

Affpuddle & Turnerspuddle Parish Wildlife Newsletter

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Red Kite Photo by Roger Hewitt



Roger Hewitt: Someone asked if there were any Red Kites about. Well this one flew over my house on 14th July at 1pm. By the time I found my camera it had drifted away, so a little bit distant but okay.

Nightjar nesting

Ian Cross: We are fortunate in our parish to have good populations of nesting Nightjars. Usually, our closest and most memorable encounters with these mysterious birds are on balmy, summer's evenings, when we can tune into their unearthly churring song, hear the characteristic wing-clapping, or, if we are really lucky, catch a glimpse of a silhouette as a bird wheels overhead against an evening sky.

I used to lead Nightjar walks in my countryside ranger days and there are many ways of enhancing these evening experiences. Try the old trick of flicking a white handkerchief. This can draw in a close fly-past by a territorial male, who

thinks that the flash of white is the white wing patch of a rival male. This does actually work. Though the key is to give it a quick flick, not jump up and down, waving it frantically around as if you were auditioning for a part in the Railway Children!

Much rarer are those daytime encounters when you put up a nightjar on a heathland walk. Usually the bird quickly vanishes but, if it is sitting on eggs, you may witness another aspect of their bizarre behaviour.

Nightjars build no nest but simply deposit their eggs – usually two – on bare ground. This makes them particularly vulnerable as you can imagine. On taking off an incubating bird may feign injury, with short ‘hopping’ flights and wings drooping as if they were broken. The idea of this is that it will distract a predator who thinks it has stumbled on an easy meal. Occasionally the bird will settle on the ground in front of you (see picture) inviting you to pursue it. All the time, though, it is carefully drawing you away from the nest.



Female Nightjar feigning injury, sitting on the ground and inviting pursuit.

Photo by Ian Cross

So, what to do? The most important thing is to leave the area as quickly as possible. Whatever you do, don't go looking for the eggs. They're well camouflaged and you probably won't see the eggs until you trample them. Instead, retrace your steps carefully and precisely, scanning the ground as you go.

If in doubt you could try following the bird. At least you know that she will be trying to lead you away from the nest.

A close encounter of this kind really drives home the message of just how vulnerable ground-nesting birds are. Any dog criss-crossing through heather or grass will flush a sitting bird. You may think, "Ah, no harm done, it's got away". However, eggs are exposed to predators, incubating birds stressed and the nest and contents may be trampled.

Always keep any dog, no matter how well-behaved, on a lead in areas where there are likely to be ground-nesting birds. Nests can be perilously close to footpaths and the damage can be done even if the dog doesn't stray.

A micro-moth from SE Asia

Adrian Middleton: Moths seem to dominate my deliberations at the moment, once again causing me something of a challenge. I found this moth in the garden, looking like a comparatively large micro-moth (36mm across the wings). Unfortunately after a diligent search in a well-known tome about micro-moths full of pictures, my mind boggling, I found nothing.

On seeing my photo, Hamish Murray once again kindly responded very quickly, having identified it as the Box-tree Moth (*Cydalima perspectalis*) an accidental introduction from SE Asia first seen in Kent in 2007. In the event I looked through the book again (400 pages) and found a couple of lines of small print about it but no photo). Over 1500 micro-moths have been recorded in GB and Ireland – I had tried!

The moth concerned was very flighty but the photo of it at rest shows it in a

good light, a striking mix of black edging with a purplish wash. In fact very attractive but the caterpillars can sometimes completely destroy the foliage on a box bush, something of a problem.



Box-tree Moth Photo by Adrian Middleton

A moth which creates mixed feelings.

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/moths/box-tree-moth>

Many thanks to: Ian Cross, Wildlife Advisor,
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Please send your contributions to macheetham@hotmail.co.uk.

I will confirm receipt. If you don't hear from me it means I haven't received your email, so
please make contact through

Briantspuddle Community Website and we'll sort out a Plan B.