



Wild About Barrow

July/August 2022

We're Having a Heatwave

In case you hadn't noticed! It is a summer of thirst and firsts with soaring temperatures, so little rain and very little in the foreseeable future. While many plants have already finished flowering and lawns yellow, it is amazing how most trees are withstanding the drought. A mature oak tree can draw up to 50 or more gallons of water a day and some trees take much more.

It's a win-win for those who took part in No Mow May. Not only was it great for nature and a rest for the gardener but you now have a greener lawn. I've mown my lawn just twice this year, both on the highest setting, and have quite a green sward. No need to water a brown lawn though as grass is resilient and will green up when the rain finally falls.

Where have all the butterflies gone? I have seen only one red admiral and one fritillary this summer on my buddlia although there are plenty of cabbage whites around. A few brown meadows were spotted in the field next to Millennium Park, perhaps because the grass has been allowed to grow, with pathways cut through it: consequently more wildflowers have grown. A major cause of decline of butterflies is habitat loss: they need our gardens.

The charity Butterfly Conservation are running their annual survey to monitor numbers (ending on 7th August). A report published in 2015 showed a long term decline of 76% in both in numbers and/or distribution of UK's resident and migrant butterflies. These beautiful creatures are a valuable indicator species because of their short lifespans and sensitive responses to subtle habitat or climatic changes. Their decline is another loud warning that we need to change what we do.

Bat Boxes

Wild About Barrow has been lucky enough to have 2 experts from the Leics & Rutland Bat Group to survey the village and advise on suitable sites to install boxes for these fascinating creatures. We have 18 species in the UK, the smallest and most common being the pipistrelle which measures 3 – 5 cm and weighs no more than a pound coin. We aim to install 5 boxes to begin with and see what the uptake is.

Bird boxes

Alison Rushton and Annette Richardson met the Holy Trinity Eco Group recently and the good news for swifts is that this proactive Group are working on installing boxes for these distance travellers, so fingers crossed for next year.

Fascinating Flies

Compared to bees and butterflies, these little critters are perhaps not the most loved of insects. They are, however, of direct economic importance to us as they are critical pollinators of more than 70% of crops and important in natural habitats too. In some cases flies provide a more consistent pollination in early spring than bees since they are more active at cooler temperatures.

There are about 7,000 species in the UK, including daddy long legs, hoverflies, mosquitoes, midges and many more. They are the masters of miniaturisation – a full stop could contain several of the smallest ones – and each has organs, a gut, brain and more! They have been understudied in the past but there is increasing interest in how they pack so much into a tiny space from the AI World. Flies really are fascinating, beautiful and spectacular when you look at them carefully.

Wild Celebration Jul/Aug



Egg and Bacon
(*Lotus corinculatus*)



Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*)
(*Rubus fruticosus*)



Field bindweed
(*Convolvulus arvensis*)



Oxford ragwort
(*Senecio squalidus*)

Meadow Brown Butterfly
(*Maniola-jurtina*)

Bristly Oxtongue
(*Helminthotheca echioides*)

Have you spotted any nature delights around the village? Send your photos to Wildaboutbarow@gmail.com or just let us know where you saw it and we'll take a snap.

Dragonflies

What a wonderful name – dragonfly! Of course, they are not related to dragons or flies but their iridescence is scintillating.



I found this dragonfly skin on a lilly pad in my pond and now have the adults flying around the garden. Dragonflies have been around for 300 million years. The only difference nowadays is that are not the size of seagulls! One of their secrets of success is that they have have an incomplete metamorphosis and change from a nymph straight into an

adult.

Dragonflies may spend up to 5 years as nymphs although for some species this stage is over in a few months. They are voracious predators and their impressive flying abilities allow them to catch other insects mid-air and escape predators. Their unique wing movements means they can hover, fly forward or backward and turn sharply at high or low speeds.

To encourage dragonflies in your garden, provide:

- pond weed such as water starwort or hornwort to give cover
- fish-free water as fish eat nymphs

- around the edges provide yellow flag iris, marsh marigold and flowering rush for nymphs to crawl up when changing to adults
- dead wood, some sand and gravel which is good for egg laying
- water does not need to be deep as nymphs live in shallow waters

and next year look out for those amazing flying acrobats!

What to See

1. Take a closer look at some of our insects and discover for yourself their intricacies and wonders.
2. Visit Holwell Nature Reserves, just north of Melton. It's free to visit and has a range of habitats where a rich variety of species can be found. A former quarry, it is a regionally important geological site, so lots to see and admission is free.

What to do

1. Check bird baths are filled with water in this dry weather and/or put out a bowl of water for wildlife. Hedgehogs will appreciate this as they are lactose intolerant so milk will make them ill.
2. Think twice before laying a plastic lawn. There will be no daisies, buttercups or clover for our insects; no worms for our beleaguered hedgehogs or declining song thrushes (down 54% since 1969).

Alison Rushton

Think global: Act local

All photographs by A. Rushton