



*Preston on Stour*  
**A VILLAGE FOR NATURE**

## **A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR**

A very happy new year to all, and thank you for being part of the Village for Nature Project.

What a year it has been. For many 2020 has been truly awful with so much of our normal life denied to us, and who would have thought, that yet again we are looking forward to another spring in lockdown.

There has been a bonus however in that we have more time to stand and stare and make a closer connection with nature.

As Chris Packham said at the beginning of BBC's recent Winterwatch

*" We discovered we could use wildlife to put a smile on our face.*

*Many people went out into their garden and other green spaces, and connected with nature. They looked at those things they had previously hardly noticed, they listened to those things they had previously hardly heard, and it gave them a massive lift. The best bit is that beauty and nature, are just there beyond our doorsteps waiting to make us happy."*

**The Village for Nature Project has helped many of us do just that, so now is a good time to review the successes of our first year and look forward to the coming year.**

## OUR AIMS FOR THE YEAR.

1. List And Monitor Our Flora And Fauna
2. Champion four iconic species.
3. Establish a nectar rich area on the village green
4. Create a nature map of the village

### 1. LIST AND MONITOR OUR FLORA AND FAUNA

#### Report by Ron Hoe

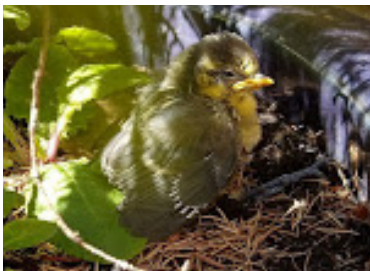
#### Cluster

Cluster the software we use to record sightings, and share with each other has given us a great start with this aim and without a doubt it has been one of our biggest successes. 31 members have signed up and contributed 211 posts.

Looking back at all of these postings (and I thoroughly recommend you do ) it is amazing to see just how much we discovered. It has included

Bats - Birds(12 species) - Butterflies (11 species) - Animals (8 species) - Insects (11 species) - Wildflowers and fungi.

Amazing! Below is a small selection from the 2020 posts



Muriel Taylor-Marty.



Ron Hoe



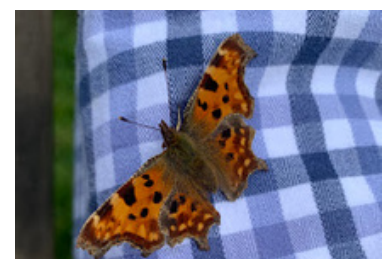
Caroline Grellier



Philip Grellier



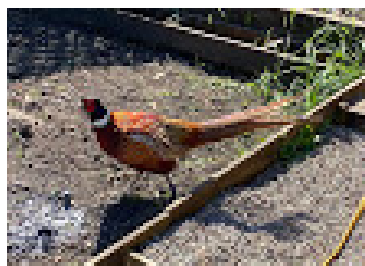
Graham Dunn



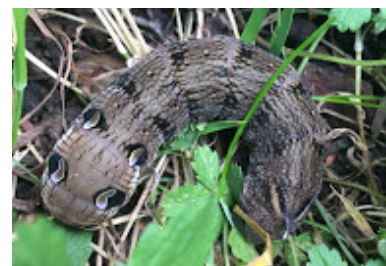
Zoe Gilbey



Margaret and Brock



Lizzi Shaw



Hana Beswick

**Please don't stop letting us know what you're noticing and continue to share with us on Cluster. Let us see if we can look and listen and record even more in 2021.**

## **2. CHAMPION FOUR ICONIC SPECIES.**

**HEDGEHOGS (Margaret Brocklehurst), BUTTERFLIES (Richard Brocklehurst),  
FROGS (Ron Hoe) AND SWIFTS (Andy Main)**

### **HEDGEHOGS**

**Report by Margaret Brocklehurst**



This has been a great year for hedgehogs in Preston. Only two years ago there had been no reported hedgehog sightings in Preston for at least ten years. Last year there were several individuals seen and one caught on camera on a regular run through our garden at number 11.

Even more exciting was a pair, hopefully a male and female, seen at Park Farm.

As well as Brock and I, those reporting hedgehogs or evidence of them were Sue Waller, Mary and Martin George, Dudley Holmes and Carole Sambrook Hurst, Lindsey Kid, Ron Hoe, Michael Wyldbore-Smith, Clare Seccombe, and Will and Jane Spencer.

Many people requested hedgehog houses but our trial with one in the garden has had no take up and my feeling is that they are really aimed at urban hogs that might not have access to rich undergrowth as we have around our patch.

The feeding station was much more successful and even when loaded with chicken flavoured cat biscuits seemed to be cat proof so hopefully we might make more of those this year.

Many gardens have been adapted to include hedgehog highways and people should be able to recognise the signs of a visit – the characteristic poo!

Our hedgehogs should now be hibernating so please continue to take extra care when digging near leaf heaps or making bonfires. Maybe this year we will see some youngsters.



Hedgehog Highway



Hedgehog Poo

**Any questions or comments are welcome on cluster or [prestonbrocks@gmail.com](mailto:prestonbrocks@gmail.com)  
and dont forget to record your sightings on Cluster.**

## BUTTERFLIES

### Report by Richard Brocklehurst (Brock)

Last year the weather was quite kind, especially in early spring and we had a pretty good array of butterflies visiting our gardens. These were the different species spotted in our garden all illustrated below. the large and small whites, marbled white, brimstone, small tortoiseshell, gatekeeper, speckled wood, red admiral, peacock, painted lady, comma, holly blue, meadow brown, orange tip, skipper and purple hairstreak.

Did you see any others?



Large White



Small white



Marbled white



Brimstone



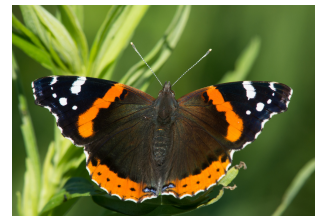
Small Tortoiseshell



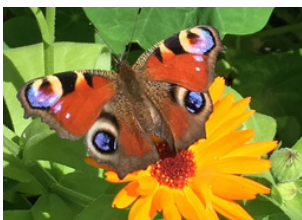
Gatekeeper



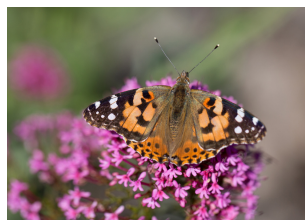
Speckled wood



Red admiral



Peacock



Painted lady



Comma



Holly blue



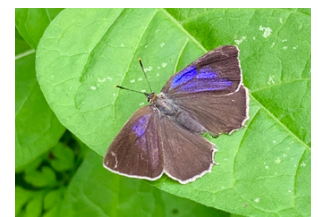
Meadow brown



Orange tip



Skipper



Purple hairstreak

Sadly another butterfly spotting year is over, but hopefully there are lots of insects hibernating and sitting out the winter ready to reappear and brighten up our gardens again. Now is the time to be thinking about growing insect friendly plants for this year. Due to climate change, it has been reported that butterflies usually only found in the south of the country are appearing much further north, so keep your eyes peeled in the spring! I hope that more of us will take part in the Garden Butterfly Survey this year.

This is only for garden sightings and is vital in monitoring how things may be changing. The *butterfly-conservation.org* site has lots of information for identifying and recording butterflies and moths, please do have a look.

**Any questions or comments are welcome on cluster or [prestonbrocks@gmail.com](mailto:prestonbrocks@gmail.com) and dont forget to record your sightings on Cluster.**

## **FROGS**

### **Report by Ron Hoe**

We have two ponds at Lower Cottage, both regular breeding sites for the Common Frog. Last year I counted over 20 frogs mating and spawning. One of the things I look forward to in the spring is the loud croaking of the male frogs attracting mating partners. They started croaking last year on the 12th February (so not long to go this year) By 9th March we had the first frogspawn and by mid June the tadpoles had become froglets.



I was delighted when three of the village children, Ruby Beswick, Edith and Jacob Dunn became interested in frogs and decided to rear some from tadpoles to froglets in their own garden's. Thanks, Ruby, Edith and Jacob perhaps you would like to do that again this year. Anyone else who would like to join in would be very welcome.

### **A Few facts about frogs**

Adult frogs emerge from their overwintering sites in early spring and head straight to a pond to breed. Males have a single vocal sac under the chin and may 'piggy back' to the pond on a female. Clumps of spawn (eggs) are laid in ponds anytime from January (in south-west England) onwards. Depending on local weather conditions, two to four weeks later tadpoles will hatch out. As they grow the tadpoles become faintly speckled with gold/brown, which distinguishes them from Common Toad tadpoles which are black. They feed on algae and water fleas. After around 16 weeks the tadpoles start to grow back legs, followed by front legs. When they have fully absorbed their tails they leave the water as tiny froglets, usually in early summer but sometimes as late as September.

Frogs spend the winter sheltering under rocks, in compost heaps or at the bottom of ponds. They don't hibernate as such, and may take advantage of milder patches of weather to come out and forage.

**Any questions or comments are welcome on cluster or [ronhoe@me.com](mailto:ronhoe@me.com).**

**Don't forget to record your sightings on Cluster please.**

## SWIFTS

### Report By Andy Main



The swift is such an amazing iconic bird but it's not good news regarding the ones that visit Preston I'm afraid. Up until just a few years ago we had a number of houses in which they nested and it was wonderful to see them flying down the main street screaming as they went. Last year only a few were seen flying over Preston but sadly none that we know of stayed to nest. There were also noticeably less house martins, although a few lucky people in the village had nests and saw the young birds fledge.

The swifts usually arrive in late April or early May only staying long enough to breed and leave again in late July or early August. Migration is believed to be triggered by the lack of insects high in the air. They will fly back through France and Spain to Africa, south of the Sahara, where they follow the rains to take advantage of rapid changes in insect populations before returning here again this spring.

Let's hope that we can attract some swifts to stay this year.

### Amazing facts about swifts

- Swifts have one of the longest migrations in the world, travelling a 14,000 miles round trip every year between the UK and Africa for the winter.
- Our' swifts are only 'British birds' for a quarter of their lives (three months per year) – the rest of the time they're African
- They almost never land – except at their nest sites – doing everything on the wing, including mating and sleeping.
- They drink by gliding over smooth water and taking sips
- Once a young swift launches itself off on its very first ever flight, that's it, it doesn't return to the nest and its no longer cared for by the parents, and may well head off to Africa almost straight away.

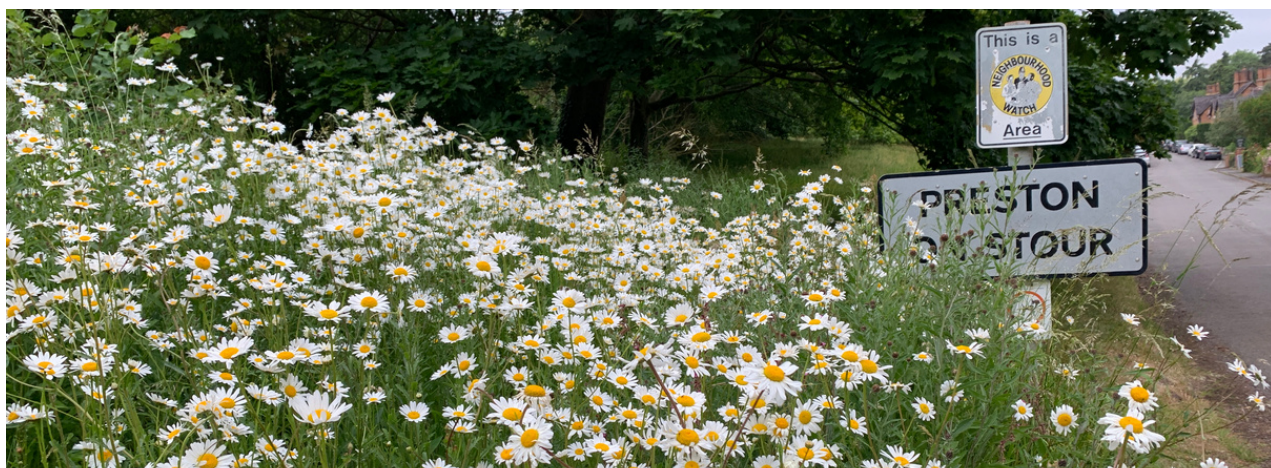
"While over them, shrill shrieked in his fierce glee  
The swift with wings and tail as sharp and narrow  
As if the bow had flown off with the arrow."

*Edward Thomas - Extract from Haymaking*



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### 3. ESTABLISH A NECTAR RICH AREA ON THE VILLAGE GREEN TO ENCOURAGE BUTTERFLIES AND OTHER POLLINATORS.



Wild flowers and pollinators are in rapid decline. The loss of insects has far-reaching consequences for entire ecosystems as insects provide a food source for many birds, amphibians, bats and reptiles, while plants rely on insects for pollination.

These are some of the shocking statistics.

- A third of bumblebees are listed as conservation priorities
- 70% of butterfly species are in decline
- The abundance of moths has decreased by nearly 30%.
- Over 97% of meadows have been lost since the 1930s.
- The floral richness of verges has declined by nearly 20% since 1990

PEG is concerned about this state of nature and wants to encourage our Parish to make a difference.

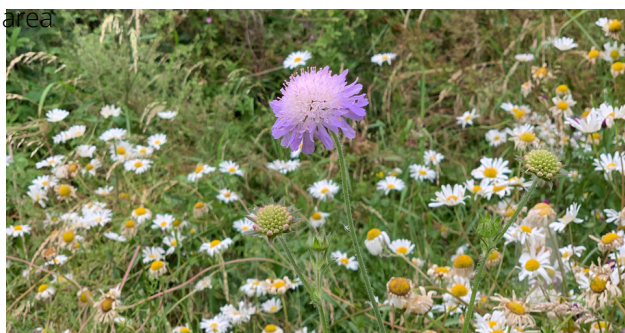
Our first small step in April 2015 was to established a wildflower patch at the entrance to the village and then expanded it slightly in 2018.



2015 - Preparing the first wild flower patch area



2018 - Working party extending the wildflower area



The fruits of our labour



Last year we wanted to do something on a grander scale with one of the village greens (the one on the left as you enter the village) becoming a nectar rich area. We were delighted when the Parish Council granted us permission .

We cut pathways through the grass and let the rest of the grass grow.

We were delighted with the way it turned out and the response it got from the majority of people. Towards the end of the year to help establish the opinion of the village about the project we delivered a questionnaire to every house.

We asked what residents thought and if they would be happy for the same to happen next year.

Of the 53 houses in the village, 41 returned the questionnaire. A clear majority (75%) liked what we did and said they would be happy for the same to happen again.

The good news is that the Parish Council have now also given it there blessing.

Last year the haymaking part of the project was later than we had hoped, and our intention this year will be for the mowing to take place around the middle of August, and Coronavirus willing we will make it a PEG Village for Nature event with as many people as possible joining in.



March 2020 The first cut



Late July



Early October - Haymaking



## **SPECIAL OFFER**

### **Why Not Create Your Own Wildflower Garden.**

It would be great if you would be interested in a packet of seeds for your own garden. The mix was bought last year and worked well at number 11 and also behind the pigsties near the footpath. All you need is a patch of relatively clear soil.

Interested?

**Then please let Margaret know on [prestonbrocks@gmail.com](mailto:prestonbrocks@gmail.com), text to phone 07933203197 or call the landline 450710.**

## **4. CREATE A NATURE MAP OF THE VILLAGE.**

### **Report by Ron Hoe**

Sorry to report that there has no progress on this aim but I hope there will be some progress in the coming year

## **OTHER PROJECTS**

### **Mayday Plant Sale 2020**



This was a small sale of plants which were home grown and particularly good for pollinators. Thank you to all who contributed. The sale made a grand £41 which will go towards planting even more in the future.

## **AND NOW A FEW THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS**



This weekend why not spend an hour recording your local birds, and contribute to the biggest citizen science survey in the UK. The Big Garden Birdwatch has been taking place for over 40 years and aims to monitor the changes in local populations of birds across the UK. Taking part is simple – choose any hour between 29th and 31st January and count the birds you see in your garden. (To avoid double-counting, record the highest

number of each bird species you see at any one time rather than a running total). Once your hour is up you can submit your results online or by post. The details and more information can be found at [rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/](http://rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/). Results from the survey help the RSPB to understand the challenges faced by wildlife and to direct future conservation efforts. Plus, it's a great way to interact with your local wildlife.

## Winter Watchlist

Winter brings with it a whole host of magical wildlife, and the BBC's Winter Watch team has put together a list of things to look out for on your daily walk.

There's something for everyone to look out for, listen to, or even smell!

### **PEG's winter challenge to you.**

See how many of these you can find and post on Cluster. Good hunting.

#### **Robin singing - Easy**

Robins are one of the few birds that sing over winter, because they defend their territories all year round. They'll even sing after dark under streetlights, long after every other songbird has settled down for the night. Compared to the loud, rich and varied song that they sing in spring, the winter song is much weaker and more melancholy.

#### **Corvid roost - Easy**

Corvids, such as jackdaws, rooks and crows can be seen gathering in spectacular numbers at roost sites throughout the country. The roosts are dominated by mainly juvenile and other non-breeding birds. This gathering is thought to act as a way to exchange information about the best feeding sites in the area.

#### **First Snowdrops - Easy**

Snowdrops are small white flowers that will start to emerge throughout January to March. Despite the cold weather they are one of the first to bloom showing a sign that Spring is not far round the corner.

#### **Smell of gorse flowers - Easy**

In a bid to avoid predation on its seeds during the spring and summer, gorse flowers all year round, even in the depths of winter. Its flowers have a wonderful, distinctive, coconut scent.

#### **Jelly ear/oyster fungus - Easy**

Jelly ear fungus is common across the UK and grows on deadwood in damp, shady corners.

#### **Hazel flowers - Medium**

Distributed all over the UK, the first hazel flowers of the year typically appear in January, before the leaves. Hazel trees are 'monoecious' which means male and female flowers occur on one tree. Look out for the yellow male catkins glowing in the low winter sunlight, and then get up close and search for the beautiful and tiny pink female flowers.

#### **Great spotted woodpecker drumming - Medium**

Great spotted woodpeckers will visit peanut feeders during the winter. You may start to hear them drumming on trees. The thumping sound echoes out across the forest and is the start of the woodpeckers establishing breeding territories and trying to attract a mate.

#### **Winter migrant gatherings: fieldfare, redwing, brambling, waxwing - Medium**

In winter the UK gets an influx of winter migrants that are often seen together in groups. They come here usually to escape the colder harsher weather of further north. Fieldfare, redwings and waxwings can be seen feeding ferociously on berry trees, while bramblings can be seen in large mixed flocks often with chaffinches as they search the forest floor for seeds.

Redwing and fieldfare are both a similar size and shape to song thrushes. You can tell them apart using the bold cream-coloured stripe across the redwing's eyebrow, and its rusty red underwing. Fieldfares on the other hand, have white underwings and a grey head.

#### **Foxes screeching at night - Medium**

For foxes, winter is all about mating. Their eerie, far carrying sounds pierce through the cold, still air as males defend territories and vixens call for their attention.

### **Overwintering insects - Medium**

Ladybirds huddle together for warmth in sheltered spots such as inside empty seed heads, under bark or in forgotten corners of houses and sheds, often congregating in large numbers. Most British butterfly species spend the winter tucked away in a larval form, but there are five that overwinter in a dormant state as adults; red admiral, comma, small tortoiseshell, brimstone and peacocks. Solitary bees and wasps seal themselves away inside hollow plant stems, underground chambers or in bug hotels.

### **Winter moth - Medium**

The winter moth is one of the few moths that can cope with the low temperatures of winter and can be seen as adults from October to January. The males and females look very different though as unlike the male, the females of the species can not fly, having only stumpy wings. To attract a mate then, the female must crawl up a tree, instead of fly. They then give off pheromones that attract the males to them.

### **Mistle thrush guarding berries - Hard**

During the winter, mistle thrushes exhibit an unusual behaviour; guarding berry bushes, including holly, yew and mistletoe. This tactic should hopefully insure they have a larder full of berries ready to eat all through the toughest winter months.

### **Glue crust fungus - Hard**

Widespread across the UK but more common on the damper west coast. Glue crust fungus (*Hymenochaete corrugata*) has a very clever way of travelling - it traverses the canopies of hazel trees by glueing branches together! As well as allowing the fungus to spread, its welding abilities allow it to 'catch' dead branches and other woody material in the canopy, and effectively store it there to feed on.

## **JOINT PROJECT CO-ORDINATORS *Ron Hoe & Margaret Brocklehurst***

### **FINALLY**

We wish you all to be safe and covid free.

Please don't stop letting us know about your observations or any plans you have to help to enrich our environment. Please contact us via the various emails and telephone numbers already listed.

### ***THIS IS A PRESTON ON STOUR ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP PROJECT Committee***

Ron Hoe - Chair   Margaret Brocklehurst - Vice Chair  
Phil Grellier - Treasurer   Jill Dyll - Secretary  
Richard Brocklehurst - Diane Hoe - Andy Main

You have received this newsletter because you filled in our questionnaire. If you do not want to receive subsequent newsletters please let us know at the following email - [ronhoe@me.com](mailto:ronhoe@me.com)