

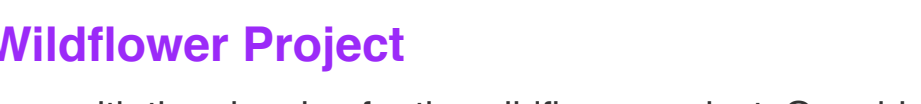


e-Newsletter



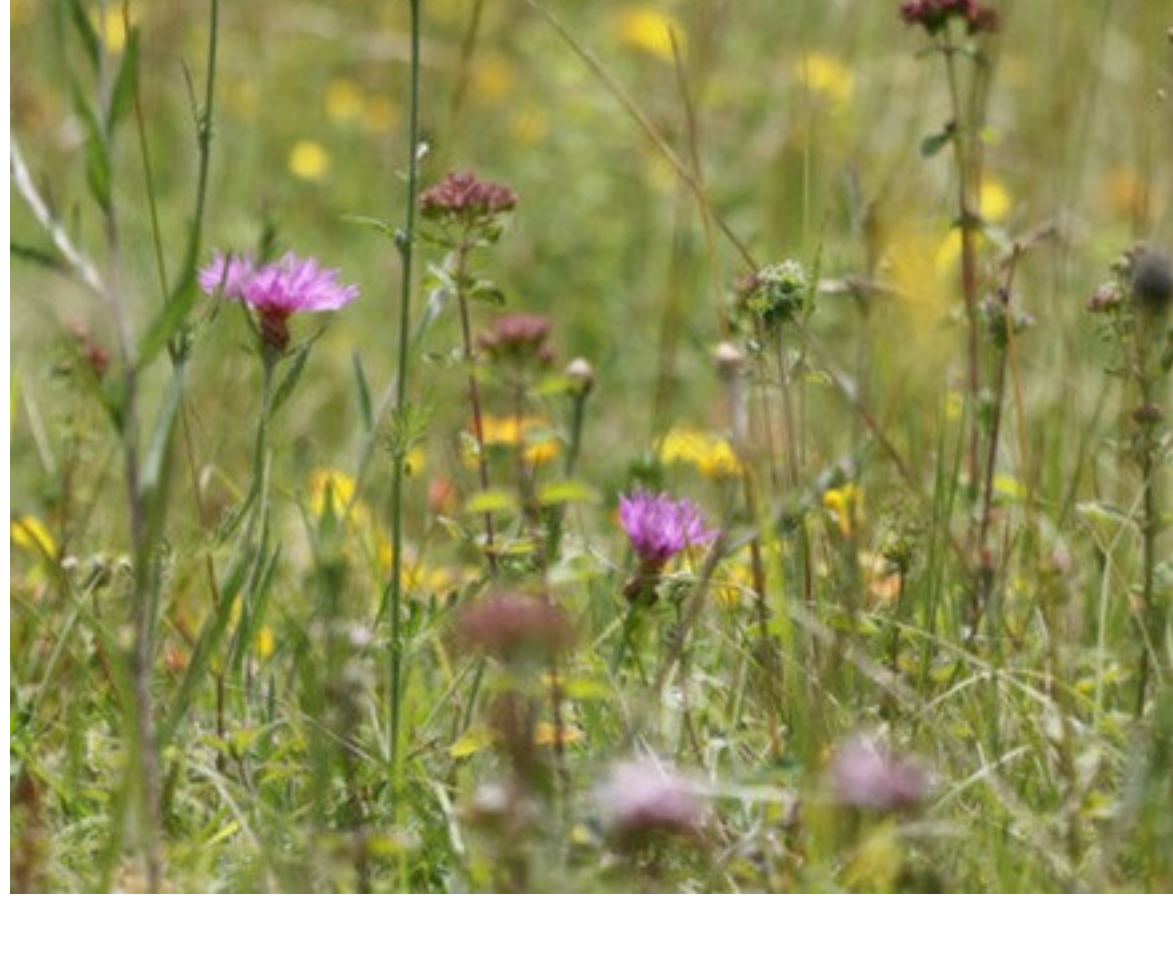
Issue One
March 2021

Welcome to South Stoke Wildlife & Conservation Group's (SSWCG) first e-Newsletter. It's been a hectic but very fulfilling six months setting up the Group, building the website, the Facebook Group and planning all our exciting community projects. The success of SSWCG is dependent on Parish participation and support; from school children to seasoned wildlife and conservation enthusiasts. We welcome ideas for activities and your thoughts on how we can develop and improve.



The SSWCG Wildflower Project

We are well underway with the planning for the wildflower project. Our objectives are to identify and re-create known local wildflower communities, extend local habitats and improve biodiversity by, for example, increasing pollinators. The protection of existing local wildflower populations will be critical.



The first stage will be to undertake a survey of what is currently growing and where, the nature and characteristics of the soil/growing media/substrate. The 'discovery study' will focus on a number of interesting and diverse sites ranging from chalk grasslands, wetland, wet and dry woodland and perhaps an ancient area.

It is likely that two survey methods will be used; a simplified version of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's National Vegetation Classification survey and a less structured but equally valuable bespoke study for less expert/schoolchildren participants.

Anybody wanting to volunteer and help with the survey will be extremely welcome; please complete the [online form](#) and we'll be in touch very shortly!

The second stage of the project will be to grow approximately 2,000 native wildflowers from seed to plug plants. Thirteen seed variants have been specifically selected on the basis of their suitability.

In addition to a number of parishioners who have agreed to take responsibility for 'bulk' seed growing, we are trying to garner support from the parish for a 'Community Grow Along'. Volumes of plants are less important than participation! Volunteers will be supplied with an appropriate number of seeds and growing instructions. A blog will be set up on the website to chart progress, publish photos, drawings and fun stories of 'Grow Along' trials, tribulations and celebrations! If you're interested in joining in, please [Get Involved](#) by 1st April.

The mature plug plants will be planted out in September 2021 and again we'll be seeking volunteers from the parish. The planting locations will be determined by the results of the initial survey and we're also hoping to introduce wildflower beauty along parish verges, the Ridgeway and areas for public enjoyment.



Wild Bee Talk

We're delighted that Roselle Chapman, a trustee of [Wild Oxfordshire](#) and Community Ecologist, will host a talk on Wednesday 21st April at 7.30pm. Roselle studied bumblebee ecology and genetics at UCL and the Institute of Zoology. The talk will cover why wild bees and other pollinators are so important, but still the unsung heroes of the environment, gardens and countryside and continue to decline in number and range. Roselle will identify what we can all do to help wild bees and, in so doing, assist biodiversity as a whole. Book your space [here](#). (The event is free to attend although a donation to Wild Oxfordshire would be much appreciated).

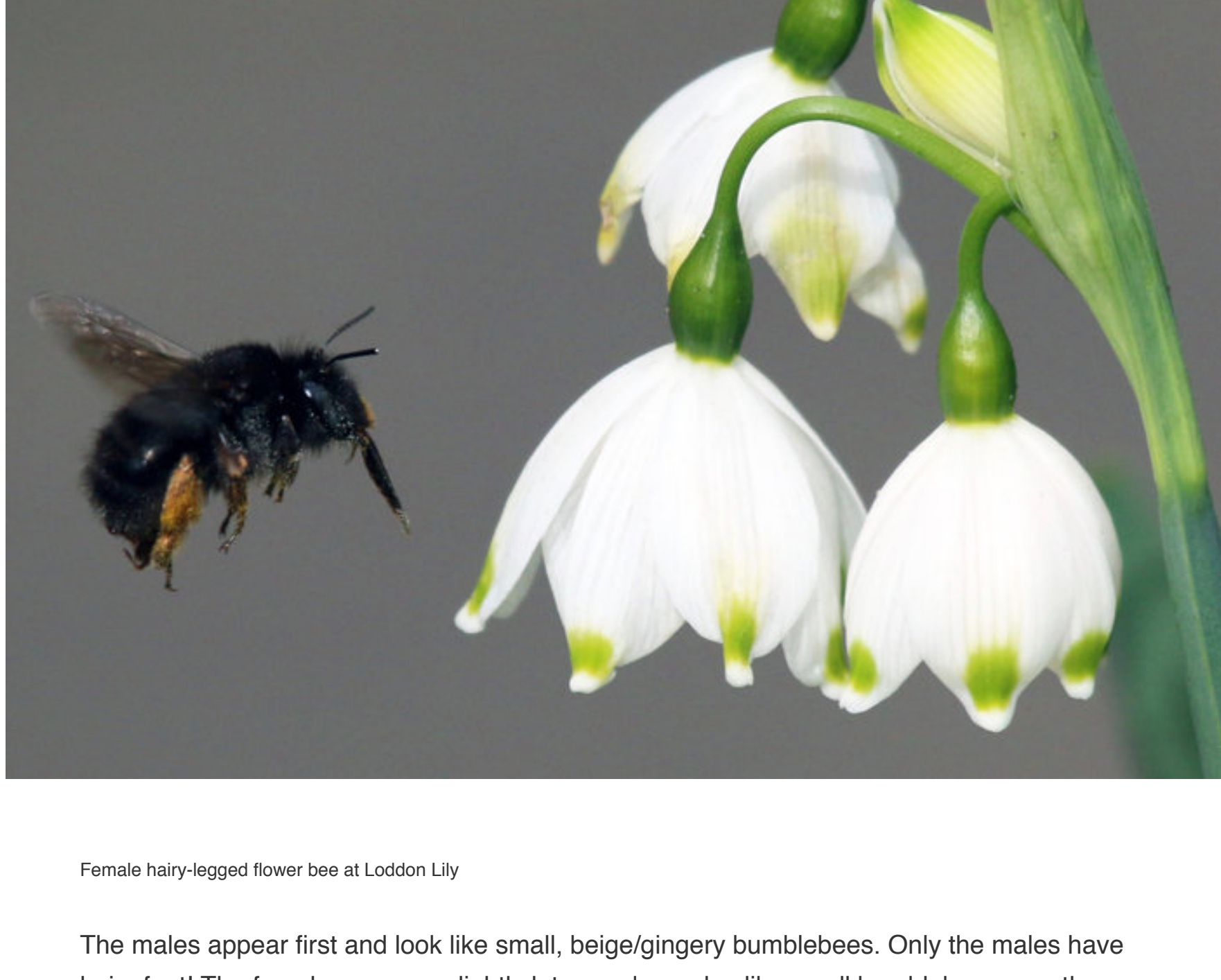


Wild bee photo courtesy of John Lindley



And on the Subject of Bees...

The hairy footed flower bee (*Anthophora plumipes*) is one of the first solitary bees to take wing in South Stoke. They usually appear in late March, and are flying until June, but you have to be quick to see them as they dart about at great speed! We are very fortunate in South Stoke in having a visible "colony" in the wall outside the Old Vicarage, opposite Plough Cottage, where they have dug lots of holes, about 10mm diameter, in the lime mortar. Whilst there are lots of bees nesting together, it isn't an organised colony, there is no social structure and no workers. Each burrow is installed with a pellet of pollen and nectar, an egg is laid and the cell is sealed by the female. The larva consumes the stores, pupates and emerges the next spring.



Female hairy-legged flower bee at Loddon Lily

The males appear first and look like small, beige/gingery bumblebees. Only the males have hairy feet! The females emerge slightly later, and are also like small bumblebees, mostly black with some yellow hairs on the legs. At about 13 -15mm long they are amongst the largest of our solitary bees.

If you watch the burrow holes carefully you might see the females arriving with pollen loads in baskets on their back legs, and leaving empty.

Hairy-footed flower bees forage on Pulmonaria, Primrose, Comfrey and flowers in the Borage family, as well as the Loddon Lily and many other spring plants with tubular flowers.



Hail the Hedgehog!

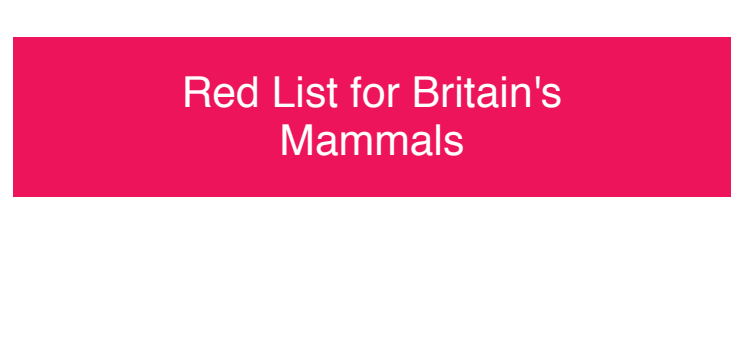
British hedgehogs are scientifically known as *Erinaceus europaeus*, *Erinaceus* being the Latin word for hedgehogs. This species occurs throughout most of continental Europe. In Britain they are found almost everywhere except some of the Scottish Islands. Hedgehogs can survive in urban habitats making good use of cemeteries, railway land, wasteland and both public and private gardens.

Everyone is sure to know what a hedgehog looks like, but did you know that they have a small tail? A hedgehog's back and sides are covered in 25 mm (1") long spines but they don't have them on their face, chest, belly, throat or legs. Their legs are covered with coarse, grey-brown fur. An average adult hedgehog has approximately 5,000-7,000 spines.

Hedgehogs like to eat insects and beetles as well as caterpillars and earthworms. If you would like to entice hedgehogs into your garden, put out a saucer of meat-based pet food and always ensure that a dish of water is available, especially during the summer months or in extreme weather conditions. Never put out milk for a hedgehog, they are lactose intolerant.



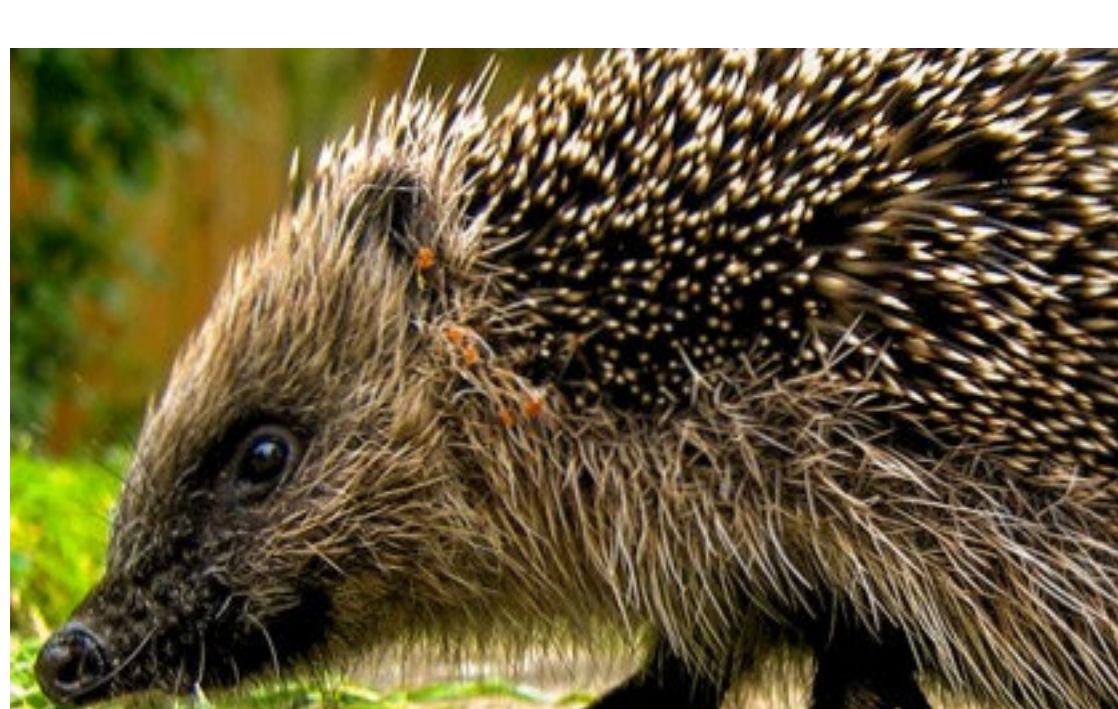
Despite hedgehogs being one of the Nation's favourite animals, their numbers are in decline and they're now classified as vulnerable to extinction on Great Britain's new Red List for Mammals. The 2018 State of Britain's Hedgehogs [report](#) (published jointly by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society (BHPS) and the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES)) found that hedgehogs in the countryside are in a serious decline.



Hedgehog Parish Survey

SSWCG will be carrying out a parish survey to audit how many hogs we have and where they are. We want to see if we can improve things for them, making it easier for them to roam the Parish. It would be great to try and help reverse their decline and we're looking for volunteers to participate in the survey.

If you're interested in finding out more please [sign up](#) and we'll be in touch soon.



Hedgehog photo courtesy of Roger Wyatt

Outline Project Plan

Step 1 Initial/preliminary data collection (late March/early April)

- Collect data on where people have seen hedgehogs, or evidence of their presence, in the past
- You can help us by recording the location of your historical sighting(s) using the website's 'Hedgehog Survey Form' (available on the website from 25th March)

Step 2 Mapping (early April)

- We'll map the locations of your past sightings and update the website's [Species Maps](#) with your recordings!

Step 3 Main survey (Sunday 2nd – 6th May) Hedgehog Awareness Week 2021

- We're looking for a group of [volunteers](#) to make and place footprint tunnels in their gardens and then check for any hedgehog footprints once a day for 5 days. Watch this [great video](#) on how to make a footprint tunnel
- The survey will give us a better understanding of the state and location of South Stoke's hedgehog population
- It will be repeated to allow us to monitor population/distribution changes

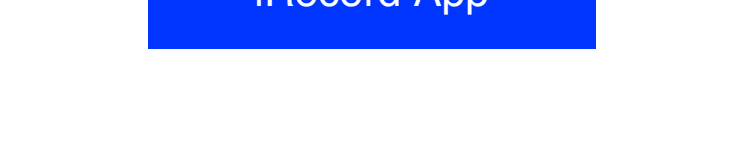
Step 4 Mapping (Stage 2)

- Sightings will be added to the website's Species Maps and will identify any data gaps for future targeted surveys



Everyone's a Citizen Scientist; Log your Sightings

During lockdown, many of us have spent more time outside enjoying our local countryside and wildlife, and across the country people have been going one step further by recording what they see online. The most widely used tool for recording is ["iRecord"](#) - available on the web and as an app for iPhone and Android. iRecord lets us all become "Citizen Scientists" by logging our sightings, and once you get used to it, it's quick and easy to use. For anyone interested, just enter "iRecord" into your preferred search engine, and follow the link to create an account or download the App.



The data is used for a variety of purposes, including research, providing evidence for making decisions about wildlife and conservation, and even for tracking invasive species such as the Asian Hornet.

You don't need to be an expert to get started, and you don't need to provide photographs of your sightings (although some people do). As you get going, you are able to view all the records that you have submitted, and to look for other records (locally or nationally) of any creature or plant that you're interested in. And don't worry about only recording rare or unusual sightings - data on even the commonest of species is important, and is used to monitor growth or decline in numbers.

So, if you want to go a bit further than just observing our local wildlife, give [iRecord](#) a go (and, don't forget, you can always use the [SSWCG form](#) to report any of our [Top 20 Species](#)).



And a Fun App to Finish...

[what3words](#)

Never get lost again
With the what3words app, it's easy to find, share and save precise locations. Find out more and how to use it [here](#)



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