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NATURE RAMBLINGS (10)

Hi again to everyone,

It has been a while since we last issued some nature notes. In fact, it was back at the end of April when we sent out our last notes. Since then, the club has, thankfully, been able to return to something like normality whilst still exercising caution. It has been great to be able to wander away from Wirral and explore the great outdoors further afield. Also, it has been good to meet up again with friends at the clubroom.

Spring and Summer have passed and generally the weather and conditions were kind to us. In these notes we have included photos from our wanderings during this time and we hope that they and their associated notes are of some interest to you.

Winter is approaching and the profile of our landscape begins to change. After a couple of seasons when flora seemed to flourish more than ever, we are starting to see leaves fall and plants, having prepared themselves for harder times, are taking a rest.

However, we ramblers are able to ignore the seasons (except for wearing appropriate clothing and footwear!). So, we hope you can get out and enjoy the changes, the frost on the ground, the lower sun in the sky for instance and appreciate the ever-changing perspective of our countryside.

Have a great rambling wintertime, keep warm and safe.



Double rainbow (if you look carefully!)

Double rainbows are formed when sunlight is reflected twice within a raindrop with the violet light that reaches the observer's eye coming from the higher raindrops and the red light from lower raindrops.

This means the sequence of colours is inverted compared to the primary rainbow, with the secondary bow appearing about 10 degrees above the primary bow.



Cobbled Road

Cobblestone is a natural building material based on cobble-sized stones, and is used for pavements, roads and streets. Cobblestones were first used to build roads back in the early part of the 15th century, traditionally set in sand and sometimes bound in water.

Paving with cobblestones allows a road to be heavily used all year long. It prevents the build-up of ruts often found in dirt roads. It has the additional advantage of immediately draining water, and not getting muddy in wet weather or dusty in dry weather.

Cobblestoned streets gradually gave way to macadam roads, and later to tarmac, and finally to asphalt concrete at the beginning of the 20th century. However, cobble-stones are often retained in historic areas, even for streets with modern vehicular traffic. Many older villages and cities still have cobblestoned roads as this photo shows.



Sunshine on Sunflowers

In Greek mythology Clytie was a water nymph, and deeply in love with the sun god Helios. Sadly, he left her for another goddess, and it's said that Clytie watched Helios crossing the sky in his golden chariot for days, without any food or water. Eventually, she was transformed into a sunflower, and it's said this is why sunflowers always face the sun.



Ploughed Fields

A plough is a farm tool for loosening or turning the soil before sowing seed or planting. Ploughs were traditionally drawn by oxen and horses, but in modern farms are drawn by tractors. A plough may have a wooden, iron or steel frame, with a blade attached to cut and loosen the soil.

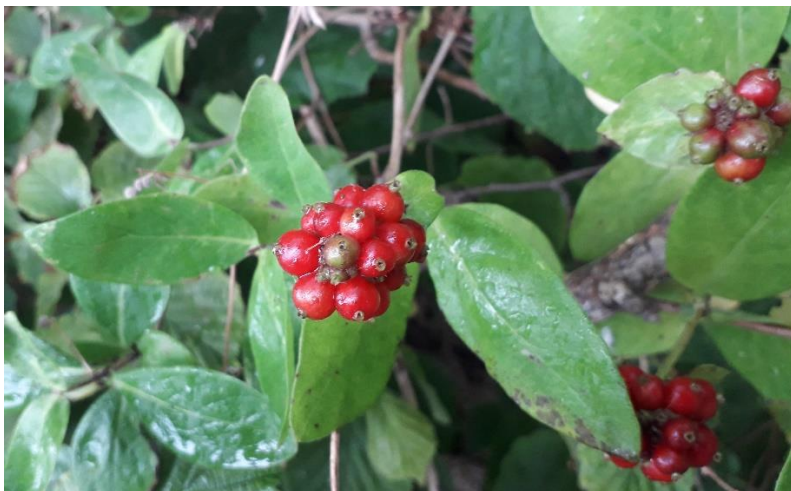
We don't know what the farmers use to plough our fields these days, but the furrows were massive in this field and others that we have seen on our local rambles. Will we get bigger spuds?!!



Apple Blossom

Apple blossoms are clustered in groups of 4 to 8 and are white to pale pink with reddish-pink undersides. They are highly aromatic with nuances of wild rose, jasmine, water lily and honey. Their flavor is subtle with a sweet honeysuckle quality and delicate texture.

In astrology, Apple is considered a feminine tree and is governed by Venus. Her element is water.



Honeysuckle Fruit

The fruit of honeysuckle form clusters of red berries which ripen in autumn. While the berries are poisonous, the leaves, flowers and seeds have been used for medicinal purposes for a variety of conditions.

Honeysuckle has been used to make walking sticks. They were created as the honeysuckle entwined itself around branches, causing the branches themselves to become twisted.



Black Slug (Arion ater)

Slugs can be serious garden pests, eating seedlings, plants and fruit and vegetable crops. However, they are eaten by a range of wildlife including hedgehogs, foxes, badgers, many birds, slow worms, violet ground beetles and Devil's coach horses. They can generally be seen at night in spring, summer and autumn.

Recommended reading – 'The Friendly Slug of Eternal Devotion'!!!!!!



Raceme Flowers of the Field Maple

A Raceme is a flower cluster with the separate flowers attached by short equal stalks at equal distances along a central stem. The flowers at the base of the central stem develop first.

This example belongs to the Field Maple or Acer Campestre. Acers (maples) are trees and shrubs grown mainly for their colourful foliage. Many varieties are the trees and shrubs responsible for spectacular Autumn colours. There are many different types of acer, from the smaller types, such as the very popular Acer Palmatum (Japanese Maple) grown in many gardens, to the large maple trees that can grow up to 45metres in height.

The flowers, which are green, yellow, orange or red, in racemes, umbels or corymbs, appear in early Spring, and are followed by fruit, - samaras - (or "helicopters", "whirlybirds" "maple keys" or "polynoses" due to the way they spin as they fall.



Red-Tailed Bumble Bee

The red-tailed bumblebee is a very common bumblebee, emerging early in the spring and feeding on flowers right through to the autumn. It can be found in gardens, farmland, woodland edges, hedgerows and heathland: anywhere there are flowers to feed on.

Red-tailed bumblebees nest underground, often in old vole burrows, under stones, or at the base of old walls.



Damsel Fly

In many species of Damselflies adults change colour as they mature. Newly emerged adults are often paler in colouration with milky coloured wings.

Damselflies are beautiful, beneficial predators. They help control populations of harmful insects. Adults consume large quantities of other insects such as flies, mosquitoes and moths and some eat beetles and caterpillars.



Shaggy Ink Cap

This is a common fungus often seen growing on lawns, along gravel roads and waste areas. The young fruit bodies first appear as white cylinders emerging from the ground, then the bell-shaped caps open out. The caps are white, covered with scales—this is the origin of the common names of the fungus. The gills beneath the cap are white, then pink, then turn black and secrete a black liquid filled with spores (hence the "ink cap" name). This mushroom is unusual because it will turn black and dissolve itself in a matter of hours after being picked or depositing spores.



Hedgerow Fruits

Hedgerows and verges in rural and suburban places can support a wide range of edible fruits including cherries, damsons and elderberries.

Scrub and moorland can also be a good foraging environment, with low-growing shrubs yielding bilberries and cranberries.

Be sure to know with exact certainty that the berries you pick are edible if you go foraging.



Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon (meadow salsify)

Its other common name is Goatsbeard, which must be a nod to the fantastic dandelion-like clock which forms the seed head with 'parachutes' like those shown here.

Its upper leaves are shorter and more erect. It is the only United Kingdom dandelion type flower with grass like leaves. The flower heads are 5 cm wide. They only open in the morning sunshine, hence the name 'Jack go to bed at noon'.



Clover Leaves

Clovers are generally short-lived herbs, usually with three toothed leaflets. They occasionally have four leaflets, instead of the usual three. These four-leaf clovers, like other rarities, are considered lucky. Clovers can also have five, six, or more leaflets, but these are rarer still. The clovers outer leaf structure varies in physical orientation. The record for most leaflets is 56, set on 10 May 2009

Clover is highly palatable to livestock and is high in protein, phosphorus, and calcium, thus providing valuable nourishment in either the green or the dry stage. In addition to their principal value as animal feed in the form of hay, pasture, and silage, the clovers are valuable soil-improving and soil-conserving plants. Clover adds nitrogen to the soil and increases availability of other nutrients for following crops.

A common idiom is "to be (or to live) in clover", meaning to live a carefree life of ease, comfort, or prosperity



Great Willowherb

The Great Willowherb has its flowers scattered about at the top, they are pink and four-petaled, with a conspicuous creamy white stigma in the middle. This is probably what gave it a name that was once quite commonly used, codlins-and-cream. Codlins, or cooking apples, were often boiled in milk and served with cream



Honeysuckle (Woodbine)

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

It was once believed that if honeysuckle grew around a home's entrance, it would bring good luck and stop any evil spirits from entering. It has also long been considered a symbol of fidelity, and in Victorian times young girls were banned from bringing honeysuckle into the house because it was believed the strong smell would make them have suggestive dreams!



Dark Mullein

Dark mullein is a biennial or short-lived perennial of road verges, hedge banks and other grassy places that are subject to occasional disturbance, particularly those on well-drained calcareous soils. The main flowering period is from June to September but can continue into November if weather conditions are favourable.

Its value for wildlife is threefold. The flowers are a good pollen and nectar source for a wide range of insects, particularly bees. Numerous seed-eating animals including birds such as the goldfinch feed on the massive number of small seeds produced and the dead flowering stems provide hibernation sites for over-wintering invertebrates.



Peacock Butterfly on Dandelion

Perhaps our most familiar butterfly, the peacock is deep-red with black spots and blue 'eyespot' on both the forewings and hindwings. Its underside is dark brown, making the wings look like dead leaves.

When alarmed, the peacock is able to make a hissing noise by rubbing its wings quickly together. Coupled with its huge eyespots, it becomes a scary prospect for would-be predators.



Fruits of Bittersweet (Woody Nightshade)

Despite being a member of the nightshade family, Bittersweet is one of the less toxic plants in this group although its berries are still poisonous. Found in hedgerows, gardens and even on shingle beaches, its purple flowers appear from May to September, and are followed by clusters of bright red berries.

The leaves of Bittersweet smell of burnt rubber when crushed.



Pheasant Feathers

Lots of these are found on our local farmland. We found these near Clatterbridge.

The pheasant was naturalised in Great Britain around AD 1059 but may have been introduced by the Romano-British centuries earlier.

It was the Caucasian subspecies mistakenly known as the 'Old English pheasant' rather than the Chinese ring-necked pheasants that were introduced to Britain.

Pheasants are well adapted to the British climate and breed naturally in the wild without human supervision in copses, heaths and commons.

The pheasant has been associated with many things throughout history. It is most commonly seen as the symbol of peace and tranquility in Buddhism



Bracket Fungus

Bracket fungi cause decay and rot in the heartwood of trees and produce bracket-shaped fruiting bodies on the trunk or main branches. These fungi usually lead to weakening and sometimes to the eventual breakage or fall of affected trees. The brackets release huge quantities of wind-blown spores, which germinate on wounded wood and penetrate into the heartwood where the fungus forms an expanding pocket of rot.



Wild Mint

Wild mint is an herbaceous perennial plant generally growing to 10–60 cm tall. It has a creeping rootstock from which grow erect or semi-sprawling squarish stems. The flowers are pale purple (occasionally white or pink).

The leaves have been made into tea to treat colds or aid digestion. They can also be eaten raw



Teasel

The teasel is biennial. In the first year of growth the leaves form a rosette on the ground. In the second year, a strong, tall stem develops which has opposite pairs of leaves. The leaves are long (30 cm+), toothed and spear shaped. The main vein on the underside of the leaf has numerous prickles. The leaves join where they meet the stem to form a 'cup-like' structure - which collects rainwater. Another name for the teasel is venus' basin - this refers to the water that collects in the base of the leaves. Folklore says that such rainwater has healing properties

The teasel was formerly the teasing plant of the cloth maker, hence one of its names is 'brushes and combs', which refers to the use of the dried heads (held in wooden frames) to comb the cloth, to raise the 'nap'

Teasels are found by riverbanks, footpaths, in rough grassy areas and open woodlands. We spotted this early example back in July in a ditch in Rest Hill Road.



Cirrus Clouds

Latin for "curl of hair", cirrus are thin, white, wispy strands of clouds that streak across the sky. Because cirrus clouds appear above 20,000 feet an altitude where low temperatures and low water vapor exist—they are made up of tiny ice crystals rather than water droplets.

They typically occur in fair weather but seeing them can also indicate storms may be coming.

A proverb that sailors learned to warn them of coming rainy weather, "Mares' tails (cirrus) and mackerel scales (altocumulus) make lofty ships to carry low sails."



Wavy Hair-Grass

With wavy stems, fine, hair-like leaves, and delicate, shaking flower heads, wavy hair-grass certainly lives up to its common name. A tuft-forming, perennial grass, it prefers acidic soils and can be found on heathland and moorland, flowering in June and July. It is the foodplant of the caterpillar of the wall brown butterfly. It has fine leaves and drooping stems that hold loose flower heads with open clusters of delicate, purplish spikelets (containing the flowers).



King Alfred's Cakes

King Alfred's cakes look like hard, roundish lumps of coal stuck to the surface of decaying wood. The older they get, the darker they become. They don't rot away quickly but can remain on deadwood for years. They are common and widespread in the UK. You can spot them in deciduous woodland in groups on dead and decaying wood, especially fallen beech and ash branches.

King Alfred lived in the 9th century when parts of Britain had been overrun by Vikings. Trying to escape them, he took refuge in the home of a peasant woman who asked him to watch over her cakes, baking by the fire. He let them burn and was scolded by the woman for his negligence. It is said that embarrassed and ashamed, he scattered the cakes to get rid of the evidence. As the fungus looks like small, burnt cakes, especially as they get older, the name King Alfred's cakes went into common use.

Many kinds of insects and small animals make their home inside King Alfred's cakes, while caterpillars of the concealer moth are known to feed on them.



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. Found in damp grassland, wet woodlands, and along riverbanks. The stems of Hemp-agrimony when cut, produce an aromatic and pleasant smell.

It was once believed that if bread was placed on a bed of Hemp Agrimony leaves, it wouldn't go mouldy.



Caption Competition.

The Fickle Finger of Fate!!

Congratulations to Mike Kendrick whose caption was voted the winner of the previous edition's competition with:

" I knew the leader said you could follow his walk digitally, but I didn't think he meant this".



If you take any photos that you would like included in the notes, please send them to us.

We will continue to look for new stuff to create these notes and with luck will be back sometime next year.

Until then.....

All the best,

Helen and Gordon.