

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust

Spring 2017



Bloomin' lovely

After a relatively mild but dull winter it was nice to see the early blossom of Cherry Plum bursting out to welcome the spring. This early flowering relative of the plum is not just a welcome sight for us, but it is important for some of our pollinators as well. Over-wintering Honeybees need to replenish their honey to feed the young bees in their hives and queen Bumblebees need an early feed as they wake from hibernation. The Cherry Plum blossom is followed by Blackthorn, Damson, Pear, early Plum varieties, Cherry, later Plum varieties and then Apples. This annual spectacle is sadly becoming less and less in the Vale as more old orchards are grubbed out to make way for other crops or development. We continue to manage our old orchards, caring for the existing trees and planting new trees so that future generations can enjoy this special sight of blossoming orchards. So get out this spring and enjoy nature's canvas at its finest.

Tree-mendous effort

As part of OVO Energy's "I Dig Trees" campaign we were awarded 400 saplings to plant at our sites. Most of these were planted at our Littleton Pastures site between South and Middle Littleton. With the help of our regular volunteers and children from the Littletons School we planted an area adjacent to the existing small patch of woodland which will develop as an area of woodland edge. This will provide ideal conditions for birds to nest as well as being a great habitat for many different insects from beetles to butterflies.



The mixture of trees includes oak, hornbeam, hazel, goat willow and wayfaring tree so there will be a good mixture of seeds and flowers to attract even more wildlife.

At the same site we continued with our pond restoration work, enlarging the existing pond which is fed by a spring-fed stream. Less than a month after we did the work the first frog spawn was discovered!



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

Pershore Plum Festival’s Princess digs in at Hipton

We continue to restore the heritage plum orchard on Hipton Hill, managing the old trees while planting and protecting new fruit trees. The present Pershore Plum Festival Princess joined us in the orchard to plant a Yellow Egg plum tree to mark the 190th year since this variety was discovered in Tiddesley Wood near Pershore.

NLCO orchard planting

Work has continued at our North Littleton Community Orchard and Nature Reserve in North Littleton. Following on from the twenty trees planted by De Montfort School during the winter, a further 62 plum trees of various varieties were planted. These have all had stock-proof guards fitted to allow sheep to graze.



Preparing for seed sowing at NLCO

We also planted Walnut and Sweet Chestnut trees and Hazel bushes to add variety to the orchard. The hedges planted last year are doing very well, and just required a few extra plants to fill some gaps. A few flowering shrubs such as Guelder-rose, Wayfaring Tree and Goat Willow were also planted around the edges of the new field sections to provide food for pollinating insects.

We have also sown a few small areas with winter bird seed as a trial to help some of our declining farmland bird species to feed through the winter months. If this is successful we will seek advice regarding sowing larger areas in the future.

Volunteers



Pruning Stocken Orchard
(Photo by Merlin Mather)

Our regular volunteers continued with their efforts through the winter in all weathers; tee-shirts one week and waterproofs the next. Tasks included tree planting, removing hazardous old barbed wire fences, repairing stock fencing, clearing hawthorn from around old plum trees, pruning apple trees and clearing up after the winter storms. This included removing a tree which had fallen through the brand new fence at Littleton Meadows. We have been joined by a few new volunteers recently which has made it possible to carry out even more work. If you would like to find out more about volunteer opportunities, please get in touch.

Dates for your diary – Events April-June 2017		
Sun Apr 30 th	Tiddesley Wood Open Day (Worcestershire Wildlife Trust)	10am – 5pm
Tues May 9 th	Lower Moor guided walk	7pm
Fri Jun 9 th	Hipton Hill guided walk	7pm
Thur Jun 22 nd	Hipton Hill guided walk	7pm
Mon Jun 26 th	Littleton Pastures guided walk	7pm
For more information see our website - http://valetrust.weebly.com/events.html or contact the office		

Vale Landscape Heritage Trust (VLHT) is a registered charity, number 1080109. We work to protect and preserve 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, over 280 acres.

Wasps

People often ask the question “what’s the point of wasps?” My standard answer tends to be that wasps often wonder “what’s the point of people?”

Wasps are social insects, closely related to bees and ants, collectively known as the Aculeate Hymenoptera. The name Hymenoptera is derived from the Greek words "hymen" meaning membrane and "ptera" meaning wings and the Aculeates are the ones with stings. So wasps belong to the group of membrane-winged stinging insects.

The yellow and black colour of wasps makes them instantly recognisable as these are nature's warning colours. Because of this, many harmless insects mimic wasps to deter would-be predators. Unlike Honeybees, wasps do not stay in colonies during the winter, instead the new queens leave the nest in the autumn and mate. They then find a dry cool place to hibernate and all the males, workers and old queens die. In the spring the new queens wake and start their own colonies.

In our orchards, wasps feed on nectar and pollen, so pollinating the fruit as they do. In the autumn they return for their share of the fruit they pollinated. They also eat many different ‘pests’ from caterpillars to aphids which would otherwise damage our crops.

Did you know?

- There are nine species of social wasps in Britain including the largest of our wasps, the Hornet.
- To identify the different species of social wasps you need to look at their face patterns (see images opposite).
- Wasps are mostly carnivorous, eating other insects but they also have a sweet tooth (or more precisely mandible) and will feed on nectar and fruit.
- Just like bees, wasps can be revived if they are dehydrated, by feeding them a small amount of sugar water.
- Wasps build their nests from wood pulp (which is why they are sometimes called paper-wasps), chewing anything from trees to fence posts and garden furniture. The different types of wood can be seen in the layers of pulp on the nest.
- Only female wasps sting. In fact the females are responsible for building the nest and defending it, caring for the young wasp grubs and collecting food. Male wasps have only one purpose!

So next time you’re being bothered by a wasp just remember she’s only doing it for the good of the colony.

German wasp



Common wasp



Hornet



Friends of VLHT pay a regular amount each month or year, which supports the important work saving and renovating old orchards and hay meadows and woodlands. For details, contact Gary Farmer at the office.

Bird Highlights from Lower Moor and Haines River Meadows January to March 2017

Rob Prudden

Most winter waterfowl if not disturbed are settled by the New Year and little movement occurs. This was the case around the wetland areas, with c180 **Teal** most days. Roughly half of these left in mid-March with all but a handful left by the end of the month. **Wigeon** numbers remained low at only c50. Other wildfowl included up to 12 **Gadwall**, 9 **Pochard** and a female **Goosander** that found the fishing along the river to its liking, from the beginning of the year until 7th March.

Lapwing numbers were low with a maximum of only c150, these were joined regularly by up to 85 **Golden Plover**, also well down on previous years for the same period. A male **Peregrine Falcon** flushed the day roosting flock off nearby arable fields at Wick on several occasions.

Snipe were present throughout, although numbers continue to fall, with the highest count being a relatively low 32. Scarcer winter visitors included two **Woodcock** which were seen on several dates in January and February, also a **Green Sandpiper** on 17th January, with a male **Stonechat** and a northerly bound **Little Egret** on the same date. A small mixed flock of **Siskins** and **Redpolls** fed in Alders alongside the river for a couple of weeks at the end of January. Up to eight wintering **Chiffchaffs** stayed alongside the Lench Ditch near the car park, along with several **Blackcaps**.

Without doubt the highlight of the winter period was a **Long-eared Owl**, first located on 1st February and a first for the recording area. Normally these are difficult to see at their daytime roost sites, as they tend to secrete themselves deep in low, thick cover, or higher up tight against the trunk of an ivy covered or evergreen tree. This particular bird however had oddly chosen an open aspect in an old Willow pollard, where it roosted daily for its whole six-week stay until finally leaving during the darkness hours of 13th/14th March. Interestingly, due to the exposed nature of the roost site the bird moved around the tree so as to always be out of the prevailing wind. A **Little Owl** had also taken up residence in an adjacent tree throughout the same period.

The first real sign of any early spring movement came when a pair of **Shelduck** turned up on 3rd February, they then remained in the area until the 21st March when they were joined by a third bird till the months end. The Shelduck were not the only early arrivals as three **Oystercatchers** were present on 16th February, all three remained until the end of March with another two birds joining them on 28th, this leading to continuous noisy aerial territorial disputes until the interlopers were forced to move on.

Spring migrants then became more apparent in March with an early winter plumaged **Dunlin** on 3rd, a pair of **Curlew** from 7th till the end of the month, 30 **Meadow Pipits** on 12th, a **Redshank** on 14th, the first **Sand Martin** on 26th, **Green Sandpiper** on 29th & 30th and up to five **Little Ringed Plovers** from the 28th.

In the warmer brighter weather of the last week of March a pair of **Sparrowhawks** were displaying high up over the site, as were a pair of **Kestrels**, several pairs of **Buzzards** and at least three pairs of **Skylarks**. Unusually a pair of **Grey Wagtails** were still present at the end of March, although they annually winter in the area they have normally gone by the beginning of the month, when they leave to seek out a nesting territory, this tending to be either alongside a fast flowing stream or around a lock on a nearby river.

Long-eared owl



Photo credit: Rob Prudden

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