

# WYMONDHAM NATURE GROUP



## SWIFT

Summer 2019



*Four-spotted chaser, Bob Carpenter (p8)*



*Sawfly with prey, John Bulpitt (p10)*



*Swallowtail, John Bulpitt (p9)*



*Bee orchid, Matthew Casey (p10)*

Norfolk Wildlife Trust: protecting Norfolk's wildlife and wild places.  
Wymondham Nature Group is a local group of Norfolk Wildlife Trust.  
Charity no. 208734

I trust you have all been enjoying Britain's wonderful wildlife across another sunny summer. Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership has been running Community Biodiversity Awards for fifteen years. The awards are a celebration of groups and individuals whose efforts lead to improvements for wildlife and encourage and support people to enjoy nature. I am proud to announce that this year, WyNG has won the group award for our local activities including conservation, education and raising awareness of local wildlife in our area. Between us the present committee has given over 80 years of voluntary work to Norfolk Wildlife Trust. I collected the award with Ann & Bob Carpenter. Jenny & Roger Jones, founder members of WyNG, also won an award for their work as churchyards surveyors. Jenny & Roger have been volunteers for NWT for nearly 30 years. Many of you know, and have worked with, Gemma Walker, NWT officer, who deservedly won an award for going "Above and Beyond" to inspire communities in urban and rural areas.

I look forward to seeing you at the next meeting in September.

*Jenny and Roger Jones, winners of the Churchyards and Cemeteries category, photos Keiron Tovell*



*Left to right, Bob Carpenter, Ann Roberts, Ann Carpenter, photo Keiron Tovell*



## The Insect Life At Tolls Meadow

John Bulpitt

Tolls Meadow is a little gem of a nature reserve! It is easy to overlook, which was the mistake I made when I first moved to Wymondham 2 years ago. But within the 5 acre reserve there are a variety of habitats: wet and dry meadow, woodland, the River Tiffey, brambles, nettles, thistles, dock leaves, hemlock and a variety of other plants loved by insects. Recording the extraordinary variety of insect life at Tolls Meadow has been one of my photographic projects this summer. I enjoy all genres of nature photography but insects are currently my number one interest. There are two reasons for this. First, the infinite variety, with over one million species worldwide of which 24,000 are to be found in the UK. After 20 years of insect photography, I can still regularly find a species (eg tortoise shieldbug)



Tolls meadow



Tortoise shieldbug



Spider and sailor beetles

or a behaviour (eg spider predating a mating pair of sailor beetles) that I've not seen before. A second reason for my enthusiasm is that the camera records details that are not visible to the naked eye. For example the lacewing has caught a tiny invertebrate, probably no more than 0.5 mm long.

This summer I have probably seen over 100 species at Tolls. Not all have been identified and even fewer photographed, but here are



Green lacewing with prey

some of my favourite Tolls Meadow pictures this year - so far!



Insects may not be your thing. But if you want to know more here are a few tips. Explore any given habitat, including your garden, when the temperature is at least 15 Celsius and probably no more than 21/22°C. Bug hunting can be particularly productive on a fine day following one or more very wet days. Wear insect repellent! Most insects are harmless but a few, such as horseflies, can pack a nasty punch. Walk slowly and stop regularly. Look underneath leaves especially where there is evidence that the plants have been eaten. Finally, invest in a good book. I particularly like "Insects of Britain and Ireland" by Paul D. Brock.

**Photography notes:** I use a Canon 5D 111 body with a Canon 100 mm image-stabilised macro lens. I often attach an extension tube enabling me to focus even closer. This is important as many insects can be 10 mm long or less (eg hawthorn beetles c.5mm). I sometimes use a flash gun set at low power (minus 2 stops).

Hawthorn beetles, JB



A few photos from the Open Day on a very sunny 30<sup>th</sup> June:



Meadow visitors, JB



Marsh orchids, JB



Nursery web spider, NC



Rust fungus on Meadowsweet (*Triphragmium ulmariae*), JB



Peacock caterpillars on nettle NC



## A Common Cause

Edith Pleasance

Early one morning in April, I opened the back door, stepped into my garden and was surprised at the sight of the hedge festooned with a myriad of spiders' webs. It was a damp, rather chilly dawn and I had noticed in the past that such weather conditions are a common cause of heavy overnight activity for garden spiders. My immediate thought was, there I had been sleeping in the warm comfort of my bed and these little creatures had been slaving away weaving these wonderful creations just below my bedroom window. I gave up counting them but as the hedge is about thirty feet in length there must have been hundreds.

So then I thought, how do these insects marshal themselves into such activity? Do they have a starting signal? Does a foreman spider give the all clear, such as "The birds are now all roosting so go to it boys (or girls)"? As far as I know there are few flies about at this time of year so what do they hope to entrap for a meal? After all they must be very hungry after their labours.

A watery sun put in an appearance a little later and I could not help but liken the display to illuminated jewels in miniature as the light caught the iridescence of the webs, which twinkled and shone, each one different, but of similar construction. All that was missing were the creators of these wonders - not a spider to be seen! Obviously, they were all taking a well-earned rest, snoring away under some leafy branch after their night-time exertions. By the following day, the webs had all but disappeared, probably rolled up and put away to be brought out for display on the next misty morning!

I was reminded of a piece I wrote some years ago about watching a spider in the garden, and here it is.....

### The Spider's Web

I pause to watch a garden spider  
 Spin its silken web  
 A masterpiece made by  
 The tiny mobile weaving loom.  
 Each gossamer thread of silver filigree  
 Leg-stabbed precisely into place  
 From the secret gluepot  
 Beneath its pin-cushion body.  
 Buttoned, herringbone velvet jacket  
 In every shade of brown  
 With four pairs of tailored matching  
 trousers.  
 I flatter it and call it "Henry".

A well-earned rest at centre wheel  
 Ever watchful for a passing morsel.  
 A miniature replica spider invades  
 Is repeatedly welcomed and cuddled  
 Before scuttling away.  
 Suddenly a hug and the intruder  
 Is ignominiously bundled into a larder  
 delicacy  
 I paused to watch a garden spider  
 And witnessed a nuptial.  
 I re-christen my spider "Henrietta"



Web, EP

Avid readers of Swift (with a good memory - it was Summer 2013) will recall Fiona Doonan's reference to purple toothwort in the grounds of Aberystwyth University - calling it the "botanical find of the day". This struck a chord with me as I had previously seen it in central Cambridge (see "The truth About Toothwort" - Swift, Autumn 2013). The Cambridge site is surrounded by colleges and it is well recorded that this was a deliberate introduction of a foreign plant. It seemed too much of a coincidence that Fiona found hers also in the grounds of a university.



Purple toothwort, RJ

Fast forward 5 years and I started a talk with a picture of Purple Toothwort, confident that no one would know what it was. How wrong could I be - a soft voice from the audience not only knew but also

offered that it could be seen in Norwich. No, not in the ground of UEA but very close! I am told that the Norfolk Flora Group does not believe it got there by itself. Abandoned by students? And, yes, it is there though I had to wait several months to see it.

## Bluebells and Tea

## Bob Carpenter and Anne Edwards

Sunday 19th May started out grey and dull. Well it is England! Making sandwiches started at 8.30 am in the Carpenter house together with scone making, cake cutting and a thousand other little jobs. We arrived at the hall around 12.45 pm and the team began to set out the hall. The food tables looked excellent and then it was just a matter of waiting for the walkers to return.



Preparations begin, BC

Walk leaders, John, Anne, Roger and Jenny, set out in staggered groups of about 10 eager participants.

The walk took us past Rosemary's meadow and the trial mowing strips. "May" looked particularly floriferous with its meadow buttercups, ox-eye daisy and variety of grasses. At the entrance to the wood we stopped to examine a hawthorn leaf which was playing host to the curious fungus *Monilia johnsonii* (haw goblet). At this stage in its lifecycle, the fungus was a grey patch which smelt almost identical to the hawthorn flowers. Apparently, it mimics the aroma of the blooms to attract flies which normally pollinate hawthorn, and which will inadvertently carry the fungus to the flowers. After pollination, *M. johnsonii* continues to grow on the fruit. When the haws fall to the floor, the fungus lives on, eventually pushing up small cup-like fruiting bodies. The cups ripen and fire spores into the air to land on the new leaves in spring.



*M. johnsonii*, AE

As we continued our walk, we looked at the regenerating coppiced blocks and the ground flora that relies on this ancient woodland management method. We admired the beautiful early purple orchids, an impressive patch of mysterious herb paris just coming into berry, cheerful low-growing yellow pimpernel and thyme-leaved speedwell, as well as a cluster of enigmatic twayblades. With so little rainfall over winter and spring, the wood was very dry. Orange-tips had sought out the sparse cuckoo flowers and multiple striking eggs were evident on individual plants.

Water avens drooped their delicate orange heads and powerful marsh thistles reached for the skies. In the "wild wood" areas, there were magnificent patches of sanicle and yellow archangel flowering in the shade. We continued north to where the bluebells, despite being slightly past their best, shimmered in the dappled afternoon light and wild garlic (ramsons) glowed aromatically. We saw large patches of ash seedlings,



Early purple orchids, AE



Herb paris, AE



Yellow pimpernel, AE



Sanicle AE



Bluebell, AE



Wild garlic, AE

growing in the sunny glades created by dieback of their beleaguered predecessors, and applauded the substantial, and apparently healthy, grove of East Anglian elms. After a brief examination of choke, the remarkable fungal symbiont of grass, it was time to head back to the hall for some well-earned refreshments.

After a few last-minute ticket sales, we ended up with 46 visitors. The afternoon made around £300 for WyNG which will be passed on to NWT in due course. Comments about the tea were all very favourable and we are very pleased that people enjoyed the walk and the tea. Very many thanks to all those who worked so hard to prepare the food or provided cakes, sandwiches and other items. Thanks also to our kitchen team, those who donated raffle prizes and our walk leaders. Finally, many thanks to all those who supported the afternoon by buying a ticket and coming to the event.



Afternoon tea, BC

## Out and About

Bob Carpenter

Whit Monday was quite cool and windy but three of us decided to visit NWT Upton Marsh on the floodplain of the River Bure near Acle. We walked the five miles round the site and only got rained on once! There was quite a lot about. Garden, sedge, reed and cetti's warblers were all heard but not seen. A cuckoo was calling from the trees in the Upton Fen area. We heard a bittern boom but did not see it. However, we did see several damselflies, including a female azure with the distinctive spur on the thorax and a large red with its characteristic black legs, as well as dragonflies including a female scarce chaser. There were butterflies about too and the twenty or more wall brown butterflies were particularly pleasing to see. Birds sightings included marsh harrier, common tern, chaffinch, reed bunting, linnet. Photos BC



Azure damselfly (female)



Large red damselfly (male)



Four-spotted chaser BC



Orange tip, BC



Wall brown, BC



Linnet, BC



Pochard, BC



**24<sup>th</sup> April:** A visit to Ashwellthorpe Lower Wood. Plenty of bluebells in flower, early purple orchids looking good and several large patches of herb paris. But who on earth was crashing through the undergrowth making such a noise? It turned out to be about 30 roe deer in line astern heading purposefully through the wood. They seemed not to have noticed us as we stood still and quiet as they passed, Roger Jones

**May** Cold, windy and dull with some useful rain on both the Bank Holidays. Occasional sunny days led to clear nights and late frosts

**1<sup>st</sup>:** Insects, which I believe to be buttercup micro moth, were doing some sort of mating display on herb paris. Evidently there are usually four males to every female, Mike Riches



Buttercup micro-moth, MR

**1<sup>st</sup>:** A blue tit has found an unusual nesting site on a telegraph pole and sparrows have moved into a blue tit box, Queens Rd, Hethersett, Anne Edwards



Telegraph pole nest, AE

**12<sup>th</sup>:** Swifts arrived in Hethersett today, AE **17<sup>th</sup>:** Swifts arrived in Wymondham, Janet Stevens

**18<sup>th</sup>:** Australian monarch butterfly in our local park, Gail Kelly, Brisbane



Australian monarch, GK

**18<sup>th</sup>:** A good selection of moth caterpillars in Longs Wood, Wreningham today, including pale brindled beauty and mottled umber, Anne Edwards

**18<sup>th</sup>:** I was delighted to find a pair of mating lily beetles in my garden in Wymondham. The head gardener was less enthusiastic as they can cause massive damage to lilies and fritillaries, John Bulpitt



[Red lily beetles are non-native invaders and should not be encouraged! Ed]



Pale brindled beauty, AE



Mottled umber, AE



Bullfinch, JS

**19<sup>th</sup>:** For the first time in my garden, a pair of bullfinches came to my damson tree and stayed for a while picking off small insects. One of the benefits of not spraying! Janet Stevens, Wymondham



Great tit nest, TR

**20<sup>th</sup>** Sparrows are nesting in my blue tit box. It is a tight fit! Colin Ward, Hethersett

**21<sup>st</sup>:** An unusual place for a nest! A great tit is nesting in a roll of barbed wire in my garden, Tracey Rayner, Surlingham



Sparrow nest, AE



Brassy long-horn, AE

22<sup>nd</sup>: Brassy long-horn (*Nemophora metallica*) and orange tip eggs hatching on garlic mustard in the garden, AE

24<sup>th</sup>: Brown argus in the garden, AE



Brown argus, AE

25<sup>th</sup>: Whilst walking along Suckling Lane in Hethersett, my attention was drawn to a frenetic burst of activity in the bramble-covered grassy bank running alongside the path. On closer inspection, I could see masses of common shrews squeaking and scampering amongst the vegetation. Some disappeared into a



Orange tip egg and caterpillar, AE

burrow within a tree root, only to reappear as a stampede. It was hard to believe that such tiny creatures could make such a racket. I wondered whether a nest had been disturbed or whether these were young making their first foray into the wide world, AE

24<sup>th</sup>: Orange-tip egg laying on honesty in the garden, AE

26<sup>th</sup>: There were some magnificent dragonfly (chaser?) exuviae at NWT Sparham pools. There were also swarms of mayflies performing their mating dance, AE

Dragonfly exuvium, AE



Orange tip, AE

27<sup>th</sup>: A few snaps from our walk in the Middlesex Fells, (Massachusetts) today: A pink lady's slipper orchid, "The Queen of the Fells" and an eastern tent moth caterpillar communal nest. The newly hatched caterpillars initiate the construction of a silk tent soon after emerging. The larvae are very social - they aggregate at the tent throughout the larval stage, expanding the tent each day to accommodate their increasing size. They emerge from the tent to feed, add silk to the structure, move away to feed; and then return, Lucy Foulston



Lady's slipper orchid, LF



Eastern tent moth caterpillars, LF

31<sup>st</sup>: I spotted this impressive drinker moth caterpillar whilst walking along the path by the Yare at UEA. It was resting on cleavers, of which there were plenty. The moth gets its name from the habits of the caterpillar which is supposed to have a liking for drops of dew, Nicola Cooke



Drinker moth caterpillar, NC

**June** June began with a scorching weekend. Mid-month, the drought broke with vengeance and there was a week of heavy downpours and the inevitable flooding! The month end was more settled and predictable

**1<sup>st</sup>:** There are red kites over my car park in Thame, not far from where they were re-introduced alongside the A40 at Stokenchurch in 1989, Clare Clark. Red Kites photos by Simon Powell



Red kites, Simon Powell

**2<sup>nd</sup>:** My first visit of the year to Strumpshaw Fen. I sensed that many species were a little late, but we were able to photograph swallowtails near to the visitors' centre. The golden-bloomed grey longhorn beetle was a first ever sighting for me. Neither had I ever seen a green shieldbug egg-laying before, John Bulpitt



Golden-bloomed grey longhorn beetle, JB

Swallowtail, JB

Green shieldbug, JB

**3<sup>rd</sup>:** Armies of young tits including blue, great and coal in the garden and **4<sup>th</sup>:** A young sparrow makes an emergency landing, Anne Edwards, Hethersett

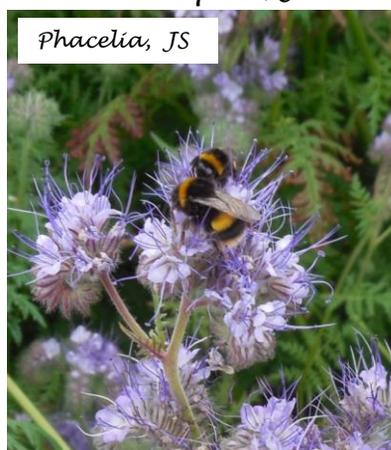


Blue tits, AE



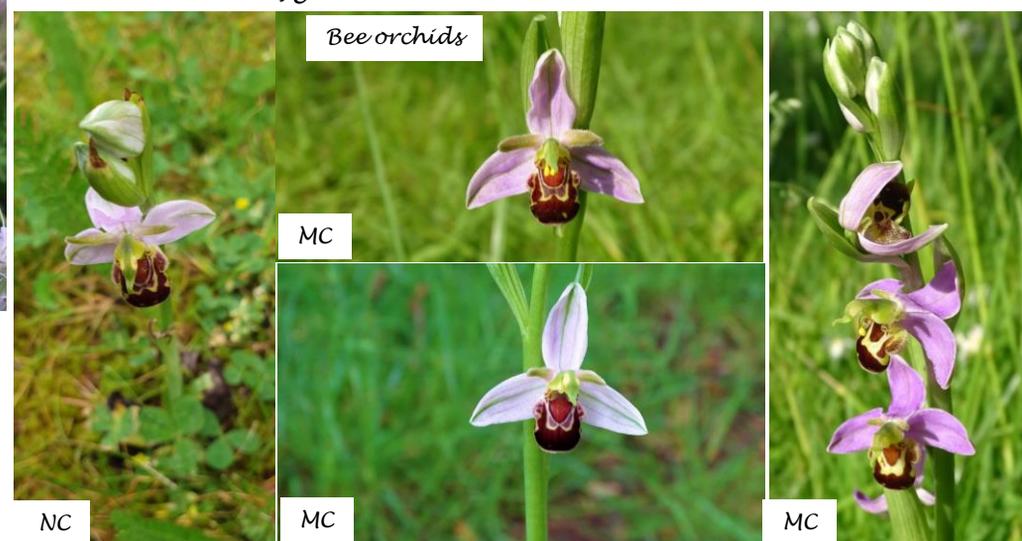
Sparrow, AE

**5<sup>th</sup>:** Bees are going mad on Phacelia on my Wymondham allotment plot, Janet Stevens



Phacelia, JS

**5<sup>th</sup>:** Bee orchids galore!  
At John Innes, Nicola Cooke; In Hethersett, Matt Casey; In Wicklewood, John Beckett



Bee orchids

MC

MC

MC

NC

**7<sup>th</sup>:** Hummingbird hawkmoth on Valerian in my front garden, before rain set in later in the day! Jane Hardy

13<sup>th</sup>: Marsh orchid at Morley and eight spikes on Tolls Meadow; common spotted orchid in Wicklewood John Beckett

14<sup>th</sup>: We've had a blue jay nest in our rhododendron tree for the last few weeks. The adults are extremely protective and have been dive-bombing us whenever we get too close. They're very intimidating! Today the two little birds have left the nest for some test exploration under the watchful gaze of their parents. Apparently this is normal behaviour for them and means that they will full fledge in a few days...and we can get our garden back!



Orchid, Morley, JB,



Orchid, Wicklewood, JB



15<sup>th</sup>: Ash leaf gall in Hethersett. Norfolk gall recorder, Anne Hickley identified it as *Aceria fraxinicola*, a mite, AE

*A. fraxinicola*, AE

Blue jay, LF

15<sup>th</sup>: Just a few observations from a visit to Hethel churchyard today, AE:

Four-spotted chaser, AE



A scorpion fly tucks into a chrysalis, AE



Pyramid orchids galore!, AE



Yellow rattle, AE



Common malachite beetle, AE



Burnished brass, AE



Painted lady, JB

16<sup>th</sup>: My first sighting of painted lady butterflies this year. About 6 were nectaring in my

garden in Wymondham. This individual is a bit the worse for wear, but that is hardly surprising as painted ladies migrate from Southern Europe and North Africa during the late spring. The migration of the monarch butterfly is well documented but in many ways the story of the painted lady butterfly is just as extraordinary, John Bulpitt



Toadlet, AE



Bullfinch (m), AE



Bullfinch (f), AE

25<sup>th</sup>: Stormy weather prompted a mass exit of tiny toads from the John Innes pond today, AE 29<sup>th</sup>: Pair of bullfinches, Bawburgh, AE

**July** The weather continued to be tennis-friendly! Mostly warm and dry but often cloudy. Rainy mid-month followed by a week of record highs (>30°C!!!) Nights of muggy sleeplessness gave way to dramatic lightning and deafening thunder.

Bee orchid, JB



2<sup>nd</sup>: At this time of year my blood pressure tends to rise when I see so many wild flower habitats destroyed by over-zealous groundsmen in public places. So I was delighted to see a group of bee orchids in the centre of Cemetery Lane car park. The rest of the area had been mown recently but somebody had obviously taken the trouble to protect the orchids, John Bupitt

4<sup>th</sup>: There is a pyramid of young starlings on top of fatballs on my picnic table and I was charmed by this lovely scene of a mullein moth caterpillar nestling (and nibbling away) in the centre of a great mullein in the garden, Jane Hardy, Wymondham

Starlings, JH



Mullein moth caterpillar, JH

5<sup>th</sup>: Lesser stag beetle in the garden today, AE, Hethersett



Lesser stag beetle, AE



Pyramid orchid, John Beckett,

6<sup>th</sup>: A record 604 pyramid orchids in Hethel churchyard, AE



Marbled white, RE

9<sup>th</sup>: Marbled white seen on a dog walk today, Robin Edwards, Welwyn Garden City

14<sup>th</sup>: Blue tit feeding frenzy, Robin Edwards, Welwyn Garden City 17<sup>th</sup>: Gasteruption jaculator, a parasitic wasp, spotted in Ponthir, S. Wales. It lays its eggs, via the long ovipositor, on the body of larvae of solitary bees and wasps, Anne Edwards 20<sup>th</sup>: This odd-looking moth was identified by



Blue tits, RE



Gasteruption jaculator, AE

local expert, Matthew Casey, as being a female ghost moth for which metamorphosis had gone awry. Part of the pupa case can



Deformed ghost moth, Eloise Mcgregor

still be seen and the wings are absent, Janet Stevens

23<sup>rd</sup>: Lots of silver washed fritillaries and STOP PRESS: Report of purple emperor female in Ashwellthorpe Lower Wood, AE

**May 2019 Conservation in Norfolk's Farmland - Mike Edwards, Norfolk Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)**

FWAG is a farmer-led conservation charity and Mike covered a wide range of issues including the effects that changing farming practices have had on wildlife. In post-war Britain, there was a need to increase food production; cultivation areas were increased, and pesticides were widely adopted. Agricultural intensification continued throughout the 20th century bringing widespread alterations to traditional practices. There was less hay making and more silage production; there were declines in the number of mixed farms; there was a switch from spring to autumn sown cereals; there were fewer overwintered stubble fields and less weed seed as herbicides became widely available; new pesticides resulted in fewer insects; an increase in combine efficiency meant less spilt corn and larger machinery demanded bigger fields. These rapid changes have had, and continue to have, devastating effects on wildlife species including birds such as corn bunting, tree sparrow, lapwing and skylark and insects like butterflies and wild bees. Norfolk FWAG is currently working with farmers and landowners to increase biodiversity throughout the countryside. There are projects to link and expand existing habitats, plant more hedges and trees, introduce wildflower mixes to grassland and improve ponds. Mike also discussed future possibilities for our farmed environment. He described how climate change and the need to reduce carbon dioxide, along with consumer dietary trends and advances in technology will all be drivers for change in agricultural practices to produce a healthy and sustainable environment. What began as a rather depressing message of nature in crisis finished on a spirit-lifting note and a stimulating question and answer session completed a most informative and enjoyable evening.



*Goldfinch on knapweed, farmland, ME*

Meetings and Events

@WymondhamNatureGroup



**Indoor Meetings**

**August:** No indoor meetings.

**12<sup>th</sup> Sept:** Decomposing in Norfolk- Tony Leech

**10<sup>th</sup> Oct:** Goannas, gum trees and galahs - Pam and Mike Merrick

**14<sup>th</sup> Nov:** Up the garden path - Anne Edwards

**12<sup>th</sup> Dec:** Botswana's Okavanga: Africa's greatest wetland - Nick Acheson

Meetings are held on Thursdays at the Town Green Centre (behind the Methodist Church, formerly Cornelius Tipples' Bombazine Factory), Wymondham, starting at 7.30 pm, admission £2.00.

**Practical Conservation**

Ashwellthorpe Lower Wood: Coppicing will recommence on Sunday Sept 30<sup>th</sup>. Contact Anne Edwards 01603 812309 or email [Wymondham@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:Wymondham@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk)

Hethel Churchyard: Mowing and raking work parties will take place on Sunday August 19<sup>th</sup>, August 26<sup>th</sup> and Sept 2<sup>nd</sup>. Contact Anne Edwards as above for more information

Tolls Meadow: Work will resume in the autumn. Contact John Beckett

**In This Issue:**

Chair's Report	P2	Bluebells and Tea	P5,6
The Insect Life at Tolls Meadow	P2,3	Out and About	P6
Tolls Meadow Open Day	P4	Nature Notes	P7-11
Common Cause	P4	Meetings Reports	P12
Purple Toothwort	P5	Meetings and Events	P12

Please send articles, letters, photographs etc. for publication in Swift by email: [Wymondham@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:Wymondham@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk), by post: Anne Edwards, 6 Queens Rd, Hethersett NR9 3DB or hand at one of the indoor meetings. Swift is produced in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. Next deadline for submission of articles is the end of October.