

Bealeswood Common Wildlife

January 2023

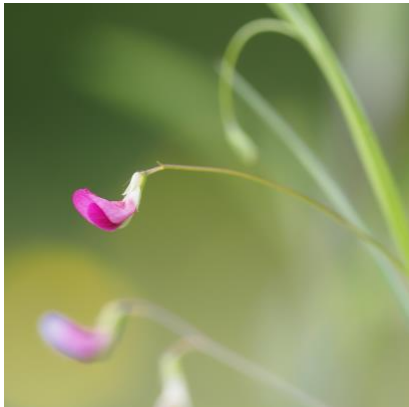
Bealeswood Wildlife Reporting Group (BWRG)
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www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife

Flowers (DB)

Last year the UK's average temperature topped 10° C for the first time since records began in 1884. This has had a significant impact on wildflowers on the Common. Casting our minds back to July and August 2022 the grassy areas of the Common were brown, and with flowers that had gone to seed earlier than usual in the summer. In more normal years there is a purple haze over the grass on the Common from the Knapweed, an abundant tall flower.

In detail some 134 flowers were recorded in bloom over the year and 29 grasses, sedges and rushes. This is slightly higher than in previous years (e.g 128 flowers in 2020 and 111 in 2021) but this reflects our increased knowledge and learning from WBC's professional botanical survey in 2021-22 somewhat offset by some plants that have been recorded for many years that did not flower in 2022 (e.g Honesty, Field Bindweed, Burnet Saxifrage, Common Persica, White Bryony, Figwort): these being plants that would normally flower later in the year, so were more likely to have been affected by the hot dry conditions.

Some taxonomic groups fared worse than others. Notably the clovers (an important food source for bees) which are a feature of the grassy areas in summer, had a very short flowering season. In 2021 Red Clover flowered for 21 continuous weeks but in 2022 for just 14 weeks, and then, after the autumn rains, flowered again in October for 3 weeks. Similarly, White Clover (that comes into flower a few weeks after the Red) flowered for 22 weeks in 2021, but this was reduced to just 3 weeks in 2022 and then, like the Red, flowered again after the rains in late September. A similar pattern was noted for the Pig (or Earth) Nut that flowered for 8 weeks through May-June in 2021 but for 6 weeks over this period in 2022, but then flowered again over 7 weeks in October and November.



Three common flowers from the summer of 2022 on Bealeswood. Left to right: Grass Vetchling, Common Spotted Orchid, Bush Vetch with visiting bumblebee (probably a Carder bee)

Photos by Alan Cox

Taking a broader view of how our most abundant flowers fared in 2022 we can compare flowering times of that year with the previous 10 years. For this exercise we have looked at flowering times of 10 common summer flowering species on the Common: Wood Dock, Nipplewort, Selfheal, Harebell, Lesser Stitchwort, Meadow Buttercup, Bush Vetch, Red Campion

Red Clover, and Pig (or Earth) nut. For our 10 species *the length of flowering in 2022 was, on average, 6 weeks shorter than the average flowering times of the previous 10 years*. This short flowering season was also reflected in the last flowering date of these 10 species, compared with the previous 10 years. These species *finished flowering 5 weeks earlier, on average, than their last flowering date of the previous 10 years*.

This long-term recording of flowering times backs up our perception that 2022 was a tough year for our wildflowers and we expect this will have a knock-on effect for the insect, bird and mammal populations next year.

With respect to our trees, the weather caused some unusual events, some more noticeable than others. The drought and exceptional heat through July and August caused many trees to drop leaves while still green, and the autumn colours appeared late, with some Oak trees remaining green or finally turned brown, holding their leaves until the end of 2022.

Fungi (AA)

January is a quiet month for fungi, the severe frosts have seen off most winter fruiting species. A few hardy species are hanging on as photographed below:



Left to right:
Hairy Curtain Crust
Rusty Porecrust
Common Puffball



Left to right:
Jelly Ear
Blushing Bracket

Birds (AA, DB, AC)

A quiet time of the year for our birds and the near absence of our winter-visiting Redwing and Fieldfare is puzzling. The following were recorded on the Common during the month: Pheasant, Wood Pigeon, Stock Dove, Sparrowhawk, Tawny Owl, Green Woodpecker, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Kestrel, Magpie, Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Long-Tailed Tit, Firecrest, Goldcrest, Wren, Nuthatch, Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Dunnock, Chaffinch and Bullfinch.

Flying over, we noted: Canada Goose, Raven, Buzzard, Grey Heron and Red Kite.

Amanda Adolph, Dan & Alison Bosence, Alan & Pauline Cox, Philippa & Colin Hall, Clare Jackson, Steve Lockett, Phil Nangle, Alex Potts, Christina Rasmussen, Anne Tutt, and Raf & Karen Wane.
27/1/2023.