



Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes
Environmental Records Centre



BMERC C19 Special Edition Newsletter 1

Thursday 14th May 2020

Wildlife Photography Competition 2020

Theme : Connecting the Dots

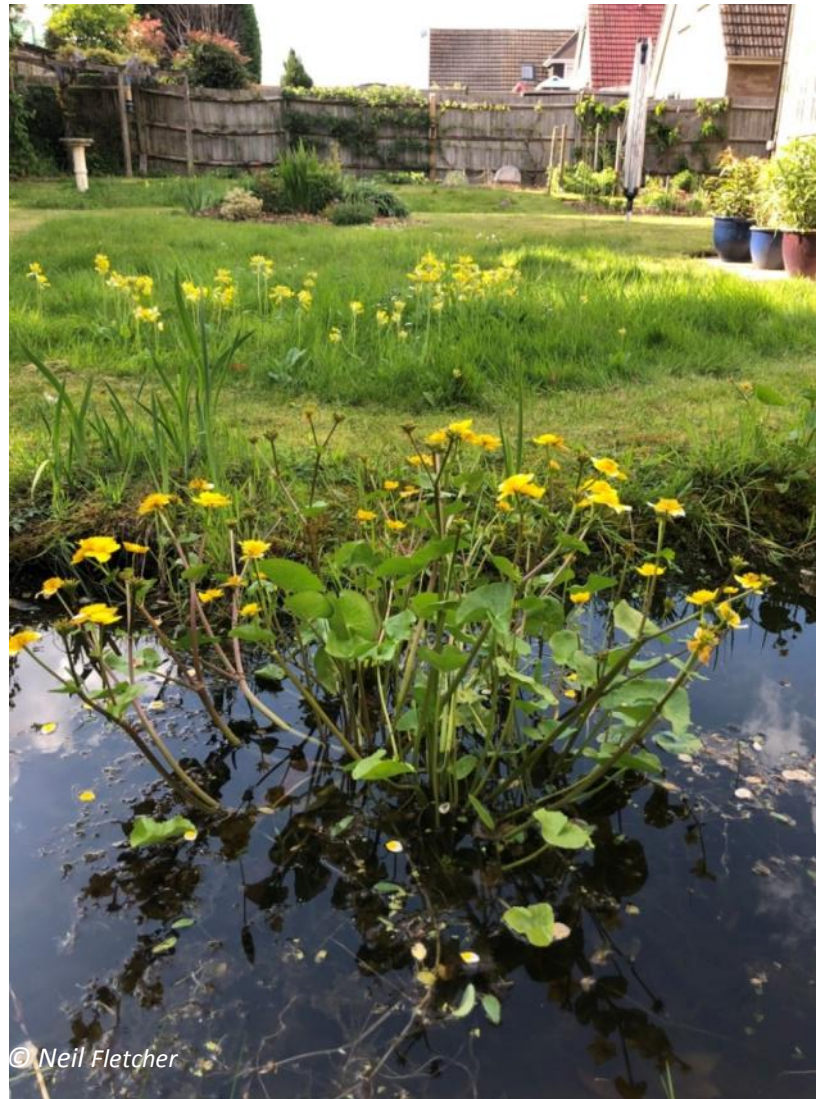


Classes: 1: "Landscape"
2: "Wildlife "

In these unprecedented times we are producing this newsletter to keep in touch with our wonderful recorders and bring you some news from the team.



Take the time to really appreciate our wildlife closer to home during 'Lockdown' this spring.



WORKPLACE
HEROES 

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Changes to the Team

In April 2020 Buckinghamshire Council was formed. This new, unitary authority replaced the former County Council and four District Councils in Buckinghamshire. Bucks and Milton Keynes Environmental Record Centre (BMERC) is part of the Environment Team at the new Buckinghamshire Council. BMERC staff work alongside Ecologists, Archaeologists and Conservation Officers, who all work together to protect and preserve Buckinghamshire's natural and historic environment. This newsletter is to keep you informed of the wonderful and varied work that the BMERC team are involved with...

Eliza Alqassar

Awards

In February this year BMERC was nominated for the Buckinghamshire County Council **Workplace Heroes Awards**.

We are happy to announce we won a prestigious award on the day – the **Outstanding Contribution to keeping Bucks Thriving and Attractive**. The competition was extremely strong, so we were very lucky to win.

A huge thank you to all our volunteer recorders and colleagues who support the BMERC Team.



(left to right) Cllr Martin Tett; Julia Carey; Eliza Alqassar; Cllr Bill Chapple; Fiona Everingham; Rhiannon Flemming; Claudia Bernardini and Rachael Shimmin.

Struggling Charities

How many of you were planning on taking part in this year's Marathon? Probably not many, but maybe some of you would have been sponsoring someone who was. Sadly, the Marathon was yet another casualty of the current health crisis. The cancellation of such events has left many charities that rely on them to raise valuable, if not essential funds, with a gaping hole in their finances.

We applaud the efforts of Captain Tom – over £30 million raised so far for NHS charities is amazing ! But please spare a thought for the myriad of small charities that are really struggling to survive right now and don't have Captain Tom fund raising for them – from mental health to wildlife charities, they all provide important and valuable services.

Not using your car so much during the lockdown? Consider the money you are saving in fuel and car maintenance – perhaps some of this could go to support your favourite or local charity in these hard times? Many charities have 'wish lists' so you can purchase kit they might need, some local animal charities always need towels and newspaper that can often be dropped off in special bins if you live nearby. Every little helps!

Fiona Everingham

May is blooming in every sense of the word. The Hawthorn (or May tree) is festooning the hedgerows with a froth of creamy white blossoms, alive with the buzz of insects.

The sunshine is also bringing out a wealth of butterflies. Orange tips are plentiful and easy to identify, the clue is in the name – at least for the males.



The birds are in full song – waking us ever earlier with the dawn chorus. One advantage of the lockdown is that we can really hear them now they aren't drowned out by traffic noise. The mellifluous tones of the blackbird often start the day in the company of robins, skylarks and song thrushes. See if you can pick out the different songs.

The RSPB can help:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/bird-songs/what-bird-is-that/>

At the other end of the day, nightingales have been heard in the north of the county – keep an ear out for this beautiful, but unfortunately now rare song.

Another clear sign that spring is well under way is the return of the swallows, house martins and finally the swifts. Swooping around the houses, as if in celebration to be back at their nesting sites after their long journey from the south.

Now we have had some rain there should be plenty of mud for both the swallows and house martins to construct their nests under the eaves our houses. You can always help by creating additional 'muddy puddles'.

Hedgehogs are also very active so please take care with the strimmer and mower! If you hear strange huffing and puffing noises in the night it could well be the prolonged and often unsuccessful mating ritual of a pair of hedgehogs.

Should you want to feed them please avoid bread and milk, hedgehogs really are lactose intolerant! Cat or dog food is good, apparently chicken in jelly is a favourite but meat in gravy is not a good idea. A supply of fresh, clean drinking water is vital and if you have a garden pond make sure there is a ramp or steps so any unfortunate hedgehog that topples in can clamber out safely. Strictly nocturnal, if you find a hedgehog out in the day 99% of the time there will be a problem and you need to get it to a wildlife rescue centre for treatment. Please check one of the many hedgehog sites on the internet for more advice.

So get out into your back garden and get your daily 'nature fix'!



Photo Competition Winners Announced 'Connecting the Dots'

Early this year BMERC held the first Wildlife Photography Competition 2020. We asked keen photographers amongst recorders and volunteers to send their best shots of Bucks and Milton Keynes to go into two categories 'Wildlife' and 'Landscape'. We were very pleased by the response. Some photos really showed amazing level of passion and skills. All photos were sent to three judges to be reviewed and independently judged against four criteria: technical skill, creativity, originality and reflecting theme.

The variety and beauty of some shots revealed incredible expertise and patience, the judges had a tough job selecting their favourites. The judges independently voted for two winning photos belonging to the same author - Harry Appleyard (pictured right), an extremely talented young photographer. Harry has won with his 'Shepherd's Delight' and 'Waxwing in Tattenhoe, December 2010'. The Waxwing was one of seven Harry found feeding on Rowan berries in the Tattenhoe estate on Christmas Day 2010, perched in morning sunshine.

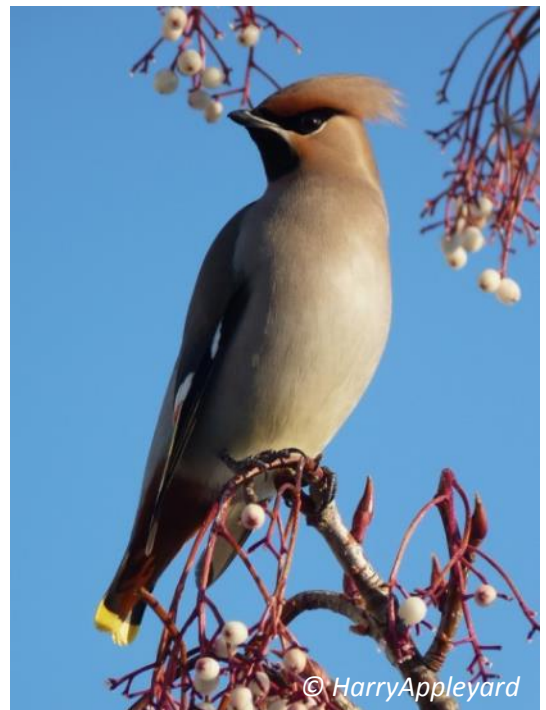


Harry Appleyard

Winner in the *Wildlife* category
Waxwing in Tattenhoe, December 2010

Winner in *Landscape* category

Shepherd's Delight. Sunset over the fields of Tattenhoe Park in Milton Keynes, taken on 24th November 2017



Every photo was special and we enjoyed looking at the world the way recorders see it. We want to thank you for taking the time to select your photos, fill in the forms and send them to us. All photos were printed professionally in high resolution and they will be sent to the photographers on demand, or displayed at the next seminar.

The People's Vote unfortunately could not take place due to the seminar having been postponed; nevertheless we will be asking for your vote for next year's competition.

Emma Foster & Claudia Bernardini

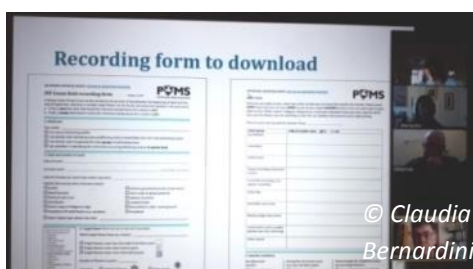
3,2,1..... FIT to go?

We are now several weeks into the lockdown due to COVID-19 and are all adjusting to this new life.

After the first disappointment of having to postpone the BMERC seminar in March the team is now bouncing back and adapting to the new routine. Since the lockdown we have been blessed with weeks on end of great weather and beautiful sunshine. Although at the present time we can't go out surveying there are many other ways to keep up our skills, to learn new things and support wildlife and conservation projects.

There is a lot of juggling to be done when you work from home with a ten year old boy. After the first few days of panic, I decided to embark in a few recording schemes that I could do from my garden with my son Dylan and during my daily walk (or run). The one thing I had wanted to do for a while, but never had the time, was to get more involved with the invertebrates group. The UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme (PoMS) project seemed just ideal to start from home with the FIT Count (Flower-Insect Timed Count) good for beginners like Dylan and me.

As it happened just when I was getting started, Nick Marriner, Martin Harvey and Edwina Brugge organized a webinar session "Pollinator Monitoring Scheme online workshop" (PoMS) that was very useful and incredibly well timed. Martin and Edwina trained us on the 'ten-minute pollinator FIT Counts' during a very successful session!



After the webinar Dylan and I were ready to start. We built our 50x50cm quadrat with bamboo sticks and looked around the garden to find the best flowers to survey.



We tried to stick to target flowers suggested by the scheme, but we had to adapt slightly with what we had available in the garden and the pear tree and the rosemary bush had masses of flowers.

We have been recording the same patch for a few weeks now, usually during our lunch time. We monitor and record on days with temperatures above 13 degrees and we have collected some interesting data. We are finally getting around to identifying different groups. It is all very fascinating.



In the next few months we will try and record more as more species come into flower.

We are waiting for the buddleia, the lavender and the ivy to flower. Meanwhile we are learning something new every day and enjoying the sun in lockdown.

Can your Lawn, However Small, be Helping Pollinators?

Julia Carey

Do you fancy a “No Mow May”?

Every Flower Counts

Plantlife have re launched their fun family friendly “Every Flower Counts” project and are looking for more volunteers.

What is Every Flower Counts? With 15 million gardeners in the UK, they want to know which flowers are most abundant on lawns and small green spaces to work out how much nectar the supply to our beleaguered pollinators. It’s very easy to do, each session takes just a few minutes and children love to help. Once you’ve submitted your results, you’ll get your own Personal Nectar Score. Countrywide results will be combined to produce a top 10 of lawn flowers and a National Nectar Score.



When and How do I take part? This year the counts take place on the late May Bank Holiday weekend, Saturday 25th to Monday 27th May and again on Friday 12th to Sunday 14th July. You will need to go through a very simple registration with Plantlife, details can be found on the project’s main webpage from where there are also links to all sorts of interesting facts and figures, guides on how to count and an introductory video.

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/everyflowercounts/>

What is “No Mow May”? In the lead up to Every Flower Counts, we’re encouraging you to leave your lawnmower in the shed. That way, smaller plants like clover, daisies, dandelions, selfheal will get a chance to flower in time for Every Flower Counts. After the survey, you can carry on and leave some or all your lawn unmown if you want to encourage more flowers for pollinators. You can find more information on their website.

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/about-us/news/no-mow-may-how-to-get-ten-times-more-bees-on-your-lockdown-lawn>



Why are our Gardens so Important?

Since the 1930s, nearly 7.5 million acres of flower-rich meadows and pastures have gone. Just 1% of our countryside now provides this floral feast for pollinators. With 15 million gardens in Britain, lawns have the potential to become major sources of nectar. Every Flower Counts aims to work out how many flowers are on our lawns and how many bees can be supported through the National Nectar Score.

What’s the point of collecting all this information? Both foodplants and pollinators are in sharp decline. On a single summer’s day, one acre of wildflower meadow can contain 3 million flowers, producing 1 kg of nectar sugar. That’s enough to support nearly 96,000 honey bees per day, or a multitude of butterflies, hoverflies, beetles and other pollinating insects.

Recorders Seminar

As is oft repeated on the news, we are living in unusual times. Because of ongoing uncertainties and the likelihood that the autumn period will be very busy with many events which have been postponed from earlier in the year, the BMERC Team have very regrettably decided to not hold this year's Recorders Seminar; instead, utilising a hopefully quieter period very early spring 2021. Once plans are a little more advanced we will share the latest news with all of our recorders and partners.

Get Involved

There are many activities, events and webinars you can get involved with over the next few months.

Photo Competition for 2021 - now is a great time to get started.....

Next year's BMERC photographic competition will have a new theme - *'Life in Lockdown'*. So get your cameras and phones out this spring and summer to get ready!

We will give plenty of time for entries to be submitted before the next Recorders Seminar, so please get your lenses ready and watch this space!



Recording Events and Surveys in May and Beyond

- Garden Butterfly Survey 2020 <https://www.gardenbutterflysurvey.org/>
- Garden Birdwatch with BTO <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/gbw>
- Living with Mammals survey <https://ptes.org/get-involved/surveys/garden/living-with-mammals/>
- Blossom watch <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/blossom-watch>
- Nature Calendar with the Woodland Trust <https://naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>
- Garden Butterfly Survey 2020 <https://www.gardenbutterflysurvey.org/>
- Challenge to help save butterflies and moths by raising funds in a creative way: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/how-you-can-help/fund-our-work/other-ways-to-help/join-the-26-challenge>
- Hedgehog Street Live Hedgehog Map <https://bighedgehogmap.org/>
- Wild Challenge is a call to get up, get out and get wild! Get to know wildlife in your garden and help nature thrive in your outdoor spaces <https://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/families/family-wild-challenge/what-is-wild-challenge/>
- Herbology Hunt is the junior arm of Wild Flower Hour. It's an informal partnership between #wildflowerhour and the Wild Flower Society and is supported by BSBI.

Zooniverse

Fed-up with the view from your window? Perhaps joining a project on Zooniverse might broaden your horizons. How about counting penguins, dive deep into the seas around Sweden or look to the stars? Take a look at Zooniverse; your biggest problem will be trying to choose from the many projects available. <https://www.zooniverse.org/>

Calling all Wildlife Recorders

If you would like to be part of our newsletter, please share your lockdown stories by emailing us at: erc@buckinghamshire.gov.uk Whether it is about you gardening, recording, or anything that keeps you active and positive - we'd love to hear from you!