



Events

November 2024 – April 2025

Walks

Winter Woodland Walk at Saltwells nature reserve

Friday 6th December at 10am.

Our walk will be led by Les Drinkwater, events co-ordinator, Friends of Saltwells nature reserve. Meet on the main car park on Saltwells Lane off Saltwells Road/Coppice Lane near Saltwells Inn. Postcode DY5 1AX. Grid ref. S0933868.

Chance Wood – Snowdrops and Stories

Sunday 16th February at 10am.

Ian and Avril Williams will lead a circular walk from Kinver and through Chance Wood, with a little bit of history and hopefully a lovely display of snowdrops. Meet on the Kinver Community Centre car park, follow the signs from Kinver High Street.

Talks

At St. Saviours Church Hall, Hagley.

22nd November at 7.30pm.

Wildlife and work at Upton Warren

A talk by Gordon Forrest

24th January at 7.30pm.

Open Evening and AGM

If you would like to give a short talk on any wildlife topic please get in touch beforehand

28th February at 7.30pm.

Life on the edge – between a water vole and a hard place

A talk by Paul Wilkinson

28th March at 7.30pm.

Birds and how they see – compared with humans

A talk by John Medlock

25th April at 7.30pm.

Our Stour

A talk by Graham Beckley

For more details of events please visit

www.worcestershirowildlifetrust.co.uk/whats-on

The knights, cavaliers and deceivers of Penorcharde Meadows

If you are a keen historian, you might well be thinking from the title that a battle of the English Civil War took place around the Clent Hills; especially as the Monarch's Way footpath, the escape route of Charles II, passes to the south. But apologies to all

history buffs, this article is about the fungi that grow on Penorcharde Meadows and bordering paths.

I started to notice fungi in the meadows in 2023 and since then our volunteer parties have become adept at finding them. We attempt to work out what they are, with greater or lesser confidence, with the help of *Shroom ID* and *Google Lens* and at home with various books.

Most of the mushrooms that we have found around Penorcharde have tended to be associated with the margins of the fields and

trees, as many species form symbiotic relationships with tree roots and like the damp shade. Fungi are generally saprophytic, which means they are great recyclers, breaking down dead organic matter and releasing nutrients back to the soil. Some fungi are parasitic and cause damage to living plants (ash dieback, for example) whilst others can both kill the host and then help it to rot.



Shaggy inkcap

In the autumnal grass of the meadows we have found yellow and snowy waxcaps and we often find fungi like mottlegills, associated with horse dung. St. George's Day and fairy ring mushrooms appear in spring. The unpleasantly named but beautiful red "sickener", a *Russula* species, is in several places and I recently found a snakeskin grisette with its characteristic stem.

It's particularly good for fungi around the pipeline earthworks: poison pie, shaggy and hare's foot inkcaps and common cavaliers grow in the treeline as do the aptly named shaggy scaly caps.

Where we have cleared trees, we can find interesting species including rosy bonnets, pestle puffballs, beautifully purple amethyst deceivers, false death caps and another fungi you could almost guess if you saw it – the jelly baby fungus.

Identifying fungi is not easy! There are 15,000 UK species and many are LBMs (little brown mushrooms). Fungi can be highly variable and change appearance significantly as they develop and fade. But there are some easy, fun diagnostic features – the Devil's bolete, for example, is a dumpy reddish fungus that bruises inky blue when damaged. The aniseed funnel has an unmistakable odour that gives it its name whilst the sulphur knight is a striking bright yellow mushroom with an oily note of coal gas, if you're old enough to remember that smell. Fly agarics are the classic toadstool of children's books, unmistakable and mystical with red and white spotted caps.

One of the by-products of our work are habitat piles; when these contain logs, the fungi love to get involved. We've created food sources for turkey tail, hairy curtain crust, candle snuff and sulphur tuft fungi.



Trooping funnel cap

We have species of coral fungi and jelly fungi as well as other species on trees including artist's bracket, King Alfred's cakes and hoof fungus not to mention tapioca slime moulds in the leaf litter. The most prominent autumn fungi is trooping funnel cap, which appears around the reserve and you will know it when you see it.

Fungi can be found all around us so please do keep a lookout where you live. If you're visiting sensitive sites like nature reserves, please remember to keep to paths in order to protect other wildlife. Happy fungi spotting!

Matt Spencer

Is Merlin really a wizard?

Growing up on the edge of the countryside in north Staffs, I have always been familiar with the songs and calls of the most common birds. I learned early on that the chaffinch announces that it is "pink, pink, pink" and that yellowhammers inform us that they have "a little bit of bread and no cheeese". It was only when I retired that I began to develop a real interest in birds. I joined the local RSPB group where members were most generous in sharing their knowledge and my daughters bought me a CD of how to identify bird songs and calls, which I played in the car as background music. In very little time I found that by tuning in as I was walking, I was able to pick out many different bird songs and began to be able to spot and identify the songsters.

As time passed I used various methods to help me. Some birds are easy as they announce their own names: jack, jack, jackdaw, cuckoo, chiffchaff and peewit (lapwing). Others have a clear message: the wood pigeon moans "two bags full Susan" whilst the stock dove exclaims "oh look, oh look". Mistle thrushes ask questions "who are you? What do you think you are doing?" but song thrushes are determined to teach me by repeating each phrase at least three times.

I've found that I compare bird calls to other sounds. Some remind me of animal calls: woodcocks grunt and squeal, buzzards miaow, ravens (with a wider vocabulary than other birds) woof. Others sound more human: starlings wolf whistle, greenfinches wheeze, green woodpeckers chortle and mallards let out a ribald guffaw! Some birds make very little sound but I listen for the sad half note of bullfinches and the sharp intake of breath whispered by treecreepers. My favourite of all is the joyous display of tree pipits as they launch themselves skywards from the top of a tree, opening their wings like a tiny shuttlecock and crying 'whee, whee, wheeeee' as they descend back to the tree.

I recently downloaded the Merlin app to my phone as so many people are using it to help them identify birds. Is it really a wizard? It does a similar job to my old CD. I used it to confirm that I was hearing four different warblers and it alerted me to a party of siskin that I had not noticed ... pretty impressive! It's a useful tool for beginners wanting to learn what's around them, a confidence boost if you think you know what you can hear but are not sure and an alert to the unexpected and unusual. But to walk through a wood at dawn in spring, to tune in to nature and be able to pick out for yourself all the different voices that make up that glorious chorus? **That** is real magic!

Wendy Wilkins

A good read

The twelve birds of Christmas

by Stephen Moss

This is the ideal time to choose *The Twelve Birds of Christmas* as a good read. It's based on the song we all know, first sung in the late 1700s.

Not all of the 'days of Christmas' name a bird species so the most suitable one is chosen to fit the line. Sandpipers were chosen for 11 pipers piping and nightjars for eight maids-a-milking.

The book is full of information about the behaviour, history and folklore of each species, with many obscure and quirky facts. As you read you will think many times "well, I never knew that!"

Avril Williams

Penorcharde Meadows update

July and August work parties were spent trying to stem the invasion of bracken in the lower part of the reservoir fields. This seems never-ending but persistence will reduce its vigour, making the job easier in future.

Volunteers then moved to the top church field in September and October where we continued the bracken battle, cut back encroaching bramble and holly and repaired the fence.

A big thank you to everyone for all your hard work and for making Penorcharde such a great place to volunteer.

Ian Williams

Volunteer days at Penorcharde Meadows

Work parties take place from 10am – 3pm on
December 2nd January 6th February 3rd
March 3rd April 7th May 12th (5th is May Day)

Volunteer days at Romsley Meadows

Work parties take place from 10am – 3pm on
December 16th January 20th February 17th
March 17th April 28th (21st is Easter Monday)

If you are interested in giving volunteering a go contact Andy Harris on
andyh@worcestershireswildlifetrust.org