

MAY 2021

Bristol Naturalist News



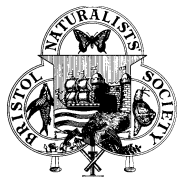
Photo © Jean Oliver



Discover Your Natural World

Bristol Naturalists' Society
BULLETIN NO. 600 MAY 2021





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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Cover picture: Jean Oliver found the Townhall Clock (or Moschatel or Five-faced Bishop!) – read all about it on [pages 6-8](#).

SOCIETY ITEMS

160 years of BNS

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2022 will see the 160th Anniversary of the Bristol Naturalists' Society. The first meeting was held, appropriately, in the **Philosophical Institution for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art** under Adam Leipner in 1862.

In 2012, to mark the 150th Anniversary, a photographic exhibition was held in Henleaze but as we don't know yet what the future has in store for us all, it seems a simpler idea would be more apposite, such as, special talks, field meetings or publications, for example.

If you have any ideas on appropriate means of marking this date, please let us know via secretary@bristolnats.org.uk

Would you like email reminders of upcoming events?

For Society events, please contact the Secretary and for individual sections, contact the section secretaries.

Bristol Weather

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March 2021 summary

In some respects, the month of March 2021 was an average one. It was drier and slightly warmer than the average month but amounts of sunshine were slightly down on the average for March. Pressure was high for the month. From the 10th to the 13th there was a windy spell but much of the month was quiet. The total rainfall of 44.0mm was 72.6% of the 30-year average 1991-2020. The average temperature of 8.6°C was 0.6°C above the same 30-year average. The average pressure at 09:00 hours was 1022 mb which was the highest for the month since 1026 mb was recorded in March 2012. The 2012 pressure was the highest recorded at this site since the data started in 1994.

The maximum temperature of 23.4°C recorded on the 30th of March was the highest recorded for the city since this data started in 1938. The previous highest was 23.2°C recorded on 28th March 2012. The average wind speed of 15.9 mph recorded on 11th March was the windiest day since 9th February 2020. It was the windiest March day since the 10th March 2011.

Barry Horton

Moth Survey: Butterfly Conservation has issued a report summarising the current knowledge of Britain's species of larger moths, presenting analyses of long-term change based on millions of records gathered through the Rothamsted Insect Survey (RIS) and National Moth Recording Scheme (NMRS). Moths are a vital part of biodiversity and like the Canary in the Coal Mine – they warn of imminent danger when species are in decline. The total abundance of larger moths caught in the RIS light trap network in Britain decreased by 33% over 50 years (1968-2017). Losses were greater in the southern half of Britain (39% decrease) than in the northern half (22%). Long term abundance trends for 427 species, of which, 41% (175 species) had decreased - and only 10% (42 species)



increased with the remaining 49% (210 species) that did not show statistically significant change. Thus, four times as many moth species decreased in abundance than increased. The pattern of change is complex. The decline in the abundance of larger moths is clear, yet many moths are increasing due to climate change and other factors. The report does not have trends for most scarce and rare species. The decline of moths and other insects in Britain and elsewhere demands an urgent response. In Britain, the expansion, restoring, connecting and creating habitats that support rich arrays of moths and other wildlife, that improve human wellbeing and that deliver ecosystem services such as carbon storage, flood prevention and cleaner air, is the key to reversing moth declines and confronting the biodiversity and climate crises. Powerful insecticides also play their part.

Common Shelducks: Green et al from the BTO have been studying these colourful birds as they migrate around the seas of Britain. Shelducks are Amber listed. They write, *Offshore wind farms are a key part of the UK government strategy to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change impacts; however, it is important to understand their potential on wildlife. The majority of British and Irish Common Shelduck (Tadorna tadorna) undergo a moult migration to the Wadden Sea passing wind farms in the North Sea en route.* (The Wadden Sea stretches along from the Eastern side of the North Sea from the Netherlands, Germany to Denmark.) *We conducted a review of ring recovery data to inform understanding migration routes. Analysis of recovery data confirmed that the British and Irish Shelduck occurring in the Wadden Sea predominantly between August and November and use moulting sites in the Dutch Wadden Sea and Heligoland Bight. Four Shelduck were successfully tracked from East Anglia to the Wadden Sea. Four separate routes across the North Sea were identified, with previously unreported stopovers noted in the Dutch Wadden Sea, before birds continued on to moult sites in Heligoland Bight. Flight speeds of 30.3 +/- 9.2 knots (n=299, range 8.7-55.0 knots were recorded and altitudes of up to 354 metres. An expansion to the tracking study is planned, to increase sample sizes and geographical representation.*

Watch: <https://vimeo.com/145506442>

Also of note: Thousands of Amber listed Oystercatchers have been filmed at Burry Port in South Wales.



Oystercatcher. © Martyn Pratt

Illegal Wildlife Trade: According to Fauna and Flora International (FFI), Liberia is a key source and transit country for the illegal wildlife trade (IWT) in West Africa. They write, *In the country's capital city, Monrovia, markets are well known trade hubs and porous international borders allow for easy, unregulated transboundary trafficking. Wildlife such as chimpanzees and Timneh Parrots (African Grey Parrots, Psittacus timneh) are wild caught for the pet and entertainment trade, forest elephants are hunted for their ivory, most of which is for export and pangolins (the world's most trafficked animal) and other animals are targeted for national and international demand for wild meat and other wildlife products (such as the Pangolins' scales for traditional Chinese medicine). Many species face serious decline across their range in Mano River Union, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Côte Ivoire and West Africa.* FFI are working to develop a national strategy to combat wildlife crime and collecting data on the extent of IWT across Liberia leading to more successful prosecutions of wildlife offenders. [Contents](#)

Deep-sea mining: Google, BMW, AB Volvo Group and Samsung SDI are the first companies to sign up to a **WWF** call for a **moratorium on deep-sea mining**, reports from the **BBC** and **Science – The Wire** (the journal) have shown. This will likely shrink the potential market for deep sea minerals harvested for cars and smartphones. The move away from fossil fuels to electrify the global economy is creating ever increasing demands for materials to go into batteries, some of which (cobalt, copper, nickel and manganese) are found on the seabed whose ecosystems have yet to be fully explored. In backing the call, the companies commit not to source any minerals from the seabed, to exclude such minerals from their supply chains and not to finance deep seabed mining activities, the WWF said in a statement. Deep sea mining would extract these key materials from potato sized nodules that pepper the sea floor at depths of 4-6 kilometres and are particularly in the Clarion-Clipperton zone in the North Pacific Ocean, an area spanning millions of kilometres between Hawaii and Mexico. *'With much of the deep-sea ecosystem yet to be explored and understood, such activity would be recklessly short-sighted', WWF have said.*

Watch: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-56607700>

Critical Thermal Limits: A worldwide study led by Canberra University has looked into, *'The evolution of critical thermal limits to life on Earth'*, by **Bennett**, et al., published in **Nature Communications**, published on 19th February, 2021. They write, *'Understanding how species' thermal limits have evolved across the tree of life is central to predicting species' responses to climate change. Here, using experimentally-derived estimates of thermal tolerance limits for over 2000 terrestrial and aquatic species, we show that most of the variation in thermal tolerance can be attributed to a combination of adaptation to current climatic extremes, and the existence of evolutionary 'attractors' that reflect either boundaries or 'optima' in thermal tolerance limits. Our results also reveal deep-time climate legacies in ectotherms, whereby orders that originated in cold paleoclimates have presently lower cold tolerance limits than those with warm thermal ancestry. Conversely, heat tolerance appears unrelated to climate ancestry. Cold tolerance has evolved more quickly than heat tolerance in endotherms and ectotherms. If the past tempo of evolution for upper thermal limits continues, adaptive responses in thermal limits will have limited potential to rescue the large majority of species given the unprecedented rate of contemporary climate change.* Read more, in **Nature Communications**.

Lesley Cox, 6th April 2021

BOTANY SECTION

PRESIDENT:- Clive Lovatt
HON. SEC:- David Hawkins

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MEETINGS

At the time of writing here in England we have left lockdown 3.0 and are allowed to meet outside, but only within the 'rule of six'. If all goes to plan, from 17 May 2021, larger groups may be possible.

LEIGH WOODS – Paradise Bottom Sunday 25 April.

This is now (7 April 2021) fully booked according to the 'rule of six'.

ULEY BURY

Clive Lovatt

Wednesday 26 May

6.00 pm

A meeting to look at the very species-rich open east-facing Oolitic limestone banks of this Cotswold hill-fort. More than 200 plant species can be found over 300m. We expect to see *Drabella muralis* (formerly *Draba muralis*), Wall Whitlowgrass, for which we have recent records in only twelve 1km squares in Gloucestershire. See the BNS Bulletin for July/August 2020 for my report of when I went there on Wednesday 27 May 2020. If the rule of six is lifted as planned, we will need to limit the attendance to 10 because of the restricted roadside parking. Please book with the leader by email on or after Saturday 1 May 2021. Details will be distributed a week before the meeting.

BOTANICAL NOTES

Except where otherwise stated, all notes are by Clive Lovatt with the assistance of the named contributors of the records, comments, and images.

A tale of *Adoxa* and its many English names



Plate 1. *Adoxa moschatellina*
from Newton St. Loe on 6 April
2021 Photo © Jean Oliver.

Jean Oliver sent me the image of *Adoxa moschatellina* from Newton St. Loe on 6 April 2021 (Plate 1). *Adoxa* is a delightful spring herb of old woodlands and hedgerows, which the *Flora of the Bristol Region* has in about a quarter of the available one-km squares. It is missing from most of the alluvial lowlands, and in areas or woods where it does occur, it will still be patchy. I haven't seen it in Leigh Woods for over 30 years.

There are two common names regularly used for *Adoxa*, Moschatel, from the reputed musk-like scent of the flowers in evening, and Townhall Clock, for obvious visual reasons.

Looking back into history, John Ray in the 1724 edition of his *Synopsis Methodica Stirpium Britannicarum* includes pre-Linnean Latin names starting with one that translates 'the little Moschatel with a bulb and leaves like a Fumitory'. So if Moschatel sounds like a foreign name, in a sense, it was, and the plant has still similar names in a variety of European

countries. Ray gives 'Tuberous Moscatell' as an English name, and that 'book-name' was used in English Botany (1865) although when Babington first introduced English names in

his *Manual of British Botany* (5th edition, 1862) it was just plain Moschatel, and as such it is therefore used in White's *Flora of Bristol* (1912). [Contents](#)

One of its English names in Bonnier's encyclopaedic French Flora of a century ago is Gloryless, and that dull name, derived no doubt from its small stature, its rapid disappearance and its lack of bright flowers, also appears in Fisher's *English Names of our Commonest Wild Flowers* part 2 (1934). Indeed, that source is the earliest mention I have to hand of the plant being called Town Clock or Town-hall Clock. WR Price, the last of the editors of the *Flora of Gloucestershire* (1948) mentions Town Clock as a name in local use, but I haven't come across any other mention in Floras of that period. Fisher's source for Town-hall Clock was Joseph Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* (1898-1905), so the usage must go back into Victorian times and might be found somewhere in a 19th Century Flora in the passing comment of one of those ecclesiastical gentlemen who studied folklore as well as botany. Still, it cannot go as far back into history as the name Moschatel does.

All three editions (1952, 1962 and 1987) of 'CTW' (Clapham, Tutin and Warburg's *Flora of the British Isles*) use both Moschatel and Townhall Clock (un-hyphenated) as English names, and so do the related *Excursion Floras* (1959, 1964 and 1981). From there local Floras such as Cambridgeshire's (1964) and Clapham's Derbyshire (1969) follow suit. Somewhat like a Jack-in-the-box, up pops a third English name in the second edition of the big *Flora*, Five-faced Bishop. This name, which I haven't found elsewhere improves on the Townhall Clock in the sense that it includes the fifth 'clock-face' looking up to the heavens (see Plate 1), but what was the allusion to a Bishop about? I happen to own a collection of Tutin's copies of CTW and in the attached series of plates you can see his handwritten addition in the first edition, the revised text in the second, and the reversion to the original in the third (Clapham Tutin and Moore) edition (Plates 2-4). 'As you were', so to speak.

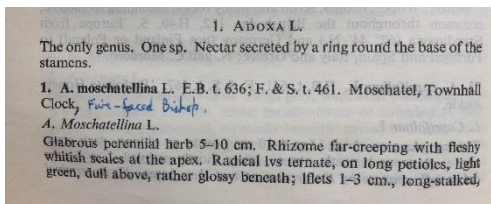


Plate 2. Extract of the text for *Adoxa moschatellina* in Clapham, Tutin and Warburg's *Flora of the British Isles*, 1st edition 1952, with Tutin's handwritten addition of a third common name. In CM Lovatt's possession.

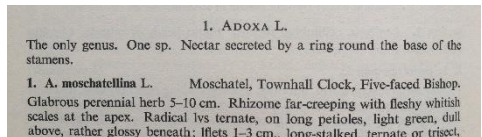


Plate 3. The corresponding text for edition 2, 1962. *Adoxa* now has three printed common names.

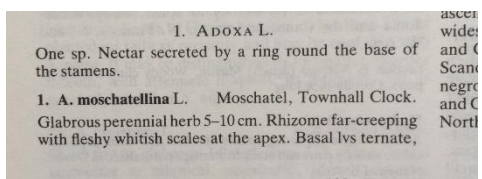


Plate 4. The corresponding text for edition 3, 1987. *Adoxa* reverts to the original two common names.

There is an ecological principle that two different species cannot occupy the same niche, and, as it should be the same for names of things, in 1974 the BSBI issued a small book of *English Names of Wild Flowers* which they recommended for general use. The authors (Dony, Rob & Perring) tried to create a binomial system for English names, so that all rushes, except for Flowering-rush, belong to the genus *Juncus*, and there are two sorts of Arrowgrass, neither of which are grasses. For someone familiar with the books of bird cartoons from Kenya that illustrated Pied Crows (remember those blackbird shaped pottery steam vents poking through the pastry of a home-made pie?) and Sandpipers (Sandpaper, get it? The wooden bird being smoothed down looked over its shoulder with a

grumpy air.), it was difficult to avoid or perpetuate names like Tea-leaved Willow, which calls to mind an aged gardener fertilising her garden with the left-overs from afternoon refreshment. *English Names for British Bryophytes* (3rd edition 2003) has sections on the subject of humour, and the problems of hyphenation. Waxy Earwort and False Beard-moss are two repeatable anthropomorphisms. [Contents](#)

Clive Stace, in his *New Flora of the British Isles*, first published in 1991, greatly expanded the number of species included, as CTW had failed to keep up with the onslaught of aliens establishing themselves in the wild. He stood up strongly for the use of unambiguous English names, and he followed the latest edition of the BSBI list (1986) and consulted with the senior living author (Perring) for the names he selected for the thousand or so plants not in that work. Thus, for *Adoxa moschatellina* only Moschatel remains. But isn't Town-hall Clock an evocative name? More than any other, it reminds me of a fine example, still in use as a roundabout, in the town of Gweru, in Zimbabwe.

Something to look forward to (the outcome)

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In the March 2021 Bulletin I wrote about looking forward to a visit to a new Motorway roundabout on the M49 at Dyer's Common in the hope of finding what White used to describe as 'a motley throng of curious weeds'. Lois Pryce and Jean Oliver took me there on 1 April. For some reason, the track from where we parked at Easter Compton Church hadn't been 'square-bashed' beyond 40 species so as we steadily progressed, we added another hundred or so. Most of the bare soil was well grassed-over, but there must have been some seedmix on the stony banks of the old road, because there was a dozen or so plants of *Onobrychis viciifolia*, Sainfoin. From the footpath we saw something with big yellow flowers in what is now a drainage area, *Caltha palustris*, Marsh-marigold hanging on of course.

The accessible parts of the industrial area (mostly recently built distribution centres) were also dull, so we walked northwards to the remaining wild part. There, within 20m of the motorway was a ditch with a mushy green mass of something I needed to look at. Not the Common Water-crowfoot, *Ranunculus aquatilis* which I was expecting (though it was thereabouts flowering in small quantity), but a mass of a Charophyte in a disturbed part where some piping had been put in (Plate 5).

With a good hand-lens one could see the corrugated stem-sheath making it a Chara, and then the two small equal growths (stipulodes) below the whorled branches, so I knew it was *Chara vulgaris*. The round orange male parts of the reproductive system were readily visible and the long branchlets (bracteoles) above made it the 'usual suspect', the variety *longibracteata*. Still, any charophyte is good to find and the last Chara record around Avonmouth I can trace was in 1999. Charophytes can be quite malodorous and as Jean wrote afterwards, 'I felt I could still smell the Chara even after giving my hands a good wash'. As for its texture, it reminded me of nothing so much as the spinach quiche I had in my fridge, stringy, tangled, and impossible to extract a small piece from.



Plate 5. Botany in less pleasant surroundings: *Chara vulgaris* in an old ditch between the M49 and the distribution centres of the Avonmouth industrial estates. Photo by CM Lovatt.

George Garlick begins his botanical survey of the Avon Gorge

I've often mentioned George Garlick's 1951 survey of the Avon Gorge and how lucky I am to be able to use a copy of it. When I found out that the Somerset Rare Plants Group (SRPG) were having a 'Zoom' meeting on 27 March (not 28th as I had in mind) I realised that was the 70th anniversary of Garlick's first foray on the VC6, North Somerset side of the Avon Gorge. So I quickly put together a visual presentation, with a photo of him, his survey sheet (a neat copy in alphabetical order), the base map, and the Leigh Woods recording card he later submitted to the BSBI for use in their first *Atlas of the British Flora* (1962).

Garlick had begun his survey two days earlier on the Clifton side, on Easter Monday, on the south-facing slopes above the New Zigzag. Fortunately, being a teacher, he had plenty of holiday time for the work – just as happened in my case when I was completing my writing-up in 1982. One of his survey plots that I find interesting is the waste ground by the Portway at the bottom of the Gully. Garlick made a note of complaint that a few weeks after he had recorded the plants there, it was all cleared away, 'for some municipal purpose', he wrote. But of course if you think about it, putting it on record the way he did, it is almost as if it is still there – and indeed the *Buddleia* is!. For that, I concluded, 'Thank you George'. A copy of the presentation should be on the Somerset Rare Plants Group website by the time you read this.

Plant records

If you've found any interesting plants growing wild, please let me know or send an image of the plant and its habitat. Please include the location, date, and Ordnance Survey grid reference, and any useful notes about where you found it or its abundance. Keep fit and well, everyone.

Clive Lovatt, Stroud, 7 April 2021

GEOLOGY SECTION

PRESIDENT: Richard Arthur

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HON. SEC: Richard Ashley

Fossil surprise

A BNS member Neil Talbot contacted me after he came across some blocks of rock which had come from an overgrown outcrop right in the centre of the city. These blocks had some rather nice fossils so it just shows how important it is to keep alert and make sure such findings are recorded. Neil says he is not a geologist and was there as a naturalist but it is great to see him and others taking an interest in the local rocks, minerals and fossils.

Here is Mr Talbot's account: *"On my regular cycle route through north Bristol (I have agreed that making the exact location too public as this might result in them being collected; but near Lockleaze) I stopped and spotted a potential site for early flowering spring plants. Though I did find a couple of quite interesting flowers, I actually found something unexpected, which was more exciting. There were some rocks with large ammonites, amongst the bramble, discarded scooter and other rubbish. The ammonites were the largest ones I've ever found, and were in good condition."*

The BGS (British Geological Survey) app "The Geology of Britain Viewer" confirms that "This part of Bristol is underlain by Lower Liassic rocks of Jurassic Period age". I sent the photographs on to another BNS member, Simon Carpenter and he has provided a description of the fossils: *"... An interesting block of Lias limestone containing abundant ammonites. The thinner whorled beast is an Alsatites liasicus (a zonal ammonite) and the others look like species of Waehneroceras. This is very similar to material I used to see in the GWR cutting at Salford when there were landslides. The ammonites tend to be preserved as body chambers only, with the inner whorls preserved as impressions - these are often encrusted by oysters - I presume this is to do with the recrystallisation of the shells. These fossils belong to the Alsatites liasicus biozone (Hettangian) of the Lower Lias (Lower Jurassic). The bottom fauna is fairly restricted in this part of the succession - a few bivalves (Lostrea and Plagiostoma), and then lots of ammonites and other pelagic animals that have been carried in by ocean currents. The chaotic orientation of the fossils and the lack of bedding suggests a reasonably high energy environment?? The restricted fauna suggests low oxygen levels and a muddy sea floor unsuitable for organisms wanting a hard substrate for anchorage - the reason why the shells of ammonites become islands on the seafloor for encrusters."*



Photos ©Neil Talbot

So there you have it, and like I say great to see such interest in geology and such great geology to be found in the City of Bristol, so keep your eyes peeled and keep the interesting reports coming.

Richard fj Arthur



INVERTEBRATE SECTION

PRESIDENT: Maico Weites.

Hon. SECRETARY:

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Introducing the new Section President

This March I was elected as the new president of the Invertebrate Section, following Mike Hutchinson who has served as president for the last few years, thanks Mike! Many thanks to Mike, Ray, and others for the support and I am looking forward to organising some meetings and meeting more of you.

As many members may not know me, here is a short introduction:

So, I am Maico, 28. I am originally from the Netherlands but I have been living in the UK since 2014, first in Scotland and since 2019 in St George, Bristol. I work in ecological consultancy where I work on a range of projects throughout England and Wales, often comprising botany (Phase 1, NVC), bat, or bird surveys. I consider myself a naturalist with an all-round interest in wildlife but with an inordinate fondness of invertebrates. With the invert season taking off you may catch me overturning stones in the Gully or poking a stick into something stinky looking for beetles. With life slowly returning to normal (touch wood!) I hope we will get the chance to hold field meetings and to meet face-to-face. Feel free to contact me if you have any comments or suggestions.

INVERTEBRATE NOTES FOR MAY 2021

Mid to late March and early April saw some interesting weather patterns including in the last couple of days of March very warm air arriving from Europe and North Africa. As always with such instances this brings with it the chance of migratory insects assisted on their way to these shores. This spring has seen a considerable number of Large Tortoiseshell butterfly *Nymphalis polychloros* records from across England and also a fall of Striped Hawk moths *Hyles livornica* – but neither seen in our region (as far as I am aware). However, we have been visited by a few Humming-bird Hawk moths *Macroglossum stellatarum*, delighting people lucky enough to see them feeding by day at flowers, and for moth recorders using light traps a fair few of the Diamond-back Moth *Plutella xylostella* which despite its diminutive size is a seasoned traveller.

The warm weather also brought forth early sightings of Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*, all three common White butterflies *Pieris brassicae*, *P. rapae*, *P. napi*, Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines* and Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria* along with the species out of hibernation such as Peacock *Inachis io*, Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*, Comma *Polygonia c-album* and Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*.

Bee-flies were also out early and the number of sightings of Dotted Bee-fly *Bombylius discolor* seems to continue to rise and it may soon be thought of as common as the more familiar Dark-edged Bee-fly *B. major*. In the summer months, although they can appear from the beginning of May, do look out for the less conspicuous and smaller species *B. canescens* sometimes referred to as the Western Bee-fly as it is found in the SW of England and Wales primarily. The somewhat similar (at least in size) Heath Bee-fly *B. canescens* is restricted to heathy and sandy areas of Dorset and on the Isle of Man.

The bee-flies are parasitoids of solitary bees and so a healthy population of bee-flies should translate into the same for many of these hymenoptera. Dave Goulson has just published a new book on gardening for bumblebees which I am sure many readers will be interested in acquiring.

Ray Barnett
08/04/21

LIBRARY

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

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LIBRARY COMMITTEE CHAIR: - Clive Lovatt

HON. LIBRARIAN:- Jim Webster

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.**

NEWS FROM THE LIBRARY

As I write, we are out of the third period of lockdown, and progressing along the laid-out roadmap, which prescribes that Museums can open no sooner than 17 May 2021. Once the Bristol Museum & Art Gallery opens, the Librarian and his committee can consider and prepare for our own re-opening. The BNS Library will therefore remain closed during May. We will have no more firm news for the June Bulletin either, given the copy date of 7 May. Hopefully then in July we can take our first cautious steps.

In the meantime, we have bought three more books for the Library, two of the excellent WILDGuides series and one that I mentioned last month.

Britain's Freshwater Fishes by Mark Everard (2013). We seem to have missed this WILDGuides volume when it was published. From the description on Amazon: 'Includes detailed information on more than 50 species, the places they inhabit, and their roles in Britain's ecosystems'. I remember as a junior schoolboy, long before my interest in plants, jam-jar with a string handle and a small net on a cane, collecting three-spined sticklebacks in the stream in Abbey Fields, Kenilworth. Perhaps that was when I became a naturalist.

Britain's Plant Galls: A Photographic Guide by Michael Chinery (2011). This is another from the WILDGuides back catalogue, published with 'the aim of stimulating the general naturalist to take a closer look at the bumps and lumps that make up the fascinating world of plant galls'. It covers some 200 of the more frequently encountered species. The Library has the more recent *New Naturalist* but that is not a field guide. We have the small book by Darlington from the 1970s and, I think, some of the old books on the subject, but not the 2011 Field Studies Council AIDGAP key. Some members of Somerset Rare Plants Group have a keen interest in them, and who knows, like the Knopper Gall of oak, it may spread.

The Accidental Countryside: Hidden Havens for Britain's Wildlife by Stephen Moss (2020). As the Somerset author says, the title pays homage to Richard Mabey's *The Unofficial Countryside*, published, not in 1688 as Amazon has it, but in 1973. The new book refreshes the story, starting with the unexpected arrival of the Peregrine Falcon to breed in 'almost every British city'. Many of us too will recall the surprise of the urban fox in Bristol streets, and the rapid creep of Scurvy-grass along major roads at the start of this Century. It sounds like a very interesting book.

Another reliable series of books is the British Wildlife Collection; the BNS Library has most of them. There is a new one on *Heathlands* (no 9) just published, by Clive Chatters, who wrote the earlier volume on *Saltmarsh* which one of our members is reading at present. I'll review it another month as my copy came only yesterday and so far, I have only read the introduction. It is by Andy Byfield, a Bristol University student in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and a fellow aficionado of the plants of the Avon Gorge. He co-authored a seminal work, *Dorset's Disappearing Heathland Flora* (1986), and he later went on to co-found *Plantlife* (1989). It is difficult now to imagine the Bristol Downs as dry heathland; on the slopes we still have Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*), but the Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) and Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) have gone, though the *Calluna* is easily found in and below Leigh Woods.

Clive Lovatt, Stroud, 7 April 2021

ORNITHOLOGY SECTION

PRESIDENT:- Giles Morris

HON SEC.:- Lesley Cox

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FIELD MEETING

Please contact the Leader for the current rules under which this meeting could take place.

DURDHAM DOWN: Dawn Chorus

Sunday 2nd May

Leader: Mike Johnson Tel: 07530 981106

Time: 7:00 a.m.

Meet 07:00 outside the main entrance to Bristol Zoo at the top of Bridge Valley Rd, Clifton.

We will walk through parts of the Downs opposite Bristol Zoo particularly listening to the early morning song and calls of birds that are resident or passing through the areas of scrub and copses. The walk will be undulating and uneven in parts and mostly over grass which could be wet and muddy. The meeting will end at about 09:00.

It is essential that you contact the Leader no later than Friday 30th April if you plan to attend. Please take your own transport to the meeting place and bring your own equipment and hand sanitiser, etc. Also bring a mask, in case it is needed.

AVALON MARSHES

Saturday 22 May

Leader: Giles Morris Tel: 07712 398903

09:00 – 13:00

Meet at 09.00hrs in the RSPB Ham Wall Reserve car park at Ashcott Corner (ST 449397 BA6 9SX). From the middle of Meare Village on the B3151, Wedmore to Glastonbury road, take the minor road south, now with a brown signposted to Nature Reserve. After approximately one mile the car park is situated on the left just after the Railway Inn and the drain bridge. NB – **not** the Shapwick car park, which is on the other side of the road.

Level walking but may be muddy in places. **Parking charges: RSPB members are exempt at the Ham Wall car park (place membership card in the windscreen).** Remember to remove all valuables from parked cars.

This is usually the best time of the year in the Avalon Marshes – one of the top birding sites in the country. We would hope to see Bitterns, Hobbies, Egrets, Cuckoo a big selection of warblers and it is also a great time for dragonflies!

We shall start at Ham Wall but may move on to Shapwick or Westhay.

We hope that by then the limit on group size will be 30. Please inform the leader if you are intending to join the walk.

BIRD NOTES MARCH 2021

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March, as so often, treated us to a real variety of weather. A well-known saying is that the month “comes in like a lion” and this year the beginning of the month did indeed roar in with a series of south westerly gales. Unusually strong winds tend to have birders thinking about seabirds, and gales from the south-west are the most productive for us. Birds can be funnelled up the Bristol Channel and Severn Beach is a particularly rewarding spot since the estuary narrows suddenly here, forcing birds close to the shore, and many birds are unwilling to fly past the M4 bridge so swirl around offshore. The number of birds brought in by gales is somewhat unpredictable, especially outside the peak autumn season, but the strong winds this March were very productive. The dominant species was Gannet, a frequent enough species along more open stretches of coast but uncommon with us. An unprecedented flock of over 300 off Severn Beach

must have made a fine sight and similar numbers were seen at Portishead and Clevedon. Associated species included a Leach's Petrel, which is something of a Severn Beach speciality but is normally seen in the late autumn, and four species of skua. The smallest of these, and also the rarest and arguably the most beautiful, is Long-tailed Skua. March records of this species in the UK are extremely unusual but as well as this bird, individuals were seen in Dorset and Devon and, much more unexpectedly, near Sheffield. After the Severn Beach sighting either this or another bird was seen over several days at Bristol Airport, on an inaccessible part of the site visible only to airport staff and seen by birders only when it made a brief foray to Chew Valley Lake. This is a much more delicate bird than the other skuas, which feed by harrying and even killing other seabirds, and the Yorkshire individual fed largely on earthworms, as ours is likely to have done.

These seabird wrecks are exceptional events and none is the same as another. A year ago I wrote about the never-previously detected, or even imagined, nocturnal passage of Common Scoter across our region and speculated over whether this was also a one-off, brought about by unusual weather conditions, or is an annual phenomenon. It seems to be the latter: there have been several reports over various gardens this year, perhaps spread out over a slightly longer period than last year's concentrated event. Traffic noise is greater for some of us than it was last year, making migrating birds harder to hear. However, it appears that the nocturnal migration of Common Scoter is indeed an annual and detectable occurrence that was previously overlooked – a reminder that even in such a well-studied field as the British avifauna there is still much to discover, in this case literally from our doorsteps.

Rupert Higgins

Your sightings are welcome at: avonbirdrecorder@outlook.com

MISCELLANY

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL BOTANIC GARDEN



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 REOPENING OF THE GARDEN

External areas of the Botanic Garden re-open on April 12. All visitors will have to book tickets in advance. Tickets will be available one week ahead of time on the Botanic Garden website.

Avon Organic Group - www.groworganicbristol.org

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Thursday, 27th May We plan to host a talk with Peter Brinch at the Grow Wilder site in Stapleton, BS16 1HB:

Open Pollinated Seeds: A Resource for the Future

Peter Brinch, passionate about seeds, actively promotes the practice of using and investing in open pollinated seeds throughout the world.

There is still some uncertainty about this talk. If for any reason it cannot go ahead as planned there will be an alternative Zoom talk online. Final details will be posted on the website and Facebook, with tickets available on Eventbrite in the usual way.

www.eventbrite.co.uk

"Why aren't common names common, but scientific names are?"

asks Roger Steer

I have had several similar conversations with people recently. They have gone along the lines of:

Person: "What's the name of this plant?"

Me: "It's *Flos ignotum*." (Note that I tell them, correctly, in italics).

Person "Oh, no. I want the proper English name."

At the risk of teaching grandmothers to suck eggs, let me give you a simplified account of how we have come to use 'scientific' names. Many of you will know what I am going to say. Many will know the subject far better than I do. I'm not writing this for you.

The general public has always had common names for living things. Actually, the names that people use are not always that common. A Mistle Thrush will sometimes be called a Stormcock. A Green Woodpecker is also called that, or similar names. In addition, the Green Woodpecker may be called a Yaffle, which refers to its call. Grey Herons are well-known birds, but in my Somerset childhood, locals called them Cranes. The Dunnock has also been called the Hedge Sparrow. House, Tree and Hedge Sparrows are just called Sparrows by most people, though the last one is not a sparrow at all. The delightful Yellowhammer was referred to as a Yellow Bunting, by a birdwatcher of my acquaintance, even though there is a perfectly respectable Yellow Bunting – part of the East Asian checklist. I imagine that he was trying to rationalise the 'common' name to some sort of uniform 'Type, family' name. Last year at Westonbirt I was asked what the common name of a tree was. It was *Salix serissima*. I did not know anything else. There was no 'common' name on the label. With my rusty Latin I thought I recognised 'seri', which I thought was silk. I suggested Silky Willow. Despite the fact that I had just made it up and pointed this out, the person was delighted. Those tree buffs amongst you will know that I was a total imposter. *Salix serissima* is the Autumn Willow. Had I been better at Latin I might have hazarded 'Serious Willow' and still been wrong.

My point is this: Every known living thing has been given a scientific name. This is made up of a Genus (Family) and a specific (defining what we call a species). The important thing is that this scientific name is the same the world over, so the 'star' in Bonn, the 'étourneau' in Toulouse, the 'stornello' in Milan and the 'starling' in Lawrence Weston are all the same species – *Sturnus vulgaris*. When we use the scientific name, we use a name that is common to everyone (even rural Somerset). If you are talking about a micro-moth or a fungus, or any of the lower plants and animals, the chances are that their 'common' names were made up a very few years ago and probably by a committee. Well-edited publications tend to follow a very good rule: At the first mention of a plant/animal, its 'common' and its scientific name are both printed. Thereafter just its 'common' name. That way you can always check back what is really being written about.

Use 'common' names as much as you like. However, if you want to talk to someone else about the organism in question, don't be totally surprised by a blank look.

Roger Steer

Now spring is upon us, the bees have also reared their heads again. The Bristol area has a rich bee fauna comprising many nationally scarce species. We started the season with winter-active Buff-tailed Bumblebees (*Bombus terrestris*) and soon the rising temperatures and flowering Cherry, Plum, Blackthorn, and Willows brought out many other species. A new one for me was Trimmer's Mining Bee (*Andrena trimmerana*) feeding on a Dandelion in Clifton.

The bee fauna is not static and in recent years there has been a remarkable increase in the range of certain species such as Tree Bumblebee (*Bombus hypnorum*) and Ivy Bee (*Colletes hederæ*), both now common in Bristol. The Grey-backed Mining Bee (*Andrena vaga*) was considered extinct in the UK but was rediscovered in Kent in 2008. It has since expanded its range rapidly and nesting aggregations have popped up in sandy areas throughout Hampshire, Sussex and in 2021 also in Norfolk. The



Female Grey-backed Mining bee (*Andrena vaga*),
Photo © M Weites

species is superficially similar to the Ashy Mining Bee (*Andrena cineraria*). Females of the species are easily told apart by colours of the hairs on their



Female Ashy Mining Bee (*Andrena cineraria*) Photo © M Weites

thorax: all grey in *A. vaga* and grey with a clear black band in *A. cineraria*. The species is common on the continent and can be found as far north as northern Scandinavia. It will most likely continue its range expansion in the UK so keep an eye open for this charismatic bee!