

# Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter: April 2018

**This Edition:  
Surviving even more Snow  
Preparing for spring – finally!**



By the Bridge (Photo: Margaret Cheetham)



Margaret writes: I don't go out in the snow if I can help it. However, a call from Sue Taylor prompted me to nip over to the garden at Bridge House and see some strange tracks in the snow – something had come out of the river and then gone back in again.

Sue thought (and hoped) that it might be an otter.

It's very difficult to tell because the soft snow didn't produce a very sharp track and it was obscured by subsequent falls of snow.

Neither her photos nor mine can do the tracks justice.

We will never be sure, but keep a look out round the Piddle – you never know what you might see.

## Feedback from March Newsletter

**Marion Perris** writes: How exciting to know that there is still a lesser spotted woodpecker in Oakers Wood. Haven't seen one for years - last one we saw was nesting in Thorncombe Wood. Well done Roger.

**Brian and Jan Ambler** write: Yes we did enjoy it, as usual. Glad you included the recommendation about "H is for Hawk" – it is, of course, so much more than the bird. How did the Butterfly Evening go?

(Margaret responds: see below!)

## Tadpoles Emerge

The tadpoles that survived the frost and snow are starting to emerge. Newly hatched tadpoles often mass like this, their black bodies combining to absorb the warmth of the sun.

They form a strange oval: wriggling around in the middle, surrounded by the spawn that they have emerged from. The little dots of white are their frozen brethren that didn't survive "the Beast from the East".

When the sun appears they wriggle around more vigorously, and it's only a matter of time before they will start to explore the rest of the pond



Photo: Margaret Cheetham

## Affpuddle

**Roger Hewitt** reports: On the 17 March I thought I would have a look at Roger Prideaux's farm at Affpuddle. There are always birds up there: Roger leaves the cows out all winter and it makes a better food resource for the birds.

A mixed flock of Linnets, Chaffinches, Yellowhammers, Goldfinches and a few Skylarks was good to see. There had been some ploughing and a lot of gulls were present - 100+ Black Headed Gulls, Herring Gulls, at least 10 Lesser Black Back Gulls and quite a few Common Gulls, not forgetting Crows, Jackdaws and Rooks.

Moving on up the bridleway, Nick Gore came up with some cattle feed and said they had had 18 Little Egrets recently. With only one on view he drove to the top of the hill to see if any were over the brow, but he came back down and said there were no more that day.

A Red Kite was flying around, so we had good views before it drifted towards Cliff House.

### On the bird feeder (Briantspuddle)

**Roger Hewitt** writes: From what I hear, a few more people have had Bramblings in their gardens. This one was on my feeder.



Photo: Roger Hewitt



Photo: Roger Hewitt

At last I have caught up with a Hawfinch that I could photograph in our parish. I have walked every where to find this bird and others, but where did it turn up? In my garden on the sunflower hearts feeder!

Looking out of the kitchen window and there it was, a quick rush for the camera, a few quick shots and it was gone. It did come back three more times, but not seen since.

Should anyone else get lucky, make the most of it, because the last invasion was around 30 years ago. It is thought that a food crop failure in Germany and Romania forced them this way looking for food. We do have our own population, and the main place to see them is the New Forest and the Forest of Dean.

## Southover

**Roger Hewitt** reports: This was on the fishing lake. We get a few Cormorants on the lake but this one is a male in breeding plumage and I think it may be a Continental subspecies of Cormorant – *sinensis*. Our Cormorants do go a bit white but the determining feature is the angle at the back of the yellow patch below the eye on the throat called the gular patch, and it seems to be about right for this subspecies. They are not rare, just scarce. They have been around for a while now and they take to inland lakes. I have not seen it on our lake before.



Photo: Roger Hewitt

**Ian Cross** responds: I've probably seen *sinensis* as I've seen cormorants on the continent but I couldn't claim to be familiar with them. Looking at the angle at the rear of the gular pouch this one does seem more likely to be *sinensis* but the photo is too pixelated to be sure. The continental birds are a different subspecies, not a full species.

### Preparing for spring

**Lynn Pullen**, a volunteer from Butterfly Conservation gave a talk in the village hall on how to encourage butterflies in the garden.



Here are some dos and don'ts that formed part of her talk and that I have taken from the excellent Butterfly Conservation website (<https://butterfly-conservation.org/>)

#### Do

- Grow lots of nectar-rich flowers between March and November.
- Choose different plants to attract a wider variety of species. Place the same types of plant together in blocks.
- Prolong flowering by deadheading flowers and watering well. Well-watered plants produce more nectar.
- Grow caterpillar foodplants for butterflies and moths.
- Let an area of grass grow long.
- Allow a patch of 'weeds', such as Dandelion and Bird's-foot-trefoil to flourish.
- Leave bare patches of wall, fence or earth, or place large stones in sunny borders, so butterflies can bask.

- Create a shelter-belt of trees, plant a mixed, native hedge, which will protect butterflies and moths from the wind.
- Grow climbing plants up walls and fences, where butterflies and moths can shelter from the rain and frost.
- Make a log pile, where butterflies and moths can hibernate. Some moths breed in dead wood too.

### **Don't**

- Use pesticides, especially those containing neonicotinoids, as these can remain in the plant for several months and potentially harm butterflies and moths which drink nectar from the flowers.
- Buy peat-based compost. Peat bogs are home to many species, including the Large Heath butterfly. Check the label before you buy and choose peat-free alternatives.
- Be too tidy – leave borders intact over winter, allow leaves to accumulate under hedges and create a 'wild' area that you don't touch very often. These areas will provide shelter for insects to hibernate and rest.

## **Planting for summer nectar**

Lynn also talked about the best plants for summer nectar, namely:



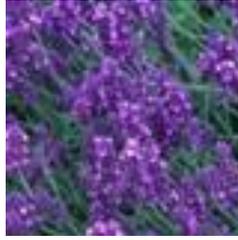
### **Buddleia (The butterfly bush).**

Very easy to grow in almost any soil. Different varieties will flower in pink, red, purple, and white. Usually in bloom through July and August. These shrubs need pruning well in Spring as they can grow 5' to 8' from the ground in a single season.



### ***Verbena bonariensis.***

Stems up to a metre tall support heads of lilac-purple flowers from August to October. Easy to grow from seed, plant March to April in well-drained soil. These can provide useful height at the back of a border. Only half hardy so can be a short lived perennial.



### **Lavender**

Flowers are a purplish-blue in color and grow on spikes through the summer. Plants can be used for edging beds or grown to form an attractive, low-growing hedge. It thrives in a sunny, sheltered position in well-drained soil. Lavender should be planted in April or May and pruned back to encourage bushy growth.



### **Perennial Wallflower (Bowles Mauve)**

Produces a profusion of sweet-scented purple flowers from April all through the summer. Wallflowers make great bedding plants and will grow well in full sun or light shade. Plant in well drained soil.



### **Marjoram (Oregano)**

A perennial herb, growing from 20 to 80cm tall. White, pink or purple flowers grow on spikes from June to September. A good edging plant and useful ground cover, requiring little maintenance. The smaller varieties also do well in rock and alpine gardens.

**Many thanks to:  
Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor  
Mel Parks, Proof-reading  
Campbell de Burgh, Website  
Margaret Cheetham, Editor**

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