Bealeswood Local Nature Reserve

Highlights for July 2026 from the Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group (BWRG)

Betony and Bumblebees (AC)

Betony (*Betonica officinalis*) is a good indicator of ancient grassland but is Red Listed as “Vulnerable” because of its declining abundance in England. In early July the main common just 25m east of the bench has a wonderful display of Birds-foot-trefoil, Knapweed and dense pockets of Betony. The deep, rich purple of the Betony contrasts with the more delicate lilac hue of the Knapweed and is flowering in profusion to the delight of our invertebrates.

Garden Bumblebee approaching Betony flowers with tongue extended

Feeding with tongue extended down long flower tube of Betony

In the left photo a rather large bumblebee hovers ready to do its sugar mining from deep within the long tubes of the Betony’s flowerhead. The left photo shows the reddish tip of the tongue (or proboscis) drooping from the pollen encrusted, long protective sheath of the proboscis called the maxilla. This large bee is a male Garden Bumblebee (*Bombus hortorum*) identified by its colour banding and length (12 mm) of its proboscis and a distinctive elongate “horsey” head.

Measurements of the flower tubes of the Betony here show that they are all near 10mm in length. Hence to reach to the nectar only bumblebees with long tongues, like the Garden Bumblebee, will be capable of extracting nectar. The Common Carder Bumblebee is the only other species we are likely to see that has a long enough tongue to reach the Betony nectar.

(For detailed account of Alan’s observations see our website (www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife)

Summer Migrants

We have had several prominent butterflies on the Common this year that migrate to the UK across the Channel all the way from continental Europe:

Clouded Yellows (*Colias croceus)* usually arrive in the spring from southern Europe. They lay their eggs mainly on clovers and trefoils which are plentiful on the Common. It is probable that the Clouded Yellows we are seeing this month are locally bred from this spring's migrants. With warmer winters it is possible that some caterpillars may survive the winter.

Red Admirals, (*Vanessa atalanta)* though very familiar to most people, are also migrants arriving from the continent in variable numbers each year. Despite breeding successfully on nettles, they rarely survive the winter. However recent reports of hibernating adults suggests this is changing.

Clouded Yellow feeding on Knapweed

Red Admiral resting on dead Oak leaf

The **Painted Lady** (*Vanessa cardui)* is probably the best known migrant butterfly, often arriving in huge numbers. This year seems a good, but not spectacular, year. It can breed here but again rarely survives winter. Research involving radar and nets suspended under Helium balloons has discovered that millions of Painted Ladies migrate here and millions make their way back each year. Presumably this is true of all three butterflies, and as all seem to be adapting to warmer winters, we may soon have all 3 as residents as well as migrants.

Photo: Alan Cox

Fragrant Mints (DB)

Many of the flowers of our open grasslands are now in developing into seeds and if the hot dry weather continues there will be few grassland flowers in bloom. However, late in the summer and in the damper areas of the Common thrfour species of Mint, or the genus *Mentha,* come into flower, and attract pollinators including moths (including the Mint Moth - *Pyrausta aurata*), flies and beetles. Unlike many wildflower groups the identification of the mints is aided by the strong and distinctive scents of their leaves. Used widely in flavouring and commonly grown in gardens, it is no surprise that the Spear Mint and the Pepper Mint on Bealeswood Common are in all likelyhood garden escapes. Water Mint is the commonest species in the UK whereas Corn Mint is Red Listed as “Vulnerable” in England.

Corn Mint *Mentha arvensis*

Spear Mint *M. spicata*

Pepper Mint- *Mentha x piperata*

Water Mint- *Mentha aquatica*

Wildlife Walks on the Common

These start at the notice boards at the end of the lane downhill past the garden of the Bluebell pub (GU10 4EX). Contact the leader if you wish to join the walk, so that we can keep a track of numbers and in case of bad weather etc:

Small Mammals (wood mice, voles etc)- September 26th (Saturday) 10 am, led by Roger Trout, contact: rabbitwise@hotmail.co.uk
Mushrooms- October 17th (Saturday) 10.30 am, led by Manda Adolph, contact: amandaadolph@gmail.com

As reported by the Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group:
Amanda Adolph, Dan & Alison Bosence, Alan & Pauline Cox, Philippa & Colin Hall, Alex Potts, Roger & Jill Trout, and Anne Tutt