

Bealeswood Common, November 2021

Non-native or Alien species

Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group (BWRG)

Previous monthly records and notes are posted at www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife

Birds



Spotted and photographed (Alex Potts) on Bealeswood Lane for the first time in November. The Ring-necked Parakeet is a tropical species that has successfully adapted to the European climate, the current British population of 31,000 is concentrated in Greater London. The first Surrey record was of one shot by the stationmaster at Dorking station in 1857. The subspecies is now feral in Britain and are presumed escapes from South London pet shops – imported in the 1970s from the Indian sub-continent. Numbers began to increase during the 1980s and then to rise sharply; as recorded in annual counts in riverside Poplars at the Esher Rugby Club; 1994 (697) to 2002 (3,650). They feed on nuts and fruit and peanut garden feeders are possibly one element of their successful adaptation. They compete with native species for nesting sites.

Other non-native birds on the Common are the Collared Dove (introduced in 1960-70s) and until recently the Little Owl (1880s), but this appears to be locally extinct in the Bealeswood/Lake Lane area at least - their former stronghold.

Alien water fowl include the Mandarin duck; they have used the pond from time to time and the stream that flows past the Lower Common (bridge in Bealeswood Lane). To these we add overflies of the Canada Goose, Greylag Goose and, more recently, Egyptian Goose.

Wildflowers

Given the location of the Common surrounded by houses in the village it is not surprising that a number of non-native plants have made their way out onto the Common. The plant recording includes these in the current total of 160 flowering plants (not including grasses) found on the Common. Of these 22 (some 14%) are considered non-native plants. We include those native British plants that are clearly out of their normal habitat in Bealeswood and must have been introduced from elsewhere. After 12 years of surveys their presence is well known and their distribution often gives a clue to how they might have arrived. There are many different ways in which non-natives are thought to have arrived on the Common:

- 1) Some, such as the pink flowered Geranium, Columbine, Crocosmia, Honesty, Grape Hyacinth, Periwinkle, St John Wort (cultivar) and Snowdrop are distributed close to gardens from which they are likely to have escaped or were tipped with garden waste (not to be recommended).
- 2) Some non-natives are widely scattered on the Common (such as the Spanish Bluebell) and may have been brought in by birds or animals (on their feet, or in faeces).
- 3) A single plant of Cowslip adjacent to the bridleway was likely to have come in on a bicycle tyre, or walkers' boot as the nearest populations are many miles away on the Chalk downs near Farnham.
- 4) Corn Mint was recorded for the first time on the Common in 2020. This lives next to a pile of cuttings from the Common and we assume it came in on the machinery used to cut the Common.
- 5) Our agricultural heritage is reflected in one non-native plant the Hop or *Humulus lupulus*.
- 6) Finally, Daffodils must be included as the ones we have are non-native cultivars that were planted in the 1980s in a practice that would not be encouraged today.

Trees

The trees in Bealeswood Common are almost exclusively native, ie trees indigenous to the British Isles. It is likely that they are the product of natural regeneration, with no human involvement. The non-natives are limited to the hybrid Apples (the wild crabs hybridising with the domestic apple), Damsons and a few shrubs; the Laurels, Cotoneaster and Amelanchier, that are almost certainly garden escapes. The Sycamores and Sweet Chestnut, being introduced to the UK many years ago, are now widely regarded as "honorary natives".