



Sandnats Newsletter WINTER 2024/2025

Welcome to the Winter Newsletter – hopefully the articles and photos will inspire you all to get out and enjoy as well as record our local wildlife in the coming year.

Exciting Fly News! Exorista grandis at Sandwell Valley by Jenni Wilding

Having heard from Dave Blyth that Rhonda Avery (one of the RSPB volunteers) had spotted an Emperor Moth caterpillar on Tanhouse Avenue by the RSPB entrance, and that he had rescued said caterpillar from the perils of crossing the road and given it to Andy Purcell to look after until it pupated and then emerged as an adult moth, I was looking forward to some moth photos of Andy's usual excellent standard.

Even better....well perhaps not from the moth's point of view....Andy presented me with a box containing the pupal case and a number of flies, that had hatched out instead of a moth. Examination of the flies under a microscope revealed that these were in fact *Exorista grandis*, a parasite fly from the Tachinidae family. This is a scarce species, with only 47 records in the UK. The flies lay their eggs on caterpillars, and the unfortunate caterpillar spins its cocoon for its own metamorphosis but is in fact providing food and a sheltered place for the fly larvae to themselves pupate.

We are still treated to some of Andy's wonderful photos – just of a lovely fly instead of a lovely moth! (Photos below by Andy Purcell.)



The cocoon which has a couple of flies still stuck in it that didn't quite make it out will be donated to the Natural History Museum in London. This is also further confirmation of the presence of Emperor Moth in the Sandwell Valley.

More mothy goings on...from Mike Bloxham

It was late and I was about to conclude my computer session when the screen flickered, and all sorts of strange things took place. Had my sickly machine crashed?

No. A tiny moth was walking across the touch screen making mischief!

I tubed it & set up the camera. The offending moth was released onto a piece of old plank I keep for naturalistic photos. It sat obligingly foe several shots and these were sufficiently good to let me discover the minute girl who had been calling (my moth was a female).

Clad in bronze, purple and brown scales, with characteristic white markings and a dusting of liny white scales, my visitor told me she was *Mompha langiella*!



She told me she was going to hibernate in the house.

What a lovely guest- and rather a scarce one too!

Janet Granger and the garden birds – Mike Bloxham

Janet lives in New Meeting Street in West Bromwich. She has been a Sandnats member for over 30 years and has taken a keen interest in the lives of both mammals and birds. She helped in the breeding of Harvest Mice for the release programme starting during the spring of 2000 and joined in the subsequent searches for them- unfortunately none have been discovered to this day.

In spite of the apparent failure of our aforementioned project, Janet continued to pursue her interest in birds. She has been a visitor at the RSPB Centre since it opened and enjoyment of her garden birds and other wildlife in her garden has led to all sorts of recording activities.

Her garden lies close to Jesson Park- a large area of community greenspace offering a variety of recreational activities. It is notable for having a considerable fringe of fine mature deciduous trees, some of which overlook her garden. These give shelter to passing birds and are valuable to corvids and occasional raptors. Smaller birds are active and Janet feeds them on a regular basis.

She makes notes about her birds and devotes a short period of observation each week when she notes the various birds in or above her garden. In the tables, the birds most usually not regulars actually visiting the garden are greyed out. This table show the weekly observations from 2020 and 2024.

It is based on numbers noted and gives a notional 'pecking order' for the garden!

Bird counts 2020 (43 counts)	TOTAL	Bird counts 2024 (39 counts)	TOTAL
House Sparrow	296	ring-necked parakeets	360
Greenfinch		Starling	183
Great Tit	172	Greenfinch	180
Blue Tit	158	Blue Tit	173
Wood Pigeon	114	Carrion Crow	154
Starling	2000000	Woodpigeon	154
Crow	108	Great Tit	146
Magpie	89	Goldfinch	132
Goldfinch	89	Magpie	124
Long-tailed Tit		House Sparrow	65
Blackbird	54	Blackbird	60
Feral Pigeon	52	Robin	61
jackdaw	15170	Dunnock	45
Robin		Long-tailed Tit	45
Dunnock	(A) (B)	Wren	28
Wren	100000	Chaffinch	18
Chaffinch	0.000	Grey Heron	13
Grey Heron	10.00	Sparrowhawk	13
Swift	9	Feral pigeon	12
Sparrowhawk	9	Buzzard	9
Buzzard	4	Rock Dove	6
Great Spotted Woodpecker	4	Song Thrush	5
swallow	10.75	Coal Tit	4
Song Thrush		Grey wagtail	4
Jay		Jay	4
Mistle thrush	2	Great Spotted Wp	3
		Pied Wagtail	2
		Swift	2
		Mistle Thrush	1
	1772	TOTAL	2006

Readers can enjoy themselves in trying to find things of interest in that table. Perhaps the most shocking feature is the sudden intrusion of the parakeets in 2024. However-Numerical summaries such as this tell only a small part of the story......

The full 2024 story throws more light on matters & the parakeet explosion at the end of the year is revealed!

BIRD	J 1	J2	JЗ	J4	F1	F2	2 F	3	F4	М1	мз	M4	A1	A2	2 A	3 A	44 P	/12	мз	J1 J	2 J	3 J	4 .	15 .	JL1	JL2	JL3	JL4	Au 1	Au2	Au3	Au4	Au5	S1	52	53	SZ	ı c	1 (02	03	04	TOTAL
Ring-necked parakeets		30*	*20	1	20)	9				10				1	6							10	5				0 0					10	40	50	30	2	0 4	40	50	30	30	360
Starling	30			7					10	8	2	4	4		2 1	2		6	8	6	8		2			8						30				L 8	3	5	6	8	5	3	183
Greenfinch		10	8	12	10)	8	10	8	9	7	6	10)	8	6	3	7	4	5	5	6	5	4	- 63	7	5	.0 6.				1		3		2	2	3	1	3	3	1	180
Blue Tit	5	6	4	5	6	5	5	5	6	4	6	6	5		6	6	4	5	5	6	4	5	2	5	5	6	4	2	3	4	5	3	(1)	4	8.7	5 4	l.	4	3	3	3	1	173
Carrion Crow	4	2	2	3	4	ı	3	4	4	4	3	6	5		6	4	6	4	1	1	2	4	5	6	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	e	4		5 6	5	3	3	5	2	4	154
Woodpigeon	4	2	1	4	4	ı	2	2	4	7	3	4	4		6	4	4	5	5	7	4	6	4	4	3	5	3	7	2	4		4	5	4	7		_	6	2	4	3	1	154
Great Tit	4	7	5	4	ε	5	4	6	6	6	2	5	4		3	4	5	2	4	2	2	4	2	4	7	5	4	1	1	5	2	2	2	4	3	3 5	,	4	2	4	4		146
Goldfinch	5		6	4	E	5	8	7	8	2	2	2	5		2	4	4	8	3	2	4	5	6	6	5	6	4	2	4	2			1	2				2		2	2	1	132
Magpie	3	4	1	4	3	3	2	4	4	4	2	3	6	,	5	3	4	2	2	4	2	5	4	2	2	4	2	4	2	3	2	2	3	2		6	5	2	4	2	4	2	124
House Sparrow			2		4	ı	2	4	5		4		4		2	4	2		2	3	4			4	2	5	3	1		2		2				2	2				2		65
Blackbird	1	1	2	1	1	Ĺ	2	2	1	3	1	1	1		3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1		1	L		1	2	1		60
Robin	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	1		2	2	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	2		2	2	2				2	1	1			61
Dunnock	1	1		57	1	Ľ	1		- 8	1		1			1	1	1	1	1	3	2	2	2	3	2	- 6	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1		1 2	2		1		1		45
Long-tailed Tit	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2			2	2	2	2	2				9										5	2											7		45
Wren	1	10		V				1	- 6		1	1			1	1	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	- 69	1	1	0	1	1	2		1			1	L	1		1			28
Chaffinch																		2	1	2	1	1	3	2		2	3	1									189						18
Grey Heron		- 10	1	SZ(S)		3			- 6	2					1	1		1				1	1	1	- 00	1	1	8 8								1	L				1		13
Sparrowhawk									1				1				1	1						1		1	1	1							:	1 1	L		1	1	ľ	1	13
Feral pigeon				2					2				2	2	2			2								- 0		0														2	12
Buzzard												1						1	1						1	1	1	1				1				1	Ļ						9
Rock Dove				× 89	1	Ĺ			- 6											2						- 63		1		1	1						10						6
Song Thrush								- 1	1		1							- 20	1					1		1											16				ľ		5
Coal Tit																								1		2	1	0															4
Grey wagtail	1						2												1																		12						4
Jay		1		SZ		3			- 8					8	- 83		1			1	- 1		- 6		- 0	- 6		8 8			1							0					4
Great Spotted Wp									1							1										1											120						3
Pied Wagtail				S7												Ι										1		8 8	1								0						2
Swift																							1	1																			2
Mistle Thrush				S/					1						- 89											0		8 6				0											1
TOTAL				V					- 0											П		T		П		- 0		8-8				0									T	П	2006





Two familiar birds found in most gardens, Blue Tit and male Blackbird, photographs by Andy Purcell.

Another interesting concept is that of fidelity (presence on a weekly basis)

2020 fidelity summary (43 weeks-left) 2024 Fidelity summary (39 weeks-right)

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Sparrow	43	Blue Tit	39
Great Tit	43	Carrion Crow	39
Wood Pigeon	43	Magpie	39
Crows	43	Woodpigeon	38
Magpie	43	Great Tit	38
Robin	42	Blackbird	37
Greenfinch	41	Robin	37
Blackbird	41	Goldfinch	33
Blue Tit	40	Greenfinch	31
Goldfinch	37	Dunnock	29
		Wren	24
Dunnock	34	Starling	23
Starling	27	House Sparrow	22
Feral Pigeon	25	ring-necked parakeets	17
Long-tailed Tit	22	Long-tailed Tit	15
Wren	19	Sparrowhawk	13
Chaffinch	18	Grey Heron	12
jackdaw	11	Chaffinch	10
Heron	11	Buzzard	9
Sparrowhawk	9	Feral pigeon	6
swift	8	Song Thrush	5
Buzzard	4	Jay	4
Great Spotted Wp	4	Coal Tit	3
Song Thrush	3	Grey wagtail	3
Jay	2	Great Spotted Wp	3
- C	-	Pied Wagtail	2
Mistle thrush	2	Swift	2
swallow	1	Mistle Thrush	1

So there are many ways of discovering interesting statistics about the bird population in your garden!

The parakeet may appear in large flocks- but it aint the most faithful of Janet's birds and deserts her for a few weeks!

What can be seen is the great fidelity of a familiar group of birds. They like reliability and Janet has been at her house for a considerable period showing consistent behaviour towards them. There are some special features. The Greenfinch seems to specially favour Janet's garden and that probably throws light on why they rarely visit my feeders. I am not the most consistent feeder (too interested in insects!), whilst Hillary up the road not too far away, has an encyclopedic knowledge of ornithology feeds creatively and has similar Greenfinch Fidelity to Janet!! Bearing this in mind, some species may appear to be much reduced in numbers, but it may be that they recognise only the very best places to hang out and stay there!

Some more of Andy's garden bird photos: goldfinch, robin & chaffinch







Sandnats Talk November 2024 Moths and mothers by Richard Orton

The talk started with an overview of moths and their relationship to other insects. This included diversity and distribution. The complexity of the life cycle was also discussed. This was followed by an overview of the history of moth collecting in Britain, starting with Moses Harris and the Aurelian Society who were responsible for so many of our moth's evocative names. The focus then shifted to the entomologists whose collections can now be found at the Birmingham Museum. These collections include those made by Richard South, who wrote the first popular book on moth identification, published in 1906 and Thomas Woollaston, who collected widely in the UK, but was sickly and spent the winters exploring the fauna of the warmer Atlantic islands such as Madeira and the Canaries. There are also collections by local naturalists such as Cephas Buttler, (a lamp maker from Barnt Green) and Ralph Bradley, a tobacconist from Snow Hill. The most important local collector was probably Stuart Carlier, who was an important member of the Birmingham natural history Society and was active from the 1920s up until his death in 1961. He took meticulous notes, and his labels not only included date and location, but also habitat and method of capture.

The museum insect collections are an important resource because they enable changes in the national and local moth fauna to be studied. For example, the melanistic form of the Pepper Moth used to be quite common in the Victorian collections but are now rarely seen in a modern moth trap. The light Brown Apple Moth and Ruddy streak are familiar moths in most gardens but would have been unknown to the Victorian collectors as they only arrived in Britain, (probably transported accidently from Australia in plant material), in the twentieth century. The process is continuing, the Box Moth being the latest alien pest species to move into our area; the first we recorded in Sutton Park was in 2021.



Box Moth

Photo by Jenni Wilding

This also highlights the importance of continuing to record moths. Their populations and distributions are constantly changing, sometimes very rapidly, with the help of the climate warming. Pest species are spreading and some species (e.g. garden tiger), have undergone dramatic declines. All the data we collect is used by Butterfly Conservation and DeFRA to monitor changes, using the baseline provided by the museum collections to compare against.

Some Photos by Dave Blyth



25th July 2024

A still from Video.

Umbellifer Darwin Wasp

(Amblyteles armatorius)

Between Gun emplacements and Grestone Ave



8th August 2024

Other side of river opposite RSPB reserve

Dave spotted this Larvae on an Alder Leaf.

Large Alder Sawfly (Cimbex connatus)



2nd August 2024

Between Oxhill Rd and Priory Woods crossing point

An extremely dense cluster of Galls, on a fallen Field Maple Leaf.

(Aceria myriadeum)

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who contributed articles and / or images to the Newsletter.

If possible, please send articles in Word format (pictures can be included). It's helpful if you are contributing images of a species to use the species name as the filename if possible.

Do check out Sandnats' website:

http://sandnats.org.uk/