



## e-Newsletter

October 2022, Issue 9



Firstly, South Stoke Wildlife & Conservation Group would like to say a huge thank you to those who have supported us this year and those who have contributed to the SSWCG [GoFundMe](#) page. Donations have helped to pay for the printing of 'No Mow' signs, and will fund hedgerow restoration in the coming months which will help increase biodiversity in South Stoke Parish.

It has been a busy summer for SSWCG who continue collecting data for national flora and fauna surveys as well as recording and uploading images to [iRecord](#) and [iNaturalist](#).



### Is it a Hawker?

In mid-August John Lindley led a dragonfly walk through private gardens; 7 species were spotted, plus a pair of courting Orb Weaver spiders. The group saw the Red-eyed Damselfly which is less commonly seen and the Ruddy Darter which is on the wing well into late October.



Red-eyed Damselfly



Ruddy Darter



## The Beauty of Moths

Most of us are aware of butterflies in our gardens and countryside - there are around 60 species in the UK, flying from Spring until well into Autumn. However, we tend to pay much less attention to their cousins the moths, despite the fact that there are around 2,500 species in the UK, with different species on the wing in every month of the year.

In June this year, the group decided to try to identify how many species there are in South Stoke. The first challenge was to find a way of attracting and temporarily catching moths, so that they can be counted and identified. We chose to use an ultraviolet (UV) light trap. The light attracts moths, they enter the trap and then hide under egg boxes. In the morning we come along and identify them before releasing them.

Our first major success came in early June, when we recorded 5 species of Hawk-moth - some of the largest and most spectacular moths in the UK. We were particularly pleased to see The Pine Hawk-moth, a local species which uses Scots pine as its larval foodplant, and the Privet Hawk-moth, which has the biggest wingspan of any moth resident in the UK. Other notable Summer moths included the Buff-tip, which is camouflaged to look like a piece of broken twig, and The Jersey Tiger, a large and brightly coloured moth that is currently expanding its range across southern England.



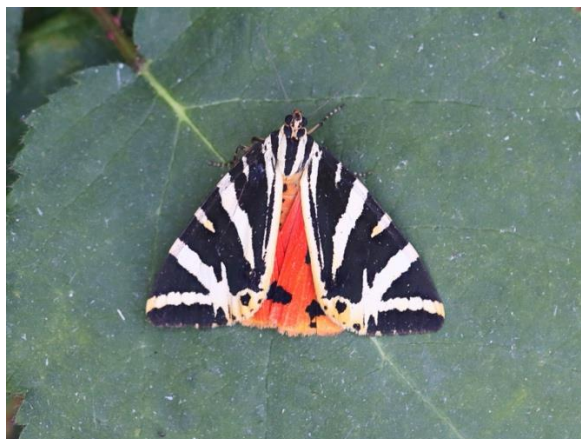
A Pine Hawk-moth - only to be found where Scots pines grow



The Privet Hawk-moth, with a 12cm wingspan



The Buff-tip - well disguised when hiding amongst twigs and foliage



The Jersey Tiger. Once rare, but becoming more common in recent years

Not everything that we found was big and spectacular. South Stoke is home to several species of "grass moths" - they are easily disturbed when walking through long grass in the daylight, and they are attracted to light, making it relatively easy to survey them. The Elbow-stripe Grass-veneer, at well under 1cm long, was the commonest of these moths this year.



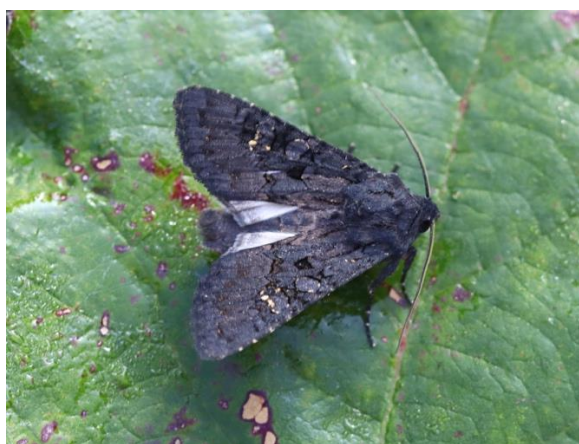
The Elbow-stripe Grass-veneer - even tiny moths like this have attractive markings

Moving into Autumn, the numbers and variety of moths declines, but we have still recorded a number of moths that only fly at this time of year, including the Sallow, a small but very bright yellow moth which lays its eggs, perhaps unsurprisingly, on Sallow and Willow. We have also recorded very large numbers of Black Rustic, a true Autumn specialist which stays on the wing until well into November.





The Sallow - one of our moths that only flies in the Autumn



The Black Rustic, a common moth in mid to late Autumn

Since the start of June, we have recorded over 180 different species of moth in the village, and we think that this number would be closer to 300 species over the course of a full calendar year. So far we have only recorded at three sites in the village, so next year we're hoping to survey more gardens - ***let us know if you'd like us to come to record in your garden.***



## Bats about bats!

As part of our research into local wildlife, SSWCG organised a bat walk which was very well attended. It was especially great to see so many youngsters joining in the fun. We had confirmed recordings of Noctule bats, but no sightings (they fly quickly and high up). We sighted Daubentens bats over the river, but got no recordings (it may be that they were being "drowned out" by the large numbers of Soprano Pipistrelles that were constantly calling). We also had a potential recording of Brown Long-eared Bats, which we are looking to verify by analysing the recordings further.



Villagers gather at South Stoke slipway to watch the bats flying over the river

John Lindley is working hard on getting to grips with the process of confirming a bat using our recordings. The process is as follows:

1. Capture a recording on the bat detector (which is plugged into an android phone) using the associated app
2. Upload recordings from phone to laptop
3. Analyse the recordings using a tool called kaleidoscope
4. Take the output of the kaleidoscope analysis, and compare it to "classic" recording data using the SSWCG bat book
5. Upload confirmed records onto iRecord

As you can imagine, step 4 is where the real skill comes in and this is what we hope to spend more time doing later on in the Autumn.

We will aim to run more sessions both for villagers to get involved with and to gather more data in the near future.



## Glow-Worm Survey – An Update

We held a second annual survey of glow worms in late July this year – and it was even more successful than the first, both in numbers of glow-worms and the number of people that turned up for the survey!

First, a few basic facts about glow-worms – with a nod to Richard Newton, who was a passionate advocate for glow-worms and for preservation of their habitats, and put together several previous articles about glow worms and their habits.

- latin name, *Lampyris noctiluca*, not actually at all worm-like, but rather a wing-less beetle up to 25 millimetres long.
- in the larval stage (of about two years) they are voracious predators turning the slugs and snails they find into a slimy mess. The larvae are armed with hooked jaws that they use to nip at their prey over and over again. Each bite injects a small amount of toxin which slowly starts to dissolve the proteins that make up the slug or snail. This rather gruesome process ends with the glow worm slurping up a 'snail soup'.
- a rare ability to glow in the dark, usually between May and September, they emit a bright green luminescence; but only the wingless female glows strongly in order to attract the flying males.
- the females climb up grass stems and switch on their lights. This glowing, which she can only maintain for a few weeks, acts as a beacon to the males who have excellent sight and spend their limited time flying around looking for females. Once they have mated, females turn out their lights, use all of the energy they have left to lay 50 to 100 eggs and then sadly die.
- glow worms can often be seen in gardens, hedgerows or railway embankments – all of which we have in abundance in South Stoke.



Seen in Ferry Rd – larvae have spots on their sides



Glowing female photographed by Alex Dommett

So, the results – and this was from a set walk around South Stoke including ragwort field to the south of the village, South Bank, the Glebe, Ferry Rd, and the banks of the railway embankment up to the Bogey Hole.

In the 2021 season we saw 19 glow-worms on the survey evening, and this year we trumped that with 32 glow-worms in and around the village. There were 18 on and about the Ridgeway path down to Withymead, 1 on The Street, none surprisingly on South Bank, 1 on the Glebe field, 8 on the west side of the railway bank in the field leading to the Bogey Hole and 4 on the eastern side of the embankment.

So, are glow worms becoming more numerous as the numbers suggest, or are they actually in decline? Two surveys do not make for good statistical analysis so we can't draw any conclusions from that, plus some of the spotters were a little more adventurous in their attempts to 'bag a worm' and wandered further afield than in the first year. Some studies have suggested that glow-worms have declined by a staggering 75% since 2001 - light pollution, habitat loss and fragmentation and insecticides have all played a part, as well as climate change.

However, the number of sightings this year was encouraging and we can only hope that by preserving our verges and long grassy areas we continue to enjoy this fine spectacle in future years.



## Hedgehog update

Rural hedgehogs have experienced a rapid decline in numbers in recent years and therefore it is imperative for us to do as much as we can to assist their survival. As part of our ongoing hedgehog research and tracking in the village, we are asking all members of the public to let us know if they see any hedgehogs (alive or dead). Please get in touch via [contact@southstokewildlife.org](mailto:contact@southstokewildlife.org). This information helps us to map common hedgehog routes and have an idea of numbers in our local area.



A lack of connectivity in the rural environment is thought to be a cause of the decline in hedgehogs and is therefore one of the areas that SSWCG are working on improving. An article detailing the recent hedgehog decline can be found [here](#).

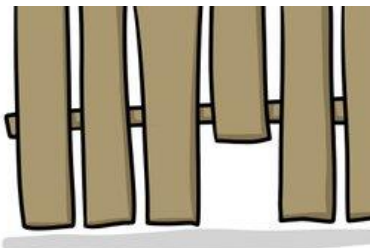


Would you be happy to have a hole made in your garden fence to allow hedgehogs to move around the village safely?

*Please contact a member of the SSWCG or email us at [contact@southstokewildlife.org](mailto:contact@southstokewildlife.org) and we will be happy to come and create a hole for you and our four legged friends!*

As you will be aware, Winter is fast approaching and for hedgehogs that means hibernation. In order to give them the best chance of survival it is vital for them to take in as many calories as possible over the next couple of months. In order to help our hedgehog population, please consider offering food and water from now until November.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR HEDGEHOGS?



**HEDGEHOG HIGHWAYS -  
MAKE HOLES IN YOUR GARDEN  
FENCE SO HEDGEHOGS CAN GET  
IN AND OUT.**

@DOODLEBETH  
©BETH WILSON 2019



**FRESH WATER IN  
A SHALLOW DISH**



**MEATY FOOD  
(CAT, DOG OR HEDGEHOG FOOD)**

If you think you may have some prickly visitors in your garden, then how about borrowing a trail cam to catch them on camera? We have cameras that South Stoke villagers can borrow - just send us an email! [contact@southstokewildlife.org](mailto:contact@southstokewildlife.org)

With bonfire night a few weeks away, we should also be mindful that hedgehogs often seek shelter in piles of wood. One tip to keep hedgehogs safe, is to build your bonfire at the last minute to prevent any wildlife moving in.

**What should you do if you find an injured animal (including hedgehogs)?**

Please contact Oxfordshire Wildlife Rescue who work tirelessly to return injured animals to the wild. Below are their contact details:

Oxfordshire Wildlife Rescue, Woodway Road, Blewbury, OX119 HW

24-hour Wildlife Emergency Tel: 07549322464

Wildlife Hospital Opening Hours 9am-3pm & 6pm - 8pm (Monday - Sunday)

Website: <https://oxfordshirewildliferescue.myfreesites.net/>



## Wildflower surveys

SSWCG has been doing surveys of the wildflowers on a selection of sites around the parish. We've just completed our second year of surveys and our team of volunteers has recorded about 160 species of flowering plant. We were pleased to see that this year there were twice as many Pyramidal orchids at White Hill Quarry as there were last year.

We will be surveying a new set of sites next year, and if anyone wants to join us they'd be very welcome, no special knowledge is necessary. We usually take a couple of hours in the early evening and often finish in the pub! Look out for our new programme which we'll publish early next year.





## Competition Results!

In September we judged the SSWCG tallest sunflower competition (launched at the May Fayre). There were a total of 28 entries and the winner was Maeve with a sunflower measuring 205cm high (see photo). Congratulations Maeve!



Maeve's winning sunflower reached a staggering 205cm!



Upcoming events will be advertised on the [SSWCG website](#) and on our [Facebook](#) page. Everyone's welcome to get involved - we hope to see you soon!