



Blair's Mocha moth John Newbould

## GARDEN BIRD WATCH DATES 24<sup>TH</sup> TO 30<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2024

### HARVEST MOUSE IN WEYMOUTH



Dave has recently been volunteering at Lorton Meadows. DWT reserve. His group were tasked with cutting vegetation back when just as an operator was approaching, he noticed a nest similar to the one on the left. In fact, there were two and subsequently a third.

The following week he was doing some similar tidying up in Sutton Poyntz, when he noticed another nest with a subsequent search by the Friday Group finding a second nearby. The Friday group then searched the Wessex Water reed bed finding around six more nests.

Classed as IUCN **Near Threatened** it is protected under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 in England. (see NBN/Atlas.org)

The Mammal Society [mammal.org.uk](http://mammal.org.uk) tell us that adults only weigh about 6g, living some 18 months They breed from May onwards about three times a year and are found in tufts of long stalked grasses (as per the photograph) and on reeds, which is where I first saw a harvest mouse in South Yorkshire many years ago.

**Nests:** Breeding nests are the most obvious sign indicating the presence of harvest mice, as they are the only British mammal to build nests of living woven grass well above-ground. Nests are usually around 10cm in diameter and are found in dense vegetation such as grasses, rushes, cereals, grassy hedgerows, ditches and brambles. They are generally located on the stalk zone of grasses, at least 30cm above the ground in short grasses and up to a meter above ground in tall reeds. Harvest mice also produce solitary or non-breeding nests, which are smaller, with a diameter of around 5cm. Nests are built from leaves split lengthways (strips of roughly 1-2 mm wide) and woven together to form the nest's framework.

### Slow worm

Last month virtually within minutes of sending out the *Newsletter* Jon emailed this shot of a slow worm in his garden. Most years, I find at least one under a small paving slab in my garden. This year, there were six under a slab where there is plenty of litter.

Although there are many records on the NBN Atlas, this is also protected under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 and under the Berne Convention.



### Moths:

The banner picture is a **Blair's mocha**. A moth found mainly along the south east coast is most likely a migrant from the continent. It is nearly always found in a light trap, although this one obligingly let me capture it in a glass tube from the kitchen window in early evening. (Seen whilst washing up!). It feeds on Holm oak *Quercus ceris*. The evergreen one seen in the Rectory garden on the Weir. I m grateful to Andy Foster for help with identification.

Butterflies have about disappeared for the winter. I have just two records for November a peacock and a red admiral.

### Birds:

One of the questions raised by the National Trust's National publicity team this week related to the numbers of **house martins** and **swallows** seen this year. I found getting answers from colleagues locally very difficult. Nobody wanted to put figures on the situation. The main negative was not seeing breeding, which was the situation in Sutton Poyntz where we have some basic numbers for 2023 and 2024

No of observations	2024	2023
House martins	21	30
Swallows	10	21

Very often, in previous years, we have seen thousands of swallow/house martins gather under cliffs or in bowls of hills feeding up. Then within a few minutes they have disappeared south east to the continent. This phenomenon did not happen in 2024.

I am also concerned about **house sparrow**. Only five out of twelve observers sent a score. Over the years, there have been places where even I could see and hear house sparrow around Sutton Poyntz and Preston. Very rare today. On a more positive note, Caroline reported a **little egret** in her garden. Jon W. tells me that Ian has seen kingfisher in the Osmington brook from the bridge. What that bird finds to feed on, I do not know. He also tells me that a good place to see kingfisher is in the harbour flying across from the old Customs House.

There were a couple of records of grey wagtail; three records of grey heron and green woodpecker. Listen out for tawny owl – just one record and there are plenty of small mammals about. Also watch out for winter thrushes. I saw a flock of *circa* 200 redwings on Combe Valley Road but no song thrush.