9246968)** - you will be very welcome.

**A practical BBS training session will be held on 29 March** in Westbury-on-Trym and is open to new participants or anyone who would like to know a bit more about the Survey before committing. If you are interested please contact Dave - details above.

*Dave Stoddard*

**Field Meeting Report:** Newport Wetlands, 23<sup>rd</sup> February.

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Unfortunately, the storms of February led to this event being cancelled. We shall return to the site in the future. (Sec.)

## **RECENT NEWS**                      **February 2020**

*We welcome **Rupert Higgins**, who has kindly offered to continue the role filled until recently by John Martin.*

As many of you are doubtless aware, John Martin has left the region, returning to his (and my) Midlands roots. I'm sure you'll join me in thanking him for his work as Avon Bird Recorder and his numerous other contributions to local natural history and in wishing him all the best in Shropshire.

As is often the case February has been a rather quiet month locally for birds. The mild weather has doubtless been good for many birds, reducing mortality rates amongst small passerines in particular, but it has denied birdwatchers the chance to see irregular winter visitors such as Smew and Slavonian Grebe.

Strong south-westerly winds in summer and autumn often bring sea birds to the estuary but at this time of year there are few birds in the outer Bristol Channel to be blown up the estuary; the various depressions that have swept over have brought no notable storm-driven wanderers. However, there have been some scarce species to interest local observers and attract visitors to the area. The most popular have been a trio of water birds at Barrow Gurney Reservoir: a returning Long-tailed Duck, unusually for us an adult male complete with splendid tail, and Great Northern and Black-throated Divers, which have often been seen swimming side-by-side. All three species usually winter at sea and the views, and photographic opportunities, at Barrow Gurney have been exceptional. They all appear healthy but the Great Northern has been trailing fishing line, a reminder of one of the hazards that water birds face.

Bearded Tits are usually very elusive and when we are blessed with this beautiful species, days can often pass between sightings, particularly at Chew Valley Lake where they have a large reedbed to hide in. However, a small group present here recently has been co-operative and will normally reward a moderate degree of patience by showing extremely well, as evidenced by some exceptional images that have circulated on social media. One way to pass the time whilst waiting for them to appear, usually preceded by their distinctive ringing call, is to ponder the species' taxonomic status. Originally placed within the tit family, they have been shunted into the babblers, then grouped with a small family of Asian birds known as parrotbills and are currently placed in a family of their very own. Bird systematics seem to be in a state of constant flux, and this elevated status may well change soon. Another point to ponder is whether they will stay to breed, as happened in 1991. An established population would be very welcome and recent observations of courtship behaviour suggest that optimism may be justified.

Away from these honeypot sites, this is a time of year when every trip out seems to result in another species in song for the first time in the year. Late winter can be a gloomy season but sounds like the near ubiquitous trills of Dunnocks, the whistles of a Mistle Thrush defying the worst storms, or a drumming Great Spotted Woodpecker, lift the spirits. Despite humanity's worst efforts nature marches on and spring is just around the corner.

*Rupert Higgins*  
*avonbirdrecorder@outlook.com*

# MISCELLANY

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BOTANIC GARDEN

The Holmes, Stoke Park Rd, Stoke Bishop, BS9 1JG.  
Tel. 0117 428 2041 <https://botanic-garden.bristol.ac.uk>.  
Email: [botanic-gardens@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:botanic-gardens@bristol.ac.uk)

**Friday 10 April – Monday 13 April 2020 10-5pm**

## **A FEAST OF SCULPTURAL CONTRASTS**

Carboniferous limestone giants striding through prehistoric forest, delicate sounds of Zen bells chiming on trees, mosaic foxes and mesmerising sight of the potter's wheel are all features of this year's Sculpture Festival. View & buy sculpture, enjoy demonstrations of willow weaving, pottery & woodworking. Refreshments available. Plant sales. Admission: Adults £9 (£9.90 with Gift Aid). Advance online booking discount: £1. FREE to Friends of the Garden, University staff and ALL students and under 18s.

**Avon Organic Group** - [www.groworganicbristol.org](http://www.groworganicbristol.org)

**Thursday, 23rd April: Talk "Growing Biodynamically: the principles and practice of biodynamic gardening"** with Robin Snowdon, who runs Limeburn Hill Biodynamic Vineyard & keeps an allotment. Venue: The Station, Silver Street, Bristol - in the Engine Room (ground floor). BS1 2AG. 7pm - 9pm. All welcome. Admission (incl. light refreshments): Members £2 / Visitors £5. Students & Benefit Claimants: £3.50 (with proof of eligibility)

For full FB event details visit: <https://www.facebook.com/events/530656271131080/>

## **Ed Drewitt's Ferry Boat Trips**

Following on from the success of Ed Drewitt Bristol Ferry wildlife trips down the Avon Gorge, Ed and Bristol Ferries have dates for early morning trips (7am) up the river Avon towards Hanham listening for birdsong and riverside wildlife on Sundays in May, <https://www.bristolferry.com/public-trips-and-tours/early-birdsong>

Ed's successful Gorge trips down to Avonmouth looking for waders, peregrines and deer will also continue with dates set for the 28<sup>th</sup> May, 24<sup>th</sup> September and 8<sup>th</sup> October <https://www.bristolferry.com/public-trips-and-tours/waterside-wildlife/>



## Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project

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Booking and further information: Contact the Project on 0117 903 0609 or e-mail [mleivers@bristolzoo.org.uk](mailto:mleivers@bristolzoo.org.uk) . **Pre-booking essential** for all events.

Details of meeting points are given on booking.



Photo © Denice Stout

and view full festival programme at: <https://www.bristollearningcity.com/events/#events>

**Sat. 4th April. Spring along the Promenade (walk)** on Clifton Down. Meandering up to the Observatory, explore the special wildlife & history of the area. Discover a tree that's unique to Bristol; find out about historical landmarks including the Iron Age Hill Fort and the Clifton Suspension Bridge. 2.00pm – 4.00pm, Free, but booking is essential

*This event is run in partnership with Friends of the Downs & Avon Gorge as part of the Bristol Learning Festival which takes place from 30 March to 5 April at various venues across Bristol. Find out more*

### Sat. 25th April. Birdsong on the Downs (Course)

Learn how to identify birds from their song with Ed Drewitt. After a multimedia introduction to the birds you're likely to see and hear, our expert will lead you on a walk to identify birds 'in the field'. 10.00am - 3.30pm, £25.



Photo © Denice Stout

## HAIR ICE

Two of our most observant members were out walking with their daughter when they spotted another quite rare phenomenon. David & Anne Jewell write:

*"We were again walking up through Long Wood, at the lower end of Velvet Bottom. It was about 11am on a Sunday morning, (Jan 26<sup>th</sup>). It was cold and sunny. The temperature was just about on freezing and it had been a cold night after a cold Saturday.*

*Immediately on entering the wood we noticed several instances of a white growth on fallen branches, mostly up on the sides of the valley. We talked about it and concluded that it*

*must be a fungus of some kind. As we walked up the valley, I spotted a fallen branch with the 'fungus' very evident and it was accessible. So, my daughter & I went across to investigate. See the attached photos, taken by my daughter. I was surprised to see that the growth was a very bright white, and fibrous - just like candyfloss. I broke a piece off and held it in my hand. To my amazement, it melted slowly to a small drop of water. The whole 'fungoid growth' was, in fact, a hair-like, very low-density form of ice. The exudations of the fungus evidently modify the freezing properties of the water in the wood and allow the resulting ice to form as separate threads, only about 0.01- 0.02mm in diameter."*



Photo © J Ratcliffe

They had discovered Hair Ice which only forms in very specific circumstances and is often very hard to spot. Formation requires a humid, still winter's night when the temperature is just below freezing. It also needs the presence of certain types of trees, usually Hazel, from which dead wood has fallen AND the existence of a specific fungus, *Exidiopsis effusa*. However, Hair Ice will never form on bark so the dead wood must be at least partially bare and the best chance of seeing the phenomenon requires the observer to be between the latitudes of 45° and 55° North. Read more in [Natty News](#).

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