

SEPTEMBER 2020

Bristol Naturalist News



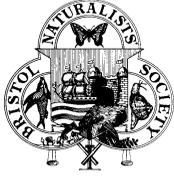
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Discover Your Natural World

Bristol Naturalists' Society
BULLETIN NO. 593 SEPTEMBER 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 agreement of the leader.

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SOCIETY ITEMS

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Dear Member

The Society's postponed AGM was held 'virtually' over the web on 29 July enabling the business of the Society, as required by its Constitution, to be completed. Thank you to those who attended so making it quorate. It was particularly gratifying to see two members, David Davies and Cathy Barron, rewarded for their outstanding contribution to the running of the Society. David continues to pull together this Bulletin 10 times a year, always to time and always full of inspiring content and Cathy has done huge amounts of work in caring for and cataloguing the Society's library holdings. Both have been awarded Honorary Membership of the Society.

The AGM was followed on 5 August by a 'virtual' Council meeting which discussed how to adapt our programme of activity planned for the autumn and winter in the light of the continuing need for social distancing. As a result we are recommending some field meetings from September but restricted to only groups of six (including the walk leader) and where separation of 2m can be maintained. Consequently, you will be required to contact the walk leader in advance if you would like to attend. Please do not just turn up 'on spec'.

The season of indoor talks would normally commence in October but whether this will be possible remains doubtful at present. Consequently, Council is investigating whether talks could be delivered on-line as an alternative if necessary. The AGM and Council meetings suggest this is possible and actually may make it possible for more members than usual to attend talks. Only Society members will be able to access these talks; look out for further information in the October Bulletin.

Finally I would like to thank Professor Andy Radford for having held the position of President for the last three years, so continuing that long and valuable connection between the Society and the University of Bristol. My thanks also to Giles Morris for stepping in to act as Chairman of Council from now to the next AGM which should revert to the usual March date in 2021.

Ray Barnett

AGM

The (Virtual) AGM was held on 29th July at 19:30 after being postponed from 18th March 2020. The following were elected to serve the Society.

Ray Barnett: President

Giles Morris: Hon. Chairman

Lesley Cox: Hon. Secretary

Mary-Jane Steer: Hon. Treasurer

Margaret Fay: Hon. Membership Secretary

David Davies: Hon Bulletin Editor

Jim Webster: Hon. Librarian

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Geology: Richard Ashley

Inverts: Mike Hutchinson

Ornithology: Giles Morris

Lesley Cox

Bristol Weather

June and July 2020

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In the last bulletin I mentioned that there is some evidence to suggest that very good spring weather can be followed by a mediocre summer. Well we still have August to go before we can compare properly but certainly June and July 2020 have not lived up to the extraordinary weather events and data of April and May. It is sometimes easy to think of dry hot periods as being good but as many interested in nature will know good rainfall is a vital component of the growing cycle.

June's rainfall put an end to the long dry spring with nearly double the 30-year average (1981-2010) at 116.8 mm, 199.7% of the average in Bristol. The 4 days of the 17th, 18th, 26th and 27th recorded 81.0 mm of rain which represents 69.3% of the month's total. It was the wettest June since 2012 when 181.0 mm fell. The 24-hour maximum rainfall of 29.1 mm on 17th June was the highest since 1985 when in one 24-hour period 42.8 mm was recorded in June.

The average temperature for the month of June was 17.0°C which is just above the 30-year average at +0.7°C. The maximum temperature of 33.0°C recorded on the 25th was the 2nd highest for June since records began in 1937. The highest daily minimum temperature of 20.2°C on the 26th was the highest for June since this data started in Bristol in 1960.

The average June pressure of 1012mb was the lowest since 1010mb in June 2012.

As we moved into July temperatures stayed mainly below the 30-year average for the month and it was the coolest since 2015 when the average temperature was 17.3°C. With an average temperature of 17.5°C in 2020 it was -1.2°C below the 30-year average (1981-2010) for Bristol. Rainfall in 2020 was close to the 30-year average of 64.7 mm but only 71.8% of the 10-year average. The maximum hour watts per square metre (W/m²) of 983.5 at 12:00 GMT on 20th July was the highest for the month since 1017.0 W/m² recorded at 12:00 GMT on July 13th 2006. 2020 is the second highest hourly value for July and 2006 was the highest. There were only 6 days in July when the prominent wind direction was not from the SW.

We await to see if August 2020 will help confirm the good spring, poor summer theory or whether it will give us some welcome respite from our much-altered social interaction and restricted holidays due to the virus.

Barry Horton

Have you changed your Email?

If you change - or have changed - your email address, please let the membership secretary know. It saves the society both time and money especially at renewal time if she can contact you this way. If you're not sure she knows it, please just send her your name and email – no matter if you're confirming what she already knows, she'll still be glad of confirmation! Write to: membership@bristolnats.org.uk (She's also the person to ask if you'd like to change from a printed to an email bulletin!)

Nature in Avon / Proceedings of the Society

Contributions are invited for the next *Nature in Avon* 2020.

Many people have found themselves noticing natural history on their home patch through lockdown in glorious weather. All articles of whatever length will be welcome for consideration. Hopefully we will be able to reflect on an extraordinary year.

The deadline is 31 March 2021.

Please send to Dee Holladay, dee.holladay@tiscali.co.uk

Phenology: A study appearing in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* outlines an issue of concern regarding climate change. Richard Bland, whose Memorial Lecture we hope to be able to present to members soon, walked the same route on the Downs every Sunday morning to document the issue whilst keeping records of the first flowering dates, amongst other things, to establish a local pattern of change. He was not alone in his endeavours. Ten years ago, an international team led by Cambridge University wrote, *Widespread concerns about global biodiversity loss have led to a growing demand for indices of biodiversity status. Today, climate change is among the most serious threats to global biodiversity. We derived a 250-year index of first flowering dates for 405 plant species in the UK for assessing the impact of climate change on plant communities. The estimated community-level index in the most recent 25 years was 2.2-12.7 days earlier than any other consecutive 25-year period since 1760. The index was closely correlated with February-April mean Central England Temperature, with flowering five days earlier for every 1°C increase in temperature. The index was relatively sensitive to the number of species, not records per species, included in the model. Our results demonstrate how multi-species, multiple-site phenological events can be integrated to obtain indices showing trends for each species and across species. This index should play an important role in monitoring the impact on biodiversity. Furthermore, this approach can be extended to incorporate data from other taxa and countries for evaluating cross-taxon and cross-country phenological responses to climate change.* The paper, 'A 250-year Index of the First Flowering Dates and Its Response to Temperature Changes' by **Amano**, et al., is still worth reading today and many estimates put the difference at twice that of ten years ago which may cause some species to be 'out of sync' with their needs.

6th August: Defra has announced that a family of **wild beavers** can stay on the River Otter in East Devon making them the first wild Beavers to breed in England for 400 years. The Devon Wildlife Trust worked on the project for over five years with support from Exeter University which provided the *River Otter Beaver Trial: Science and Evidence Report* (See, Prof Brazier, et al.) after a group of the Beavers were found to be living on the River Otter in 2013. Where they had come from was unknown but up to fifteen groups of Beavers are now estimated to be living on the River Otter. The DWT and other community groups stepped in to persuade local farmers, etc, of the benefit of beavers to local wildlife and the prevention of flooding, etc., after the Beavers were threatened with removal. They were able to demonstrate that the Beavers were European Beavers and not their North American cousins. Whilst many farmers are supportive of wildlife in general and of conservation and re-introduction programmes, Phil Jarvis, Chair of the environment forum at the National Farmers' Union said, *'Beavers can have a significant local impact on the countryside and farming; from creating dams that can undermine riverbanks, to impeding farmland drainage with waterlogged fields becoming unsuitable for grazing and cropping; all lead to serious implications on our ability to produce food.'* The Government issued a statement which said it would consult later this year on the possibility of further reintroductions and a national approach to the issue. Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUb5YJc2rPY>

Emperor Penguins: Fretwell and Trathan from The British Antarctic Survey have reported on a new study using satellite mapping technology which revealed 20% more small colonies in Antarctica than previously thought. The results provide an important benchmark for monitoring the impact of environmental change on the population. However, this may only represent a ~5-10% increase in the population. See, *Remote Sensing in Ecology and Conservation*, 4th August 2020.

Lesley Cox, 7th August 2020

BOTANY SECTION

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FIELD MEETINGS – Steady as you go

At the time of writing here in most parts of England we can spend time outdoors, including private gardens and other outdoor spaces, in groups of up to six people from different households, following social distancing guidelines. Council has approved a limited resumption of field meetings from September on a members only, booked-in-advance basis. Any or all of these meetings may have to be cancelled or varied if local or England-wide restrictions are re-introduced in the meantime.

Indoor meetings are likely to present more difficulties and Council and the sections are considering the feasibility of virtual meetings. The Botany Section have opted to continue outdoor meetings instead.

Our **provisional programme for field meetings** in the remainder of 2020 is given below. All meetings will be late in the month, and on different days of the week and at different times to ensure no-one with regular commitments elsewhere is barred. Further details will appear in the Bulletin for the relevant month, and also in the Society Diary on the website.

- September: Lower Woods, Wickwar. Leader Clive Lovatt. See below for details.
- October: Lamplighter's Marsh, Shirehampton. An afternoon meeting of identification from un-promising material, supplanting the traditional late October indoor identification meeting.
- November: The third in the ongoing series of introductory bryophyte meetings. Leader David Hawkins.

As the Bulletin may be posted online 10 days or more ahead of receipt of paper copies by post, enquiries or bookings should be made to the meeting leader (preferably by email) **ONLY ON OR AFTER** the first day of the relevant month. In all cases participants should attend at their own risk and should bring face coverings, hand sanitiser, and their own 'tools of the trade' as we should not share binoculars, hand lenses, and probably even ID guides. Un-booked members will not be allowed to join a group which already has six participants.

LOWER WOODS, WICKWAR Clive Lovatt

**Tuesday 22 September
10.30am**

A first post-lockdown meeting limited to the leader and five BNS members as described above under 'Field Meetings'. Advance bookings are required. Email the leader at clivemlovatt@gmail.com on or after Tuesday 1 September. The day and time are selected to give us a good chance of parking space at the Lodge. Grid reference ST746881; postcode GL9 1BY. We will probably head south as described in the plant notes below. I suggest you bring lunch so we can eat and chat at the end of the morning meeting.

FIELD MEETING REPORT – An unexpected meeting Lower Woods, Wickwar, Tuesday 7 July 2020.

Lois Pryce and I, missing the regular BNS field meetings, and now being 'allowed out' by the early round of Government's loosening of lockdown, decided to meet midway for a walk in Lower Woods. We settled on '10 for 10.30' in case lots of other people got the same idea. Indeed they did, as by lunchtime the parking was full. Rather extraordinarily there

putting on her boots was Jean Oliver, explaining that she had agreed to lead a birding meeting here which had of course been cancelled – so she thought it would be fun to come on her own. We agreed it would be good (and permissible) to go together and so we had an unexpected meeting. [Contents](#)

We were seven hours on our feet so went home well satisfied. In the morning we did a loop eastwards and anticlockwise back to the parking by the lodge. Such a lot of different speedwells and rushes! Reaching the common we admired the many bushes of Spiny Restharrow, *Ononis spinosa*. The pond where the famous Adder's-tongue Spearwort *Ranunculus ophioglossifolius* grows was wholly covered in vegetation and we couldn't identify any amongst the occasional Spearwort, *Ranunculus flammula*.



Plate 1. A ghostly orchid: *Epipactis purpurata*, Violet Helleborine in Lower Woods. 7 July 2020. © CM Lovatt.

In the afternoon we walked south, socially distanced, and quite apprehensive of coming close to unfamiliar folk. We saw Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla filicaulis* subsp. *vestita* flowering on a grassy path and just on the north side of the Little Avon River (following instructions from a site volunteer) we found a spike of the ghostly chlorophyll-free version of Violet Helleborine, *Epipactis purpurata* (Plate 1).

We took lunch just south of the river, the ladies either side of a bench and the writer on as dry a patch of ground as he could find. The meadow here is species-rich with Saw-wort, *Serratula tinctoria*, and there was a plant or two of Pale Sedge, *Carex pallescens*. A sprawling willow sapling with red stems, small round rugose leaves and auricles (leafy bracts) was probably 'good' Eared Willow, *Salix aurita*. It is generally said that if you think you've got that species, it's the hybrid with *Salix cinerea*, Grey Sallow, *Salix x multinervis*. Further south on the wide ride were many willow bushes with longer leaves. I'm grateful to Graham Lavender of the Somerset Rare Plants Group who knows these plants on Exmoor for confirming them. Neither appear in the main body of the *Flora of the Bristol Region* (2000).

On a small area of water in the damp woods Lois spotted some small faintly iridescent flies (about 1cm or less long) which kept landing and flying off – but somehow left the water surface completely unmarked with not a ripple. She sent an image to Ray Barnett who responded that it was *Poecilobothrus nobilitatus* using the surface tension of the water to land on it, and no doubt flicking their wings in display at each other. He added, 'this is an attractive fly with a lime green thorax. The male has conspicuous white wing tips and is easy to identify, the female lacks these white wing tips.'

There was a good show of butterflies throughout the day, and the writer learnt a few things about identifying them. Thanks to Lois Pryce for the list that follows: Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood, Ringlets, Comma, Silver-washed Fritillary, Marbled White, Red Admiral (but sadly not White Admiral which can be seen here).

We continued on and back to the cars, seeing both native Valerians, the Common, *Valeriana officinalis*, and the less common, Marsh, *V. dioica*. We were seven hours on our feet so went home well satisfied.

Unless otherwise stated, notes are by Clive Lovatt with the assistance of the named contributors of the records and images.

***Stachys annua*, Annual Yellow-wort in Radstock (by Helena Crouch)**

Railway sidings have always been places of interest to botanists. When I moved to Somerset over twenty years ago, I became actively involved in managing the incredibly biodiverse disused railway sidings at Radstock, and campaigning to protect them from development. Cam Valley Wildlife Group held regular workdays clearing scrub; we did population counts of Fine-leaved Sandwort (*Minuartia hybrida*, now *Sabulina tenuifolia* subsp. *hybrida*); we carried out translocation experiments to try to save this diminutive Endangered, Nationally Scarce plant; we held open days to encourage residents to care for the wildlife of the site (Pyramidal Orchids were more charismatic than Fine-leaved Sandwort); Natural England declared the site to be “of near SSSI quality”; and I was branded a “tree-hugger” in the Somerset Guardian for my efforts to protect a plant which at best attained heights of about 50mm! We lost the battle and the site is now developed and almost unrecognisable and Fine-leaved Sandwort has lost its habitat and gone.

Radstock Railway Sidings was also the last site of the splendid Large-toothed Hawkweed (*Hieracium prominentidens*), which has only ever been found twice in Somerset: a single plant almost as tall as me was found here in 2014 by Dave Gibbs, just before development commenced. In 2019, I found an immature Hawkweed in a gutter, but it didn't survive, so was never identified. Some suitable habitat is still present beside the trackbed though, so in the hope of finding this species, or indeed any Hawkweeds, I visited again in July 2020. Sadly, not a single Hawkweed was found, anywhere on the site.

On a patch of undeveloped gravelly waste ground, amongst an array of Goosefoot (*Chenopodium*) and Orache (*Atriplex*) species, I found a small white-flowered Labiate which I did not recognise. This turned out to be Annual Yellow-woundwort (*Stachys annua*), a rare casual, recorded only eight times in Britain since 2000. This Eurasian



Plate 2. Annual Yellow-woundwort, *Stachys annua*, Radstock Railway Sidings, July 2020 © Helena J Crouch

species, native to central and southern Europe, is described by Sell & Murrell in their *Flora of Great Britain and Ireland* (2009) as a rather rare casual of waste places, formerly a common weed of arable land. There have only been two previous records of this species in North Somerset (VC6): one plant in a fallow field between Twerton and Englishcombe [Bath area], found in 1886 by David Fry, the other at Portishead, where it was known between 1904 and 1908, at the station-yard! Clement & Foster, in their *Alien Plants of the British Isles* (1994) described this species as a grain and oil-seed alien: it is likely that it arrived in Portishead station yard as a contaminant of grain, in sacks passing through the yard. If it arrived at Radstock in the same way, then seed must have lain dormant for over fifty years, which seems unlikely. The recent *Flora of Sussex* (2018) refers to this species as a garden escape, but *Stachys annua* is not apparently listed on the websites of any nurseries or seed suppliers in this country. Its origin remains a mystery.

***Stachys alpina*, Limestone Woundwort, found by David Hawkins at a new site in West Gloucestershire**

Limestone Woundwort, *Stachys alpina*, was one of the first batch of 20 or so plants protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). It was discovered, new to Britain, in 1897 by Cedric Bucknall, (at the time, President of the BNS Botanical Section) near Wotton-under-Edge. It still grows there in the London Road Reserve of the Gloucestershire



Plate 3. David Hawkins, the finder, pointing out *Stachys alpina*, Limestone Woundwort, at his new site on a canal towpath east of Stroud, VC34, June 2020. © CM Lovatt

Wildlife Trust (GWT), though it needs periodic 'gardening' to ensure its survival. When first found it was apparently scattered over two square miles (see White's *Flora of Bristol*, with a lithograph of the plant). Elsewhere in Britain it has been known in a few places in Denbighshire, where it also benefits from the attention of conservationists. [Contents](#)

On a canal-side walk east of Stroud and a few yards into VC34 West Gloucestershire, David Hawkins found one in flower at the end of May 2020, and when I joined him in early June, we found 44 plants, mostly vegetative, over more than 100m. Of the dozen or so in flower, half had been cut down, presumably to allow social distancing on the narrow footpath on this stretch of a mile or more. The moment of the find is recreated in the attached image of a very happy botanist and a very rare plant. Well done to our Botanical Secretary (and hence a successor to Bucknall's constant companion, JW White)!

GWT and English Nature were informed, and conservation management plans are being made, with the co-operation of the landowner. A full account is in preparation for publication elsewhere.

Barcelona Nuts! Look-alike hedgerow hazels

The late Peter Sell, principal author of the five-volume *Flora of Great Britain and Ireland* and the lifelong assistant curator of the Cambridge University herbarium, was able to recognise that something was amiss in newly planted woodland and hedgerows. I've written about the non-native Dogwood with middle-rooted hairs below the leaf, and in the last *Bulletin*, the rugose-leaved Wayfaring tree. On an evening walk near the close-to motorway services near Stroud, I picked up what seemed to be an unusually large hazelnut, 3cm long. By comparison, nuts from bushes at the edge of the ancient Siccaridge Wood were 2cm long, and therefore about a third of the volume.

Using the Sell & Murrell key and illustrations, it seems I had found *Corylus avellana* forma *grandis*, with the English name of Barcelona Nut. If the nut is covered by bracts closely wrapped beyond the nut, you have Kentish Cob (*Corylus maxima* in Stace's *Flora*). Shorter bracts are usually ragged in wild hazel but forma *grandis* (and by the look of it some wild Hazel) has a crown-like top. Hybrids may or may not occur. The nuts on the logo of the Kentish Cobnut Association looks like my *Corylus avellana* f. *grandis*, but their photograph is clearly *C. maxima*.

Do watch out for the Barcelona Nut in recent plantings round Bristol and send me photos with a scale object like mine, and a habitat and site description, and a grid reference.



Plate 4. Comparison of the 3cm Barcelona Nut from a hedgerow close to the M5 near Stroud and the 2cm wild Hazel from Siccaridge Wood, east of Stroud August 2020. © CM Lovatt



Plate 5. *Mentha x smithiana*, Tall Mint, New Passage July 2020. © Brian Lancaster

***Mentha x smithiana*, Tall Mint**

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Brian Lancaster recently copied me another of his superb plant images of a mint from a ditch at New Passage ST5486 where he had been shown it and been told its name by John Martin, then living at Severn Beach. John kindly confirmed it was *Mentha x smithiana*, Tall Mint. It had not been found anywhere in the Bristol Region (County of Avon) during the survey for the Flora (2000) and the last record was given as 1973. There's a fine drawing of material from a nature reserve north of Stroud in the 1986 *Supplement to the Flora of Gloucestershire*.

The different English names given to plants in books is an interesting subject; many are just that – book names, invented by authors keen to have all plants equally accessible to those who find the scientific names difficult. Hybrids though tend not to have English/common names, but before the nature and significance of hybridisation was understood, mint hybrids had often been described as species. In his monograph of British Mints (1798), William Sole of Bath has this plant (his *Mentha sativa*) as Tall Red Mint, distinguished from his Common Red Mint (*Mentha rubra*). It appears under that Latin name in Butcher's *Further illustrations of British Plants* (1930) with the plate drawn by our sometime BNS Librarian Miss Florence Strudwick.

The name Tall Mint (fair enough as it can grow 1.5m high, taller than any other British mint) might be first used in McClintock & Fitter's influential *Pocket Guide to Wild Flowers* (1956). By then, taxonomic confusion about the use of the scientific name '*rubra*' (and perhaps amongst Sole's 'red mints') was resolved by Graham, who named it after James Edward Smith, founder of the Linnean Society of London, who, a few years before the latter's death, rather profoundly disagreed with Sole's treatment of the mints. A pity. It might have been named after a local man.

Or perhaps not. White in his *Flora of Bristol* (1912) describes its scent as 'coarse and disagreeable'. White gives a good account of Sole and his 'individuality' but concludes from a reading of some of his letters that 'we cannot suppose him to have been a man of much culture'. Ironic perhaps then that despite indicating his preference for the 24 plates of his monograph to be uncoloured, a set with Bath provenance with 26 original coloured paintings instead (by various Bath artists) has been on sale in New York for at least a decade and is currently priced at over £50,000. Over £1,000 may be asked for ordinary copies, when they appear. A print-on-demand copy adequate for research use can be had for a tenner.

Autumn (Lady's-tresses) comes early this year

Brian Lancaster also sent me a fine portrait of Autumn Lady's-tresses, *Spiranthes spiralis*, from Sand Point ST3265, taken on 28 July 2020. There were very many, towards the point, he added. It seems rather early. Was it tricked by a very hot period in May followed by heavy rain?



Plate 6. Autumn Lady's-tresses, *Spiranthes spiralis*, Sand Point, 28 July 2020. © Brian Lancaster

Looking in my diary for the first time in absolutely ages I find the following botanical meetings which were planned for August: Blue Anchor (Somerset Rare Plants Group, SRPG); Bathampton Meadows (BNS); Aquatic plants workshop (SRPG); (clashing with) Clee Hill (Herefordshire Botanical Society, HBS); Selsley Common (Gloucestershire Naturalists' Society, GNS); Nailsea (BNS and SRPG). For September: Newent (GNS and HBS); Clevedon Moor (SRPG); Fern workshop (SRPG); Bristol whitebeams (BNS). Taking a quote from the Bible, the late Oliver Rackham described the period when ancient woodlands were being grubbed up or overplanted with conifers as 'the years that the locust hath eaten'; elsewhere his image is of a renowned library, from which each year books are randomly burnt or recycled and replaced by multiple copies of pulp fiction. How will we look back on 2020, the (first?) of the Covid years?

With the limitation of outdoor meetings and the effective prohibition of indoor meetings, chance encounters with fellow botanists (I can think of four this year) comes to mind. Perhaps Adam Smith's invisible hand was involved: there must be a limited supply of 'best places to go' at a given time, and this year in particular, some of us have felt a demand to enjoy the botanical attractions on offer.

I bumped into John Rees at Daneway Banks the other morning when we were both hoping to see some of its special plants. I've pictured him pointing out the many rosettes of the rare annual *Teucrium botrys*, Cut-leaved Germander (Plate 7). John was brought up in Nailsworth, near Stroud, and attributes his interest in botany to growing up in this rich Cotswold area. 2020 is the 50th anniversary of the publication of his *Flora of Oundle*, a mimeographed production by the Oundle School Natural History Society. John has enjoyed plant recording all his life, and moving around in medical practice, was able to contribute to the *Review of the Cornish Flora* (1981), the *Atlas of the Devon Flora* (1984) and the *Flora of the Bristol Region* (2000). Retired and back in the Stroud district, the so-called Five Valleys, John nonetheless prefers to cycle: 'you see more plants that way' he said. John made over 70,000 Gloucestershire records for the BSBI Atlas 2020 project and is pictured here with his recording cards.



Plate 7. John Rees, one of the recorders for the *Flora of the Bristol Region* (2000), recording at Daneway Banks near Stroud. 2 August 2020.
© CM Lovatt

With the completion of field work for the BSBI Atlas 2020, and benefitted by lockdown, and the indoors habit that succeeded it, I've kick-started three projects. I've got 169 pages of editable typescript for the Historical Flora of the Avon Gorge. I've at last tabulated George Garlick's 1951 survey of the Avon Gorge (original in the BNS Archives): 9,068 abundance records mostly resolvable to at least 1km square resolution with 572 different plants over 129 contiguous survey sites, nearly all (bar the Leigh Woods plateau) marked on a large map which he gave me 40 years ago. I hope to write this up for Nature in Avon later this year.

Finally, I've drafted a species list for a Gloucestershire rare plant register, defining the plants that need some sort of account in any publication on the subject (some are born rare, some have rareness thrust upon them). The Somerset list which was created and curated by Helena Crouch is accessible online at <https://www.somersetrareplantsgroup.org.uk/new-rare-plant-register/rare-plant-register/> and the carefully researched detailed

individual accounts so far available are only a click away. There is often a habitat photo and plant portrait, always a historical account, and for species still occurring a tabulation of extant sites and the performance of the plant there. The Gloucestershire list (currently 623

different plants) has been derived based on similar criteria and will be made available in a form compatible with that for Somerset (645).

Plant records

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Thanks to all the plant recorders who have provided material for this report. If you've found any interesting plants growing wild, please let me know. Please include the location, date, and Ordnance Survey grid reference, and any useful descriptions of habitat or abundance. Keep well, everyone.

Clive Lovatt, Stroud, 7 August 2020

GEOLOGY SECTION

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HON. SEC: Richard Ashley, richardwashley@gmail.com Tel: 01934 838850

As things stand, I have not arranged any formal meetings of the Geology Section as the future is uncertain and the numbers attending will of necessity be limited. One idea that I have is to visit the upper end of Goblin Combe, accessed from the A38, to further our search for volcanic rocks in the area. If there are any members interested in this they are asked to contact me so that we can arrange a mutually convenient time and date some time in September.

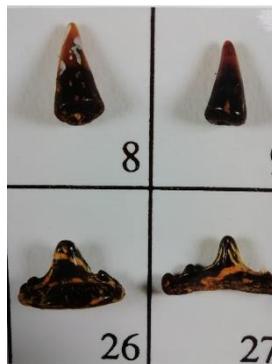
On Saturday 3rd October there will be a convenient tide for a visit to Kilve on the coast of West Somerset. Would anyone interested please contact me? With rapid changes in weather conditions and Covid 19 restrictions it is important that I have contact details if there are any last minute changes of plan.

Richard Ashley

Fossils from a badger sett

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When I was in my early twenties (I'm now in my mid-60's) I made regular evening visits to watch badgers at a sett on the edge of Saltford near Bristol. During one of these trips I picked up a small lump of fossil-rich clay containing a profusion of small fish scales and teeth. These would later be identified as fossil fish remains from the Late Triassic Period, approximately 210 million years old. The lump had been expelled by the badgers during their excavations and was lying on the surface of the spoil. I was feeling particularly lucky and pleased with myself. The lump could easily have been missed, but now I had it in my hand and could see a number of small glass-like pointed teeth protruding from its surface. As the evening light was failing, I decided to return the following day to see if I could find more.



A selection of Late Triassic fish teeth from Saltford (all less than 1cm in size).

Photo © Simon Carpenter

The badger sett occupies a large area on a wooded slope and has been occupied by badgers for over a century or more and remains very active to this day. Although a thorough search was made of the spoil no additional material was found and it would take several more months before, almost by accident, I noticed a layer of clay containing teeth, well below the surface, but close enough to reach with my arm at full stretch down the badger hole. Over the following few years I extracted enough clay to sieve, using my mother's old tights for this purpose. The rich residue of small teeth, scales and bones (see picture) were later identified by Triassic fish expert, Dr. Chris Duffin.

Many years then passed and in late 2017, I revisited the site to relocate the fossil-rich layer. The badgers in the interim years had completed re-engineered the surface and many of the large Elm trees I had used to fix the location had been felled. It took several determined visits before the layer was found again. I thought the site and the fossils would make an exciting project for Bristol University, Earth Sciences Department. My offer was taken up by Professor Mike Benton and in 2018, accompanied by some of his students (see picture), Dr Chris Duffin and BNS member, Richard Ashley, a section was dug through the layer very carefully so as not to disturb the badgers. A sieving project was set up at Bristol University and a student assigned to write it all up. The project is due to be published in the Proceedings of the Geologists Association and is part of a series of similar papers describing Late Triassic bone beds in the South West – all coordinated by Professor Mike Benton.



Professor Mike Benton examining the fossil-rich clay with Dr. Chris Duffin looking on.

Photo © Simon Carpenter

I am very grateful for all the professional help offered by Bristol University. It has been particularly satisfying to see this fossil-rich site receive the attention it deserves. Nick Mould, Deputy Land Steward, Duchy of Cornwall is thanked for allowing the excavation to proceed. I must also thank the badgers, because without their superior digging abilities, I would never have tripped over the fossils in the first place.

Simon Carpenter

INVERTEBRATE SECTION

PRESIDENT: Mike Hutchinson mike@mikehutchinson.com

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Hon. SECRETARY: Moth Broyles mothbroyles@gmail.com 07809 281421

INVERTEBRATE NOTES FOR SEPTEMBER 2020

After the intense interest in garden entomology created by the Covid lockdown and the glorious weather in May/June, July proved to be much less exciting both in terms of the weather conditions but also species recorded. However, that changed on 23 July when Matt Hobbs recorded a Light Crimson Underwing moth *Catocala promissa* in his Henleaze garden moth trap. This is the only record locally since the 19th C, when it was reported from Compton Greenfield in what is now South Glos by John Sircom Junior. As a resident species this lovely moth is restricted to oak woodlands in counties such as Hampshire but this year, it and the similar Dark Crimson Underwing *Catocala sponsa* have both put in appearances as migrants from the continent. Following the colonisation of the south of England by the Clifton Nonpareil *Catocala fraxini* in recent years (confirmed as breeding in our region this very summer with a larva near Weston-super-Mare) perhaps these other members of the same family of moths could also become new members of our local fauna in due course?

Hitting my doormat with a very loud thump this week was the third volume in the series *Beetles of Britain and Ireland* by Andrew Duff (previous resident of Somerset before moving to Norfolk). This latest volume (four are planned in total) covers the dung beetles and chafers, click beetles, chequer beetles and darkling beetles amongst others. A fantastic piece of work, the series is an indispensable up to date summary of all the British species with identification keys. Also on beetles, the latest copy of the *Entomologist's Gazette* journal includes a list of beetles identified by Paul Whitehead of Worcs, on a visit to Ashton Court, by searching for the dead insect remains, wing cases and the like, around the bases of the veteran oak trees. This location and habitat is a really important one for deadwood insects, species assemblages which the UK as a whole is very important for.

This summer you will also have received the latest edition of our very own *Nature in Avon*. Lists of interesting and significant records of insects found locally have been published annually in our Journal since the 1940s when moth reports began and broadened out to other orders from the 1980s. Annual lists of plants and mammals have fallen by the wayside in recent years just leaving the invertebrate report (birds are covered in the separate *Avon Bird Report* of course). I would be interested to receive feedback on whether continuing to publish lists in this way is of interest to the membership or whether a less detailed narrative (more along the lines of these monthly notes but summing up the year) would be preferable and of greater interest? Do let me know which you would prefer.

Ray Barnett
06/08/20

CARPETS AND ERMINES

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The delights of moth trapping

Towards the end of last year, I purchased a moth trap and then wondered why I had waited so long to get one. Earlier in the year, I began setting it up at least once a week and intend to share my moth records with Somerset Environmental Records Centre. I have found it totally absorbing and would recommend this activity to anyone with an interest in moths. I have found it a real salvation during lockdown.

I am fortunate to have a semi-wild allotment garden on the edge of Frome. It forms part of a larger patchwork of gardens that were created when the Innox Hill community, where I live, was first established in the early 1800's. The site occupies a sloping aspect, swept by expansive skies and home to a rich diversity of plants and animals. The margins of the allotment gardens hold many wild flower species lost from the surrounding countryside and many of these are essential food plants for our native moths. Armed with good identification guides on macro and micro moths I began my weekly trapping. The excitement of the first moth trapping experience has never left me, each subsequent trapping can be as exhilarating as the first, as new species are seen and recorded. I've surprised myself, at how quickly I've learnt to identify the moths I've caught and this will only get easier as I continue. And what quirky names some of them have including Brindled Green, Beautiful Arches, Burnished Brass and Scorched Carpet. The stars of the show are definitely the moths. Their stunning shapes, colour and design are mesmerizing and continue to surprise and delight. And it only gets better when you look at them under magnification. These jewels of nature live right under our noses.

I purchased a portable Heath moth trap, battery (it's easy to set up and straight forward to operate), a few good moth identification guides and some collecting pots. These came to about £200, so not an inconsiderate amount. If they are too expensive to purchase alone,



Scarlet Tiger moths *Callimorpha dominula*.

Large numbers of these day flying moths can be seen across the allotments in June.

Photo: Simon Carpenter

the cost could be shared with others and/or take the opportunity to join moth trapping activities offered by our Society. There are Facebook groups specializing in moth identifications and I would recommend moth trapping with a friend. Sharing the challenges of identification can be real fun.

If you can keep accurate records and share these with the wider nature community, all the better. British moths have declined by 31% between 1969 and 2016 (Rothamstead Insect Survey: bit.ly/3b7AYIP), as highlighted in a recent BBC Wildlife magazine. And don't forget our own experts in the Society who will help you get started.

Simon Carpenter

LIBRARY

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

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LIBRARY COMMITTEE CHAIR: - **Clive Lovatt** clivemlovatt@gmail.com

HON. LIBRARIAN:- **Jim Webster** 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.

Outline Plan for Gradual Re-opening of Library

At the Council meeting of 5th August an outline plan for the gradual re-opening of the BNS Library was discussed and agreed. The Museum itself is now expected to re-open in mid-September and they will set the protocols for access to the Library. After that, members of the Library Committee who feel able and safe will be able to carry out various duties in the library and consider the best way forward. As anyone familiar with the Library will know, it is in a basement room with precious little space and no 'passing room' in the corridors between the shelving, so we will certainly need to have a booking system in place.

We are wondering if, as is the case with some public libraries, a system of members asking for a specific book or 'for a book on...' would work, requiring them to collect it from the Museum reception.

At the time of writing we clearly do not expect to be able to open before the end of September. These are strange and difficult times and we ask for your forbearance. We will provide an update in the October Bulletin.

Book review: Woodland Flowers by Keith Kirby, 2020.

This is no 8 in Bloomsbury Wildlife's British Wildlife Collection and has a £35 cover price (£26.99 on Amazon). The series is similar in scope to Collins well-known New Naturalists, and earlier numbers covered Meadows, Saltmarshes, Rivers, Rocky shores, Climate change, Mountain Flowers and Mushrooms. Several are already held (albeit currently under lockdown) in the BNS library. Keith Kirby was for 33 years until 2012 a woodland ecologist with the Nature Conservancy Council and its successors and, like the late Oliver Rackham, the leader in the field, sported an unfashionably long beard of the type Edward Lear poetically described. Kirby even describes himself as a 'grey haired wanderer in the woods' – expect snippets of autobiography amongst the text, especially relating to his love of folk music and theatre, and the inevitability of his career having been born near a pub called 'The Woodman'.

Like others in the series, the book has a lighter touch than others on the same subject, and rarely do two opposite pages lack a relevant colour image. Passing mentions of the National Vegetation classifications of woodland stands do not interfere with a general reader's enjoyment. Later chapters are particularly original and cover new woods and their flora, a changing atmosphere, and fun and games in the woods - from fern collecting to performances of opera. A history of two centuries of woodland conservation is laid out as Shakespeare's Seven Ages, and the last chapter answers the question, where should we 'hold the line' and where should we 'go with the flow'? Inevitably, perhaps, the book ends at a bank of sweet primroses.

Whether the book is about woodland flowers, or woodlands and their flowers may be a moot point, but no matter. Ignore the cake-icing pink endpapers and worry not whether the buttercup plate at the start of chapter 3 is correctly captioned. Just sit down one dull day and read about woods as they are. Then tomorrow, you can go down to the woods and read them too.

Clive Lovatt, Stroud, 7 August 2020

ORNITHOLOGY SECTION

PRESIDENT:- Giles Morris, 01275 373917 danesmorris@btinternet.com

HON SEC.:- Lesley Cox 07786 437528 fledglingnat@icloud.com

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FIELD MEETING

STEART MARSHES WWT Reserve
Leader: Giles Morris (07712 398903)

Saturday 19th September
09:30 – 13:00

The WWT Steart Marshes Reserve has rapidly become a major ornithological hotspot since its opening in 2014. Most recently it was in the news for a pair of Black-winged Stilts which bred there this summer. We hope to see a good mix of waders, duck, birds of prey and passerines and there is always the chance of an unusual migrant at this time of year.

Meet (**after observing instructions below!**) at the main reserve car park (ST 25208 44210, TA5 2PU) at 09:30, see www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/steart-marshes/ for further details and directions.

We will walk the paths to the main lagoons, using the hides (if open). We might also move on to Stert Point to see the wader roost. The walking is flat and will mostly follow well surfaced paths.

COVID EPIDEMIC. PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING:

This will be the Society's first attempt at a field meeting since the Covid lockdown and clearly will only be possible if national rules allow.

The following conditions will apply:

1. The meeting is limited to 5 members plus the leader, so you must book your place with the leader. Email - danesmorris@btinternet.com Places will be allocated on a strict first come, first served basis.
2. You are responsible for your own safe transport to the reserve. We cannot offer car shares.
3. Please bring a mask for use in the hides if they are open, **plus the toilets and shop if visited. Also, please bring a polythene/plastic bag to keep the mask in safely while not in use. There is no point in having a mask if it is stuffed into a pocket where your hands have been or it is placed on your face with dirty hands!**
4. Safe social distancing must be observed at all times.
5. Bring your own binoculars (and scope, if you have one).
6. The leader will provide hand sanitizer.

Roads and Bird Communities

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Robin: Less affected by roads
© Lesley Cox

We know that the presence of roads can kill birds and other animals in various ways but what other favourable or unfavourable factors could be lurking around roads? In *'Roads as a Contributor to Landscape-scale Variations in Bird Communities'*, **S. Cooke, et al**, (from [Cambridge University](#)) have done some research to find out, using Great Britain as the area of study and the Breeding Bird Survey as the source data with the results being published in ***Nature Communications***, 7th July 2020. The authors write, *'Roads and their traffic can affect wildlife over large areas and, in regions with dense road*

networks, may influence a high proportion of the ecological landscape. We assess the abundance of 75 bird species in relation to roads across Great Britain. Of these 77% vary significantly in abundance with increasing road exposure, just over half negatively so. The effect distances of these negative associations average 700 metres (approx. 765.5 yards) from a road, covering 70% of Great Britain and over 40% of the total area of terrestrial, protected sites. Species with smaller national populations generally have lower abundance with increasing road exposure, whereas the opposite is true for more common species. Smaller-bodied and migratory species are also more negatively associated with road exposure.

By creating environmental conditions that benefit generally common species at the expense of others, road networks may echo other anthropogenic disturbances in bringing about large-scale simplification of avian communities. Sophia is now in the Galápagos working to assist policy-makers in their aim of achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/I4MCXUR2IGQ?autoplay=0>



Lapwing: More affected by roads
© Peter Hilton

Arctic Terns

Scientists are asking bird watchers for help in spotting colour tagged Arctic Terns following the abandonment of the UK's largest colony situated on the Skerries, just north of Anglesey, which is also home to several hundred Common Terns. The BTO, whose ringers have been colour-marking a sample of birds each year as part of a *Re-trapping Adults for Survival Project*, are also hoping that observers among the general public can help with establishing exactly where these birds have gone and help to explain the fate of the colony. RSPB Wardens, who usually look after the colony, have been absent due to



Arctic Tern
courtesy of Edmund Fellows/BTO

the Coronavirus pandemic. One bird is known to have turned up in Ireland. The RSPB think that in the absence of the wardens, Peregrine Falcons have predated the Terns and /or caused them to abandon the colony. If anyone should spot a colour ringed Arctic Tern, please let me know. Arctic Terns have the longest migration route of any bird. The species leaves its breeding area in the north between July and early October to reach the Antarctic between October and December.

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvXYFRHgMTs>
Lesley Cox, 5th August 2020

Mid-summer is often a notably quiet time in the birding year. Birds have settled into their breeding territories and song tails off as adults first become preoccupied with the crucial matter of rearing young and then become unusually secretive as they enter moult.

There are, however, always things to see and there are always birds on the move, and this summer has seen some unusual irruptive movements. Irruption is a less predictable and regular event than the familiar north and south fluxes of migration. It involves large movements of birds away from their usual ranges in response to fluctuations in food supply. The relatively few bird species that undertake irruptive movements tend to be dependent on a restricted food supply and the species that irrupt into Britain tend to come from two areas: the conifer forests of northern Europe and the semi-arid regions of eastern Europe and central Asia. The former generally involves birds that are dependent on seeds of trees whose productivity fluctuates greatly at high latitudes, so that years of heavy seed harvest and successful nesting are followed by lean years, forcing swollen bird populations to seek new food supplies. Summer 2020 has seen large movements of Crossbill into Britain and several local observers have seen small parties, usually located by their sharp jip-jip-jip calls, over their gardens. Flocks have yet to be found in local conifer plantations, but once settled into suitable habitat they can be difficult to locate. Irruption movements of the related Two-barred Crossbill, a much rarer and more erratic visitor to Britain, probably led to one of the more astonishing global distributions of any bird: it has a circumpolar range in far northern conifer forests, but a small population (now treated as a different species) is resident in the Caribbean island of Hispaniola.

Irruption visitors from the Asian steppes are far rarer, but Rose-coloured Starling is becoming more frequent. Its irruptions are probably linked to droughts in its home range and to cycles in grasshopper populations. This year's influx to western Europe has led to the first breeding records ever in France. Locally, it was recorded in five years in the late nineteenth century, not at all in the twentieth century, but in seven years since the millennium. Rose-coloured starlings may breed in sparsely inhabited plains and mountain ranges, but they show a strange liking for urban habitats once they reach Britain. So far this year we have records of three individuals: in Whitchurch; just off Stokes Croft in central Bristol; and just inside Gloucestershire in the village of Stone. The last bird showed a curious fondness for hiding under solar panels on house roofs. Adult Rose-coloured Starlings are spectacular birds but one irruptive species of the steppes would be a far greater prize: Pallas's Sandgrouse appeared in Britain in huge numbers, and even bred, in 1863 and 1888 with local records including a party of 20 at Norton St Philip. A repetition may be unlikely, but we can dream.

Rupert Higgins

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

The Botanic Garden hopes to re-open in the not too distant future. Please watch the website and social media for the latest information.

Bookings are being taken for the following courses:

- **Sun. 13 Sept.** 10-4 Propagation workshop
- **Sat. 19 Sept.** 10-4 Seasonal Gardening – make the most of your garden for autumn
- **Sun. 4 Oct.** 10-4 Autumn photography workshop with Graham Parish.
- **Thu. 22 Oct.** 10-4.30 Intro. to Ferns & associated organisms with Dr. Paul L Smith
- **Fri. 6 Nov.** 10-4.30 Introduction to Bryophytes with Dr. Paul L Smith

Curator Tours: Dates to be confirmed: Please see the website for details.

PICNIC ON THE ROOF...

This picture came from Ray Gooding on 29 July. He writes:

“There were lots of Common worker Wasps working over the surface of my car yesterday. I park the car beneath a Silver Birch tree and at this time of year the tree sheds clouds of pollen making my car rather sticky. There were also lots of green Aphids on the car which a group of House Sparrows visit at intervals to eat. Not sure if the Wasps were gathering the pollen or perhaps a sweet residue from the Aphids.”



BNS Facebook Group

In these times of restricted operations, this group has been a lifeline of communication, sightings, questions and general chat about all things ‘Natural History’ in the Bristol area. Why not give it a try?

To join Facebook, go to www.facebook.com. There, you will be prompted to register a new account. It needs your name, email address (or mobile number), birthdate, gender and a password of your choosing.

Once you have a Facebook account, search on ‘Bristol Naturalists’ Society’ in the Facebook search box. When you are sent to the BNS page, click on the box marked ‘Join’. The moderators (I am one) will receive your request and will approve it. When that has happened, go back to the BNS page and select a level of notification (next to the Join box). There are three choices ‘All posts’ (I would choose this in the first instance), ‘Highlights’, ‘Friends’ posts’ or ‘Off’. When a new post is received, you should get an email to tell you. If this proves too often, just amend the ‘Notifications’ setting.

I look forward to approving your join request.

Roger Steer