

# The RSPB Macclesfield Local Group



## The Heron



### Newsletter - March 2021

**We look forward to our ZOOM speaker Paul Bingham  
on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> March starting promptly at 19:45**

A birders perspective of the amazing Northern Historical Circuit followed by a journey down the Rift Valley, stopping off at bird-rich lakes before venturing up into the Bale Mountains to explore their unique wildlife. Discover the positive and beautiful side of a country steeped in history but normally portrayed for its famines and political troubles.

#### Diary Dates

#### March 2021

Tuesday  
9

**Zoom Meeting: Ethiopia: fascinating landscapes, birds, animals and ancient history by Paul Bingham**

Contact: Lydia Taylor by eMail - [members@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk](mailto:members@macclesfieldrspb.org.uk) if you haven't already shown interest in receiving our Zoom presentations and would like to be added to the list.

#### April 2021

Tuesday  
13

**Zoom Meeting: The Goshawk by Steve Watson**

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#### Garden Wildlife Survey 2020

#### Part 2– mammals, butterflies, moths, amphibians and odonata

Thankyou to the twenty observers who completed the mammal, butterfly, amphibian and odonata garden survey. This was the first time we have undertaken a survey of this type so we have no past data for comparison and personally I find the observations very interesting to see what visits our gardens.

Table 1 overpage shows that the top mammal that visited 95% of the gardens was the grey squirrel. Just one garden from the twenty respondents to the survey didn't see a grey squirrel. As birdwatchers this mammal is probably not the most favourite visitor as it wrecks birdfeeders searching for food. In addition, during the breeding season squirrels will search out and destroy nests consuming anything that is present. On a positive note they are easily seen and children like watching them, possibly their first introduction to wildlife.

The second mammal in the ranking was the field mouse which was seen in 55% of the gardens. I

was surprised at this finding and wonder if it is due to us feeding the birds and field mice finding an easy food source from scattered birdseed. Those three or 15% of the gardens that reported the brown rat were probably visited for the same reason. If you find rats visit your bird feeders it is best to stop feeding for a few weeks and they will move on when the food source disappears.

<b>Mammal Species</b>	<b>No. Gardens</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Mammal Species</b>	<b>No. Gardens</b>	<b>%</b>
Grey squirrel	19	95	Stoat	2	10
Field mouse	11	55	Wild rabbit	2	10
Bat species	10	50	Wood mouse	2	10
Fox	9	45	Deer species	2	10
Hedgehog	6	30	Mole	1	5
Badger	4	20	Weasel	1	5
Brown rat	3	15	Shrew species	1	5

Bat species were reported from 50% of the gardens and which species cannot be certain when they are in flight, most often at dusk. The usual way to determine which species is to use a bat detector, which converts the bat echolocation ultrasound signals to audible frequencies, usually about 120Hz to 15kHz. Use of a mobile phone app then allows you to identify the bat, please don't ask me to explain this further, it really is out of my area of expertise!

The cunning fox was observed in 45% (9) of the gardens and this urban visitor is again searching for an easy food source from scraps left out or just to dig for earthworms etc in your flower borders. Stopping foxes getting into your garden can be difficult as they are known to be able to get through a hole 10cm square or scale a 2m high fence or wall.

A more welcome visitor but one we don't see so often now is the hedgehog, seen in 30% of the gardens, a number that is higher than I expected, although this should really be 25% as one of the reports was of a deceased hedgehog. Hedgehogs do help keep the garden clear of slugs, beetles, earwigs, caterpillars etc. a natural way to keep garden pests down without resorting to chemical sprays. Please don't leave a saucer of milk to feed them, cat food is a better option.

Badgers were seen in four (20%) gardens and they can cause damage as they search for worms and grubs under the lawn or in the flower beds. They are very shy and are best seen using an infrared trail camera because they visit at night and if you put a light on they quickly disappear. While they receive a bad press from farmers because of the alleged transfer of TB I wonder how much longer we can expect their visits if culling them is allowed to continue.

Other mammals worth mentioning are stoat in two (10%) and a weasel in one (5%) garden. These observers were very fortunate to see these secretive little mammals.

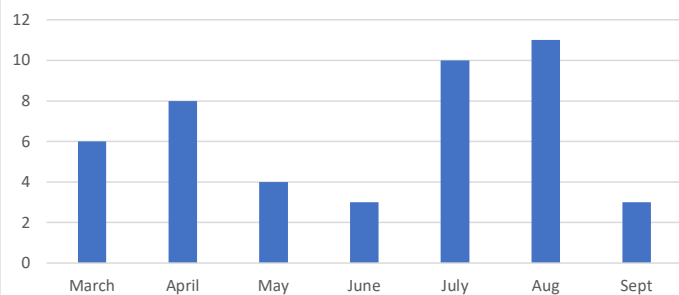
Moving onto the butterfly records, table 2 shows the distribution with the peacock and small white being present in 80% of the gardens. I've chosen a few of the more common species to make comment on.

As winter approaches the peacock finds a dry, sheltered place to overwinter to wait for a sunny spring day when it becomes active between March and May, immediately seeking to reproduce and lay eggs. These eggs give rise to the main bulk of sightings between June to August. The bar graph on the next page shows the initial increase over March and April as the adults come out of hibernation then a decrease in sightings until the only brood of the year hatches and the cycle starts again. The markings on the peacock's upper wing resemble four eyes and these are thought to be a warning sign to deter birds from eating them. Peacock butterflies feed on

**Table 2**

Butterfly Species	No. Gardens	%	Butterfly Species	No. Gardens	%
Peacock	16	80	Brimstone	10	50
Small white	16	80	Speckled wood	10	50
Red Admiral	15	75	Holly blue	8	40
Small tortoiseshell	14	70	Common blue	5	25
Orange tip	13	65	Meadow brown	5	25
Comma	12	60	Gatekeeper	4	20
Large white	11	55	Green-veined white	4	20
Brimstone	10	50	Painted lady	3	15
Speckled wood	10	50	Small skipper	2	10
Holly blue	8	40	Large skipper	1	5
Common blue	5	25	Ringlet	1	5
Meadow brown	5	25	Small copper	1	5

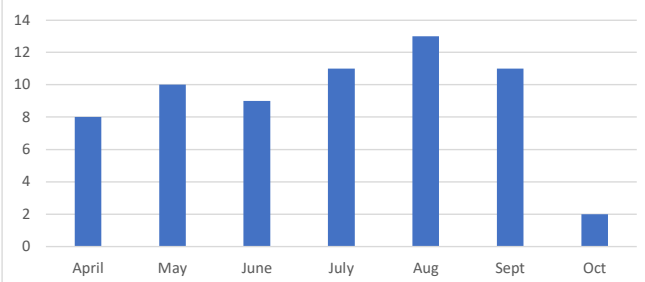
**Number of gardens where the peacock butterfly was seen at least once during the month**



buddleia bushes so if you want to attract this butterfly to your garden plant a buddleia bush.

The small white also known as the cabbage

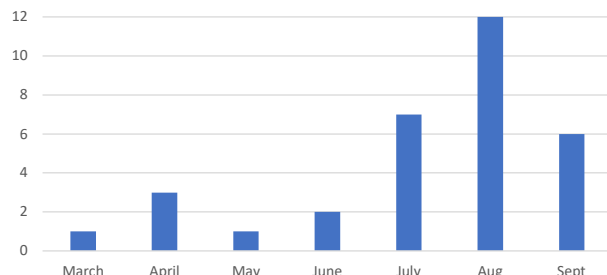
**Number of gardens where the small white butterfly was seen at least once during the month**



white butterfly likes to lay its eggs on brassica (cabbage) plants so when the caterpillars hatch they feed on the leaves, to the bane of the allotment gardener.

In comparison to the peacock butterfly, the small white lays eggs from May through to June then July to September, so the adult is active from late spring through to autumn. This is shown from even our small sample in the bar chart above. The eggs take about one to two weeks to hatch and an adult life expectancy is about three weeks.

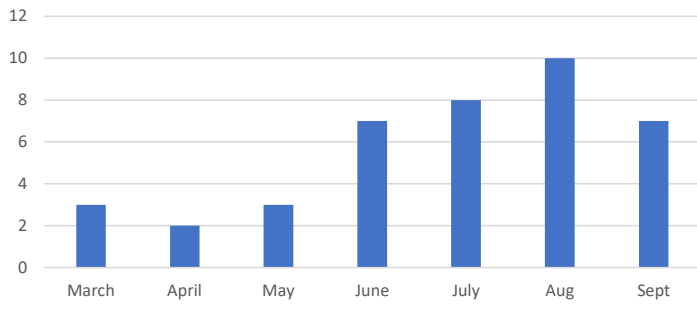
**Number of gardens where the red admiral butterfly was seen at least once during the month**



Another garden favourite is the red admiral, a migratory species which can spend the winter in Africa or hibernating in the UK. Fifteen gardens (75%) reported this species and the bar graph to the left shows how the numbers increased during the year with a peak in August. Red admirals, like the peacock are attracted to nectar rich plants e.g. buddleia and sedum spectabilis.

The small tortoiseshell was seen in fourteen

**Number of gardens where the small tortoiseshell butterfly was seen at least once during the month**



gardens (70%) and is usually seen between March and October. Our records show the same distribution in the bar chart opposite. The caterpillars feed on nettles and it is a common butterfly in the UK being recorded from mountain tops to city centres.

An interesting butterfly is the orange tip, which was seen in thirteen gardens (65%). There is one generation of adults per year with the caterpillars feeding on lady's smock and garlic mustard. The adults are in flight for only three months, April, May and June. The

data from our respondents showed sightings in April (12) and May (9) with just one in June plus a late one in July.

The brimstone is often one of the first butterflies to be seen flying each year. It can be seen in February on an unseasonal bright day. The bulk of the reported sightings came in April and May in seven and six gardens respectively. None were reported in June and just five further reports, two in July, one in August and two in September. Once this was a south of England species but it is now common in Cheshire.

Moth species	No. gardens	%
Cinnabar	2	10
Elephant hawkmoth	2	10
Six spot burnet	2	10
Small yellow underwing	2	10
Hummingbird hawk moth	1	5

Only five moth species were reported although one member did list fourteen moth species (e.g. the flame, oak beauty, common quaker ) that were seen between June and August. I'm not very knowledgeable about moths so will need to do a lot more reading before I can make any sensible comments.

Of those listed in table 4 the elephant hawkmoth is a very attractive species and the hummingbird hawkmoth is often mistaken for a hummingbird - hence the name.

Table 4 shows that the frog is the most frequently seen amphibian in our gardens. I should have asked if these gardens had ponds, which if yes would explain the high incidence.

Amphibians	No. Gardens	%
Frog	14	70
Common newt	3	15
Toad	3	15

Only three odonata were reported, a common darter, a black tailed skimmer and a brown hawker. This genera are difficult to identify and from these observations are not seen very often in our gardens.

Finally one observer in the Macclesfield area has an interest in bees, a species I know little about. They observed six bee species in their garden; white tailed, red tailed, tree, early and garden bumblebees plus a honey bee. These bees were seen at various times in the reporting period.

I hope this summary has been of interest to you. I would like to thank again all of the participants who sent their observations, without your contribution there would be no record of the wildlife in our gardens.

Ian Taylor  
Bird and Wildlife Survey Analyst