



Garden Bird Watch September 22nd to 28th 2024

September is always a difficult month to write about. Most of the wildflowers are over except the obnoxious garden weeds we need to clear, which this year have included Bermuda buttercup – an *Oxalis* and what is becoming a major nuisance is the butterfly bush *Buddleia*. I cleared 14 small ones out of my patio this week. One common name for this alien bush is the butterfly bush and as far as I can see it has failed in that duty in 2024.

The pond is due for an autumn clear out in October; now that the mallard and moorhen chicks are no longer feeding in the watercress beds. Children still show me the small freshwater fish – the bullhead, when they move the stepping stones. Nobody has reported the Endangered European eel this year. One of the major problems during heavy downpours has been the amount of soil washed into these small waterways. The River Jordan is not too bad, but the brook running across the fields from Osmington is often cloudy with suspended soil after heavy rain. This is then washed out to sea and with it all the carbon the soil holds. I am also getting concerned with the yellow flag-iris blocking the stream in places.

Despite the strong winds and rain, the team monitoring butterflies round the waterworks has managed to do the surveys most weeks. Sometimes, it has been managed only on the one suitable day in the week. The rules are quite tight. It should be done between 10am and 4:00pm. There should be at least 50% sun and wind speed below force 5. So far 29 species with 1247 records in 22 weeks of observations. There is two more weeks to go with meadow brown being the local champion. However, for the last two weeks, the most common butterfly in my garden has been the small white. Nationally, the Big Butterfly Count had the worst year ever with 22% of the respondents reporting no butterflies. Bees have also suffered, with my lavender bushes received many fewer bees, few wasps and flies in the kitchen



I was ordered to eject this large house spider *Tegenaria gigantea* from the bathroom but there have not been many smaller spiders and harvestmen. I have hardly seen a crane fly but have had a few grasshoppers in the garden and mainly southern hawker dragonflies. Colin reported a few golden-ringed dragonflies on Puddledock Lane but otherwise that group has been scarce.

The mop head plant structure on the photograph is caused by a mite gall *Aculops fuchsiae*. This gall is quite common in the south-west and was first seen at Kew in 2007. What I have found unusual about this example on Mission Hall Lane is that it is on a pink flowered fuchsia. I have seen it many times in Sutton Poyntz and Preston but always on fuchsia with a red and violet flower. Mites are small creatures in the genus **Arachnae** with eight legs. I rarely see the animal and on the one and only occasion I managed to catch one it went to the Natural History Museum for identification. However, I have identified many species, which form plant galls. Nearly all the Records on the NBN Atlas are from the Royal Horticultural Society.



Garden Bird Watch:

We have only had 13 contributors this month. August is always a bad month to see birds during their annual moult when they tend to stay close to the ground with small birds especially sulking in hedgerows. Interesting that blackbird was only seen in half the gardens. Early in a morning, I occasionally see one skulking from the hedge bottom along Puddledock Lane. Only three chaffinches. Also, only three chiffchaffs. I know one or two people like to use the acoustic identification assistant Merlin on their phones. However, BTO are advising that it can confuse calls between redstart and chiffchaff, as humans can. So to quote one journalist "I use Merlin but only book the bird when I can see it". However, BTO are working on the problem. Their science is fantastic and well worth supporting with a membership.

Three people report half decent numbers of house martins but only one person reported swallow. Those two species seem to have stayed in France this year and there has certainly been no mass southward migration. Some nice flocks of long-tailed tits flying down the back gardens of Puddledock Lane, then turning in Penny's vegetable garden. Most common spot robin by 11 people.

Garden Bird Watch starts this Sunday 22nd September for a week or similar if away. Please send me your returns promptly. I know some people have been doing this for 15 years and