

# Bealeswood Common, February 2022 Annual Review of 2021

## Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group (BWRG)

The wildlife recording group, founded during the first lockdown in March 2020, added a further 99 species in 2021. This gives the cumulative total of 415 taxa for the Common. A full downloadable checklist will be available soon on the Dockenfield Parish Council website ([www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife](http://www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife)). Recording last year was extended through individual initiatives to include grasses and sedges (DB), bats (SL), bees (AP) and fungi (SL).

The high of the year was the realisation that the Purple Hairstreak butterfly was present and active in late afternoons in August on several oaks across the Common and particularly above the seat by this noticeboard. Most thought the year's low point was when a Ring-necked Parakeet screeched overhead for a few days in late November, and again in January, and hoped colonisation was not to follow from its first record for the village.

In Spring the Common was alive to Blackcap, Chiffchaff and Nuthatch song, 6-8 pairs of each bred but only one pair of Bullfinch could be confirmed (see photo), unkempt hedgerows and thickets are needed for nesting habitat.



Breeding male Bullfinch  
photographed on Common  
in June 2021  
(Photo Alan Cox)

Bealeswood's biodiversity is in large measure due to its grasses of which 14 species were identified during the year. For example, Red Fescue may provide food to the young caterpillars of Marbled White in Spring producing a flourishing colony of butterflies - a summer highlight of the Common. Another grass, Cock's Foot, nourishes no less than six species of Bealeswood's butterflies - two

Skippers and four Browns. The Bents (Common and Creeping) are the attraction for the return of the Small Heath after several unrecorded years.

Given concern over the decline in Bumblebee populations, through their essential role in pollination, it was heartening that six of the Big 7 species\* were identified after patient photographic fieldwork and analysis. Ranging from Buff-tailed (see photo) in Spring to Red-tailed into late Summer seen on Devil's-bit Scabious. Only the Early Bumblebee is so far absent from this septet.



Buff-tailed Bumblebee  
*Bombus terrestris*, one of  
Europe's commonest  
bumblebees, homing in on  
gorse flowers (April 2<sup>nd</sup>  
2021) Photo Alex Potts.

Technology in the form of bat detectors came to our aid in confirming that both the Soprano and the Common, *Pipistrelle* bats, and the larger *Noctule*, are resident here. Night activity by the group included light traps for moths that resulted in a large number of new records for the wildlife on the Common.

After the host of wildflowers recorded weekly across the early year (136 species) it is to the kingdom of fungi that attention passes in autumn. An initial study located eleven species including the exotically named Scarlet Waxcap, Amethyst Deceiver and Collared Earthstar.

A National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey was undertaken on the Common for Waverley Borough Council in 2021. The NVC aims to produce a comprehensive description and classification of Britain's plant communities. This involves mapping the site in accordance with standardised vegetation types which are each defined by a particular plant community. Eighteen different NVC plant communities were mapped for Bealeswood Common, which is quite impressive for a relatively small site. Significant, are the areas of unimproved grassland that occur, one of which is nationally rare. Furthermore, eight plant species were recorded for Bealeswood as being rare or threatened and are on the English Red List. A further eight species are of conservation interest. Please tread carefully and do not pick wildflowers or throw out your garden rubbish onto the Common!

**Dawn Chorus Day- 1<sup>st</sup> May.** Join us outside the Bluebell pub at 6.a.m. for a tour with local warden and guide Steve Lockett.

\* poster from <https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Big-7-Poster.pdf>

Dan & Alison Bosence, Alan & Pauline Cox, Philippa & Colin Hall, Claire Jackson, Steve Lockett, Alex Potts, Christina Rasmussen and Anne Tutt, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022.