

# LONGHIRST WILDLIFE & COMMUNITY TRUST

## NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2022

Welcome to the fourth issue of the Longhirst Wildlife & Community Trust newsletter! In this issue we get a look at the great variety of species that are found around Longhirst, the autumnal harvest which is so abundant in the hedgerows and woodlands right now and the wildlife which relies on it to stock up for winter. We also find out what the bees and hedgehogs are up to at this time of year. There's also news of an event happening very soon (see below) and little snippets of news from round and about. Read on!

### **STOP PRESS!! Bat Walk!**

**Longhirst Wildlife and Community Group**

You are invited to come on a "Bat Walk" starting at 7.30pm at St. John's Church on **Friday 16 September**. Claire Snowball, a Longhirst resident and bat expert, has offered to lead the walk and hopefully identify a number of different species living in and around the Village and Micklewood Close. She will bring along bat detectors, an infrared viewer and other equipment. The walk is expected to last between 1 - 1.5 hours. Warm clothing, sensible shoes and a torch are recommended. NB. This event will not go ahead if it is raining.



### **Endangered Wildlife at Longhirst Hall**

Could residents and visitors using the road to Longhirst Hall please be aware that there is a speed limit of 10 mph. Small populations of endangered red squirrels and hares live around Longhirst Hall and regularly cross this road and, sadly, a number have recently been hit by cars. We cannot afford to lose any individuals from these fragile populations of red squirrels and hares so please observe the speed limit! Thank you on behalf of **Morpeth and District Red Squirrels**

### **Out and About in Longhirst**

**Photos: Keith Cochrane Words: Janet Quinn**

Longhirst has an abundance of wildlife ranging from common garden birds to less well known varieties, a number of species of mammals and, whilst not iconic, insects that are vitally important to the ecosystem.

Have you spotted any interesting wildlife (animal or vegetable!) in the Parish which you would like to share with us? If so, we would love to receive photos which we can include in a future newsletter.

Below are a few photos taken by Keith Cochrane of wildlife seen around Longhirst.  
Many residents support garden birds by providing nest boxes and putting out feeders in the winter.



Here's looking at you!

We are practising to be angels.



A redpoll - a less well known bird





There is a pair of resident moorhens living on the pond at Micklewood. They breed every year with varying success.

There are also several different species of mammals around the village, some more visible than others. A few are mentioned below.

Hedgehogs are coming under increasing pressure and numbers are decreasing: you can help to support them by cutting holes in fences to allow them access across gardens.

This one lives in Micklewood and is raising a litter of young which is why she's out in the daytime (hedgehogs are mainly nocturnal) collecting food.



A more unusual but very welcome visitor to the pond on Micklewood

And last but not least, a couple of invertebrates and an amphibian!



4 Spotted Chaser



Southern Hawker



Common frog

## **Beekeeping in Summer**

**Peter Lovering**

Summer is the time when beekeepers can relax a little while the bees are busy harvesting nectar from a wide range of forage. But we mustn't let our guard down: late swarming hives can set a colony back more than a month while a new queen develops, mates and the first eggs that she lays hatch into adult bees.

There is also the unpredictable nature of colonies; queens disappearing for no good reason or being superseded by the colony, usually because the queen is damaged in some way or is under-performing - the Queen in any colony is just a worker with a specialist role and decisions are made by the community. Consequently, not all



colonies are strong enough to produce sufficient honey for beekeepers to harvest in reasonable quantities.

The bees collect pollen, which provides the protein for the growing larvae, and nectar that provides carbohydrates to feed the whole of the colony. The nectar is put into honeycomb at the top of the hive from which the queen is excluded and therefore can't lay eggs in the cells. Very cleverly, the bees reduce the water content of the nectar to about 18% when it becomes honey and the cell is capped with wax. Beekeepers will remove the frames and extract the honey when all the cells on a frame have been capped.



Runny or set? All honey, except for Heather honey, starts out runny and gradually granulates over time, the duration of which is dependent upon the origin of the honey. Warming set honey at about 35°C returns it to its runny state.

The first honey of the year is from the yellow fields of Oil Seed Rape which the bees love, guaranteeing a near pure non-blended product; akin to a single malt whisky. However, granulation starts soon after harvesting and so the honey is removed as soon as possible, after which it is 'creamed', remaining in this state for the duration.

Summer honey is a blend of all the plants on which the bees forage, usually within a three mile radius of the hive, and granulation occurs more slowly, turning from runny to set honey with a gritty texture.



Blue Borage

At the end of the season we are blessed with Heather on which bees gorge, producing a strong tasting 'single malt', premium product that is jellified and needs to be pressed out of the comb and filtered before jarring. Alternatively, Heather honey is sold in the comb, a rare delicacy for honey lovers and very tasty!



Honeybee on Winter  
Flowering Heather

## The Autumnal Harvest

## Woodruff Wood

With autumn upon us, we are hoping the harvest is good for our local wildlife. Nuts, seeds, fruit and fungi are ready for feasting upon – and signs are that this season's crop is in plentiful supply. Rowan berries are one of the first to ripen and branches have been weighted down with large bunches of glossy, red berries – most of which are quickly devoured by blackbirds and the like.

Following on from last year's poor acorn crop (both UK and Europe wide – possibly due to the wet spring of 2021), this autumn looks to be more promising for our oaks. There are two main types of native oaks in the UK – English oak and sessile oak. One of the best ways to tell them apart is by their acorns. On English oaks, the acorns have a stalk whereas on sessile oaks the acorns are attached directly to the twigs. In our wood, it is the English oak which grows.

Blackberries are widespread throughout the village and enjoyed by many insects and birds. They are a great place to look for late season butterflies such as commas, peacocks, red admirals and small tortoiseshells. Pick a sunny day. The image below shows a feasting comma.



And finally, the hazelnut season is upon us. Supply is good in the wood – and it will be the local squirrels and mice who benefit. In fact, the squirrels tuck into them before they are fully ripened from early August onwards. We began to find empty shells lying beneath the hazels from around the 5 August this year. Whilst we would like to think that it is the reds who are busy munching, we suspect it is a combination of both reds and greys. We continue to get both in the wood – though sightings of reds are few and far between (averaging around one a month). Greys continue to enter the wood one or two at a time and culling them is made all the more difficult in early autumn by the thick tree cover prior to the leaves falling and the abundant natural food supply meaning that they are less inclined to enter our baited traps. However, we leave you with a photo taken two years ago when we were lucky enough to witness a red squirrel raiding a hazelnut bush.





## Food for Thought...

The topic of foraging seems to pop up everywhere these days in numerous TV programmes, glossy magazines and books, encouraging us all to get out picking wild foods. We certainly see folk along the lanes at this time of year stripping sections of hedgerows bare of blackberries, hazelnuts and sloes. Please remember, these foods are vital for the survival of our wildlife in order for them to build up their reserves before winter sets in...

### **Hedgehog Helping from Autumn and into Early Winter**     **Richard Tordoff**

Now the weather is turning cold, wet, dark and windy, this is the time that hedgehogs start looking for places to hibernate.

Most hedgehogs have their first litter of young in June or July. This gives the young hogs plenty of time to fatten up for hibernation in October or November. Some hogs, however, have a second litter in September or even October. These hoglets have only a short time before the weather gets cold and food becomes scarce. Hedgehogs need to weigh at least 500gms to survive winter hibernation. Hoglets born in a second litter may struggle to reach this weight before winter sets in. These are autumn juveniles.



Hedgehogs are nocturnal so those out in the day are displaying odd behaviour. Even though they appear lively and are rushing around, these hedgehogs probably need rescuing in autumn/winter. Once out in the day they can be days away from death. Even when rescued they can seem OK for a day or so and then suddenly collapse and die. So if out in the day whether rushing about or curled up asleep they need rescuing. Hedgehogs do NOT hibernate in the open. They make a nest of leaves etc and disappear into the depths of the nest and are completely hidden. Hedgehogs



under 450gms (1lb) that appear to be hibernating (cold and in a tight ball) are suffering from hypothermia and are in fact dying. These must be rescued if they are to stand any chance of survival. As a general rule, from October, those under 450gms (1lb) should be rescued.

When gardening and clearing at this time of year, be aware that your pile of unsightly leaves may be replicating the natural habitat of a hedgehog and some forceful raking can cause at best disturbance and at worse injury. Hibernation can take place quite late in the year and even be delayed into January. You might think it is cold but a hedgehog can still be wandering around when you are warmly tucked up.

At any time of year please put out fresh water. In winter it causes its own problems as it freezes but anything you can do will help. Also feeding at any time of year is a bonus and just might be enough to keep the hog alive but also increase its territory into your garden. It is wonderful in summer to venture out around 11 o'clock and listen for them as they shuffle around and fight for courtship.

Remember at any time of the year, no milk, just water. I find chicken based cat food in jelly and cat dried food works well. Consider allowing part of your garden to grow wild with logs and leaves. Cut a 5-6" hole in your secure fence to allow them in. If you have any specific questions then feel free to contact me. 07850 066633 Richard Tordoff

## **We're Getting There!**

The Steering Group of the Longhirst Wildlife & Community Trust has been busy in the last few months, and we can report that an application to the Charity Commission to set the group up as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) has now been submitted.

Following a visit from the local office of the Heritage Lottery Fund, we are also working on an updated application to HLF for initial funding to kick start the development of the project. Hopefully this will be submitted later this month.

Let's hope we have positive news on both fronts soon!

## And finally ....

Janet Quinn sent in these photos of the meadow developing just inside the gates at Longhirst Hall. It used to be cut every few weeks but last year it was left to develop and only cut in the autumn. It has been left again this year and is looking good!



And I've added another habitat, a small pond, to my own garden at Broomhaugh over the summer! It's very new so still settling down but I hope that next year yet more wildlife will be attracted to my patch. The wasps have already found a new spot to find a drink!

We'd love to hear about what's happening in your garden or anywhere in Longhirst Parish, so if you've been inspired by any of the articles in this or earlier newsletters, please feel free to send me ([kim.woolhead@gmail.com](mailto:kim.woolhead@gmail.com)) a snippet of news which I can include in the next newsletter.