



**Sutton Poyntz Biodiversity Group.
March 2024 Newsletter**

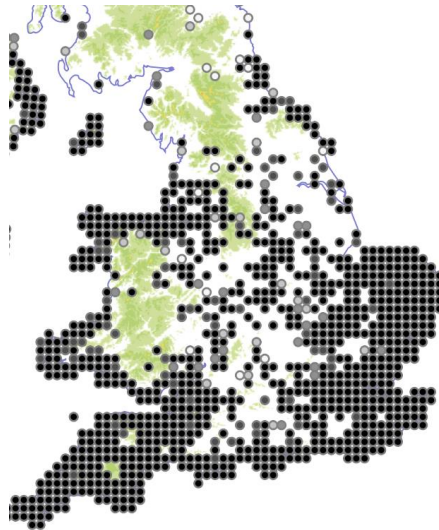
Garden Bird Watch week 25th - 30th March 2024

The not-so-brilliant photograph was taken with an iPad and cropped. I make the declaration as I do not want the Press Association after me for not declaring editing. Basically, this is a sample of lichen from thatch. It appears to be *Cladonia ramulosa*. It is a brilliant habitat on south facing thatch in Preston full of mosses with my sample having Cypress-leaved plait-moss *Hypnum cupressiforme*. One has to be careful with moss on old thatch in Dorset as there could be thatch moss *Leptodontium gemmascens*, which has gemmae at the end of the leaf.

Whilst out walking down Preston Road, a grassy bank has some Alexanders *Smyrniolum olusarum*. The plant is a member of the carrot family and was introduced by the Romans. It remained popular until the 16th century when it was replaced by celery. It is mainly a coastal plant, but does not tolerate salt, with the warmer coastal climate suiting it.



Alexanders – Preston



Distribution BSBI Atlas 2020 on line



A rust fungus *Puccinia smyrrii*

The rust fungus is quite common and I have seen it on Alexanders plants in early January in Dorset.

Spring is almost with us. Plenty of lesser celandines in flower and the hedgerows are full of cherry plum with blackthorn not far behind. Hawthorn is in leaf but daffodils seem to be going over early.

Garden Bird Watch:

In summary 37 species seen in 13 gardens at an average of 17 per garden. Rita and Colin have been testing out some software called Merlin, which aims to identify birds by their song. Used with care, it is very useful although I have in the past rejected identifications, e.g. coot miles in land away from water. They sent me a note about two interesting species on Puddledock Lane. The first was a firecrest. By sight this small migrant bird could be confused with goldcrest, but years ago I was with Dave, when one of the team pointed to a small bird in a bush near the camping field, which Dave was over the moon to see – a firecrest and at the time it was his first record from our recording area. The firecrest has not reappeared on Puddledock Lane but as a migrant it will have returned to the continent. The second bird was a marsh tit. Again, it is not a name that appears regularly here. By sight it is hard to distinguish marsh tit from the much scarcer willow tit. However, Collins *Bird Guide* describes the song as being totally different so there is not much doubt that marsh tit was present. The “experts” often identify marsh tit on the Golden Cap Estate. I have only met one person who could identify both by ear, at the same place and believe me she was a country lady and a brilliant bird watcher.

Whilst dealing with the wider countryside, we usually see redwings frequently at the top of Combe Valley road but this year just three occasions including 12th March when 30 were in a small bush there.

In our gardens, the only species appearing in every garden was wood pigeon – what a surprise! However, in 12 gardens, blackbird, blue tit, great tit (one of the few birds I can hear calling, and robin. At least two appear to be breeding in Brookmead Close. House sparrow and song thrush numbers down. Grey wagtail only by the pond.

Frogs Toads and Newts.

Nobody has reported frog spawn in the garden pond. Has anybody seen a hare especially down towards Whitcombe Farm?

