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NATURE RAMBLINGS (6)

Hi again everyone. We hope that you are all keeping well and when able, going out for some walks. It is great to hear that our club walks have started up again in some form.

Well, August was a changeable month weather wise. We had mud sticking to our boots for the first time in months!

One of the consequences of our peculiar summer has been the opportunity to get out more regularly, locally, and to see the fabulous growth of the wildflowers. Luckily, it has been a fantastic time weather wise.

The month just gone saw many plants and flowers coming to fruition and this is reflected in quite a few of our photographs that follow.

However, as summer draws to a close and autumn nears, there are less opportunities to see flora as it settles back after a highly active growing period this spring and summer.

Consequently, these will be our final nature notes for a while. We do hope they have been of some interest for you. We will still keep our eyes open for stuff and may produce future notes on a more ad hoc basis. Contributions will always be welcome!

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



Rose Hips

The rose hip, also called rose haw and rose hep, is the accessory fruit of the rose plant.

Rose hips are used for herbal teas, jam, jelly, syrup, beverages, pies, wine, and marmalade. They can also be eaten raw, like a berry, if care is taken to avoid the hairs inside the fruit.



Lily Beetle

Lily beetles are attractive, bright-red beetles around 7mm long with black heads, legs and undersides. They can deter predators by squeaking – they are audible if you hold them close to your ear.

They originated in the Mediterranean region, though they also occur in China and northern India. The Lily beetle was recorded in England in the early 1900s. However, it did not become successfully established until 1940.

The scarlet lily beetle is a leaf beetle that eats the leaves, stem, buds, and flowers, of lilies, fritillaries and other members of the lily family. It is now a pest in most temperate climates where lilies are cultivated.

When you spot the little red devils use two hands to pick them off. One hand beneath them, as they have a habit of just letting go of the leaf and falling to the ground where they're hard to spot. The other hand can pick them off and then dispose of them.



Linden/Tilia or Lime Tree

Tilia is a genus of about 30 species of trees or bushes, native throughout most of the temperate Northern Hemisphere. In the British Isles, they are commonly called lime trees, or lime bushes, although they are not closely related to the tree that produces the lime fruit.

In mythology the Linden tree is a symbol of peace, truth and justice.



Red Berries of Honeysuckle

Honeysuckle grows in woodland and along hedgerows, weaving through shrubs and trees. It is common and widespread throughout the British Isles.

While the berries are poisonous, the leaves, flowers and seeds have been used for medicinal purposes for a variety of conditions including inflammation and infections.



Seed Head of the Common Hogweed

Commonly known as hogweed, common hogweed or cow parsnip. The plant provides a great deal of nectar for pollinators.

Hogweed has 5-petalled pinkish or white flowers, arranged in umbels usually less than 30 cm in diameter, flowering typically occurs between June and October.

The leaves of common hogweed are less jagged and more rounded than giant hogweed. Giant Hogweed is a dangerous plant with phototoxic sap which will burn your skin badly if exposed to the Sun. It has slightly shinier leaves, more hair in a ring around the stem where the leaf joints are, and more flower stems. It is much larger when mature growing to 4 to 5 metres tall. Common hogweed is normally around 2 metres or less.

The seeds can be dried and used as a spice, with a flavour similar to that of cardamom.

Hogweed oil was used as a sedative and expectorant.



Barley

In Notes 5 we told of the difference between wheat and barley (barley has a long beard while **wheat** a shorter one). Here you can see the long beard of the barley. We saw vast fields of barley adjacent to Dibbendsdale.

Commonly used in breads, soups, stews, and health products, though it is primarily grown as animal fodder and as a source of malt for alcoholic beverages, especially beer.



Red Hips on Hawthorn

A hedgerow berry which grows abundantly at this time of year is hawthorn.

Thought to be poisonous, in fact. the fruit is not toxic, but the seeds can be and are best avoided. They contain cyanide so the fruit can only be used in recipes which includes the removal of the seeds.



Reflexed Stonecrop

This is a species of perennial succulent plant of the genus Sedum. It is commonly called stonecrop because of its stone like appearance. Also known as Jenny's stonecrop, blue stonecrop, stone orpine, prick-madam and trip-madam

Reflexed Stonecrop is naturalised mainly on walls, rocks and stony banks, but can frequently be seen escaping from gardens. We saw this one on a footpath near Huddersfield.



Song Thrush Eggshell

We think this is a Song Thrush eggshell.

These relatives of the blackbird begin to build their nest in early spring. They lay light blue eggs with black markings.



Creeping Thistle Seed Heads

The Creeping thistle has flower heads with lilac-pink florets (tiny flowers) on top of a small cylinder of spiny bracts (leaf-like structures). Like most thistles, it produces masses of fluffy, wind-borne seeds in late summer. They provide an important food source for farmland birds, many of which are declining rapidly.



Crane Fly (Daddy Longlegs)

There are 94 species in the UK. Flitting about the house in summer, the gangly, brown daddy longlegs is familiar to many of us. The larvae can become pests of lawns and crops, but the adults are a valuable food source for many birds.

As a larva, it is a grey grub (also known as a 'leatherjacket') that lives underground, feeding on plants stems and roots. This habit makes it an unpopular species with gardeners as it can leave bare patches of lawn and can also become an agricultural pest. The adults are on the wing during the late summer and are common in gardens and fields, often coming indoors.

They are not spiders. They are Opiliones and also known as harvestmen. They are also arachnids but are more closely related to scorpions than to spiders. A few characteristics differentiate Opiliones from spiders. For starters, Opiliones just have two eyes. They cannot produce silk and therefore cannot make webs. They also lack venom glands.



Hemp-agrimony

Also known as 'Raspberries and Cream', Hemp-agrimony displays 'frothy' clusters of tiny, pink flowers on top of long, reddish stems. Its leaves look like those of Hemp, although it is not related. It is found in damp grassland, marshes, fens and wet woodlands, and along riverbanks. When the stems of Hemp-agrimony are cut, they produce an aromatic and pleasant smell.



Garden Snail

This fellow overtook us whilst we were out walking recently! They are found throughout the UK in hedgerows, gardens and fields and seen all year round. Mostly active between March and October. Mainly nocturnal but will emerge after rain during the day.

The world snail racing championships are held each year in the village of Congham, Norfolk. Each race begins with the umpire's cry of 'Ready, steady, slow!'



Reedmace (Bulrush)

Great reedmace, also known as 'Bulrush', is a familiar plant of freshwater margins, such as the edges of ponds, lakes, ditches and rivers. It is in the category of 'Grasses, Sedges and Rushes'. It can grow up to 2 metres in height. They are sometimes also called cattails.

Reedmace is a forager's dream as it is one of the few wild plants that provide food all year long. At their best from autumn through to early spring, reedmace roots – or more accurately, rhizomes can be eaten raw, roasted like yams (a great carbohydrate hit to go with spring greens), or made into a flour.

A famous story involving bulrushes is in the Book of Exodus. In this story, it is said that the infant Moses was found in a boat made of bulrushes.



Himalayan Balsam

This plant is from the Himalayas and was introduced here in 1839 as a garden plant. However, it soon escaped and is now an invasive weed of riverbanks and ditches, where it prevents native species from growing. Its explosive seed pods aid its spread by sending the seeds into the river, causing further dispersal downstream.

Its common name is "Policeman's Helmet" due to the shape of the flowers.



Acorns

No introduction needed here we are sure!
Acorns are the nut/fruit of the oak and are starting to drop on our heads around now.

Watch out for squirrels burying them in your lawn!



Water Mint

There are about 14 or 15 species or hybrids of mint growing in the UK, most of which have very aromatic leaves. Water Mint prefers damp habitats and grows in water, making it a good choice for wildlife ponds and bog gardens. Its leaves can be used in the same way as other mints, flavouring cooking and drinks. It flowers from July to October and spreads vigorously using its creeping runners.

Water mint is attractive to a variety of insects, including Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Comma butterflies, as well as the Green Tortoise Beetle.

Water Mint has both culinary and medical uses. Water Mint tea is considered to be effective in settling upset stomachs and to be a mild sedative; and in the Middle Ages Water Mint plants were strewn on the floors of banqueting halls so that as guests came in odours of mint would be released.



Blackberries

There seem to be masses of blackberries this year, great for crumbles and Jams!

The usually black fruit is not a berry in the botanical sense of the word. Botanically it is termed an aggregate fruit, composed of small drupelets.

Folklore says that blackberries should not be picked after Old Michaelmas Day as the devil has made them unfit to eat by stepping on them.



Culinary Crab Apple (John Downie)

We have seen a few of these trees on road verges throughout the Bebington area.

This species of crab apple is great for making crab apple jelly due to the size, flavour and pectin level of its fruit.



Purple-loosestrife

Purple-loosestrife is a tall plant, with large, pink flower spikes and long green leaves in opposite pairs up the stem. It is found in wet habitats, such as reedbeds, fens, marshes and riverbanks, where its impressive spikes of magenta flowers rise up among the grasses. We saw these in Dibbendsdale Nature Reserve.

The juice of this plant is rich in Tannins and has been used as an alternative to oak bark for tanning leather. It flowers mainly from June to August when its nectar becomes a valuable food source for long-tongued insects, such as Brimstone butterflies, Red-tailed Bumblebees and Elephant Hawk-moths.

Other names include spiked loosestrife and purple lythrum.



Sloe

Prunus spinosa, called blackthorn or sloe, is a species of flowering plant in the rose family. The fruits have been used to make sloe gin in Britain, and the wood used for making walking sticks or the shillelagh by the Irish.

Autumn is the time to pick sloes.....

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/sloe-gin>



Baling Out!

The Bale brothers – Christian, Gareth and Cotton!!

Or is it just a giants' game of Jenga?



Seed heads of a Spear Thistle

The flower of this plant provides a great deal of nectar for pollinators. See our nature notes 4 for further information.

Later on, when the seed heads appear, they are eaten by goldfinches, linnets and greenfinches.

The seeds are dispersed by wind, mud, water, and possibly also by ants.

The stems can be peeled and then steamed or boiled. The tap roots can be eaten raw or cooked but are only palatable on young thistles that have not yet flowered.

The dried florets steeped in water are used in rural Italy for curdling goats' milk in preparation for making cheese.



Opium Poppies

Papaver somniferum, commonly known as the opium poppy, or breadseed poppy. It is the species of plant from which opium and poppy seeds are derived.

Poppy seeds are used as a food in many cultures. They may be used whole by bakers to decorate their products.

Poppies have long been used as a symbol of sleep, peace, and death.



Elder Berries

Elderberry is one of the most commonly used medicinal plants in the world. Today, elderberry is most often taken as a supplement to treat cold and flu symptoms.

The berries can be cooked and used to make juice, jams, chutneys, pies and elderberry wine. The flowers are often boiled with sugar to make a sweet syrup or infused into tea.



Cardoon

The cardoon, also called the artichoke thistle, is a thistle in the sunflower family. It is a naturally occurring species that also has many cultivated forms, including the globe artichoke.

The wild cardoon is a stout herbaceous perennial plant with deeply lobed and heavily spined green to grey-green leaves with yellow spines. The flowers are violet-purple, produced in a large, round, massively spined dome.

The cardoon originated in the Mediterranean region and is grown for its fleshy, leafy stems which feature on menus in France, Italy, Spain and North Africa. It was a popular vegetable in 19th century Britain but has long since fallen out of favour.



Tortoiseshell Butterfly

Let's end the summer with a butterfly!

The small tortoiseshell is mainly reddish-orange in colour, with black and yellow markings on the forewings and a ring of blue spots around the edge of the wings. The similar painted lady is also orange with black spots but lacks the yellow and blue markings.

The similar-looking large tortoiseshell was a common butterfly in Victorian times but is now considered to be extinct in the UK.



Congratulations to Beryl Sibeon whose caption was voted the winner of the previous competition with:

‘Is this my best side?’

Well done Beryl.

(There is no caption competition this time).



As the season is slowing down and the cooler, darker evenings are coming, we can now start to look forward to the good things that autumn brings.

Mornings shrouded in mist and landscapes changing colour from green to orange to yellow to brown and all hues in between.

As mentioned earlier, these are our final notes for now but, perhaps we will produce some more on an ad hoc basis in the future.

All the best,

Helen and Gordon.