

## e-Newsletter Issue Two

May 2021 Welcome to the second issue of our e-Newsletter. We had an overwhelmingly positive

reaction to the first; thank you to everybody for your reading, 'clicking' and feedback! We're very keen to make sure every issue is a good and interesting read and welcome ideas for your thoughts on what we should include and how we can develop and improve. 

## Reversing the loss of natural habitats in the heart of South Stoke (John Lindley)

Keen eyed villagers will have noticed that Chilterns to the east. A combined effort of there has been a lot of work going on in the channel clearing with the residents of

Woodland area to the left of the footpath towards the Bogey Hole. A medieval site, originally producing fish for the monks of Eynsham Abbey, it had effectively been left to dilapidate. No more! Will and Theresa Higgs, who settled in the village in 2018, ramped-up work last year on this part of their land, with two main aims: to re-instate the old fish ponds and drainage channels on the property, and to improve the habitat to encourage a greater diversity of wildlife and wildflowers. A large digger has been used to clear out the various channels and ponds that

naturally fill from springs charged by the

risk. Minnows and other small fish have already been seen in the ponds and channels, and there have been frequent visits from Kingfishers and Herons. As early as last Autumn, at least four different species of Dragonfly were seen "prospecting" the area and laying eggs.

Fishponds, Lower Farm and Ashmount

House has reconnected the ponds to the

Thames. As a result, water flow has been

improved, and the water level has dropped

by about 50cm, resulting in reduced flood





insects.

All images courtesy of John Lindley and with thanks to Will and Theresa Higgs At the same time, a lot of work was done to create a wider range of wildlife habitats. courtship display. Fallen trees, that were choking the habitat, together with some of the canopy have been opened up to allow more light and access. Piles of logs will be left dotted around the wood as a habitat for

The benefits have been seen already, with a great show of Loddon Lillies this Spring. We are very fortunate to have such a Several bird species are also present in diverse wildlife site in our village and the increased numbers, including Nuthatches, work done here has already had a very Wood Warblers and Tawny Owls. The longpositive effect. It will be interesting to see established pair of Buzzards that nest here how it develops further in the coming years. 

invertebrates and small overwintering

(with thanks to Simon Booker)

mammals.

have also been seen performing their aerial More recently, a new fence has been erected along the property boundary and 1,000 native British hedge plants have been put in, with a view to eventually masking the fence line and offering more habitat for small birds, mammals and

The pursuit of nature's perfection I used to draw pictures of Ospreys and Owls as a kid! Something about the perfect wing shape and regal pride of a raptor (bird of prey) fascinate me. Today, capturing that beauty is my passion. Here's where I am going with this ..... Natural Selection has created the great variety of birds we see today and this is especially true of 'the specialists'. As an Engineer, the Barn Owl is a fascinating piece of biotechnology. Asymmetrically

## turbulence! A hunting machine for their diet of small rodents in grassland. However, the 'special stuff' comes with an 'Achilles heel'! Those perfect slow flight feathers are not waterproof and rain is their nemesis. Too much rain & Owls cannot hunt.

arranged ears to judge distance. A large wing to body size ratio for effortless gliding and

feathers with noise reducing fringes on leading and trailing edges for zero sound and

The Kingfisher is a perfect aerodynamic diving machine, each plunge is a perfect Tom Daly

the crazy colour scheme .... Kingfishers may look bright blue, but actually, they are brown

If you want to see a particular bird you first have to find them. That also means study and

Kingfishers are often out on the Thames the challenge is learning how to see them! Most

understanding. Last year I spent hours at 6am watching Barn Owl hunts tracking around the

splash less 10! The Japanese Bullet train was designed to mirror the Kingfisher profile. As for

(there is no blue pigment in their feathers). Their feathers scatter only blue light by a process

called the "Tyndall Effect". So the classic iridescent Blue Kingfisher is one of nature's magical

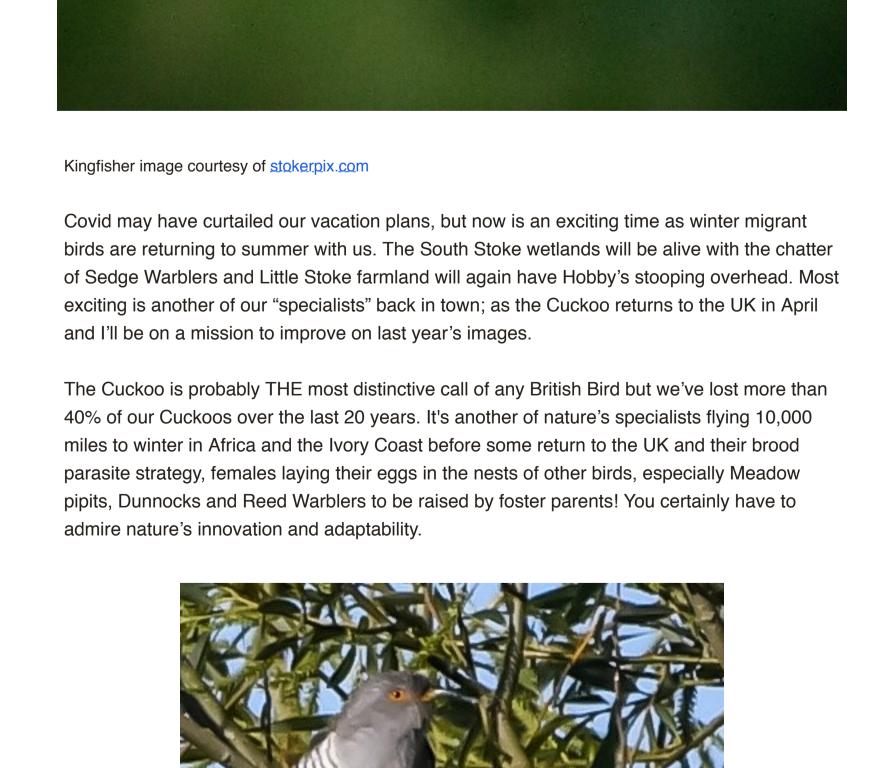
importantly, you will always hear a Kingfisher before you see it. So listen out for a sound like a small boy with a tiny whistle! A 5" Kingfisher can skim two feet off the surface of the water at 25 miles an hour. So start scanning the far river bank for a flash of blue (well brown!) and if you see one - don't let it out of your sight. It's often en route to a fishing perch where they may stay for many minutes "watching". They also hover and for me, that is right up there in my top

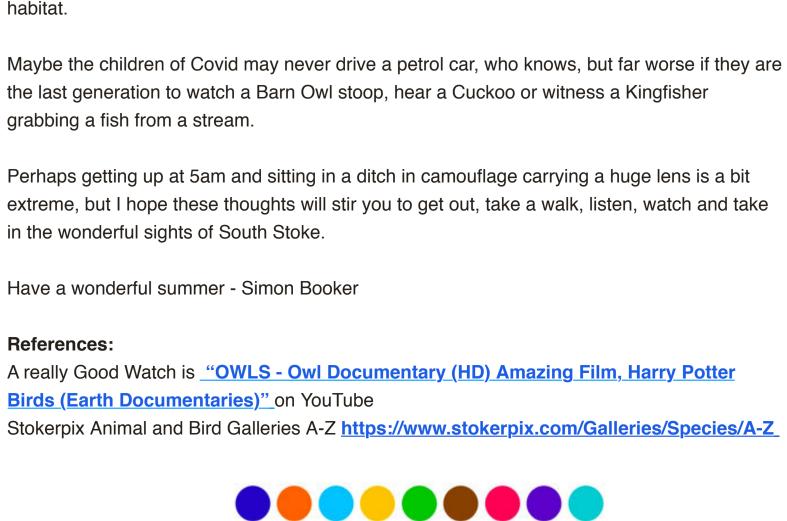
tricks and all part of the mystery of the master fisherman.

periphery of a field stooping on a movement or sound.

Barn owl image courtesy of <a href="mailto:stokerpix.com">stokerpix.com</a>

natural wonders.





Keep calm and help the hedgehogs!

(Ali Brazenor)

Nationally hedgehog numbers are in decline, but we can make small changes locally to give

their active season (usually March/April to November) and the safest places for them to travel

are through our gardens and away from roads. One of the best things we can do for hoggies

them the best chance of survival. On average hedgehogs travel about 2km a night during

South Stoke Wildlife & Conservation Group invites you to help us save the humble

On 29th April a few of us attended a talk by Stephen Powles (hosted by Woodcote

on either side of a boundary is at different levels. Chris made what he thinks is the

Please help us make hedgehog highways in the South Stoke Parish and protect our

hedgehogs for years to come. If you're happy to make a hole for hedgehogs please have a

by making a small hole in your fence, removing a brick from a walk or digging a channel

emailing sswildlifegroup@gmail.com. If you've made a hole in your garden wall or fence

Here in South Stoke we have an unusual insect; the glow-worm, or, to give it its Latin

name, Lampyris noctiluca. The glow-worm is not a worm, but rather it is a beetle up to 25 mm

long. It has the rare ability to glow in the dark, emitting a bright green luminescence. Only the

wingless female glows strongly, to attract the flying males. Each individual female has an

adult glowing life of no more than a few weeks until she mates since she dies soon after

under your boundary. If you'd like some help making a hole please get in touch by

please log it on the Big Hedgehog Map on the Hedgehog Street website

chat with your neighbours and, with their agreement, make a hole in the sides of your garden

is to set up a 'hedgehog highway' i.e. link up our gardens.

All these creatures have a multiplicity of adaptations designed for a specific environment. All

sights. One of the main modern causes of extinction in animals is the loss and degradation of

the more reason why we must maintain and protect habitats or risk losing these wonderful

Cuckoo image courtesy of <a href="stokerpix.com">stokerpix.com</a>

hedgehog.

first staircase for hedgehogs.

(hedgehogstreet.org).

laying her eggs.

next.

Where should you look for glow-worms?

Though they are said to favour chalky or

reported in many areas of Great Britain.

worms in gardens, hedgerows or railway

noticed before. The uncultivated land

adjacent to railway lines are prime sites

and probably the reason we have had a

in South Stoke for many years.

area.

continuous population of glow worms here

embankments where they had never been

People are often surprised to discover glow

limestone areas, sightings have been

**Glowing brightly in South Stoke** 

(with thanks to the magnificent Richard Newton)

brother Chris. Back in 2016, Chris realised that hedgehogs could only enter and leave his garden along the driveway, there weren't any gaps in his walled garden where hedgehogs could pass safely between his and neighbouring gardens. After making some gaps in his walls he talked to other villagers and now the project has linked up 60 properties. The gaps only need to be about 13cm in diameter and clever solutions can be used where the ground

Conservation Group) about the Kirtlington Hedgehog Street project set up by Stephen's

Fêmea (15 - 25 mm Macho (15 - 18 mm) Larva (3 - 25 mm)

After a few weeks, the eggs hatch into larvae, and they remain as larvae for one or two further

summers, feeding on small snails which they apparently paralyse before sucking them empty.

The two or maybe even three-year gap between a mating and the subsequent appearance of

an adult helps to explain why you may find plenty on a site one year, yet few or none at all the

go on, it is hard to put numbers on it or provide empirical evidence. Similarly, we can't be dogmatic about the reasons for any decline. If you study one site over a period of years you find that numbers can vary wildly from year to year, and from place to place on the site. Hence our desire to survey them properly and add to the ad hoc observations of the past. There are some common issues that are affecting populations everywhere: • Use of pesticides and herbicides which are likely to affect the prey of glow-worms and the insects themselves. • Artificial lighting; few landscapes are free from light pollution and there is no doubt that male glow worms are attracted to artificial lighting of any colour. However, it distracts them from finding females... • Changes in land use. Much of what was open downland (such as the Chilterns and South Downs) is now no longer grazed by sheep and, as a result, has become overgrown. Glowworms prefer open areas to dense undergrowth. The increasing amount of set-aside land

Are glow-worms in decline? This is a tricky one. The answer is probably 'yes', and on many

individual sites they certainly have vanished, but with so little accurate historical information to

may be a positive change in the short term if there are glow worms nearby to colonise the

Watch this <u>short video</u> for 16 more glow worm facts!

Image courtesy of Richard Newton

We plan to organise a village walk and

**spotting session** during the peak glowing

period (likely to be the second half of July)

and you can book your spot by filling in the

form here. We will also carry out a short

survey so that people can record where

they see glow worms around the village

giving us a more accurate picture of our

for the glow worm survey if you haven't

already done so!

The importance of hedgerows

(Paul Jenkins)

without them. A good hedge contains a variety of native plant species and provides food and

Hedgerows are a familiar part of our environment. England just wouldn't look the same

habitat for a wide range of wildlife. Hedgerows also provide connections between areas,

forming corridors along which wildlife can travel.

Image courtesy of stokerpix.com

local 'glowing' population. Please sign up

The glimmering world of glow worms

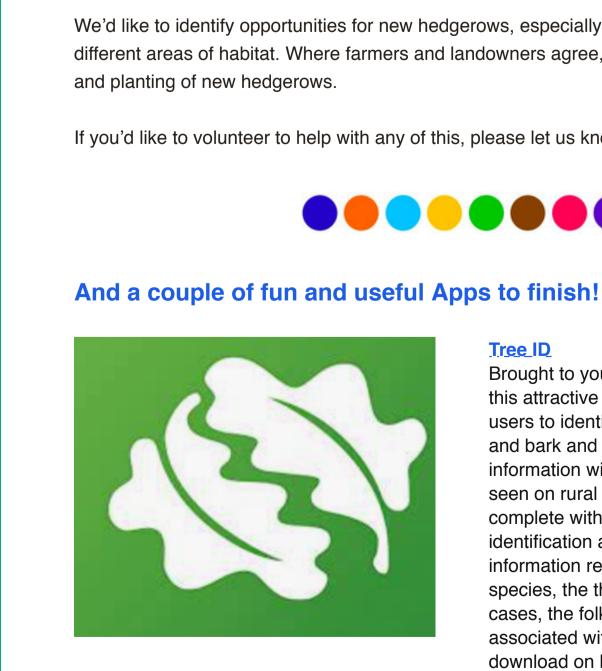
Hedgerows act as carbon sinks, and they help reduce soil erosion and even flooding, by boundaries. A hedgerow is a wonderful thing in many ways. and die off.

at the base. Hedge laying and coppicing are now generally considered to be uneconomic by the farming community, but perhaps, with some community support, just like Watlington Climate Action Group has done, we could change this. You can watch their informative and inspiring video here. SSWCG would like to map and survey the existing hedgerows, assess their condition, and identify opportunities for restoration. This could involve obtaining grants, hedge laying and planting up gaps. We'd like to identify opportunities for new hedgerows, especially where they could link up different areas of habitat. Where farmers and landowners agree, we'd like to arrange funding and planting of new hedgerows. If you'd like to volunteer to help with any of this, please let us know! 

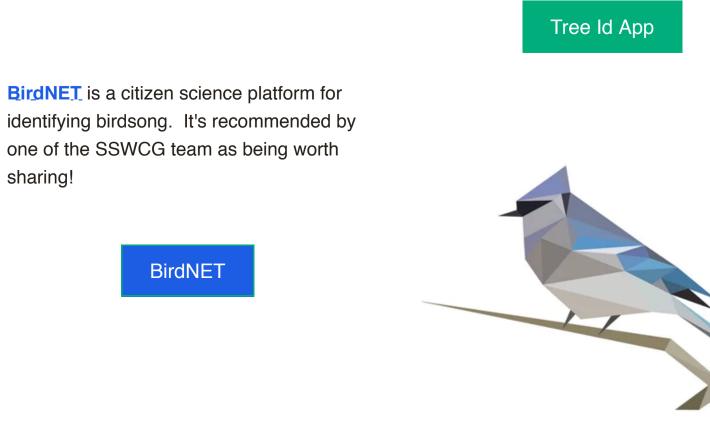
Image courtesy of <a href="stokerpix.com">stokerpix.com</a> To avoid these problems a hedge should be either coppiced or laid every 30 to 40 years. This will rejuvenate and thicken the base of the hedge. Such practices used to be essential because, in the absence of wire, hedges kept livestock in or out, and they had to be kept thick







sharing!



Tree ID

devices.

Brought to you by the **Woodland Trust**, this attractive and easy to use app allows users to identify trees by their leaves, fruit and bark and provides no end of useful information with regards to the species seen on rural (or urban) walks. It comes

complete with a handy A-Z for easy

cases, the folklore and historical uses associated with our trees. It is free to download on both Apple and Android

identification and presents users with useful information relating to the status of our tree species, the threats they face and, in some

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