



Bristol Naturalists' Society

Registered Charity No. 235494

Wildlife News: Week 31 – August 03rd 2008

Weather. Weather in July.

July's average max temperature was 20.3C, just below the long-term average (since 1881) of 20.7C. The warmest July was 1921, 25.5C, and the coldest 1883 at 16.5 (the year without a summer after Krakatoa erupted). The 30 year average (ie the period that defines climate) has always been between 20C and 21C, and shows no long term trend. It has been just on 21C since 1996, and previously reached that temperature in 1952. At the moment ten, twenty and thirty year trends are all at this same point.

It was a wet month with 116mm, almost twice the average of 72mm (since 1853). The wettest July ever, with 163mm, was just forty years ago in 1968, when a cloudburst over the Mendips on 12th destroyed every road bridge between Bristol and the Mendips; The driest was 1955 when just 4mm fell. 1976, which we think of as dry, had 24mm, and actually 1977 was drier with only 11mm. The thirty year average fell steadily from 90mm in 1940 to 52mm in 2000. It has risen slightly to 63mm now.

It was also a month with about 17% less sunshine than average-; just 5.3 hours on average a day, which is only a little more than we had this year in February (4.8hrs).

Weather this week.

A cooler week, average 20.4C, and actually just cooler than last year. Year to date is 14.1C, and the last twelve months 14.3C, having risen fast because of the relative warmth of week 30. The second wettest week of the year so far with 51mm, with the consequence that we are now 160mm above average for the time of year, and have had 680mm so far this year, and 995mm in the past twelve months.

Flowers on the Downs.

102 species were in flower, down six species on the previous week. New was Hawkweed Oxtongue, a rather uncommon late flowering plant. Both Sloe and Wayfaring Tree had ripe fruit- and hawthorn berries were showing red as well. But there is no ripe Elder yet, and the fruit look very thin. Common Oak have been terribly affected by the oak gall, so this autumn there will be no Beech mast, no Acorns, no Whitebeam, few Elder and rather few Sycamore seeds. The only tree with a good crop is Ash, which few birds eat- though Holm Oak acorns are developing well.

Whitebeam leaves are turning yellow and falling- they are always the first to go. Some Elm are dying from disease, and Sycamore are, as usual, being attacked by Squirrels and turning brown, and I noticed Bay leaves were falling. Holly, Yew and Holm Oak fell a month or so ago. A few Lime leaves are yellowing, but for the most part trees are still green, and some are still putting out new growth.

Trees have to decide at this point in the year whether or not to abandon growth and concentrate on making new buds for next year. Each species has its own approach-Beech, Chestnut and Ash have long since concentrated on their buds, but Sycamore and Oak have often continued to grow. Much must depend on day-length, which is now shortening by 20 minutes a week, and temperature, but water must also play a part, and the dry spell at the start of July may have been enough to check growth for some species.

Gulls.

Almost all young gulls have now left their roofs and chimney pots, and many of them head for water. In the Cumberland Basis there is annually a gull crèche, with dozens of young brown birds swimming around, splashing and preening as their feathers grow and their down vanishes, with just a few adults looking after them, presumably keeping an eye out for dangers. How long this crèche lasts, and how far it is associated with the tides on the river, I do not know. Fairly soon the juvenile Lesser-blackback Gulls, which can only be told from the juvenile Herring Gulls by their yellow legs (Herring Gulls have pink legs) will head off for Spain and West Africa where they will spend the next two years at least. Juvenile Herring Gulls, by contrast, simply disperse across Britain. Their lives are tough- the adults no longer respond to their mewling cries, and drive them off food supplies. I was surprised to learn, from British Birds, that Britain holds 65% of the world population of Lesser-Black-backed Gulls sub-species *graelsii*, and that it thus should be regarded as a species of conservation importance. Interesting.

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