

Warwick Natural History Society

Snippets

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Battling the Asian hornets

Experts warned last year that Asian hornets had successfully survived winter for the first time in the UK, and since then their numbers have rocketed from one nest destroyed in 2022 to 162 last year. The vicious insects kill up to 50 bees a day, threatening catastrophe for British honey production and biodiversity.

However, in Jersey where the Asian hornets first gained a foothold in 2017, a strike force of government officials and volunteers is fighting back. So far this year the team of 70 volunteers has laid 850 traps, helping to capture 2,811 queens who may have gone on to build nests. The practice is currently banned in the UK, but Jersey's response has drawn scientists from the UK and other countries to learn their techniques. Early detection is vital and for large parts of France and Spain, it's already too late.

Unfortunately, try as they might, nest numbers on the island jumped from 259 in 2024 to 694 last year. Originating in South-East Asia, all of Europe's Asian hornets are believed to have descended from a single queen that arrived in France inside a pottery shipment from China in 2004.

(Daily Telegraph)

Baddesley Clinton visit, 27 August

Sixteen members braved a deluge of rain for a tour of the estate round National Trust's Baddesley Clinton, led by Ranger Craig Cooper. Everyone wanted rain after 3 months of heatwave and drought - but not that day!

Umbrellas to the fore, we set off by the moated entrance where you can sometimes be lucky to see kingfishers perched on one of the two trees either side of the bridge. A tip for your next visit!

We skirted around part of the tree lined lake to see ecstatic ducks enjoying raindrops falling on their heads and exited onto the public footpath where an 800 year old elm was pointed out, a real veteran tree. Getting wetter and wetter we plunged into woods to see a hidden pond that often has badgers nearby. Rangers are making scallops - or glades - in woods to open them up to encourage flowers and butterflies. Thistles are being planted too. Few butterflies were around that day in the downpours!



We went over several fields which are being planted with wildflower seeds for future years. A magnificent 400 yr old Lime with branches touching the ground for support was duly admired as we got ever more sodden in relentless rain. It's quite a thought that on this estate are trees that were alive in 1600s and the elm even earlier in the reign of King John. Rangers are carefully managing the estate with volunteer help and hope to open up public paths sometime.





It was a most enjoyable and informative visit, thanks to our excellent guide. We felt privileged to be shown round so many unknown parts of the estate. Afterwards, many of us headed to the warm and dry cafe for a welcome coffee and snack. Who'd have thought it would rain for so long after not seeing a drop all summer!

29th August FW

August Insects

Starting top left: The Bishop's Mitre parasite fly's host is the Bishop's Mitre shield bug (Guy's Cliffe Walled Garden).

A Deer-fly resting inside my umbrella, couple of itchy bites proved it got to me first! (Bubbenhall Wood).

An impressive bee mimic, the female Furry Hoverfly and Common Sedge-sawfly (The Mill Garden).

Middle row: The once rare Rhombic Leatherbug, now joining the widespread Dock Bug as our climate warms.

A Banded Rhopalid on a spent flower head and a Brown-footed Leafcutter bee collecting pollen under her body. Kenilworth Garden (KG).

Last row: the European Beewolf, one of our largest solitary wasps, preys on Honeybees and other solitary bees.

A Small Tortoiseshell highlights a sobering decline, the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme data shows their population has decreased by 87% since 1976 (Odibourne Allotments OA).

A territorial Small Copper, likely a male based on how aggressively it chased off other butterflies from a patch (OA).

The formidable jaws of a lacewing larva reveal why this fierce predator is commonly called the 'Aphid Lion' (KG).

29th August SG



Meanderings on the East Yorkshire coast – 11/12 August

Whitby's Marine Discovery Centre and Lobster Hatchery is a new aquarium combining conservation whilst protecting the town's fishing heritage. The centre is delightful, a jewel amidst the usual seaside tat on the harbourside. We found it quite unexpectedly on holiday, full of educational displays, several aquariums and lobster breeding areas from a few hours old upwards. It is an institute of marine research in partnership with universities, offering marine conservation students valuable work experience in the protection and nurture of lobsters. Aquariums show typical residents of rock pools, including blue juvenile lobsters and the beautiful pink Dahlia Anemone which uses stinging tentacles to feed on crustaceans and small fish.



In a tall tank a graceful Snake Pipe Fish glided around seagrass, its head similar to its relative the Seahorse. It is found in the North Sea and the Atlantic seas as well as in local rockpools hiding in seaweed where it feeds microorganisms. Other fish on display included Long Spined Scorpion fish with camouflage skills, Sole, Wrasse and Whiting.



Lobsters take precedence, starting with the 'nursery' of day old lobsters just hatched from the larvae from Berried Hens [the term for pregnant lobsters]. Breeding lobsters are caught by local fishermen and brought into the hatchery: the fishing industry now depends on lobsters, not traditional white fish. If a breeding lobster has been caught before, it will have already been marked with a painless notch in the tail – fishing rules state they can't be landed or caught for markets. Baby lobsters are nurtured in the Hatchery for 7 years until adult market size then carefully returned to the sea. In the wild only 1% of lobster larvae survive so this pioneering scheme ensures a local lobster population, essential for fishing fleets supplying lobsters all over Europe. This conservation scheme strengthens lobster stocks, local businesses and fishing fleet employment. The centre is well worth a visit, with informative guides.



*Another enjoyable visit was to **Flamborough Head Nature Reserve**– a dramatic heritage coast on chalk cliffs, east of Bridlington. Now protected as an SSSI, it is famed for seabird colonies such as Kittiwakes, Gannets and Puffins, especially in nesting seasons.*



We saw several butterflies, particularly Common Blue, and clumps of vibrant blue Harebells on grassy cliff tracks, most other plants having died in the searing heat.



Far below was the large colony of Atlantic and Grey Seals relaxing by the tideline on sea-weedy rocks. With blue seas, sunshine, white cliffs, calling birds - and above all blissful cooling breezes- it was a really special place to be in 2026 heatwave!

29th August FW and VH

I was intrigued by this unusual growth on a magnolia tree in the garden which I've not seen in other years. Apparently after the spring blooms fade, the tree often produces these knobbly elongated green and pink seed structures and can look quite strange before splitting open to reveal bright orange-red seeds in autumn.

According to AI, over the next few weeks these pink bumps 'will swell significantly, eventually splitting open and striking glossy seeds will dangle out on thin, silken threads to attract local birds'. Sounds exciting!

29th August LW



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