

Bealeswood Common Wildlife

Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group (BWRG), January 2025

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See also at www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife



A January sunrise on Bealeswood Common after a light snowfall (Photo Alex Potts)

Flowers (DB). Throughout the land botanists have traditionally carried out an often cold and wet survey of those plants that are flowering on New Years Day; the New Year Plant Hunt or NYPH. The survey based on Bealeswood Common (including the bridlepath to Pitt Farm) yielded a surprising total of 20 flowers in bloom. Some of these were late flowering plants (e.g. Bush Vetch) whilst others were very early flowering plants (e.g. Lesser Celandine). The total list comprises: Wavy Bittercress, Common Chickweed, Daisy, Germander Speedwell, Yarrow, Groundsel, Red Dead-nettle, Annual Meadow-grass, Dandelion, Common Ragwort, White Dead-nettle, Butterburs, Primrose, Lesser Periwinkle, Dog's Mercury, Gorse, Bush Vetch, Hazel, Lesser Celandine.



Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*)
flowering in ditches on Bealeswood
Common in late December and early
January. This being the earliest
flowering time for this plant in our 15
years of records (photo Dan Bosence)

Birds (AP, AC, PC, DB). Our birders have been out and about and recorded an impressive list divided into those seen on the Common, those flying over or only heard. The last being assisted with the bird recognition App “Merlin”. However, we use this as an alert and do not add birds to the list until they are actually seen or heard.

Seen: Nuthatch, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Longtailed Tit, MarshTit, Coal Tit, Robin, Blackbird, Dunnock, House Sparrow, Wren, Bullfinch, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Firecrest, Treecreeper, Carrion Crow, Magpie, Jackdaw, Jay, Woodpigeon, Collard Dove, Starling.

Flying over: Great Spotted Woodpecker, Kestrel, Buzzard, Red Kite, Sparrow Hawk, Raven, Woodcock.

Heard: Green Woodpecker, Stock Dove, Tawny Owl.



Marsh Tits have
been present for
most of this month
busy finding food in
the luxuriant lichens
growing on oak
branches (photo
Alex Potts).

Butterflies (AP)

Whilst we don't expect to see many flying in January a Red Admiral was spotted out and about on the 25th of the month. Meanwhile, others are overwintering as eggs or chrysalises. Brown Hairstreak eggs have an impressive ability to survive in freezing temperatures. The eggs, which are typically laid on new-growth Blackthorn, either in the fork of a side shoot or thorn, and enter a state of dormancy during the winter months. The cold weather triggers a period of hibernation, allowing them to endure frost and freezing conditions. When temperatures rise in spring, the eggs "wake up," and the larvae inside begin to develop, ready to hatch once the conditions are right. This amazing survival strategy helps Brown Hairstreaks navigate harsh winters, ensuring their continued presence in on the Common in early spring.



Brown Hairstreak egg (between red arrows) with coating of hoar frost on blackthorn twig on Common. The fine reticulate pattern of the egg is just showing beneath the ice crystals. The eggs are tiny, about 0.7 mm wide (photo Alex Potts)

Fungi (AA) Whilst many fungi are still showing through the winter a recently felled ash tree had a good growth of the appropriately named King Alfred's Cakes fungus. A saprophyte on dead or decaying wood.



King Alfred's Cakes fungus (*Daldinia concentrica*) growing alongside moss and lichen