



April 2023 Garden Bird Watch this month 23rd – 29th April 2023



Twice a year – spring and autumn, Rita and Colin borrow some Longworth traps used for capture and release of small mammals in the waterworks area, using the shelter of hedges. Early this month, we trapped in the meadow and the western hedge of the fen area. On each occasion three wood mice were observed and released. Going through the gate from the operational area, Rita spotted a weasel (too big for our traps). We also ran Heterodyne recording bat meters for five nights with just one recording of a common pipistrelle in the waterworks meadow and a single serotine and a few Common pipistrelle near the Cartshed.

Garden Bird Watch:

In the wider countryside, Ros reported swallows blown into Lodmoor around 8th April. John heard nightingale on Church Road just north of Waterside followed by Rita and Colin on 13th. We took a small party to Ringstead on Wednesday 19th where we heard six separate songs in blackthorn scrub between the little Church and the Caravan park. It was so windy on the top, we saw a skylark struggle to get aloft.

I received reports from 12 people representing 37 species. Notable that house sparrow numbers are dropping. They feed on seed and I do hear people say that they have stopped putting bird seed out because the large Corvids act the feeders. All but one person reported a robin, with a male calling persistently from the conifers by our front door. Never satisfied with one partner Mr Robin. Two people reported tawny owl and with only three people reporting green woodpecker, which is a grassland feeder these seem to be not doing so well. I rarely hear one on Puddledock Lane these days and it is not due to my poor hearing.

Dot Emblem has had to leave us, which means that we are not getting reports from her garden under the hill. In the summer, we do cover her area with our Butterfly walk, so we will need to keep our eyes open for birds.



Mike Dodd sent this picture of a violet oil beetle from his garden early in the month. John photographed this caterpillar of scarlet tiger moth on common comfrey in a couple of places adjacent to Sutton Road.

Butterflies have included brimstones, small white, orange tip, peacocks and small tortoiseshell. For those with an Android, or IOs phone butterfly conservation have an excellent app free to use for identifying and recording butterflies.



Although a good number of ash are flowering well, others are showing signs of disease and it is not all ash die-back. Many are succumbing to honey fungus, the rhizmatoids of which are found under the bark as with the example on the right. Others are dying due to a fungal infection caused by a *Neogallingea* species. True ash die back may be spotted by small white fungal blobs on the stem or flower stalks.

In my garden, smooth sow-thistle, nipplewort, hairy bitter-cress, goose-grass and petty spurge are all there in large quantities after failing miserably to grow in the hot dry summer. One unusual plant has moved in is caper spurge, which I have only seen growing by the Rectory on the Weir previously.