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# FOSM

Friends of Stanpit Marsh

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Summer 2024 #129



[www.friendsofstanpitmarsh.co.uk](http://www.friendsofstanpitmarsh.co.uk)

# View from the Chair – Alan Hopking

It's been a stuttering summer. Signs of summer have been late, but flowers in the garden and on the Marsh are now in glorious colour.

I was on my daily walk recently between the back gardens of houses and was overjoyed to see hedgehog holes created at the bottom of some of the fences. Hedgehog populations have dwindled massively, and small holes encourage these prickly creatures by supporting their free movement over their territory. They keep garden pests at bay, protecting our fruit and veg and flower beds from snails and slugs.

No doubt many of you watched the huge range of events in the Olympics just recently finished - I certainly did. Awe-inspiring, wasn't it? France promoted the importance of the environment and the climate crisis by using energy-efficient designs and low-carbon materials, recycling, preserving green spaces and reducing carbon emissions. The organizers are to be commended.

Back to our locality. Notable visitors recently seen passing through Stanpit Marsh were the Sandwich Tern, about nine Turnstone, a Yellow-legged gull, an Osprey and a Marsh Harrier. So keep your eyes peeled when you visit.

FOSM's summer garden party on Sunday 14th July was a great success. Thanks to all who supported and contributed, including the ever-popular raffle. The details of finances received in our events, and the spending to which we put this money will be spelt out at our AGM in October, along with all our activities during the last year. If you can make it, you're cordially invited and will be welcomed.

Meanwhile, I wish you all well during the months to come, and thank you for your support of this amazing little nature reserve of Stanpit Marsh. I hope we see you soon.

Alan

# Warden's Snippets – Robin Harley

The BCP Countryside Team has been formally restructured, with Robin now becoming Countryside Area Manager for the East part of BCP. Rose will take a lead on stakeholder liaison for the harbour area.

Following the decision of the grazier to stop putting ponies onto Priory Marsh, BCP Council have added some additional infrastructure to allow cattle grazing and at the end of July, moved 6 newly purchased British White heifers onto this area. They will be removed in October, with a view to grow the herd in following years.



*Photos: Robin Harley*

Part of the decking around the Visitor Centre and ramp leading to it has been repaired as it was in poor condition. We are awaiting prices to replace the main decking area, as it is reaching the end of its life.

Due to an increase in Ragwort found on site, our volunteers have been removing this plant from parts of the site. It is a native plant and very important for pollinators, so we keep a balance and monitor our livestock daily.

The oak log on the hill in Riversmeet meadow overlooking the Marsh has been recently carved with a wildlife design by chainsaw sculptor Tom Harvey. This log was selected and brought onto site for this purpose several years ago.



We have 11 foals this year, roughly half and half male and female. We still have two yearlings as well from 2023. They should all be removed in late October.

FOSM are funding a monthly moth survey carried out by naturalist Phil Budd. May, June and July visits are complete and he will report back at the end of the season

The FOSM bat detector has been used on site picking up at least 3 species of bat – Soprano Pipistrelle, Common Pipistrelle, Noctule and (probably) Brown Long-eared.

The access onto site across Ashtree Meadows has been refurbished, with the timber bridge and decking being replaced by a short culvert and new kissing gate – this is an upgrade to the access and should have good longevity

We have had several school groups, mainly from Priory School, making use of both Riversmeet and Stanpit for educational visits

The new mounted Barn Owl, the cost of which was half-funded by FOSM, has become a very popular addition to the Visitor Centre.



# Garden visitors – Janet McCoy

I wondered if FOSM members could identify the creatures our son photographed crawling out of our small pond? And thanks to the bumblebees visiting our lupins as usual!

*Ed's note: When I recently received this request from Janet. I replied that it looked like dragonfly larvae to me, but if anyone knows better, please let me know.*



Janet continues:

Probably everybody does this but I find if I bring tomatoes indoors as soon as they show any colour, they ripen very quickly and that saves the big glut as they all ripen together. I also put the green tomatoes together at the end of the summer and they all eventually turn red.

# Springwatch and Countryfile visit Hengistbury Head - *Tom Carley (CHOG)*

This year's BBC Springwatch was hosted in Dorset at RSPB Arne, and in episodes two and three Iolo Williams filmed at Hengistbury Head. He mentioned that over 300 bird species have been recorded in the Christchurch Harbour recording area, as well as acknowledging this year's Ringed Plover family in the CHOG-funded conservation area on the Sandspit, plus the recent visits from the Isle of Wight eagles.

After a wet and windy first visit, Iolo had a sunny second evening to introduce the fascinating life of the Natterjack toad. At Hengistbury, Natterjacks breed in the warm shallow ponds and dig tunnels in the sandy cliffs, where they shelter from the sun and overwinter. A protected species in the UK, the management of the land at Hengistbury is key to the Natterjack's survival here. The diverse range of habitats in the Harbour provides for other specialities, such as the heathland-loving Nightjars and a wide range of insects, including 77 different species of solitary bee.

Countryfile followed in Springwatch's footsteps and on 14 July 2024 the programme looked at the reconstruction of Long Groyne and what is being done to support marine life around it. The presenters explored the history and wildlife of the area with the help of several CHOG members and local experts, and there were some great aerial shots of the harbour.

For more about this BBC coverage, head to the CHOG Online area of [www.chog.org.uk](http://www.chog.org.uk) if you are a CHOG member (if not, you can sign up from the "Join CHOG" link). Alternatively, at the moment the episodes are on BBC iPlayer.

August and September see the peak of autumn migration, when the young birds from this year's nesting season make their first journey south. Birds of prey will be busy practising their hunting skills as they become independent of their parents. Look out for Sparrowhawks, Peregrines and Hobbies when you are watching your garden, visiting Christchurch Priory, or going for a walk along the coast. The Priory Peregrines fledged four chicks this year, so there's a good chance of seeing one.



*Juvenile Peregrines at the Priory photo: Adrian Simmons*

Christchurch Harbour Ornithological Group, known as CHOG, is an independent organisation and registered charity, which is dedicated to recording, promoting and conserving the wildlife of the Christchurch Harbour area. To find out more about CHOG, please scan the QR Code or visit [www.chog.org.uk](http://www.chog.org.uk) for the latest daily sightings and the benefits of joining such as receiving the annual bird and wildlife report which includes sections on birds, mammals, reptiles, butterflies and dragonflies.



# How does your Garden grow?

- *Ginette Bronsdon*

We live in Highcliffe and are incredibly blessed that we have quite a large garden and I am lucky to have a very indulgent husband! Our garden is divided into 'four areas' - the veg garden with greenhouse, the patio and veranda, the 'formal' lawn with apple trees and then the wilder garden. Most of it is bordered by mixed hedging which allows for lots of different bird nesting sites and rodent travel routes.



But we have sadly noticed a change in the wildlife..... We regularly take part in the RSPB Birdwatch - last year we had 42 birds in our allotted hour and this year only 31. The greenfinches, goldfinches and bullfinches were noticeably lacking and yet we got a nuthatch and even had a tree creeper.

We have a small wall surrounding the patio and veranda which has English lavender plants in it. They used to be absolutely teeming with bumblebees, honeybees etc., but now we are lucky to see about 20 bees at any one time. As for the butterflies and moths - we have the Large and Small White, Brimstone and the Holly Blue all the time with Gatekeeper and Speckled Woods (especially up in the wooded area of our garden) occasionally but this year have hardly seen the

Peacock, Painted Lady and Red Admiral. Moth-wise I have seen the Jersey Tiger moth, but not much else.



We are very lucky that we still get slugs and snails (ha ha!), ladybirds, some dragonflies, frogs, and lots of newts and dragonfly larvae, shield bugs, stag beetles (yes I report them), rose chafers, lily beetles (my poor lilies) and of course wasps, flies etc. to name a few. We have hedgehogs, bats, squirrels, mice and voles, and of course rats. We used to get foxes but now have a border terrier called Jack, so they steer clear.



My husband mows the grass but on a longer cut so the daisies and clover can still be accessed by the bees, and of course leaves the edges which has dandelions amongst other things.

In the 'wild' part he cuts a pathway through the middle and leaves the long grasses on either side, and we regularly get mice and voles running down 'their' pathway.

We have bat boxes (got a useful booklet from the Bat Conservation trust), butterfly houses, a variety of bird boxes including lots of teapots - ideal for robins - hidden within the hedging, various types and sizes of 'bug hotels', log piles and lots of water including a small pond, bird baths including water for the bees and hedgehogs.

## **Two birds with one Stone (well, Camera)**

Thank you to Deidre Price for this nicely observed picture in Riversmeet Meadow:



# Afternoon Tea Party – *Tony Wickham*

As mentioned by Alan in “View from the Chair”, our summer afternoon tea and cake event was a great success. Luckily, given how inconsistent the weather has been this summer we were blessed with a warm, dry day and only a light breeze. We had a very good turnout, and in addition to consumption of tea and cake, the raffle was enthusiastically supported, resulting in nearly £140 total being raised on the day.

Many thanks to all who participated, and especially to those who set things up, helped with the tea and raffle, or donated cakes and raffle prizes.



*Photos: Tony Wickham*



# You don't know what you've got till it's gone

- *Tony Wickham*

A couple of the items in this newsletter mentioned an apparent decline in garden wildlife this summer. I've lived in the same house for the best part of 35 years - there have probably always been year to year fluctuations in the numbers of creatures spotted, but a more telling comparison is to look back a good number of years to those species that we took for granted, and compare that to today.

Around 1990 we had regular sightings of hedgehogs most summer evenings - sometimes their snorting would wake us at night. We would also see bats buzzing around at dusk, chasing flying insects – and more than one species, judging by their various sizes. Then there was the appearance of stag beetles around May, not just one or two, but perhaps a dozen or more over several weeks. Multiple frogs would appear in early spring to lay their eggs in our pond -so much frogspawn we would donate it to local schools.

Today it's very different. Based on evidence from my trailcam in the last few years there have still been occasional hedgehog appearances - but this year, not a single one. One fox sometimes, rather than a visiting family. The bats have completely gone, stag beetles are extremely rare, and we just about get one clump of frogspawn in the pond. And it's not just the larger creatures – I see many less ladybirds, earwigs, centipedes, millipedes, ants, even worms, and pests like greenfly and blackfly.

Three nesting boxes were used by tits this year, which sounds promising, but when I cleaned them out recently I found one blue tit nest with two unhatched eggs, another with the corpses of two young, and a great tit nest with a dead fledgling. Possibly there were some survivors, but a poor return overall. I no longer get a thrush singing in the trees, and blackbird numbers are well down. Sparrows appear to be the one bird that is holding strong (and of course the gulls on bin day!). I was almost grateful this year to have a wasps' nest in the ground under a hedge and a brown rat picking

up the bird food, just so I could feel that my garden had some life in it!

I don't doubt that climate change is affecting things generally - some species possibly move location with changing temperatures, and some food sources such as caterpillars are now appearing earlier than the tit nesting time, so parents abandon the nest for lack of food. However, I suspect that for many domestic gardens, human behaviour is also having a more immediate impact. Hedges have been dug out to erect fences – forming a barrier to hedgehogs and frogs travelling to find food or mates, while also depleting nesting sites in the shrubs. Trees are disappearing at an alarming rate (those pesky autumn leaves). Front gardens are being tarmacked or paved over to accommodate increasingly-large family cars. And despite the advice to leave a wild patch, there seems to be a relentless move towards “neat and tidy” gardening (with astroturf being the ultimate insult to nature). You've only got to add in the harm caused by the chemicals in pest-control (especially slug pellets) and weed-control and you can see why nature has such a fight on its hands.

I was recently on Google maps, and using the street-level view for my local roads, did a virtual walk around. For some streets the image captures dated back to 2009. The change of scenery from then to now was really quite horrifying - so much greenery had disappeared in that period, and some areas now look almost barren.

We are very lucky to live in a part of the UK that is blessed with so many nature-rich areas, like Stanpit Marsh, Hengistbury Head, the New Forest. However, if household gardens become incapable of supporting nature, could these areas become isolated “theme-parks” that we have to visit to see the species we once saw at home? It's estimated that the UK's domestic gardens in total occupy half a million hectares – about the size of Norfolk. Each of these gardens is a stepping-stone that nature uses to travel between larger areas of countryside. It would be tragic if future generations don't have the enjoyment and fascination from the natural world that we were privileged to enjoy, literally on our own doorsteps.

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