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NATURE RAMBLINGS (4)

Hi everyone, we hope that you have been able to get out and about with some local walks during the last month.

According to our weather monitors, we had an above average level of rainfall for June, but it was still a very reasonable month and Helen and I managed to get out for a walk nearly every day.

As mentioned last month, Rosebay willowherb, Lesser bindweed and Thistles have been in full bloom and are represented in our photos below.

We have just read that the birds are falling into their July hush but there are still lots of wildflowers making their way up. Look out for Yarrow, Yellow wort, Evening primrose and the Himalayan balsam which is starting to push upwards.

The grass borders in our locale are now about forty foot high and most of my neighbours are outside daily weeding verges and roads as per WBC's advice. I hope you are too!!!

Details of the caption competition from our previous notes are included at the end of these jottings. There is also another competition to enter.

Remember, you can click inside any of the photographs and 'drag' them to expand the picture.



Convolvulus (Lesser Bindweed)

Sprouting out everywhere at the moment, this trumpet shaped flower is also known as 'Morning Glory'.

Many of the species are invasive weeds but others are cultivated for their attractive flowers.



Cornflower

As with many wildflowers, it has a number of old folk names – Bluebottle, Batchelor's Button and Knapweed.

Where it was once abundant, growing wild in cornfields, the Cornflower is now a rare sight in the wild. It was regarded as a weed and blunted sickles during harvesting and so farmers did their best to eradicate it. Indeed, it was often referred to as Hurt Sickle.

Now often seen on roadside verges and waste ground. We saw this one in a car park in Bromborough!

There is much folklore surrounding the Cornflower. People used to believe that the sky had sent down bits of itself to the fields and that's why they were scattered with blue flowers. It was believed that Cornflowers could stop a nosebleed if picked on Corpus Christi Sunday.



Feverfew

Feverfew belongs to the family Asteraceae (daisies). It is a daisy-like perennial plant found commonly in gardens and along roadsides.

It is an effective medicinal herb which has been proved to help relieve migraines, headaches, as well as arthritis and asthma.



Elderflower

Abundant throughout the UK, in woods and along roadside hedgerows. From late May you'll see masses of tiny white flowers hanging in sprays which develop into purple elderberries later in the summer. The flowers and berries are the only edible part of the plant. The fragrant flowers are most famous for making elderflower champagne and cordial.



Thistle

A widespread and common thistle, the Spear Thistle can be found on disturbed and cultivated ground, such as pastures, roadside verges and field edges from July to October.

Despite its 'weed' status, the seeds of the Spear thistle are attractive to birds like Goldfinches and the flowers are a nectar source for butterflies like the Small Copper.

Today the thistle is found in many Scottish symbols and is used as part of the name of several Scottish football clubs.

The thistle is also the emblem of Encyclopaedia Britannica, which originated in Edinburgh, Scotland.



Has your hedge-fund been diminished during the current outbreak?



Marsh Thistle

This is not the thistle adopted as the symbol of Scotland (that is the Spear Thistle, see above), but rather its very prickly cousin.

As the name suggests, this plant grows in damp areas.

The seed fluff can be used as a tinder.



Pareidolia!??

Pareidolia describes the tendency to see random images in objects or patterns that are unrelated. For instance, some people who have visited St Mary's in Rathkeale, Ireland, have reported the tree stump outside of the church to bear a silhouette of the Virgin Mary. Then there was the piece of toast said to have an image of Jesus on it (which was sold in America for \$28,000!)

Helen and I saw this tree in Tudorville Road in Bebington. The root to us looks like a child resting its head in its hand. What do you think? Or are we just mad? Don't answer the second question!!



Dog Roses

Found in hedgerows and scrubland it is the most familiar and common wild rose.

The hips, noted for their high level of vitamin C, are used to make Rose hip syrup.

Ancient belief was that the root of the rose could cure the bite of a mad dog hence its name.



Selfheal

Can be seen creeping through the short turf of a grassland or the uncut grass of a woodland clearing or roadside verge; it can even pop up in lawns.

It has a long tradition of being used in herbal medicine for everything from stopping bleeding and healing wounds, to treating heart disease and sore throats.



Seven Spot native Ladybird

This is the ladybird that everyone is familiar with. The 7-spot ladybird will turn up anywhere there are aphids for it to feed on.

The bright colours of ladybirds warn predators that they are distasteful, although some birds may still have a go at eating them. As well as their warning colouration, ladybirds also have another defence mechanism: when handled, they release a pungent, yellow substance from their joints (a form of 'controlled bleeding') that can stain the hands.

An adult ladybird can live for between 1 and 3 years.

A common myth is that the number of spots on the insect's back indicates its age. Superstitions assert that it is unlucky to kill a ladybird and they are associated with good fortune.



Oak galls

Oak apple or oak gall is the common name for a large, round, vaguely apple-like gall commonly found on many species of oak.

They are caused by chemicals injected by the larva of the gall wasp which then feed on the gall tissue resulting from their secretions, which modify the oak bud into the gall, a structure that protects the developing larvae.



Young fruit of the Horse Chestnut

The horse chestnut's fruit is colloquially called a "conker" and refers to the shiny brown, poisonous seed that is protected by a green spiny capsule. The game of Conkers started in the late 1700s. Developed from a similar game called "Conquerors" which was played with hazelnuts, cobnuts, or snail shells. Soon, children were playing Conkers at school, adding rules as they went along.



Gatekeeper Butterfly (also known as the Hedge Brown)

The gatekeeper is orange with two large brown spots on its wings and a brown pattern on the edge of its wings. The eyespots on the fore wings most likely reduce bird attacks, therefore the gatekeeper is often seen resting with its wings open.

It is thought that its common name comes from its tendency to frequent those areas of rough grassland adjacent to hedgerows and field edges, like, for example, the areas around farm gates.

We saw this one in Benty Heath Lane, Willaston.



Honesty Seed Heads (see nature notes 2)

Like silver pennies with a see-through membrane containing the seeds.

The Latin name *Lunaria* means moon like and refers to the shape and appearance of the seedpods.

Also known as Moonwort or Money Plant



Copper Beech Leaves

Reminiscent of dark bitter chocolate, compare the colour of these leaves now with those from last month. They have now turned to a deep purple and will obtain a coppery hue in the autumn.



Friend or Foe?

The answer is 'Friend'. This little creature is the larva of the ladybird.

They have a huge appetite for soft-bodied pests such as aphids and so are a gardeners' friend by helping to clear pests from gardens and greenhouses.

There are 47 species of ladybird resident in the British Isles. This larva is of the seven-spotted ladybird (see above).



Bramble flowers

Hardy and determined, the bramble uses powerful roots to grow rapidly almost anywhere. Look out for the juicy blackberries in the summer for jam and pie making.

Brambles used to be planted on graves to stop sheep grazing, but might also have had the more superstitious purpose of keeping the dead in.



Cherries

Remember the blossom from our first nature notes? Well here are the results! Looking great at the moment a really colourful fruit for humans and birds alike.



Long Hoverfly

The English name for this hoverfly describes it perfectly. Although the fly is only small, 10mm, the long thin body is instantly recognisable.

It is quite a common hoverfly and can be seen in most parts of Britain. It flies from April to November and this species lives in thickets, gardens and meadows rich of flowering plants.

These hoverflies can complete a full life cycle in as little as sixteen days and a maximum of nine generations may occur in a single year.

When at rest with its wings closed, the fly's body will protrude past the end of the wings. Hence the Long Hoverfly.



Ragwort

Also known as stinking willie due to the unpleasant smell of the leaves. Ragwort is abundant in waste land, waysides, grazing pastures and can be found along roadsides.

Considered a weed by many, it provides a lot of nectar for pollinators. It is rated in the top 10 for most nectar production.



Rosebay Willowherb (Fireweed)

This is in abundance at the moment. The tall, pink flower spikes of Rosebay willowherb can often be seen crowding together.

Fireweed, one of its common names refers to the fact that Rosebay Willowherb will grow on burnt ground as the seeds can settle deep in the soil and remain viable for many years.



Spotted Orchid

The Common spotted-orchid is the most common of all UK orchids and the one you are most likely to see. We saw this and many more on Brackenwood golf course.

It gets its name from its leaves, which are green with many purple, oval spots. They form a rosette at ground level before the flower spike appears; narrower leaves sheath the stem. The flowers range from white and pale pink, through to purple, but have distinctive darker pink spots and stripes on their three-lobed lips. The flowers are densely packed in short, cone-shaped clusters.

The highly perfumed flowers of the Common spotted-orchid are particularly attractive to day-flying moths.



White Campion

At night, the blooms of white campion produce a heady scent, attracting feeding moths. You will find it along hedgerows, roadside verges, and on waste ground. It is sometimes called the 'Grave Flower' as it can be seen growing in graveyards.

The root has been used as a soap substitute for washing clothes, hair etc.



Cow Parsley Leaves

You will, of course, remember our photo in our second nature newsletter showing the billowing white waves of cow parsley which was then in abundance.

Although it has now finished flowering it still holds interest with dark, colourful leaves and interesting seed-heads.



Crab Apple

A symbol of fertility and a forager's delight. Crab apple trees are associated with love and marriage and its small, hard fruits make an exquisite, jewel-coloured jelly.

An ancestor of the cultivated apple tree, it can live to up to 100 years. Mature trees grow to around 10m in height. With greyish brown, flecked bark, trees can become quite gnarled and twisted and the twigs often develop spines. This 'crabbed' appearance may have influenced its common name, 'crab apple'.

The crab apple is one of the few host trees to the parasitic mistletoe, and the trees are often covered in lichens.

In Ireland, a yellow dye was extracted from the bark to colour wool.



Congratulations to Peter Maher whose caption was voted the winner of the previous competition with:

‘Careful! It’s a bit boggy ahead’!

A bottle of wine awaits.



Caption Competition.

Who turned the lights out?!!

Please think of a caption for this photograph and send it to me or Sue by August 4th. We will let you know the winning entry next time.



So, that's it for now from us. July has started out a bit mixed with lower temperatures and some rain but, as we write, the sun is shining and hopefully this will presage a better end to the month.

Whatever the weather, we hope that you can all go out and enjoy some walking.

All the best,

Helen and Gordon.