

Warwick Natural History Society

Snippets

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Butterflies are losing their spots due to climate change

A recent article in Ecology & Evolution reports on the change in the number of spots on Meadow Brown butterflies in a study by Prof Richard French-Constant, a lecturer in molecular natural history at University of Exeter.

Some dots on Meadow Browns seem to be vanishing as a mechanism to cope with warmer weather. One large spot looks like an eye of a larger creature to fend off predators but smaller spots act as camouflage. Depending on heat in the pupal stage, fewer spots appear when the temperature is above 15C.....at 11C butterflies has 6 spots, at 15C only two spots. Females in particular have fewer hind wing spots when emerging from their chrysalis in higher temperatures, as shown from data collected from a field in Cornwall. This indicates butterflies adapt their camouflage based on weather conditions and with fewer spots may be harder to spot on dry brown grass in hot weather. The spots of male Meadow Browns seem to change less, perhaps because they may use the number of wing spots to attract females.

PS This is rather confusing as some of us still struggle to identify Meadow Browns from Gatekeepers anyway! [Gatekeepers have two dots inside the eye spot]



Here is a Gatekeeper photo
[two dots in eye spot]

and a Meadow Brown [one dot in eye spot],
taken 2011 and 2014 - if I have identified them
correctly.... ?]



Ref: Daily Telegraph "Butterflies are losing spots ..." 18 Jan 2024
FW

Male and female blackcaps seen in the garden today in Barford.
18th January MJ R

Tardigrades (in last Snippets)

Apologies and a correction to the piece about Tardigrades. The first video (see links below) shows a close up of one of our tardigrades and the second video provides fascinating facts about tardigrades.

20th January SG

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7Up2YTpLOE>

https://www.baertierchen.de/main_engl.html

Remember those lovely greeting cards that Lizzy Bradbury brought to our meeting in January? Here's the link to her website.

www.lizzywandersandwonders.co.uk

*17 January - **Chesterton Church** pool was covered with ice except for a small patch of clear water under two bushes, one of which contained a white oval puffball. This was not, as suspected, a plastic bag, but a hunched little egret, with raised feathers, whose bright eye and horizontal black beak emerged halfway up its chest. Disturbed by the Land Rover, it changed bushes then flew off against an orange sun, as an image in a Japanese print.*

Redwings showed white underparts and red underwings in the bright light on the village fields and fieldfares fell out of the bushes by Chesterton Mill.

Knowing that great and little egrets were at Chesterton last year, with no other bird for size comparison, or sight of the yellow feet, the bird has been identified by the length of neck and black colour of the bill.

20th January LS

The Warwick 100 birding group turned up this cattle egret on fields with horses near the A46 on the north side of Warwick. The first picture shows it with a little egret for comparison. (Pictures by LB and AC).



It's thought to be the first record for Warwick, although cattle egrets have turned up very occasionally in Warwickshire (e.g. Brandon Marsh) in the last two or three years. They are spreading their range north remarkably rapidly, following the great white egrets and

little egrets that have spread across England in recent years.

26th January RT

Snowdrops

Snowdrops are out in Wolston Woods now, a splendid sight. Access is via Wolston Village; you can park behind the Village Hall. Then turn left and walk towards the war memorial. Turn right up the lane towards the school and church.



Take the narrow footpath on the left by a big wall at the side of the school. This takes you behind a small housing estate on a woodland path and then past the leisure centre to the main wood bordered by the river - lots of circular and deviating paths, not too muddy. Always a most enjoyable short walk for about an hour and a half.

Lots of birdsong too.

29th January FW



Ladywalk RSPB Reserve – 27th January

An excellent visit was made to Ladywalk by 14 members on a cold but bright morning. Splitting into 2 groups and ably led by Derek and Marie Jane, we walked in opposite directions around the lake, amazingly meeting up in the middle hide!

44 birds made it to the list including the resident Peregrine on the pylon by the car park, Goldeneye and sightings of Goldcrests busily flitting to and fro. Chiffchaff were heard and spotted by some members on the way back to the cars several hours later.

A very enjoyable morning!

29th January LW

National Nestbox Week

Did you know that Valentine's Day, February 14th, is Nestbox Week which marks the beginning of the breeding season? We should begin to hear more birds singing, as they establish breeding territories and seek to attract potential mates to nest. The event was started by the British Trust for Ornithology.

These two pigeons inhabit our garden and are forever chasing each other but need no nestbox...!

31st January FW



England's Hedges

England's hedgerows would stretch almost ten times around the Earth if lined up end to end, a laser scanning map has found.

This is a huge resource and our hedges host hundreds of insects and flowers. About half were lost between the 1940s and 1990s due to intensive farming and development and whilst the loss has slowed over the last 25 years, neglect, damage and removal remain big threats.

(Daily Telegraph 31st January)



Aconites spotted near Broad Campden today – a welcome sight!

31st January LW

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www.wnhs.info