



Sutton Poyntz Biodiversity Group News

August 2024

Garden Bird Watch this month 25th – 31st August 2024

For the first time for four years, there has been no camping on Northdown Farm with the land producing wheat, which was being harvested at the time I took the photograph on Wednesday 16th August. I did have to stand and watch for a while as the giant combine harvester cut the crop and removed the grain, which was periodically pumped into a large trailer. A far cry from some 70 years ago, when as a young boy, we would help Uncle Jimmy cut with a reaper, which turned out sheaf's, complete with the heads of corn, which the children would stack into stooks to dry. No rabbits or small animals were seen to run out, but I suspect that wood mice were busy in the following night eating the fallen grain. Again, no small birds, despite hedges on four sides.



What I did see just before the harvest, was a moss growing on the clay soil. My eyes are not what they were, but working my way through the British Bryological Society's *Field Guide*, I suspect what we have here is **Bird's-claw Beard-moss** *Barbula unguiculata*. My specimen had a distinct yellowish hue caused by a yellow central nerve. The habitat is correct neutral or base-rich soil. There is a dot on the map in Hill and Edward's *Mosses and Liverworts of Dorset* roughly where Sutton Poyntz is, but I would value and expert opinion.

Butterflies and Moths

The group has continued doing the Sutton Poyntz transect around the waterworks. Penny started the first week in August and managed the Beacon area, before abandoning due to the weather closing in on 6th having done two sectors. John then picked up the trail on the 10th doing sectors three to six round the Waterworks enclosure. These sectors were quite poor mainly due to cattle having grazed the area to the soil. Therefore, no herbs. The most common butterfly was the gatekeeper or hedge brown illustrated.



What was disappointing was just a single common blue in the next square so no Adonis blues in the transect. Earlier in the week Penny noted a few Endangered **Wall** butterflies by the Beacon. Week commencing 19th August, was particularly poor, despite 100% sun with the best results from the more sheltered sectors.

On Wednesday 7th, the West Dorset National Trust team had a wonderful moth trapping session with 107 species recorded on Stonebarrow, so I put my trap out here in Sutton Poyntz. There were just six species. Typically, a cold north-easterly had started making the night cold. Later on, Sue and Jon had a rosy footman in their light trap and a painted lady in their garden.



Caroline sent me this photograph of a southern hawker from her greenhouse. On warm sunny days there have been many buzzing about whilst I gardened. Rita and Colin reported a few Golden-winged dragonflies around the Puddledocks. This dragonfly breeds in gravel streams, typically in the valley bottom.

Garden butterflies have been mainly small whites but I had a single comma On the 21st. Sue and Jon reported a painted lady but generally, a disappointing season. The lavender is supporting very small numbers of bees and hoverflies and despite all the buddleia very few butterflies on the numerous garden bushes.

BIRDS

Garden bird watch produced 12 returns, with members away on holiday. You observed 38 species, averaging 15 per garden from 180 records. Pretty good for July, when most birds are hiding whilst moulting. For the first time for many years, Ros did not have any breeding house martins, although I saw behaviour suggesting nesting at Whitcombe stables. Just two records of swallows, with a recent impression of birds feeding up before moving back to Africa. BTO data suggests that many migrants did not make it across the English Channel due to high winds in late April/May. Just two thrush records with one song thrush and one mistle thrush. My impression, walking round Preston and Sutton Poyntz, that house sparrow numbers have crashed. Jon recorded a spotted fly catcher, whilst doing the butterfly count.

The Pond

One Sunday afternoon, children had collected at least seven bullheads from under the stones on the shallow northern end. There have been a good number of both moorhen and mallard checks fledging sheltering in the water-cress beds.

The Sutton Poyntz Society is organising a reduction of watercress to maintain water flow in case of heavy rain. Currently, there is a pile at the side of the pond but presumably more to come out.

There are two umbellifers growing from the sedge. Hemlock water dropwort is very poisonous, whilst also there are a few plants of wild angelica as well.



