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e-Newsletter

Issue Three

July 2021

Welcome to the third issue of our e-Newsletter. We're very keen to make sure every issue is a good and interesting read and welcome ideas for content and especially reader contributions and photographs.



Research Reveals Widespread Contamination of English Rivers

Toxic pesticides found in veterinary flea treatments used on domestic dogs and cats have been detected at potentially harmful levels in English rivers. Researchers* have found widespread contamination of two neurotoxic chemicals - fipronil



and the neonicotinoid imidacloprid - in almost 4,000 samples gathered by the Environment Agency in 20 English rivers between 2016-2018.



According to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), who funded the research, there are 66 licensed veterinary products containing fipronil and 21 containing imidacloprid in the UK. These chemicals have been banned from use on farms since 2017 due to the adverse environmental effects.

The study, published in the journal 'Science of the Total Environment' was led by Rosemary Perkins at the University of Sussex who stated *'the use of pet parasite products has increased over the years, with millions of dogs and cats now being routinely treated multiple times per year...our results showing that fipronil and its toxic breakdown products are present in nearly all of the freshwater samples tested, are extremely concerning'*.

In co-author Professor Dave Goulson's view: *'Fipronil and imidacloprid are both highly toxic to all insects and other aquatic invertebrates. Studies have shown both pesticides to be associated with declines in the abundance of aquatic*

supports the hypothesis that significant quantities of environmentally harmful pesticides are entering rivers via the washing of treated pets, their beddings and other contact surfaces, while medicated dogs swimming in rivers provides another route for contamination.

And the harmful effects of these pesticides doesn't stop at our rivers; according to Professor Goulson 'One flea treatment of a medium-sized dog with imidacloprid contains enough pesticide to kill 60 million bees'.

The research authors have identified a number of steps that could be taken to minimise harm from flea treatments ranging from

invertebrate communities. The finding that our rivers are routinely and chronically contaminated with both of these chemicals and mixtures of their toxic breakdown products is deeply troubling.'

The researchers found the highest levels of pesticides downstream from water treatment plants. They suggest that this

stricter prescription only regulations to moving away from blanket year-round prophylactic use.

For more information, we suggest you contact your preferred vet.

*Perkins R. Et al (2020). "Potential role of veterinary flea products in widespread pesticide contamination of English rivers", Science of The Total Environment <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2020.143560>



Make The Most of Nature's Bounty An Interview with Justine Gens of Oxford based Ma Roemca

Justine Gens <https://www.ma-roemca.com/> is a trained herbalist and runs guided foraging tours in some of the beautiful wild areas of Oxford where she teaches how to identify, harvest and embrace wild plants with a sustainable approach.

Why forage?

Foraging has gained popularity over the past decade as people have become increasingly concerned with food provenance and reducing food miles. And it doesn't get more local than picking your food from nearby hedgerows and forests! Just follow the golden rule of picking sustainably; don't overpick, leave plenty for wildlife and allow enough plants to complete their lifecycle.

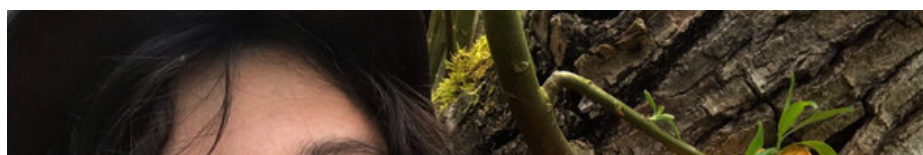




Image courtesy of [Justine Gens](#)

How did your passion for foraging start?

My passion for foraging started in France, where I grew up, I used to be a mountain guide and quickly became obsessed with the idea of survival in the wilderness and sustainability. I was raised by a family of healers so I had the herbal knowledge within my blood already.

I left France almost 7 years ago to go on hikes around the world where I deepened my knowledge of foraging and herbalism. As I came to live in the UK, 3 years ago, I fell in love with the land that is so rich and abundant, green all year around thanks to the rain!

Do you forage all year round?

Foraging is a seasonal practice, young greens in spring, flowers in summer, fruits in fall and roots in winter. That said, seasons have changed so we may need to adapt this old saying! But just to say that I can harvest different parts of one plant through the 4 seasons. It allows me to provide for my needs all year around, minimising my impact. Ecology is a priority, that's why I teach about invasive plants and those considered weeds.

Do you have any foraging favourites?

I change my favourite things to forage at each season. If not each week!

How do you ensure you forage responsibly?

I always make sure there is plenty before I forage, foraging is a sharing practice that requires being mindful of the resources. This is how I teach foraging in my courses. There are many ways to make foraging sustainable, focusing on invasive plants, foraging for different parts of the same plant at different seasons...

How about one recipe?

Oxeye daisy and honey soda is unfailingly popular!

Super simple method for this flower soda; for a 2L jar, 2 handfuls of non washed flowers, 4 tbsp of honey (best to dissolve in lukewarm water and let it cool down before pouring over the flowers), a whole sliced lemon. Shake twice a day for the first 48 hours, opening the jar each time to release some of the gas produced by the natural fermentation. Strain in then keep the jar closed and airtight to carbonate until your get the desired bubbles. Refrigerate to settle the fizz and you're ready to go!



Image courtesy of [Justine Gens](#)

Where do you run your courses?

I take people foraging all around Oxford and I am permitted on a lot of private land. I run both private and regular classes teaching people to identify, harvest and craft seasonal botanicals with a sustainable approach. I have various locations depending on the theme and the level, I teach beginners and advanced foragers - kids, adults and animals are welcome!

Find out more: <https://www.ma-roemca.com/>



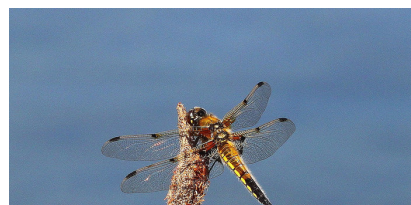
Dragonfly Fest

(John Lindley)

Sunday 13th June 2021 saw the first South Stoke Dragonfly Walk. The event had been postponed from 23rd May because the cold Spring had delayed the emergence of Dragonflies and Damselflies, but on the day, we had warm sunshine and light winds. which were perfect conditions.



Eleven of us met at the Slipway, and as we headed up the river we immediately spotted Banded Demoiselles with their blue wings, and a Male Emperor Dragonfly patrolling the river bank. Soon after, we saw Azure Damselflies (pictured below left) and a Four Spotted Chaser (pictured below right); four species in around 20 minutes was a good start to the day





We then headed to the large pond on private ground at Lower farm, where there were huge numbers of Damselflies and Dragonflies on the wing. We added Common Blue Damselfly, Red Eyed Damselfly and Blue-tailed Damselfly to our list, together with Broad-bodied Chaser and a likely (but unconfirmed) sighting of the rare Clubtailed Dragonfly. Perhaps the highlight of the morning was watching a Female Emperor Dragonfly laying her eggs in the pond.



The session finished with a visit to the private ponds at Ferry House. These ponds are very newly restored, so unsurprisingly the numbers seen were a bit lower, but we still saw four species.

We finished at around 12:30, having seen nine species, together with lots of other wildlife. We will do another walk in late August or September, when we should see a different set of species.



Wildflower Project Update

(Paul Jenkins)

Wildflower surveys

We have about a dozen people involved with the wildflower surveys and have split into two groups. We're monitoring seven different sites around the village and are building up a comprehensive catalogue of the species that are present.



We've adapted our original plan and have made the outings less formal and more appropriate to the skills of the overall group. We've found that the [PlantNet app](#) is very good. It enables photographs of flowers and leaves to be sent to a database that returns

suggested identities, along with a 'certainty' score. Some interpretation is still required but, overall, we've found it provides a pretty good level of accuracy.

So far, we've found a wide variety of species across the sites; at least 50 so far! It's fascinating revisiting each site to see what changes have taken place since the last visit. Plants that were difficult to identify become much easier when they are in flower!

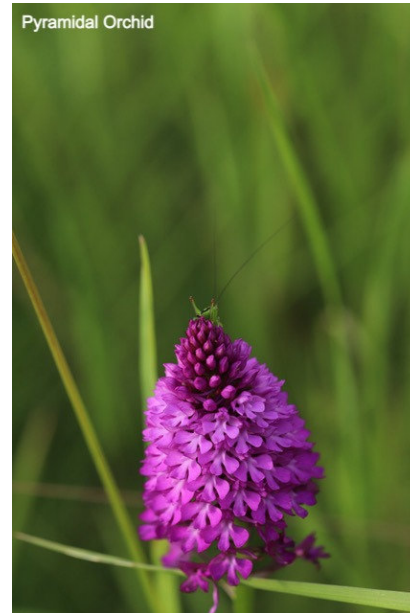
We haven't input any records into the iRecord database yet; collating photographs with the records that we have entered into our spreadsheet is going to be a long job and will be saved for winter!

Notable species found so far include: Great Water Dock, Water Dropwort (extremely poisonous!), Cut-leaved Cranesbill and Pyramidal orchids (pictured right). We also spotted the parasitic plants Yellow Rattle and Broomrape.

Growing wildflower plants

We have 22 people growing a variety of wildflower plants. Many of the plants are doing so well that they are having to be re-potted.

There is a grow-along blog on



Sites for planting wildflowers

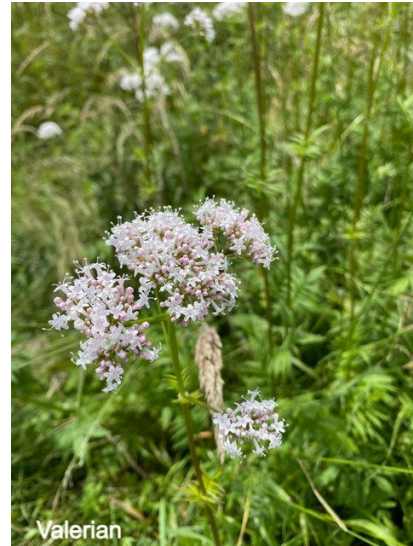
We've identified some sites for planting our plugs in September and are looking for further locations in and around the village. It's important that the sites chosen can be

the website, where growers are posting comments and pictures.



enjoyed by all parishioners.

If you have a verge that you would like to encourage wildflowers in, then please let us know!



And a couple of fun and useful Apps to finish!



[PlantNet Plant Identification](#)

Pl@ntNet is an app that enables you to identify plants simply by photographing them with your smartphone. Very useful when you don't have a botanist on hand!

Pl@ntNet is also a great citizen science project: all the plants you photograph are collected and analysed by scientists around the world to better understand the evolution of plant biodiversity and to better preserve it.

FIT Counts are suitable for all, in urban or rural locations, and



can be done at any time between the beginning of April and end of September.

Wild pollinators may have declined in the UK by more than 30% since 1980, but we need much more data to be able to track changes in abundance. You can help by doing a FIT Count, maybe even repeating it over the season. You don't need to identify the insects to species level, only to within broad groups e.g. bumblebees, hoverflies, butterflies & moths, wasps

The FIT Count is part of the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme (PoMS), within the UK Pollinator Monitoring and Research Partnership which comprises the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH), Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Butterfly Conservation, British Trust for Ornithology, Hymettus, Reading University, University of Leeds and Natural History Museum. PoMS is jointly funded by Defra, the Welsh and Scottish Governments, Daera, JNCC and project partners.

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