



Bealeswood Common Wildlife Records July 2021

The Harebell flowered early this year on June 29th. It is one of the four rarer wildflowers visible this month, which will feature together with the discovery of a flourishing colony of one of our most discreet butterflies - the Purple Hairstreak

RED LISTED FLOWERS



A recent publication “The Red List of Vascular Plants” places four of Bealeswood’s wildflowers on the list. Each are in bloom on Bealeswood in July and are described below.

It is the best year that can be remembered for the vigour of our two small Harebell colonies between the oak and electricity sub-station pole (photo opposite with Large Skipper- *Alex Potts*).

A few metres north-west there is a colony of Tormentil. A distinctive member of the *potentilla* group - because they have a petal count of four compared to five for other members The flower-head measures just 8-10mm (photo - below left). The name Tormentil originates from medieval Latin *tormentilla* (*little torment*). The dried roots of the plant were used as a herbal remedy.



Twenty metres south there is a boggy area, where flowering species include Lesser Spearwort (above right). Similar in size and colour to Tormentil but the flower stems grow to 30 cm or more in length, in contrast to the ground-hugging Tormentil. The sap from a stem or leaf, far from being a herbal remedy, is quite toxic. It causes blistering to human skin and mortality amongst sheep.



Just a single colony of Corn Mint (photo opposite), below the boggy area underneath the power lines, has been found to date. The colony was thought lost through scrub clearance under the cables by the utility company last winter. The disturbance resulted in much thicker undergrowth but the Corn Mint survived and flowered again this month (photo opposite). Like other members of the mint family, there is no terminal flower head, instead whorls of lilac-coloured flower heads are found at each leaf pair. The odour from the leaves has been variously described as akin to over-ripe gorgonzola cheese or apples and ginger.

PURPLE HAIRSTREAK - NEW TO BEALESWOOD

Purple Hairstreak is amongst the most overlooked of British butterflies. Chrysalides are known to be harboured in ant colonies and emergent butterflies then dry their wings nearby (photo opposite, female on bracken - Alex Potts). The butterfly's life is then spent amongst oak treetops, usually in woodland but with such a fine collection of oaks on the Common, including several veterans, it has often been sought after but not confirmed here until now. Observations by Alex Potts this month have included video of several arboreal flights and the photo portrait below taken on oak.



Prepared by the Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group (BWRG) (cover and flower photos - Alan Cox)

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