



## e-Newsletter

Issue Four

September 2021

Welcome to the fourth and very special issue of our e-Newsletter. A validated sighting of a rare and important bee, an updated South Stoke 'hedgehog street' survey plus maps and, an interview with a renowned wildlife photographer. Lots to read and excite you about our rich and wonderful local wildlife.

Please don't forget we welcome your ideas and input for inclusion!



# A chance encounter

All photographs in this article provided by [Dickie Duckett](https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=O2Qf92u3wY8ForzN8JNp27DV19UZxtSC7tke1teyqvw.eyJ1ljoiaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZGlja2lIZHVja2V0dC5jb20vliwicil6ljk4YTMxYWZiLTQxZTA0NGRIN2JkMSlsm0iOiJscCJ9) (https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=O2Qf92u3wY8ForzN8JNp27DV19UZxtSC7tke1teyqvw.eyJ1ljoiaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZGlja2lIZHVja2V0dC5jb20vliwicil6ljk4YTMxYWZiLTQxZTA0NGRIN2JkMSlsm0iOiJscCJ9) © 2021

Dickie Duckett

*Walking along the riverbank early one morning in July, I spotted a man photographing birds in the undergrowth. We got talking and I discovered I'd stumbled across a renowned and hugely travelled photographer. He was interested in SSWCG and very kindly agreed to do an interview (despite subsequently referring to our meeting as an 'ambush!').*

## Tell us a little bit about yourself

After a career as a pilot in the Royal Air Force, including five years flying with and, later, leading the Red Arrows, I worked for a few years for a national charity. In retirement, photography is now my main interest.

I have been interested in the natural world, and especially birds, since I was a small boy (I grew up in Goring). However, I did not try to photograph subjects until a posting to the Falkland Islands in 1985 inspired me to buy a camera. My five month tour there was mainly in the winter, but I was still able to see and photograph some of the wonderful wildlife on the islands.

From that point on, I decided to purchase a local bird book wherever I was posted.

## How has photography changed over the years?

Improvements in cameras and lenses have made it much easier to photograph wildlife than it was 50 or so years ago. Back then, bird photography was mainly restricted to static subjects such as birds at their nest. Auto focus hadn't been invented so taking a good, sharp photograph of a moving subject was extremely challenging!

When I was taking photographs in the Falklands in the mid 1980s, I used print films and slides. The films had to be sent back to the UK to be processed and it took three weeks to get to see the results!

I also remember going to Africa with 200 rolls of film, along with the challenges of trying to take large and expensive cameras and lenses onto planes as hand luggage! Clearly it's all much easier nowadays.

I think I enjoy photographing birds due to my flying background; I appreciate the aerodynamics of a bird in flight, and I love the challenge of trying to capture them!

I returned to photograph the Falklands wildlife in 2004, and in 2007 when I also spent two weeks around South Georgia.

I now live in the Thames Valley where there are many opportunities for photographing wildlife, especially water birds. I am currently working on building a 'photobook' of my favourite images. I think seeing something in print is much more satisfying than looking on a screen.

I moved to digital photography in the early 2000s. It was quite literally a 'revolution' for professional and amateur photographers alike. Very quickly, photography became much more accessible to all due to the advent of camera phones and the internet.

That said, keeping up with technology is fun but it can also be expensive. Modern images are so large that you can soon find yourself needing more storage space and having to upgrade your pc!



(<https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=fBtEXNukSt3O034S0etEGi9c3qmzOKMW2Rkye3y7Xm0.eyJ1ljoiaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZGlja>

**What advice can you give to budding photographers?**

Join a camera club if you possibly can. I learned a lot from being a member of the Henley Photographic Club (sadly no longer in existence) just by listening to other photographers and looking at their images.

As an alternative, if there isn't a club local to you, you can always turn to the internet and find specialist groups for the area

I guess I mostly try to take images that are pictorially attractive and, wherever possible, I try to avoid untidy or distracting backgrounds.

I tend to think the proof of the pudding in terms of whether it is a good shot or not is how it looks when I get it home and view it on my pc!

**What are the challenges for a wildlife photographer?**

you're interested in (eg Facebook Groups). Specialist groups are a great source of information and provide a rich resource to seek help and learn. The internet is an amazing source of not only UK but world experts which matters when you get into specialist areas or are, for example, wanting to confirm the ID of unusual or rare species.

At the end of the day, anybody who's keen on wildlife photography needs to be encouraged to look at wildlife. Once you start noticing things, you'll become interested and will start to look out for them. I'm a great advocate of 'stop, listen and look'. Sit and listen for 10-15 minutes and something will come to you!

### **What about the technical aspects of photography?**

Personally, I don't do much post-processing. I might tweak the exposure and saturation and perhaps remove some 'noise' if the image looks too grainy, but I do not manipulate images.

Generally, bigger birds and mammals are easier to photograph in motion than smaller ones; the latter also tend to be quicker, and more difficult to hold focus on.

Photographing birds in flight is more challenging than static birds - but I do it partly because I enjoy the challenge so that's part of the fun!

One of the biggest, and saddest, challenges is that wildlife numbers, particularly birds, have declined considerably since I was a boy, so subjects to photograph are more difficult to find. I sometimes use commercial hides, especially abroad, but I don't get the same satisfaction as I do from finding subjects myself out in the field.



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### **What were you looking for in South Stoke?**

I enjoy taking Natural History photographs in the Thames Valley. There are a variety of interesting subjects, but you may have to spend time looking for them! It helps if you have an idea of where to look for particular species, so a bit of research is worthwhile. The best times to see wildlife are early in the morning and evening so a special effort is required!



(<https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=Xk5IF22jMOtLolkYPozdZcYlfzNGbEmxN>)

The area around South Stoke is particularly good for warblers such as Sedge Warblers and Whitethroat, especially in the early morning, and that's what I was looking for when I met you.



([https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=rxHITYPoam53d65XwKAwy\\_tAQ1SJ0rn](https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=rxHITYPoam53d65XwKAwy_tAQ1SJ0rn)



(<https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=glXmzgVtXMx-ANjT0IFFRjM0ZKliTdNIHc97e5P5xZc.eyJ1lj>

**Which of your locally taken photographs is your favourite?**

That's hard to say because a 'favourite' can be an attractive or arresting image, or one that was technically difficult to obtain. The image below of a Kestrel catching a Mayfly would certainly be a contender.



([https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=AfZiJICLz\\_utel4pcWwzMEBLjecPrKTF6qc1ObZ4qtE.eyJ1IjoiaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZGlja2lIZI](https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=AfZiJICLz_utel4pcWwzMEBLjecPrKTF6qc1ObZ4qtE.eyJ1IjoiaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZGlja2lIZI))



**And your favourite bird that we might see locally?**

One of my favourite birds - and thus images - is the Kingfisher but I also love photographing grebes.

### **Any exciting wildlife photography experiences?**

I have been fortunate to travel to many exciting places with my camera and have photographed Polar Bears on the sea ice in the Arctic, and the huge King Penguin and Elephant Seal colonies on South Georgia. However, photographing my first Kingfisher was probably just as exciting!

### **What species would you like to photograph that you haven't?**

I'd love to go to the Arctic to photograph foxes diving into the snow to catch small rodents.



## **Rare bee discovered in South Stoke**

*Roselle Champman, Community Ecologist at **Wild Oxfordshire***

([https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=63LveJZk7r-j6aGw\\_gNFcdoO5LrUR8672qYIWajKP90.eyJ1ljoiaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cud2lsZG94Zm9yZHNoaXJlM9yZy51ay8iLCJyIjoiY2Y2MjE1M2QtYTFhNS00Y2MwLTYzMjUtMTZmYWVhMmUwMDImliwibSI6Imxwln0](https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=63LveJZk7r-j6aGw_gNFcdoO5LrUR8672qYIWajKP90.eyJ1ljoiaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cud2lsZG94Zm9yZHNoaXJlM9yZy51ay8iLCJyIjoiY2Y2MjE1M2QtYTFhNS00Y2MwLTYzMjUtMTZmYWVhMmUwMDImliwibSI6Imxwln0)), gave a fascinating talk about bees to SSWCG members earlier this year. At the end of her presentation, she challenged participants to look out for a particularly rare bee in South Stoke. Our local expert, John Lindley, found one much to the excitement of Roselle and the wider bee community:



"The discovery of this rare and fascinating oil collecting solitary bee by the South Stoke Wildlife and Conservation Group clearly demonstrates the important role that local experts and enthusiasts can play in biological recording. The NBN distribution map for the Yellow Loosestrife bee (*Macropis europaea*) show recent records from Sydlings Copse, Marley Wood near Oxford and then from Dinton Pastures near Reading and Cliveden. I have seen this

(*Epilobium hirsutum*), hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), mint (*Mentha sp.*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), knapweed (*Centaurea sp.*), rough hawkbit (*Leontodon hispidum*), sow-thistle (*Sonchus sp.*), water chickweed (*Myosoton aquaticum*) and water-plantain (*Alisma lanceolata*), all of which are common enough locally.

species in Norfolk and I always look out for it in damper areas of Oxfordshire, such as the Thames-side meadows, where yellow loostrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*) occurs, but to no avail.

This species is unique in this country for having females that provision their nests with fatty floral oils, in addition to pollen. It is thought that it actually lines its nest cells with a yellowish wax-like, waterproof substance which is most likely derived from yellow loosestrife floral oil. Whilst it is heavily dependant on yellow loosestrife for pollen it, has been observed nectaring on bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), agrimony (*Agrimonia* sp.), great willowherb

When I challenged SSWCG to find *M. europaea* on their patch, I certainly thought they were in with a chance, but I am surprised and delighted how quickly they did it. It just goes to show what you find when you look. We will spread the word to groups North and South of South Stoke and see if more dots can be added to the distribution map. Next challenge for SSWCG are *Bombus humilis* and *Bombus ruderatus*".

*SSWCG is delighted that John found this bee and also the plant that it feeds on. We look forward to meeting Roselle's next challenge!*

*For more information visit the bees, wasps and ants recording website (**BWARS**) (<https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=lokgVhUoJl-WQY8TvFkLTIdeBhCyi3TjliUGoQCS-Og.eyJ1ljoiaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuYndhcnMuY29tL2JlZS9tZWxpdHRpZGFIL21hY3JvcGlzLWV1cm9wYWVhliwici6ljlMzGU3ZDZlLWQ1YWYtNDlwZi0wZTlmLTQ1MmFmMTJjMWI3YiIsIm0iOiJscCJ9>)*



## Hedgehogs in South Stoke – sightings and trails

Hedgehogs are declining in numbers across the UK, with some surveys showing that numbers have fallen by about 50% since the turn of the century. This is mainly in urban areas, with more walls and fences preventing hedgehogs from roaming around to find food and shelter, increased lighting, road deaths and competition from other animals. However, they are also declining in rural areas due mainly to hedgerow and field margin loss.

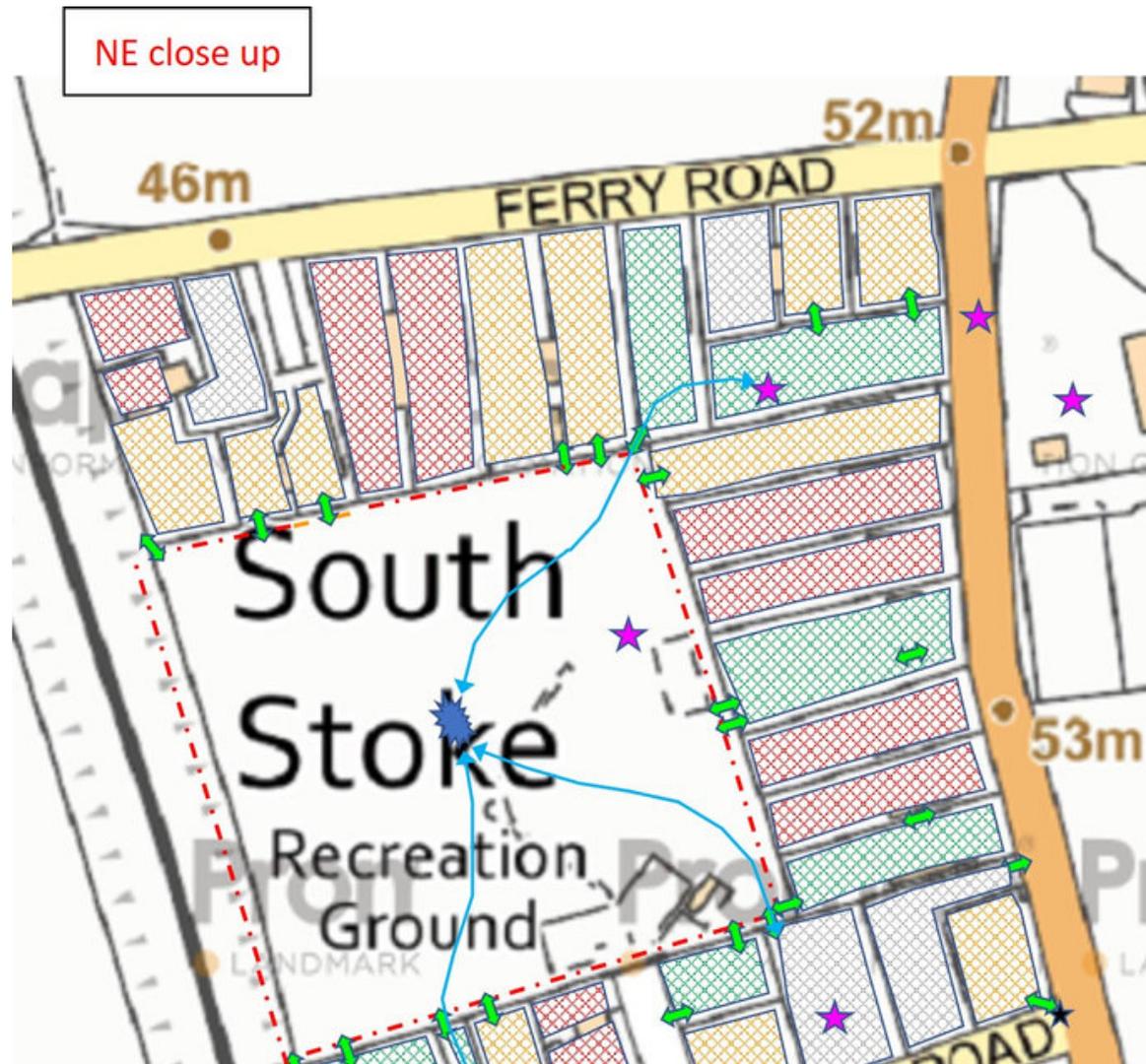
Apart from being an iconic part of our British wildlife scene (and quite cute), they are also an indicator species in the conservation world. Because hedgehogs feed on soil invertebrates, a decline in hedgehogs also indicates a decline in the quality of our environment and the health of the natural world.

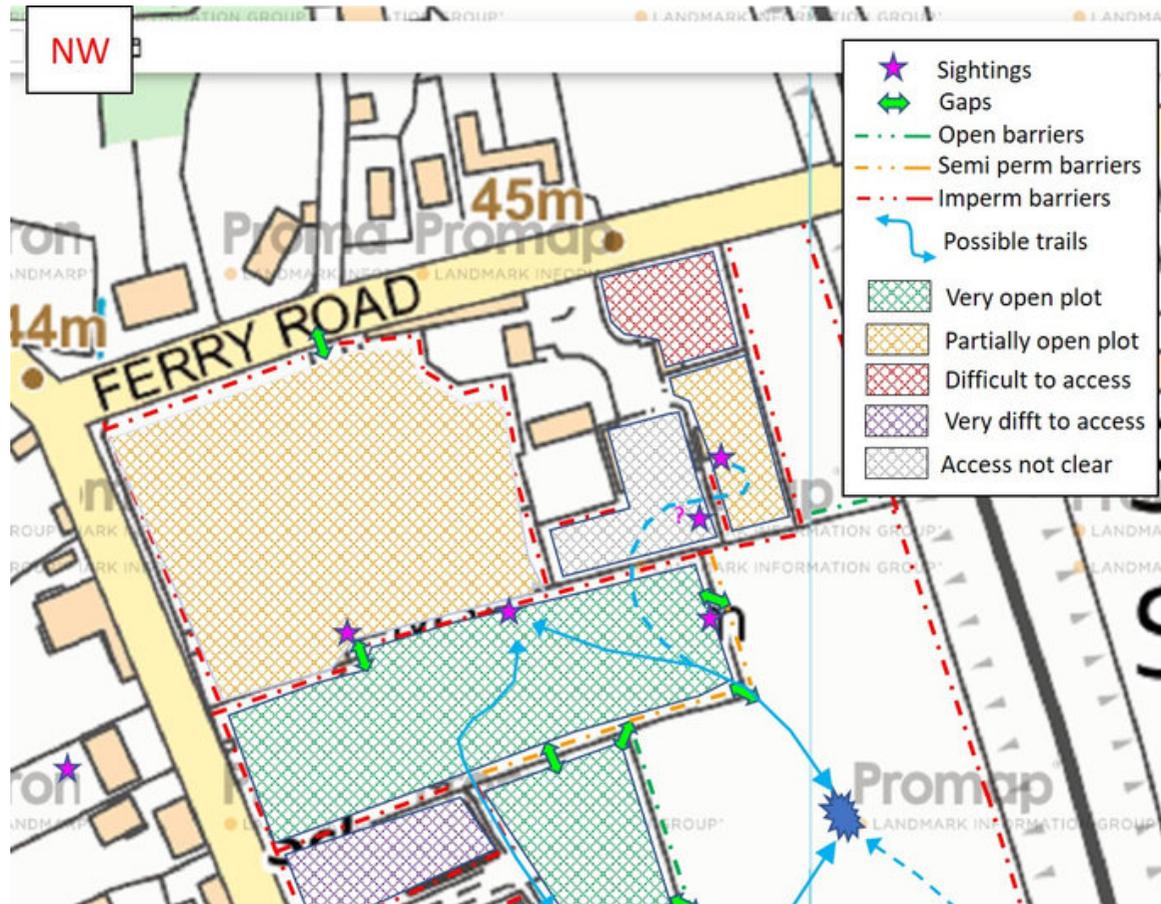
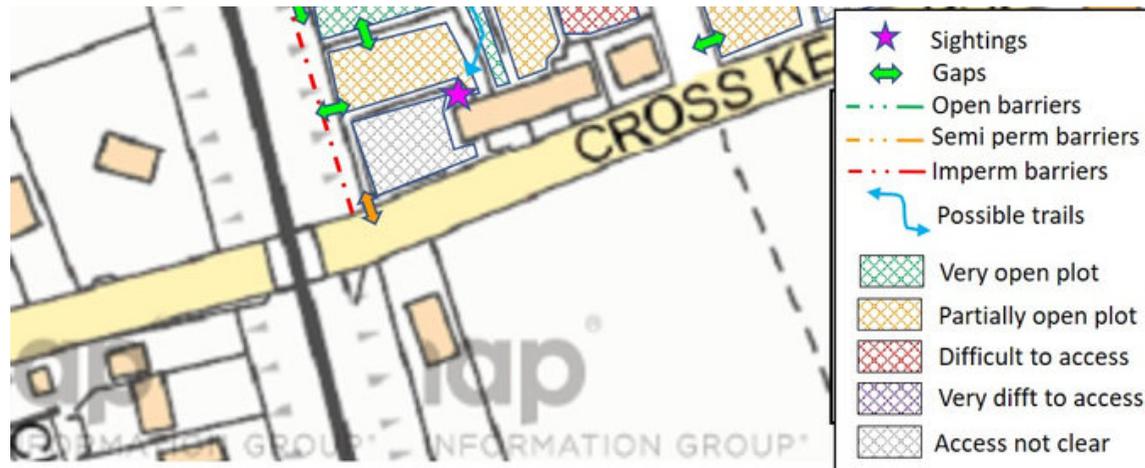
Various villages in the UK have tried to address this issue by surveying hedgehog trails and then making new trails in order to

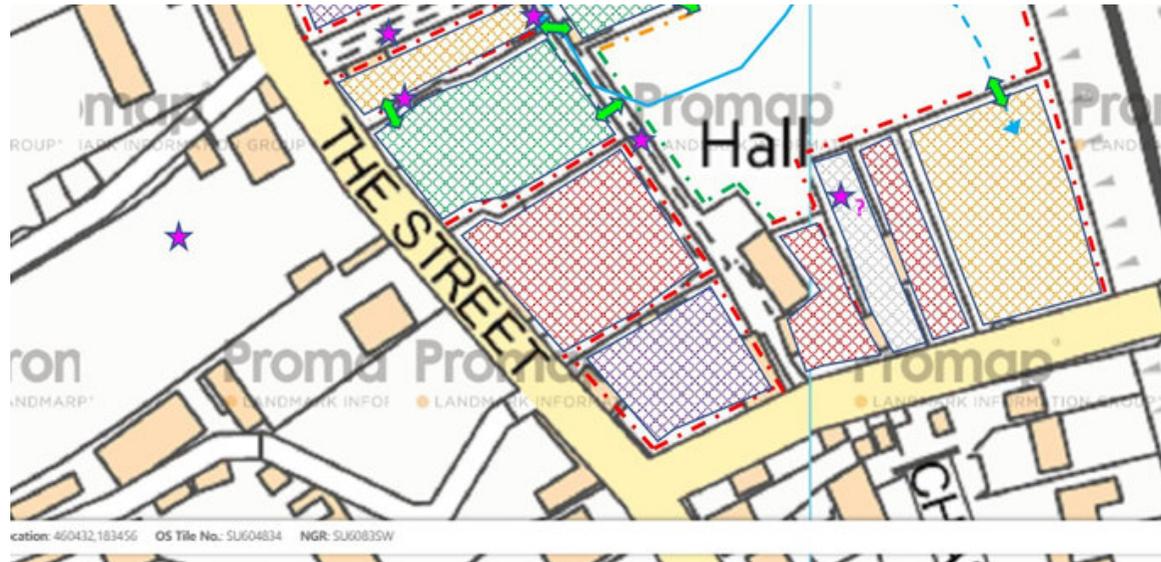
help them roam more freely and prosper in numbers eg **Kirtlington in Oxfordshire**. ([https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=Cbd7gCo62MRk7OC\\_OJz3vGVfJCw\\_bkfL96BorQo3WB4.eyJ1ljoiaHR0cHM6Ly9raXJ0bGluZ3RvbnZpbGxhZ2UuY28udWsva2lydGxpbmd0b24taGVkZ2Vob2ctc3RyZWV0liwicil6ImMwYzUwYTBiLTZiYmMtNDkzMy0xNTJjLTcxYmUyNDgyMmM2MyIsIm0iOiJscCJ9](https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=Cbd7gCo62MRk7OC_OJz3vGVfJCw_bkfL96BorQo3WB4.eyJ1ljoiaHR0cHM6Ly9raXJ0bGluZ3RvbnZpbGxhZ2UuY28udWsva2lydGxpbmd0b24taGVkZ2Vob2ctc3RyZWV0liwicil6ImMwYzUwYTBiLTZiYmMtNDkzMy0xNTJjLTcxYmUyNDgyMmM2MyIsIm0iOiJscCJ9))

In an effort to do something about the decline in numbers in South Stoke we have mapped out some possible hedgehog trails in the central part of the village (between the main bounding roads) using sightings that parishioners have informed us about, and a walkabout survey of gaps in fences and under gates (while walking only on public paths and in public spaces). We started with the two northern parts of the village, either side of the railway, but plan to do something similar for the two southern bits. Based on this rather sketchy information we have then worked out some possible, regular trails and colour coded

plots of land on how accessible we think they are to hedgehogs and how easy it might be for them to traverse that plot.







We should point out that gaps in fences and walls need only be very small for hedgehogs to squeeze through - about a 5" square gap, the size of a CD - so larger animals shouldn't be able to get through easily. As a broad rule of thumb, if you can get a clenched fist under a gate or fence, most hedgehogs will make it through, too.

It is completely understandable that some plots of land are almost impenetrable on all sides, in order to keep children and dogs in, or rabbits out, so we are not trying to criticise anyone if their land is not accessible for hedgehogs, but it gives us an idea of where they may be going at

night and an idea of some new trails that could be opened up - with the landowner's permission of course. In order to add further data to our maps and to improve our understanding of the possible trails, please could you let us know if there are further sightings that we're not currently showing, or gaps in fences, walls or under gates that we don't have access to. Or if you think we've colour coded your plot of land incorrectly because of a lack of information, we'd be very happy to change it. Thanks for your help in advance.

*Ian & Ali – South Stoke Wildlife & Conservation Group*



## And a fun and useful App to finish!



(<https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=dTg5gjO07agnVIm3SSojmY56mLTa1hC7>)

Take your nature knowledge up a notch with **Seek!**

([https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=w\\_irBJ70uhj8\\_aycdasx6jhtrcY-ZMYjQEcxi6DcFc.eyJ1ljoiaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuaW5hdHVyYWxpc3Qub3JnL3BhZ2VzL3NlZWtfYXBwliwicil6ImZiZjdiYWVmLTUzZjAtNDRjZS05MjcwLTk1NWU5MDM3ZjA5MSlslm0iOiJscCJ9](https://shoutout.wix.com/so/a5Ni2Z7t9/c?w=w_irBJ70uhj8_aycdasx6jhtrcY-ZMYjQEcxi6DcFc.eyJ1ljoiaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuaW5hdHVyYWxpc3Qub3JnL3BhZ2VzL3NlZWtfYXBwliwicil6ImZiZjdiYWVmLTUzZjAtNDRjZS05MjcwLTk1NWU5MDM3ZjA5MSlslm0iOiJscCJ9)) Use the power of image recognition technology to identify the plants and animals all around you. Earn badges for seeing different types of birds, amphibians, plants, and fungi and participate in monthly observation challenges.

- Get outside and point the **Seek** Camera at living things.
- Identify wildlife, plants, and fungi and learn about the organisms all around you
- Earn badges for observing different types of species and participating in challenges



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