



Bristol Naturalists' Society

Registered Charity No. 235494

Wildlife News: Week 25 – June 23rd 2008

The longest day, 999 minutes of daylight has been, and gone, and, though many species have yet to flower, attention is turning to fruit ripening; birds are ceasing to sing, and starting to move from their breeding sites. I saw two Black-headed gulls drifting along the Avon on Sunday, and though there are always a few around on the coast, these are perhaps the first of the huge numbers that will flood through the region in the next month, some of whom will stay for the winter. This is a dramatic population change, as they are one of the commonest winter species, but it happens silently and almost without our noticing.

Weather

A third week colder than the recent average for the week, but a complete change in the weather pattern. Much of June has been dominated by high pressure in the Atlantic, and northerly winds, but from the start of this week SW winds took over round a low pressure over Iceland, which was then unusually followed by another that came up from Biscay, producing very strong winds on Sunday 22nd. This should have led to warmer conditions, but the origin of the air mass still lay in the far north. The average for the week was 17.7C, below the recent average of 20.1C for the week. As a result June so far has been even colder than last year, a degree colder than the long-term average, and the coldest June since 1998. Of course there is still time to catch up. The year to date figure is 12.7C, the same as 2004 at this date, and the last twelve months has fallen slightly to 14.15C.

14 mm of rain fell, bringing the year total to 518, and June has had just half its normal rainfall so far- a very different picture from last year when a month's rain fell in the last week. However we have still had 110 mm more rain than average at this date and the last twelve months has seen 1012mm.

Plants that may come into flower this week.

Musk Mallow, Agrimony, Evening Primrose, Chicory, Rest Harrow, Upright Hedge Parsley, Basil, Celery, Great Plantain, Red Bartsia, Purple Loosestrife, Traveller's Joy, Musk Thistle, Small-leaved lime, Hoary Ragwort, Golden Rod. These predictions are based on last year's dates. Each week I take the previous week's list, delete those plants I have found in flower, and add from last year's dates. It does help to know what to look for.

Spring events

I have found twenty new species in flower this week, including a magnificent specimen of Giant Hogweed on the River Frome in the middle of Bristol, just by the new Cabot Centre. Himalayan Balsam is also in flower there, as is Water crowfoot. On the Downs Rose-Bay Willowherb has come into flower, as has Fennel, much earlier than last year, Wood Sage, and Spiked Speedwell, to be found on the Suspension bridge Garden. The Bristol onion there is also almost in flower. The nodding heads of bulbils that is Crow Garlic's apology for a flower have burst out of their packaging- though I have yet to see a single flower on any of them. Many lime trees- both Common and Large-leaved are in flower, but the native Small-leaved Lime, which holds its flowers upright, has yet to open, though the trees in Leigh Woods have turned pale yellow because the thin support structure for the flowers is this colour and has

turned up above the leaves. Incidentally this is the time of year when evergreen trees shed their leaves- below Holly and Yew and Holm Oak there is a spread of dead leaves.

Dutch Elm Disease is once again striking at Elm suckers in hedges, but it does not seem very virulent, at least not yet.

On the Downs on Sunday there were 94 species in flower, the record so far this year, because many of the summer flowering plants have come into bloom. Making my usual calculations, this spring is now four days later than last year but six days earlier than average, and a whole 17 days earlier than 2006.

Peregrine Watch

The five young peregrines have flown, and are trying out their wings. One crash-landed in Leigh Woods, and having been rescued was ringed and tagged with a blue tag reading AG- any reports of this bird would be welcome. They are being fed by their parents in the Gorge, and trained in catching food for themselves- this week should see more or less non-stop activity.

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