



**Wycombe Wildlife
 Group members
 visit Tiggywinkles
 Animal Hospital
 (see page 19)**

Issue 87

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COPY DATE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE
Friday 7th December 2018

Wycombe Wildlife News is published 3 times a year to promote the Group and wildlife issues, and inform members and the public of its activities.

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 Proof-reading: Frances Wilding
 Printed by: Greens, Lincoln Rd, High Wycombe.

Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Group.

For the purposes of management of the Group, membership information is held on computer.

Wycombe Wildlife Group is a registered charity with the following objects:

To conserve the environment, mainly using volunteers, for the benefit of the public.

To educate the public in the principles and practice of conservation.

Within and around Wycombe District the Group:

Surveys wildlife habitats and their associated flora and fauna, giving those taking part plenty of opportunities to increase their knowledge and identification skills.

Helps manage local wildlife sites, undertaking practical conservation work on local nature reserves.

Provides advice to schools, other bodies and individuals on all aspects of wildlife.

Stimulates public interest in wildlife and its conservation, organising walks, talks and other activities covering a wide range of wildlife topics.

Provides advice on and encourages wildlife gardening.

Co-operates with other groups with similar aims.

I have always found the weather a useful topic to refer to when I am struggling to find something new to include in this editorial. The weather was of course a subject that had to be covered in the May newsletter because of its impact on some of our walks and, on this occasion it is a very relevant subject as it has been having such an impact on our gardens and the wider countryside.

The prolonged spell of hot and dry weather has resulted in many garden and wild plants coming into flower very briefly before drying out and dying. Our lawns soon turned brown, avoiding the need to mow them and provided a chance to see some of the short flowering wild species that rarely get the opportunity to flower. Invertebrates seem to thrive in the hot weather despite the shortage of flowering plants and birds are taking full advantage of the food we put out for them: the numbers being seen in gardens shows how important our help is to their survival.

Whilst it is distressing to see the trees, shrubs and other plants in our gardens suffer from the lack of rain, I am sure we all realise the importance of saving water, and restrict the use of tap water to keeping our vegetable and salad crops alive. Despite the water shortages, it is interesting to know that our local chalk stream is still running well, indicating that there is still plenty of water in the chalk aquifers resulting from the rain and snow in the autumn and winter months.

I hope you enjoy reading about our recent visits to some of our most interesting nature reserves in our county and to the Tiggywinkles Wildlife Hospital in this newsletter, and hope to see some of you on our planned walks, visits and other events in our September to December events programme.

Our Group's constitution specifies that our elected Executive Committee members decide as soon as possible after each AGM who will undertake the officer posts until the next AGM. I have been elected as Chairman for the past 15 years probably because no-one else has shown any desire for change. I think the membership as a whole should give some thought to this situation in advance of the next AGM as it would appear that change can only occur when there are some new Executive Committee members who would be willing to take on the role of Chairman. Whilst I do not wish to take action that could result in the Group being unable to continue, I do feel that urgent action is needed to ensure that the Executive Committee contains members able and willing to undertake all of the necessary officer roles.

Roger Wilding

Correction

In the last newsletter we published a report on the talk given to us by Keith Hoffmeister from the Chiltern Society on HS2 and its impact on the Chilterns. Keith has pointed out that we should have said that the gradient in the tunnel is 'one of the steepest on the whole of Network Rail' and not 'the steepest.' The other point he has made is that the Chiltern Tunnel is to be 'fully bored': it is only the Wendover Tunnel that will be 'cut and cover'.

Thank you Keith for bringing these points to our attention. We like to ensure that the information we publish in our newsletter is accurate, and are always happy to publish corrections where necessary.

Wendover Woods to Dancersend Walk on 9th May

We started our walk from Wendover Woods which are owned by the Forestry Commission. Our eyes caught the extensive £4.5 million development, comprising a new cafeteria, Welcome Centre, improved play trail and play area, a 'Go Ape' top course and more child friendly activities. The new 140 meter deep borehole should provide adequate water for this complex. A brand new car park is being built to increase the car capacity from 220 to 500 cars with a new road layout to make it more pedestrian and visitor friendly, and an up to date Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) management system.

Before setting off from Wendover Woods we enjoyed great views looking South towards The Hale and Hale Woods and then followed the winding woodland path out of the woods to enter the muddy Icknield Way/Ridgeway bridleway with superb views towards Dancersend and Ivinghoe Beacon beyond.

We then entered Pavis Woods (the ancient beechwoods Northill, Black, and Pavis Woods being collectively known as Pavis Woods). BBOWT took on the long term management of these woods in 2015 and ancient woodland species such as Wood Spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*) and Spurge-laurel (*Daphne laureola*) can be seen, along with sunken tracks, saw pits and marl pits.

Spurge-laurel



Marl is a lime-rich mud or mudstone which contains variable amounts of clay and silt and is used as a soil conditioner: centuries ago it was dug up to spread on the acid heath that could be found on the tops of the nearby hills.

Dancersend, once owned by the Rothschild Family, became a Nature Reserve in 1940 in remembrance of Charles Rothschild, the founder of Nature Conservation. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is BBOWT's largest and oldest reserve in Buckinghamshire which, together with Pavis Woods, extends to 211 acres.

We then found ourselves outside the Pumping Station, a Grade II listed building opened in 1867 to supply water to the Rothschilds' properties in that area. The James Kay engine, also known as the Dancers End Engine, takes its name from Lord Rothschild's estate at Dancersend where it was used to pump water from a well. It is now in the London Museum of Water & Steam, by Kew Bridge. The pumping station complex and the adjacent 'permit only site' are owned by Thames Water Authority. Passing through the old allotments, we looked at the newly planted orchard with 22 varieties of fruit trees, the names of which are associated with the surrounding villages. One proud, old and tall pear tree is left on the plot, but the pears are not very tasty. At the picnic bench we enjoyed our lunch in glorious weather and then made our way through the Crong Meadows up the hill into Bittam's Wood where there was a wonderful display of Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*). We could not have picked a better day.



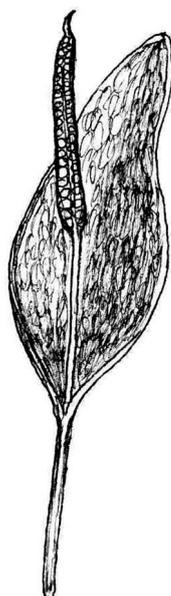
We passed a very old and tall crab apple which could have made a Champion Tree had the top not fallen. Most of the original woodlands were felled during WWII but were later replanted with mixed woodland species including Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*) and Pedunculate Oak (*Quercus robur*) and are now providing a great display of spring flowers.

As we were heading down through the Ant Hill area, a Duke of Burgundy butterfly made an appearance. This definitely made our day as Mick Jones, the Dancersend Reserve warden had only a few days before released 42 'Dukes' into the reserve. Thank you Mick !



Our group then spent some time looking at the wildflower rich meadows and found the fern Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*), a number of orchids and the rare Wood Vetch

Adder's-tongue



(*Vicia sylvatica*). This is the only location in Buckinghamshire with a sustainable population of Meadow Clary (*Salvia pratensis*), but it was not in flower on the date of our visit.

By a suitably placed picnic bench on our way back up the hill towards the exit gate we said a final farewell to a tranquil haven with a rich variety of wildlife. Before returning to our cars, however, we made a slight detour to Aston Hill to look at the plaque dedicated to Lionel Martin who made his first car climb on this hill before founding the Aston Martin company.



Although not a wildlife subject, the plaque shows signs of becoming a habitat for some of the lower plants - unless someone decides to clean it.

Admiring the view towards the North, we spotted Mentmore Towers, built for Baron Mayer de Rothschild in 1852.

My thanks go to all the participants for making this a truly great day out.

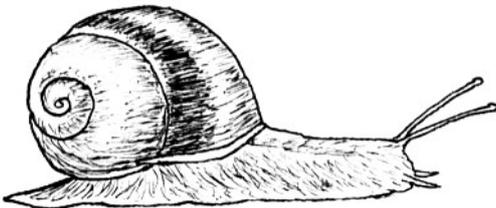
Inge

Ladies Day at Dancersend 18th June

As an alternative to our longer circular walk from Wendover, and avoiding the steep climb at Dancersend, a group of lady members set off on this hot and sunny day for a much shorter walk.

Our first stop was a visit to the nearby Aston Clinton Ragpits to admire the orchids and the magnificent view. This site was once an old chalkpit, worked for its coveted chalk freestone or 'rag' which was used for local building. Eight orchid varieties can be found there and the annual orchid count on 16th June this year was 17,958. slightly down from last year. (The following numbers were kindly supplied by BBOWT : Fragrant Orchid (*Gymnadenia conopsea*) 8,965; Common Twayblade (*Listera ovata*) 5,215; Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) 2,925; Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) 669 plus 4 of the rare white-flowered form; Greater Butterfly Orchid (*Platanthera chlorantha*) 111; White Helleborine (*Cephalanthera damasonium*) 67; Common Spotted Orchid/Fragrant Orchid hybrid 1; Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) 1. Sadly, we did not spot the Bee Orchid but the ladies had never seen so many orchids.

A great variety of different wildflowers are thriving on that reserve and it is a haven for butterflies and moths. We spotted one of the big whitish Roman Snails heading for a shady and sheltered spot.



Roman snail

After this we were ready for a tea break which we enjoyed while watching an RAF tournament at Halton Tennis Club, where the Rothschild cricket pavilion was situated. We then made

a quick tour of Halton Village to admire the beautiful panels of the 18th century cottages commissioned by Baron Alfred de Rothschild and the local church which was built using Denner Stone quarried at Denner Hill near Prestwood. Setts of this stone were used at High Wycombe for the Guildhall, Market House, All Saint's Church and Wycombe Abbey. Denner Stone was also used in the building of Windsor Castle and Little Marlow Church.

We then spent the afternoon at Dancersend starting with the 'Wildlife Walk' around the Ant Hill area where we were greeted with a splendid display of Greater Butterfly Orchids (*Platanthera chlorantha*), Bedstraws (*Galium* spp), Common Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*) in all its variety of colours, Common Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*), Meadow Clary (*Salvia pratensis*), lots of Black Bryony (*Tamus communis*), one White Bryony (*Bryonia dioica*) and the rare Wood Vetch (*Vicia sylvatica*) which was in flower on this visit. By the end of the walk we had a long list of flowering plants seen.



Wood Vetch

We eventually returned home two hours later than planned. I thank the ladies for making this visit such a joyful and happy day.

Inge



Corn Marigold



Corncockle



Cornflower

Visit to College Lake Nature Reserve

On Friday 1st June 2018 members of Wycombe Wildlife Group and Risborough Countryside Group attended a guided walk that had been arranged for us at BBOWT's College Lake Nature Reserve. The main purpose of the walk, led by the Reserve's warden, was to see the 'arable weed' fields containing some of the native flowers, which were once common in cultivated ground, but are now rarely seen in the wild. Our walk around some of the fields on the College Lake Reserve that are managed for these plants, gave us the opportunity to see a colourful show, mainly comprising the easy to grow species such as Corn Chamomile (*Anthemis arvensis*), Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*), Corn Marigold (*Chrysanthemum segetum*) and Corncockle (*Agrostemma githago*). By looking carefully, however, we were able to spot some of the less common species. Seeds of the common species are widely available from garden centres, making it possible to create a small "cornfield annual" patch in your own garden but, as those who have tried will have found, it is not easy to achieve such a habitat that will self seed to last more than a single year. Seeing these plants growing on a field scale at College Lake is of course a much more impressive sight and reflects the experience of the staff there who are responsible for this project.

Whilst all visitors to College Lake can see the arable weed fields, they do not get the opportunity provided on our guided tour to see the nursery where an experienced long-standing BBOWT volunteer undertakes the difficult task of growing some of rarer arable weed species from seed, helping to prevent them from becoming extinct. We learnt that BBOWT liaises with other organisations that are taking similar action to conserve the UK's arable weeds and that seed is often exchanged between such organisations.



At the time of our visit we saw containers in which the following species were growing:-
 Corn Cleavers (*Galium tricornutum*)
 Shepherd's-needle (*Scandix pecten-veneris*)
 Venus's-looking-glass (*Legousia hybrida*)
 Field Cow-wheat (*Melampyrum arvense*)
 Corn Buttercup (*Ranunculus arvensis*)
 Field Gromwell (also known as Corn Gromwell) (*Lithospermum arvense*)
 Prickly Poppy (*Papaver argemone*)
 Thorow-wax (*Bupleurium rotundifolium*)
 Pheasant's-eye (*Adonis annua*)
 Small Toadflax (*Chaenorhinum minus*)
 Cut-leaved Germander (*Teucrium botrys*)
 Field Penny-cress (*Thlaspi arvense*)
 Wild Candytuft (*Iberis amara*)
 Weasel's-snout (*Misopates orontium*)
 Night-flowering Catchfly (*Silene noctiflora*)
 Sharp-leaved Fluellen (*Kikxia elatine*)
 Blue Pimpernel (*Anagallis arvensis* ssp. *caerulea*)
 Larkspur (*Consolida ajacis*)

Looking at the view across the lake at the end of the guided walk, we were informed that Little Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Redshank and Common Tern had bred or were breeding at College Lake this year.

Although this was a morning-only visit, some of us took the opportunity to have some lunch in the café and spend the afternoon walking around the lake to see even more arable weed fields plus other fauna and flora. The White Helleborines (*Cephalanthera damasonium*) were at their best and the yellow flowers of Dragon's-teeth (*Tetragonolobus maritimus*) were very noticeable. The latter is an uncommon introduced species in the Pea Family but it is well established at College Lake.

The rosy-red Field Cow-wheat (*Melampyrum arvense*) flowers made a wonderful show.



and the timing of the visit was perfect for seeing the rare Purple Gromwell (*Lithospermum purpurocoeruleum*) in flower.



We are very grateful to the warden at College Lake for taking the time to show us round and making it such an interesting and informative visit.

It was also good to share the guided tour with members of the Risborough Countryside Group, and arrangements have been made to exchange copies of our respective event programmes.

Roger

Visit to Tiggywinkles Animal Hospital

Tiggywinkles Wildlife Hospital at Haddenham is one of the UK's top institutions for treating injured wildlife and providing for their aftercare before return to the wild, if and when possible. The original hospital was created by Les Stocker and his wife after they had failed to find a veterinary practice willing to treat an injured hedgehog they found. The original hospital was created on their own property, although its success soon created a need for larger premises and it moved to its current site.

Visitors are welcomed to the animal hospital and, although the animal treatment areas are not open to visitors, many of the casualties that have been treated and are recovering are kept in areas where they can be seen by the public. Visiting groups can arrange to be given a talk on the

premises followed by a guided tour, so on Friday 15th June a number of Wycombe Wildlife Group members attended an arranged visit and had a very informative and enjoyable morning.



Some of us had our lunch there and spent most of the afternoon having a further look round to see more of the treated birds and other animals that are being kept in captivity, either because they are not yet considered ready to survive in the wild or are unlikely to ever be able to do so.

A great deal of effort has been made to provide suitable habitats to ensure that the recuperating and resident fauna are content with their confinement. It was interesting to watch how well a blind Hedgehog was able to leave its allocated home and get exercise by going for a walk around the large enclosure it shared with other Hedgehogs, and find its way back home. In one of the cages a couple of invalid Ravens, presumably one male and one female, were obviously developing a friendly relationship.



Wetland habitats have been created to make the various species of waterfowl and Herons feel at home, an area with holes in uneven ground has been made available for Foxes and Badgers and a large enclosure with plenty of tree and shrub cover is available for various species of Deer.

A very large tall cage has been provided for the injured birds of prey providing sufficient space for the Red Kites to swoop down to feed and for the Buzzards to fly from one post to another whenever they feel like doing so.



Over the years the Tiggywinkles Animal Hospital has developed into a leading example of treatment and care of wildlife casualties. Les Stocker, its founder, was awarded an MBE and was honoured by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons by being appointed an Honorary Associate. It was a great shock when Les passed away in July 2016 at the age of 73, after a short and sudden illness, but his son has taken on the responsibility of running the charity.

I can certainly recommend those who were unable to join us on this visit to find time to go to Tiggywinkles and have a look round. There is much of interest to suit all ages and every visitor is helping to provide the funding needed to enable this wildlife hospital to continue to perform its valuable role in treating the injured creatures, great and small, referred to them.

Roger

What does the future have in store for Gomm Valley?



The decision by Wycombe District Council to release all of their “reserve sites” for development meant that the loss of the last unspoilt valley off the A40 corridor through High Wycombe was inevitable. As was the case with the other “reserve sites”, a liaison group was formed to take account of the views of local residents and other interested parties to produce and agree a development brief for the site against which future planning applications could be assessed. A development brief was agreed for both Gomm Valley and the adjoining Ashwells reserve site and although a planning application was subsequently received for the WDC-owned Ashwells site, the expected planning application for the AXA-owned Gomm Valley site was not received when it was expected. A further meeting of the liaison committee was convened by WDC in May this year at which its members were informed by a representative of Aviva, which had taken over the ownership of Gomm Valley from AXA, that they had appointed a new company to take on the task of developing the site.

Representatives of this new company, Human Nature, then gave an outline of their proposals for the site and notified their intention of organising an event in Gomm Valley which would enable the public to find out more about their plans.

I attended the resulting public consultation event at the end of June with an open mind, feeling that the plans to incorporate a mini village at the Gomms Road entrance to the valley, along with a school and leisure amenities, and a proposed increase in the number of housing units on the site would result in a greater biodiversity loss than would have occurred as a result of implementation of the previously agreed development brief. Having listened to the presentations by Human Nature’s team of experts on ecology, transport and sustainable living, however, I came to the conclusion that the company had not only taken account of the need to preserve the most important aspects of the Valley’s existing natural history interest, but were proposing to extend and improve them by increasing the length of hedgerows, planting lots of trees, converting much of the existing arable land into chalk grassland, and creating public footpaths though the valley. This latter provision is very important, because there are none at present. Most importantly of all, Human Nature’s proposals address the issue of the provision of on-going funding to provide a team of “rangers” to be based on site to take responsibility for the site’s initial natural habitat improvements and for their ongoing future maintenance.

There will of course be housing in Gomm Valley, more than proposed in the previously agreed development brief, but the density will be higher for most of the new homes, whilst providing some larger low density properties. All the housing will incorporate environmentally friendly standards including the capture of rainwater which will be piped to ponds at the southern end of the valley. A low-speed spur road will need to be provided, but provision of e-bikes and a car pool for the use of residents have been suggested as ways of reducing car ownership needs. The mini village complex would incorporate a general store, bakery, cafe/restaurant and a meeting room and there would be communal allotments and possibly an outlet for the sale of its produce. A bus service would provide links to the town centre and railway station, and it is hoped that this together with the proposed on-site primary school will also help to reduce car dependency.

Discussion with representatives of the Chiltern Society and BBOWT who have been involved in discussions on the future of Gomm Valley would appear to suggest that they feel that the new development proposals offer a better outcome for the valley and its links with adjoining areas of natural history interest.

During discussions with the developers, I mentioned the Round Wycombe Walk being planned by WWG and that we saw Gomm Valley being included in the walk's route. The

developers showed an interest in this and said that it ought to be possible to route the walk through the valley once the paths have been provided without waiting for the completion of the development which could take 8 years.

The Liaison Group met again on 2nd August when Human Nature stated that they were generally pleased with the way their public consultation went, stating that 90% of the attendees had expressed broad agreement to the proposals, the main areas of concern relating to parking and traffic issues. The total number of housing units now proposed is 970 consisting of 30% with 1 bedroom, 30% with 2 bedrooms, 30% with 3 bedrooms and 10% with 4 bedrooms. It was pointed out by the developers that the scheme had to be financially viable and that the number of houses built was a major factor in providing funding for the biodiversity improvements.

There was a further opportunity on 21st August for Liaison Group members to meet the developers and discuss their latest, more detailed proposals for the design and layout of the housing, streets and parking and their ideas for improving the biodiversity of the undeveloped parts of the valley and for the on-going management of the latter.

Roger

Garden tweets (plus more)

May

There have been 7 Robins in the same part of our garden - 4 adults and 3 babies, none of them fighting. I have noticed for some years that our Robins are not nearly as territorial as they used to be. Is this because they are fed regularly, or is it because we have had warmer winters lately?

The garden has been taken over by baby Starlings, clumsily missing branches and being generally very rowdy teenagers.

A Reed Warbler has been singing in our hedge for a few days. This is rather late (17th May) for being in mid-passage, but it has not stayed here for the Summer.

The Blue Tit babies are growing. I know this because the size of the caterpillars is growing steadily. The adults are the ones that have been so devoted to each other since January. They are making excellent parents.

Saw a Fox in the garden. I know it was a dog Fox because he cocked his leg up on my heathers!

Determined Starling parents have given our Great Spotted Woodpecker the peckoff. It is said that Great Spotted Woodpeckers are near the top of the pecking order, but faced with 6 clamouring Starling youngsters, the Woodpecker shot off like a bullet.

June

The nest of Goldfinch babies have fledged - the trees are full of twittering calls - a very pretty sound for a very pretty bird.

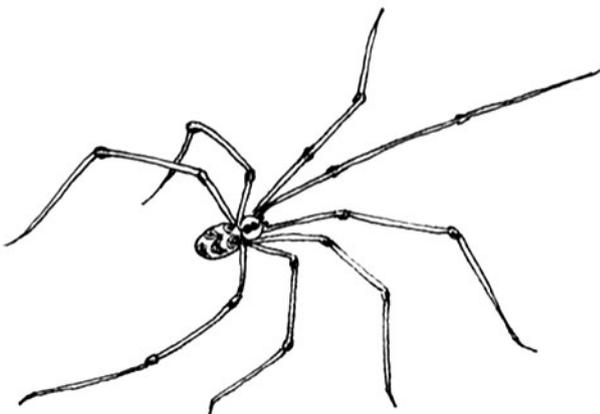
The garden seems full of baby Robins - I think 2 pairs have bred simultaneously.

July

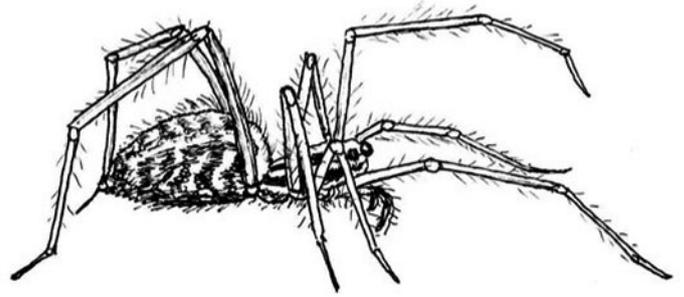
There are twelve baby Blue Tits in the bird bath all together - a very amusing sight, as was the occasion when some of them could not understand why, as they increased in size, they could no longer squeeze through the slats of a garden bench to get to the drinking water below.

The Great Spotted Woodpecker had become almost one of our garden birds, but sadly, a few days before writing this article, I found it lying dead on our patio. There was no sign of injury or parasites. Its neck was not broken and the wings were still fully functioning. I cannot think what had happened. It felt so soft in my hand. I put it on the lawn, and within a minute a Red Kite had snatched it up, so at least Red Kite babies had a good meal that day.

A fully-grown Daddy-Long-legs Spider in a dark corner has pounced on a Large House Spider, rolled it up, and has started eating it. The Large House Spider is much more robust looking, so this is remarkable.



Daddy-Long-legs Spider



Large House Spider

There seems to be a pecking order established between the Starlings already. One or two of the youngsters are holding the others back, even the adults. I wonder whether these will be our Winter population for breeding next year.

August

As I was driving up Desborough Avenue, I saw a flock of about 30 Herring Gulls all hovering over the cars. When I got up to them, I saw a dead young Herring Gull in the middle of the road. I expect it was the baby of a pair of the gulls hovering over it. A very sad sight.

This hot Summer has been wonderful for all insects (wasps included!).

We have also had a record number of baby birds:-

- 1 brood of Greenfinches
- 2 broods of Goldfinches
- 4 families of Starlings
- 4 broods of Robins
- 2 broods of Blue Tits
- 1 brood of Great Tits
- 3 broods of Blackbirds
- 1 brood of Chaffinches
- 2 broods of Wrens
- plus several young Dunnocks

A very successful year in all.

Frances

