



**Worcestershire
Wildlife Trust**

Malvern Local Group

Winter newsletter 2024-5

Indoor meetings 2024-25

Our indoor meetings start at 7.30pm and are held at the Lyttelton Rooms, Great Malvern. £3 per head. All are welcome, we'd love to see you.

5 Dec - Helen Mugridge, wildlife photographer

Wildlife of Finland

2 Jan - Eden Tanner, naturalist and retired veterinary surgeon

Just Scratching the Surface (Parasites)

6 Feb - Speaker to be confirmed

Work of the Vale Wildlife Hospital Tewkesbury

6 Mar - Gordon Forrest, wildlife photographer and writer

Birds and History of Upton Warren

3 Apr - Philip Seaton, orchid conservationist and writer

Orchid Conservation

1 May - Dominique Cragg, Western Reserves Officer Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, Co-Chair Worcestershire Mammal Group

Mammals of Worcestershire

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Watching and Wilting in Wiltshire

As humans wilted, the sun-worshipping insects were out in force. Following an initial sighting of an otter, it was the dragonflies and damselflies that took centre stage over the lake. Chocolate-brown bodies and wings of translucent bronze under the sun made the brown hawkers very easy to see with the naked eye. Also present were southern hawkers with their intricate green and blue, triangular markings, and emperors with black striped, blue abdomens.

Closer observation of the lake's surface revealed hundreds of common blue damselflies, while an elegant grey heron glided over and mute swans basked. Black-headed gulls were ubiquitous over the fields and water, one having learned how to catch dragonflies and feed in mid-air.

As we walked into the meadows of Lower Moor and Clattinger farms the change of habitat offered up meadow brown butterflies amongst

the meadowsweet, marbled white dancing over patches of bird's-foot trefoil, yellow rattle and betony whilst a pair of meadow browns mated on black knapweed.

The familiar song of chiffchaffs accompanied us throughout the walk as the heat intensified. Swallows came down low for the insects and the commonest flowers at our feet, oxeye daisies, silverweed and devil's-bit scabious, revealed a solitary common spotted orchid.

It was a relief to walk down a tree tunnel at this point. Here were speckled wood butterflies and field maples as well as the song of a wren to provide an alternative warmth to the sun's heat.

Into the afternoon the cafe and the three hides between the lakes proved the most popular parts of the nature reserve. It was in this region that a blackcap was seen and heard, the exuviae of dragonflies were viewed and photographed with something of a sense of awe, a yellow-lemon brimstone butterfly shone in the sun and a cormorant sat on the stump of a tree like patience on a monument. It was also here that Karen had a close encounter with a fledgling wren and Sarah, Richard and I had a sighting of a marsh harrier.

Philip Chambers

Mini-cruise to Santander

"Mini-cruise to Santander" does by no means convey the splendid maritime extravaganza that members of the Malvern Local Group enjoyed traversing the Bay of Biscay to Spain.

Eagerly anticipated, this brief whale-watching voyage exceeded all expectations. Caution. Do not expect a mammoth fluke to tower over your head or gaze at close quarters into the eye of a sperm whale: it is a more complex and subtle experience.



It started quietly as we left Plymouth and passed the Eddystone Lighthouse sailing serenely on a calm sea. Whale-watching passengers began lining the sides, looking out expectantly. Then the first of what were to become many cries of "sighting". In this instance it was the dark outline of a fin whale, which spouted high into the air. It was a distance away but the spout was clearly visible. Fin whales are semi-resident in the area of the Bay of Biscay and are giants up to 28 metres. Following this were several sightings of dolphins. Then, amazingly, the blunt dark shapes of two large pods of pilot whales, appearing and disappearing, swimming close by the hull of our vessel.

Our small Malvern group feel indebted to Orca staff and volunteers. One of the staff had given an excellent outline of whale and dolphin species, their size, shape, behaviour and food as well as a description of the sub-marine geography of the Bay of Biscay.

The Orca team, engaged on survey work, were willing to share information and answer all our questions. Indispensably for us, however, they were eagle-eyed at spotting whales and dolphins, indicating distance, direction and species. They would bellow or screech their sighting from (say) the starboard side and there was an immediate frantic stampede from port. In a much smaller ship, there would be a real danger of capsizing. Torrin, a young Orca person, added to the mayhem by bullocking round the deck roaring, "Dolphins, dolphins".

Since we were on deck 10, it was difficult to see birds closely but there were sightings of Manx shearwater, Corey's shearwater, great shearwater and great skua and, always impressive, gannets. Then bizarrely we hosted a wren, a pied flycatcher and willow warbler that had hitched a lift on board.

Back to dolphins and whales. There were well over 500 individual creatures sighted. But be cautioned; the sighting may be far away and it may be a brief glimpse of white wave, a splash, a back, a fin, a curved form, a silhouette. You may see just a tiny proportion of all these sightings but the ones you do see will be unforgettable: a bottlenose whale, a huge animal, breaching vertically, a school of common dolphins arcing gracefully through the air or a looming black shape close by, just below the surface.

Creatures observed were: fin whale, pilot whale, Cuvier's beaked whale, minke whale, northern bottlenose whale, common dolphin, striped

dolphin, Risso's dolphin, bottlenose dolphin, tuna and Portuguese man of war.

Our compact group bonded well; to coin a phrase we got along "swimmingly". We are all extremely grateful to Lyndon, Sheila and Jane for organising the trip so well.

Brian Costigan

Not to be missed

Wildlife of Finland by Helen Mugridge Thursday 5th December

Helen writes for her website "We are a husband and wife photography team based in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire. We travel extensively to various locations around the world. We are particularly fond of Finland and Iceland, which we have visited on numerous occasions at various times of the year."

We're very much looking forward to welcoming Helen and hearing about the delights of Finland. We hope to see you there too.

Trips for 2025

22 March - **Tring Natural History Museum; College Lake Wildlife Centre (BBOWT) and Tring reservoirs**

2 to 9 April - **Isles of Scilly**. Fully booked, reserve list operating.

15 April - **Four Shropshire WT nature reserves near Oswestry**: Sweeney Fen, Craig Sychtyn, Jones' Rough, Dolgoch Quarry

23 April - **Circular walk in the Forest of Dean including a cruise on the River Wye**

27 to 30 April - **Knepp Rewilding Project**. Fully booked, reserve list operating.

7 May - **Cors Caron NNR and Strata Florida**

29 May - **Martin Down NNR and Middleton Down (Wilts WT)**

7 to 14 June - **Alderney**. Fully booked, reserve list operating.

19 June - **Five Herefordshire WT nature reserves on the edge of the Black Mountains**: Crow Wood and Meadow, The Parks, Canon Tump Common, The Christopher Cadbury Reserve, Cethins and Little Marises Meadows

13 to 15 July - **Orford Ness, Landguard, Newbourne Springs SSSI**

Please book early for this trip in order to get the best Premier Inn rates.

21 August **Hilbre Island**