Bealeswood Local Nature Reserve

Highlights for September 2026

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

Autumn management of the Common (DB)

Frequent visitors to the Common will have noticed that our annual cut of the grassland areas was earlier than usual. With the hot,dry summer the majority of the grassy areas had flowered and set seed and were ready to cut. This late cut is to remove the plant matter (biomass) so that it does not rot down and fertilise the soil. Enriched soils encourage the growth of grasses at the expense of our grassland flowers and waxcap fungi; which both favour low nutrient soils. The mowing machine used by WBC picks up the cuttings which are dumped at a few, nutrient-enriched, sites with vigorous grass, nettle and mushroom growth.

Large numbers of pollinators (Butterflies, Bees, Flies and Wasps) were still flying in mid-September so areas of the Common with flowers in bloom were fenced off. The most noticeable of these are below this noticeboard; one patch of prominent purple/blue flowers of Devil's-bit Scabious and another patch of Michaelmas Daisies.

Common Carder bee on Scabious (photo Alex Potts)

Ladybird Fly (new for Bealeswood) on Michaelmas Daisy (photo Alan Cox)

Small Mammal Survey over Common (Bertille Presta, AC)

Friends and families gathered on the Common on the 26th September to learn about small mammals that inhabit the area. For two hours, children keenly hunted for traps laid by our guide Roger Trout the day before. They uncovered many Wood Mice and Bank Voles that were released where they had been found, after detailed observations and weighing. We learnt to differentiate between Wood Mice (i.e. goggly eyes, big ears and long tails) and Voles (i.e. tiny eyes, very small ears and shorter tails), and enjoyed a nice sunny morning outside.

The Short-tailed Vole (photo right) was first for Bealeswood. A widespread, but rarely seen, grassland vole. It is a strict herbivore, eating both grass leaf and stems leaving a neat pile outside its table tennis ball sized entrance to its shallow burrow. Handled expertly (as here) it suffers no harm and is returned to the wild after enjoying a high fibre meal and plenty of warm bedding in its temporary, totally safe holding cell.

Bird Sightings (PC, AC)

Evening sightings (and listenings with Merlin App) frequently come up with 20 birds on the Common. Most notable being Marsh Tit (near noticeboard) and Crossbill and Spotted Flycatcher (both on Merlin). One memorable evening in the wooded area below the grasslands, a Blackcap filled the air with its song. Other good news has been frequent sightings of Firecrests and Treecreepers along with Long-tailed Tits and Pied Wagtails and, of course, along with our other common birds.

Goldcrest
(photo Alex Potts)

Butterflies- (PH, AB, AP)

This month, Small Coppers, Small Heaths and Clouded Yellows have been seen in greater numbers than usual. Clouded Yellows have only appeared occasionally in the past. Fencing off areas of late-flowering Fleabane, Devil's-bit Scabious and Michaelmas Daisies has provided a food source throughout this month.

Small Copper on Michaelmas Daisy (photos Alex Potts)

Brown Argus on Devil's-bit Scabious seed head

The transects records for September are (in order of most to least abundant) are: Large White, Clouded Yellow, Small White, Common Blue, Small Copper, Red Admiral, Speckled Wood, Brown Argus, Meadow Brown and Holly Blue.

Clouded Yellows and Devil's-bit Scabious (AC)

This month saw up to six Clouded Yellow butterflies pollinating Devil's-bit Scabious. These butterflies are probably descended from Continental arrivals in mid July; their eggs yielded voracious caterpillars that would have munched the grass and clovers here for a month before transforming into a chrysalis for two weeks and emerging as pristine butterflies. The flower is hermaphroditic with both male and female organs in same flower. The mallet-shaped male organs produce spherical pollen grains (magnified inset). The pollen is held by a velchrome-like surface in rows before its release to fertilize the female parts of the flower (smaller white blobs in flower picture). The seed then develops near the base of the female part as in the Brown Argus picture above.

Clouded Yellow on Devil's-bit Scabious showing male (brown, mallet-shaped) and female (white blobs) parts of flower. Inset shows spherical pollen