

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Summer 2019



In search of the Noble Chafer

By Harry Green

For the last 35 years or so I have been involved in the search for Noble Chafers locally. Nationally this is a very scarce beetle. The larvae live in and consume naturally decaying wood and in our area use old orchard trees: plum, apple, pear and cherry. As they chew their way through the decay they produce characteristic small pellets (droppings) and we have spent a lot of time pushing spoons into hollow trees in search of this frass. The results have revealed that Worcestershire and its old orchards are the main sites in Britain for Noble Chafers and that the Vale of Evesham is particularly important. The frass may last for several years in dry tree holes and confirming current presence of beetles is difficult. They emerge and fly in early June and their visible season is usually over by mid-July. They like to fly on warm mornings and often head for hogweed flowers to feed on pollen and nectar and to meet the opposite sex. The females then seek out suitable decaying trees where they lay eggs. If the weather is cool and wet the beetles simply turn back round into the hollow tree or go to one nearby to mate and lay eggs.

In recent years researcher Deborah Harvey and colleagues have isolated a volatile chemical from the beetles and discovered that it attracts the beetles, especially males – a pheromone or lure. They have gone on to synthesise it in the laboratory. This year we received a supply of the lure and simple traps and placed them in orchards to try to confirm the presence of the beetles. Despite the awful weather for three weeks in June we caught Noble Chafers (and released them) at two sites where frass had been found, Hampton Orchard and Naunton Court Orchard thanks to the lure. Even more exciting was the capture of beetles at Hipton Hill Orchard. We have searched there for frass ever since VLHT established it as reserve in 2007 but have never found it. The icing on the cake came with chafers being captured at Stocken Orchard, a site purchased thanks to Severn Waste Services to give the beetles a home in the future and they have found us already. So VLHT now conserve several sites for this nationally rare and important beetle. Equally important – when this film-star beetle is present there are almost certainly many other insects alongside that depend on naturally decaying trees, and many of these are important pollinators – see details of our video on page 2.



VLHT trustees Harry Green and Bob Gillmor at Stocken with Noble Chafer lure



Noble Chafer: image credit Harry Green

Six minutes of sunshine

A video about orchard wildlife including pollinators and the importance of deadwood

As part of the Three Counties Traditional Orchard Project legacy we have worked with Redhead Business Films to put together a short video looking at the importance of old orchards for wildlife. The video also highlights the link between deadwood and pollinators.

To view the video visit our website and follow the link - <https://valetrust.weebly.com/news.html>

Or view and share it from our Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/valetrust>

Grizzled Skipper monitoring at Hipton Hill

The Grizzled Skipper butterfly is rare in Worcestershire and is the subject of a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The BAP recognises the decline of the species and the need for habitat management and monitoring. Our orchards at Hipton Hill hold one of the few remaining colonies of Grizzled Skipper in the county and we are eager to increase the population through appropriate management. To do this we need to identify the areas where the butterflies can be found on the site and start to monitor their numbers. In 2019 we received a boost when Severn Waste Services agreed to fund some close-focus binoculars to allow volunteers to identify and count the butterflies on a pre-determined route around part of the site. This has not only made it possible to start to gather important information about the Grizzled Skipper at Hipton but has already brought to light a new species in the orchards, the closely related Dingy Skipper. This brings the total number of butterfly species recorded at Hipton to 27 including all five of the county's Skippers. Our first year of monitoring for Grizzled Skipper recorded the first one on the wing on 2nd May and the last one seen was 18th June, with a maximum count of 16 individuals on 19th May.



Grizzled Skipper



Dingy Skipper



Small Skipper



Large Skipper



Essex Skipper

Plum Festival volunteers – help needed

We are now starting to get ready for the annual Pershore Plum Festival when the town goes plum-crazy. We will be looking for volunteers to help pick and sell plums through August especially the Bank Holiday weekend as with previous years, so if you can spend an hour or two to help please get in touch.

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust (VLHT) is a registered charity, number 1080109. We work to protect and conserve the environment in and around the Vale of Evesham and Pershore. We work with volunteers, funders, farmers and the government to secure the future of, so far 320 acres.

Volunteers

We are very grateful for the continued support from our volunteers carrying out essential tasks on our sites. The weather played its part over the last quarter with a couple of tasks being cancelled due to high winds and rain. Clearing broken branches from orchards filled a few task days and we actually got on with some plum tree pruning. After the storms the weather has been very dry and we have had to start watering young trees. Repairing fences and controlling invasive plants such as thistles and cow parsley filled most of the rest of the sessions. Barbed wire continues to be an issue and we have removed many hundreds of metres of old wire from our sites. At Hipton Hill where the two strands of wire have started to sag it presents a hazard to deer trying to jump the fences and on two occasions recently animals have been caught between the two strands. In order to prevent this further, volunteers have removed one of the strands of barbed wire at points where there are animal tracks. This has taken a lot of time walking the boundaries and removing wire but it will mean safer access for deer and other wildlife around the site in future while still allowing us to continue with the grazing, essential to the management of the site.

Hipton Hill Orchards open days

On Friday 14th and Saturday 15th June 2019 we opened Hipton Hill orchards to visitors. From comments received during previous years' guided walks we thought visitors would rather have time to wonder around and enjoy the wildflowers, butterflies and wonderful views rather than being lead round in a line. We mowed a path, all four species of orchid were flowering in abundance, butterflies were on the wing and all was set for an enjoyable couple of days. The weather however did not play its part and heavy rain the day before and



Commophila aeneana

occasional showers over the two open days meant we had fewer visitors in two days than we normally get for a two-hour evening walk! It didn't stop the show though and the first Meadow Browns of summer put in an appearance, as did Ringlets, Small Heaths and Grizzled Skippers. Several species of day-flying moths were found including brightly coloured Cinnabars and Burnets as well as Burnet Companion, Yellow Shell and Mother Shipton. The highlight though was *Commophila aeneana* a rare and beautiful little micro-moth which feeds on the roots of Hoary Ragwort.

An unexpected find By Wade Muggleton

This was found in a book that was presented to the Grandfather of a friend of mine as a prize in 1907. At what stage in the book's life it was used as a book mark we don't know and have been unable to date it. But an interesting little snippet of history that I am guessing dates from 1920s or maybe earlier. "Egg Plums 24 lbs for 5/-" that's equal to nearly 11kgs of plums for 25p including delivery, those were the days!

PERSHORE PLUMS
FROM PERSHORE

D. E. TOWER
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The Hill Fruit Gardens
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will supply Plums and other Fruit direct to customers as under:

Prolific Plums:
Ready now.
12 lbs. 4/-
24 lbs. 7/-

Egg Plums:
Ready 2nd week in August.
12 lbs. 3/-
24 lbs. 5/-

Victoria Plums:
Ready 3rd week in August.
12 lbs. 6/6
24 lbs. 11/6

Damsons:
Ready early September.
12 lbs. 4/6
24 lbs. 7/6

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D. E. TOWER,
THE HILL,
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Please forward me Carriage Paid to _____
Station _____
Railway _____

box _____ lbs. } Prolific Plums
box _____ lbs. } Egg Plums.
box _____ lbs. } Victoria Plums.
box _____ lbs. Damsons.

for which I enclose P.O. Cheque
£ : :

Name _____
Address _____

Out and About

Thanks to our trustees and volunteers we continue to promote our work and the special sites we own and manage, attending events where possible.

On 9th June two of our trustees attended Open Farm Sunday at Wick Care Farm. This National event encourages people to visit an open farm in their area to find out where our food comes from and learn about the wildlife that lives on farms.

Our assistant Ben and one of our trustees attended the very well organised Bish, Bash, Bosh 'fete' at Bishampton on 29th June. a village where we are pleased to have a very nice small woodland reserve donated to us by the Wilkes family in 2007 in memory of their son Ian. It was a very hot afternoon and was very well attended, excellently run and well supported with a good variety of stalls. A good number of locals showed interest in what VLHT are doing and some are interested in helping with a work party in the autumn.

Evesham Walking Festival came to Littleton Pastures on 6th July. About 20 people enjoyed a figure of eight walk around Littleton Pastures ridge and furrow field accompanied by three VLHT trustees. We were blessed with beautiful weather for the walk and the Lady's Bedstraw was especially beautiful not only to look at but everyone noted the heady perfume and could imagine what wonderful 'bedding' it would make to sleep on. The walkers had done a six-mile walk in the morning, a ninety-minute walk with us and were going on for another six miles in Pebworth.

BBC Hereford & Worcester Pear Orchard

Back in May we were invited to join BBC Herford and Worcester at the Royal Horticultural Society's (RHS) Spring Show at Malvern. We spent four days with the radio station helped by trustees and volunteers to promote Worcester Black Pears and the work of VLHT. The link came about as part of dual 'birthday' celebrations with BBC H&W celebrating their 30th and VLHT celebrating our 20th year we decided to plant a small orchard of pear trees in the Vale. The trees will be funded by the local radio station and volunteers will plant and nurture them. The chosen site is our North Littleton Community Orchard where we are already establishing a mixed fruit orchard. This will be an excellent addition to the site and will be there for generations to enjoy.



BBC Hereford & Worcester broadcasting from the RHS Spring Garden Show



Many of our projects are funded by Severn Waste Services through the Landfill Communities Fund. Without SWS, VLHT could not own, or protect, anywhere near as many acres.



Lower Moor and Haines Meadows bird report: April – June 2019.

By Rob Prudden

During April, winter and spring birds overlapped, with the last handful of **Teal** not leaving till 22nd April, while an unusually late **Snipe** was surprisingly still present on 23rd. At the same time early arriving potential breeding birds included pairs of **Shelduck**, **Oystercatchers** & **Curlew**.

Wading birds seen on passage heading to breeding sites well to the north, included a **Black Tailed Godwit**, 2 **Greenshank** & 2 **Dunlin**. Two **Black Terns** that dropped in for an hour after a wet misty day with easterly winds were well off course while heading for breeding sites in mainland Europe. More expected shorter distant migrants included 3 **Common Sandpipers** & single **Redshanks** on four different dates. Non-wading migrants that passed through included a pair of **Yellow Wagtails** and a **Wheatear**, while a **Hobby** drifted through, high overhead, casually catching large insects as it went. Other birds seen briefly at this time were a soaring **Red Kite**, male **Mandarin Duck** and a showy and noisy **Little Owl**.



Common Frogs have traditionally deposited their Spawn in shallow water in one of the meadows, this year 2 **Little Egrets** located the hatched tadpoles and feasted on the readily available food source throughout April and early May. On 14th May 2 more birds arrived but with most of the surviving Tadpoles having moved into nearby deeper water, all 4 birds left, flying high to the north.

Successful breeding birds included a pair of **Ravens** that fledged 2 juveniles by late April, **Barn Owl**, **Sparrow Hawk**, 3 pairs of **Lapwings**, and 2 pairs of **Lesser Whitethroats**.

The first **Cuckoos** arrived on 30th April with the last bird still singing on 25th June, during the period up to 2 males and a single female were present, presumably laying their eggs in **Reed Warblers** nests in reed beds along the Lench Ditch and the river.

Just off site on one of the larger pools at the Leisure park, 3 pairs of **Common Terns** and single pairs of **Little Ringed Plover** and **Oystercatcher** bred, the adults regularly visited the river meadows during the incubation period to feed along the river or just to wash and brush up, by mid-June fledged juveniles were brought over to the relatively shallow water of the river flash to bathe and feed.

By late June the change of seasons was already apparent with a build-up of c120 **Lapwings**, some of these were juveniles but many would be failed breeders from further north. The first 2 adult post breeding **Redstarts** arrived on 28th June.



Evesham Volunteer centre
The Lodge
Brick Kiln street
Evesham
Worcs
WR11 4AA
valetrust@outlook.com
<http://valetrust.weebly.com>
07794 835 953