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## **NATURE RAMBLINGS (13)**

Hi to all.

Taking advantage of the rain this weekend (22/07/2023) and to do something useful we decided to complete our latest Nature Notes for you.

The weather has certainly deteriorated over the last few days, but we hope that this doesn't deter you from going out.

Some of the best opportunities to go out are on our evening walks every Tuesday and Friday at 7pm. The programme of walks is available on our website, and they are available until the end of August.

As usual, the photographs contained within these notes were taken during the last six months or so whilst we were out and about. We will endeavour to continue producing the notes at indeterminate intervals but also, we would welcome contributions from other members.

In the meantime, lets make the most of the longer days of light as we enter the second half of summer (already!) and enjoy some walking and the nature that surrounds us.

All the best,

Helen and Gordon.



### **Yellow Waxcap**

During the National Trust's waxcap survey in 2007, the yellow waxcap was the most widely recorded variety of Waxcap. The population of waxcaps declined across Europe after the late 1940s when grasslands were built on and agricultural fields treated more intensively with fertilisers. Unploughed and unimproved grassland became an increasingly rare habitat.

We covered the Scarlett Waxcap in Nature Notes 11.



### **Tree Carvings**

Increasingly, we see examples of wood carvings on our walks or just randomly in parks, gardens and on display at public events.

Once a tree dies, it is often cut down and carted off to the wood chipper. Sometimes, though, nearby woodcarvers will come along and use their chainsaws and grinders to preserve trees and what they represented in people's lives.



### **Aster**

Aster is a genus of perennial flowering plants in the family Asteraceae. They now encompass around 170 species.

The name Aster comes from the Ancient Greek word aster, meaning "star", referring to the shape of the flower head. Many varieties are popular as garden plants.

'Aster' species are used as food plants by the larvae of a number of butterflies. Asters can grow in all types of terrain.



### **Cuttle Fish Bones**

How often do we see these on our walks along beaches?

A cuttlebone is not a bone, but rather the internal shell of the Cuttlefish, a small, squid-like cephalopod.

For years people have harvested and used cuttlebones for various purposes, the most widely recognized use of the cuttlebone now is for birds.

At one time, the ink that this fish secretes was used to manufacture writing ink during the 1st-century B.C. to the early part of the 4th-century A.D.



### **Black Rose-Hips**

These are the hips from the Burnet Rose. A spiny upright perennial with hairless leaves each divided into seven to nine toothed leaflets, the Burnet Rose rarely grows taller than 50cm. Its five-petalled flowers 3-5cm across are white, often splashed with pink. The hips (seed pods) are purple; all other wild roses have red or scarlet hips.

The Burnet Rose plant used to be grown in gardens for use in herbal medicines. The leaves and the hips were used to make Burnet Rose Tea, while rose-hip syrup and even a liqueur can be made from the large purple hips. There is just one thorny problem that makes gathering rose hips a risky business: the thorns! It has lots of sharp spines.



### **Dragonfly**

Different species of dragonfly are on the wing at different times of the year. Teneral (newly emerged adults) are often paler in colouration. Then, as an adult becomes sexually mature, it is often indicated by a change in colour. In some species, adults become darker in coloration as they age.

We think that this one is a Common Darter. It has a narrow body – red in male, brightening for days after emerging; brown or straw-yellow in female. Often the last species to be seen, well into November, it is found in all water bodies across Britain except the highest Highlands.



### Chicken of the Woods

There are many species of this fungus, all but one are bright orange or yellow. It grows on hardwoods and conifers, depending on the species, and causes brown rot in the host tree. They are both parasitic, attacking the host when it is still alive, and saprobic, living on dead and decomposing organic wood.

It is also known as a sulphur shelf, chicken mushroom, and chicken fungus. It earns this common name because it has a similar meaty texture to chicken, and some say it tastes like it, too. It is dense, rather bland flavored, and perfect for cooking in everything because it absorbs flavors.



### Queen Anne's Lace (Wild Carrot)

Queen Anne's Lace (*Daucus carota*) is a common sight in dry fields, roadside ditches and open areas.

It is thought that the origin of this common name was the flower's resemblance to the lace that was fashionable around the time of the British monarch, wife of King James I, as people thought it resembled Queen Anne's lace headdress. It is also called wild carrot because this is the European plant that cultivated carrots were developed from.

The Queen Anne's lace "flower" is actually a compound flower with thousands of tiny white flowers in lacy, flat-topped clusters (umbels) with a dark, purplish center. It is so adaptable that in some habitats it crowds out native species that can't compete with its vigorous growth. Many people consider Queen Anne's lace an invasive weed



### Acorns

There is no real agreement about the origin of the word. Some say it's a combination of "oak and horn", some say it's from an old English word 'aecern', meaning berry or fruit. Chaucer spoke of "achornes of okes" in the 14th century.

Myths and folklore abound regarding acorns. Here is one! 'The oak is the favorite tree of the fairies. It is believed that the smaller varieties of fairies must wear a cap of the acorn on their heads at night and gloves made of foxglove to keep themselves safe.'



## Fossils

Following last month's insert about The footprints of Triassic *Chirotherium* found in the Storeton Quarries, did you see that 183-million-year-old fossils have been found in a farmer's field in Gloucestershire?

Stunningly well preserved and contained within three-dimensionally preserved limestone concretions, the remains of fish, ancient marine reptiles, squids, rare insects and more have been discovered. Among the best finds were several fossil fish with excellent details of their scales, fins and even their eyeballs. One of the most impressive discoveries was a three-dimensionally preserved fish head, belonging to a type of Jurassic fish called *Pachycormus*. <https://phys.org/news/2022-07-jurassic-marine-world-uneearthed-farmer.html>



## Primroses

The Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) is native to Britain and Europe. It is a small plant, typically no more than 10 cm (4") high. It produces flowers which generally vary in colour from pale cream to deep yellow. Other colour variants include white and pink flowered forms.

Next time you come across a clump of flowering Primroses, stop and have a closer look. Primroses (and indeed, also many other *Primula* species) are remarkable in that they have two different types of flowers which look superficially almost identical. One type is called 'pin-eyed' and the other, 'thrum-eyed'. The two different types of flowers are produced on separate plants. The production of two different types of flowers by Primroses, the pin-eyed and thrum-eyed, is an adaptation to promote cross pollination.



## Signs

Here is the latest in our 'odd/humorous signs. We took this one in Swanpool lagoon near Falmouth. It is a small coastal saline lagoon with a shingle bar, separating it from the beach of the same name. The South West Coast Path crosses the bar.

We are sure that you all must come across similar, amusing signs so send them to us for future notes.



### **Weeping Willow (*Salix Babylonica*)**

A classical British scene (in fact, just over the road from where we live).

Graceful and refined, easily recognized by its open crown of ground-sweeping branches. Leaves are light green above, grayish-green beneath. Willow grows especially well near water.



### **Enchanter's Nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*)**

Delicate, mystical, persistent. You will find Enchanter's Nightshade in woods and woodland edges, flowering in summer. We spotted this example whilst walking on Arnside Knott.

Considered a weed in most gardens, this plant is just one part of the complex woodland habitat. The flowers are very small (around 5mm), pinkish-white with two strongly notched petals. The stamens poke out of the flower.

The Latin name *Circaea* relates to Circe, an enchantress sometimes depicted as the Greek goddess of magic, who was known for her knowledge of herbs.



### **Wild Garlic (*Allium ursinum*)**

Wild garlic is a medium-sized bulbous perennial with a distinctive and pungent garlicky smell that pervades woodland in spring.

It is common and widespread across the UK. It favours deciduous woodland and chalky soils. You can also spot it in scrub and hedgerows, but it prefers damp areas.

Wild garlic flowers early in spring, so is an important early bloom for the bees and other insects which pollinate them. The bulbs are also a source of food for wild boars.

The second half of the Latin name, *ursinum*, refers to the fact that brown bears loved to eat the bulb. This also gave rise to two of its common names – bear's leek and bear garlic.



### Willow Work

We are used to baskets made by willow weaving but this was something else!

Willow sculpture seems to be an art that is on the increase. It certainly enhances our environment.

We saw this example en-route to Hardcastle Crag.



### Fox and Cubs (*Pilosella aurantiaca*)

The name "fox and cubs" is derived from the appearance of the plant's flowers, which are small and orange-red, and surrounded by a rosette of hairy leaves that resemble a fox's ear. The plant is also commonly referred to as "orange hawkweed" or "devil's paintbrush." A key distinguishing feature (in addition to the orange colour of the flowers) is the presence of blackish hairs that cover the stems and, in particular, the young flower buds.

Fox and Cubs has many other common names including Tawny Hawkweed, Devil's Paintbrush Grim-the-collier (because the black hairs are reminiscent of a miner covered in colliery grime), and Orange Hawkbit.

This attractive member of the daisy family makes a wonderful display in summer when it appears on roadside verges and banks, but do not be tempted to encourage this plant to grow in the garden: it is a tenacious weed that spreads and is very difficult to eradicate once it has got a hold.



At least this train is always waiting for you! Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to be going anywhere. That is probably more realistic in present days.

We have all seen examples of topiary on our walks, and they always bring a smile out. Topiary is the horticultural practice of training perennial plants by clipping the foliage and twigs of trees and shrubs to develop clearly defined shapes. The term also refers to plants which have been shaped in this way.

The word derives from the Latin word for an ornamental landscape gardener, *topiarius*, a creator of *topia* or "places"



### **Blossom of a Damson Tree**

Snowy white damson blossom – one of the prettiest and most alluring of all the stone fruit flowers

It is made up of five petals and is about one inch across, and pure white in most varieties, but tinted green and yellow in a few. Exceptionally there may be six petals, and sometimes only four.

The petals attract bees and other insects which help in the pollinating processes. When pollination has been effected the petals drop to the ground.



### **Coot (*Fulica atra*)**

The coot can be distinguished from the similar Moorhen by its white beak and 'shield', and its entirely black body. Coots spend much of their time away from the bankside, diving for food, however, when walking on shore, note their big feet with lobed toes.

Breeding pairs aggressively are territorial but nonbreeding flocks can number in hundreds. Chick mortality occurs mainly due to starvation rather than predation as coots have difficulty feeding a large family of hatchlings on the tiny shrimp and insects that they collect.

The saying 'bald as a coot' actually refers to the white patch, or 'frontal shield', just above the bird's bill, rather than lack of feathers. Coots are also known locally as 'bald coots' and 'white-faced divers'.



### **Three Cornered Garlic (*Allium triquetrum*)**

Also known as Three-cornered Leek, this spring-flowering bulb carries 2cm long bell-like white flowers (10-18mm) on stems which are three-sided and about 30cm high. Along the centre of each petal is a narrow green line and between 3 and 15 flowers are arranged in a drooping one-sided umbel not unlike that of a Bluebell. The leaves are very markedly angled, coming three to a plant from the base. From April to June these flowers can be seen growing along roadsides, in hedges, banks and other shady places.

Although *Allium triquetrum* is a form of garlic, we usually use its close relation *Allium sativum* in cooking. However, our 'wild' garlic has long been given a reputation for 'keeping away the vampires' and was hung over doors and windows in times past to keep evil spirits away.



### Coltsfoot

In the wild, coltsfoot grows in a wide range of soils, from damp to dry, and thrives on bare or disturbed ground. The bright yellow daisy-like flowers appear early in spring before the leaves and are sometimes mistaken for dandelions, but the scaly crimson stems of coltsfoot clearly distinguish it, as do the large, crinkly, mid to dark green leaves with a silvery reverse that appear as the flowers fade. The flowers open in the day and close up again at night.

The name Coltsfoot refers to the horseshoe shaped leaves.



### Sea Holly

Although more closely related to the carrot than true Holly, the spiky, grey leaves of Sea-holly ensure that this plant lives up to its name. These leaves are covered with a waxy cuticle to help the plant retain water in the arid conditions in which it thrives. Found on coastlines and sand dunes, Sea-holly blooms between July and September, producing round, teasel-like heads of striking blue flowers.

The rounded, blue flower heads of Sea-holly make it look a bit like a thistle when it is in bloom. It has silvery-blue leaves with many prickly spikes on their edges.

In Elizabethan times, the flowers of Sea-holly were used as an aphrodisiac and were even mentioned by Shakespeare as such.



### Dog Violets

If you see a violet in the wild, it is most likely to be the Common dog-violet. This widespread plant lives happily in many different habitats, including woodland, grassland, heathland, hedgerows and old pasture. It flowers from April to June, but its flowers are not scented, unlike those of its cousin, the Sweet Violet, which was used as a perfume in Ancient Greece!

The purple flowers of the Common dog-violet resemble those of pansies. It has heart-shaped leaves and, unlike some other types of violet, has no scent.

This plant is very important for several fritillary butterflies, including the Small pearl-bordered, the pearl-bordered and the silver-washed fritillaries, because they lay their eggs on it.



### **Lamb's Tail Docking**

This is something that you may see around lambing time.

Docking a sheep's tail is the common practice of shortening the length of the tail. For practical reasons it is done to avoid fly strike and for cleanliness. Fly strike occurs when blow flies lay their eggs in soiled and wet wool, mostly around a soiled and moist rear end of a sheep. The emerging larvae (maggots) can cause health problems, including death.

However, tail docking is a contentious issue for some groups, for example The Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) recommends that docking should be avoided whenever possible.



### **Bolete**

We think this is a Larch Bolete which are generally only found where there are Larch trees. We saw this at Tarn Hows amongst some Larches and it seems to conform to the descriptions we have found for a Larch Bolete.

On the underside of the cap there is usually a spongy surface with pores, instead of the gills typical of mushrooms.



### **Street Artwork**

We saw this lovely piece of adaptive artwork on the junction of two roads. Just a flat piece of stone adorned with some shaped pebbles and surrounded by various plants making an attractive flower bed and also making us smile.



We hope that you have enjoyed reading these notes. We certainly enjoy putting them together although it a little harder these days as we have covered so much since we started.

If you would like to see any other notes from the series they are available on our website. Go to the '[About Us](#)' tab, then the '[Document Hub](#)' where you will see '[Public Area](#)', open this and you will see the '[interests](#)' tab and within this you will find '[Nature Notes](#)'.

You might think that with all that palaver that there is an attempt to hide these highly secretive notes from you, but we assure you that there are another 12 editions available for your perusal!

Until the next time, take care. All the best from Helen and Gordon.