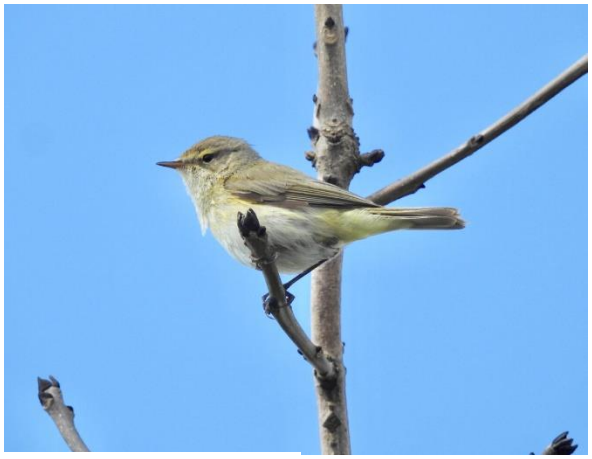
LONGHIRST WILDLIFE & COMMUNITY TRUST NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2022

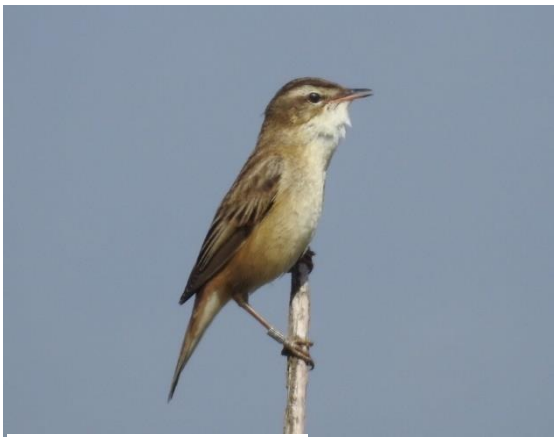
Welcome to the second issue of the Longhirst Wildlife & Community Trust newsletter! In this issue there's more on hedgehogs and how to look after them in spring, a piece on spring flying butterflies to look out for with some great photos for identification and a guide to how everyone can, by making small changes in your gardens, create great habitats for a wealth of wildlife and lots more. Read on!

Birds to look out for this Spring **Pauline Gilbertson**

If you were lucky you might have spotted a few winter visitors such as Siskins, Redpolls, Fieldfares and Redwings around Longhirst over the winter months, alongside our more usual resident birds. With the arrival of spring, however, some of these birds will be moving on and we can expect to start seeing summer migrants such as Swallows, House Martins, Yellow Wagtails, Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers returning to the Northumbrian countryside from their warmer overwintering grounds.

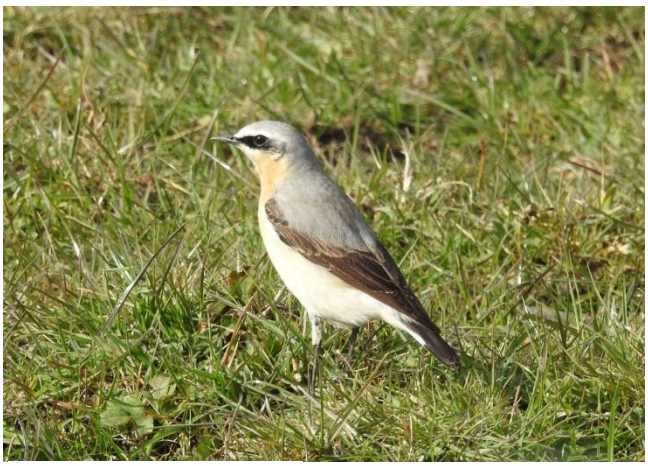


Chiffchaff



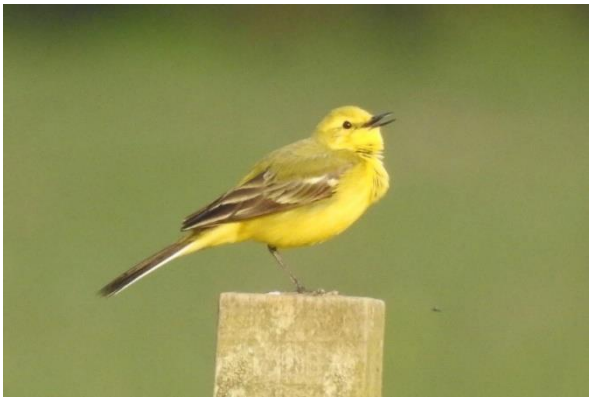
Willow Warbler

Chiffchaffs started arriving back here in mid-March, and you'll often hear their repetitive 'chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff' song before you actually spot the bird itself (but don't confuse it with the Great Tit's similarly repetitive two-tone call). The Willow Warbler, arriving in mid-April, looks very similar to the Chiffchaff apart from its paler legs but has a soft, sweet, descending song. There are some excellent birdsong apps available to download if you want to learn more about the songs and calls of the different bird species. I use "Chirp!" which can be used on mobiles in the field. At home I find the BTO bird ID videos very good as they compare easily confused species.



Wheatear

The Northern Wheatear started arriving here in March, always a welcome sight in our local farm fields and often to be found around horses or cattle. That is also the preferred habitat of the Yellow Wagtail (another April returner – unlike its near relatives the Grey and Pied Wagtails it is a summer visitor). Look out for both Wheatears and Yellow Wagtails around Longhirst's bridleways and horse fields, along with the Yellowhammers and Skylarks which, although resident all year round, become more prominent as they herald the arrival of spring with bursts of song.



Yellow Wagtail

I was fortunate to host a House Martin nest under my eaves last summer, and was delighted to watch my pair successfully raise four young. The nest fell down over the winter but hopefully the same pair will return to rebuild it. If you see House Martins starting to build a nest on your house, remember that they will need mud as the basis of their nest so it's helpful to provide a muddy puddle. The amount of work which goes into the build, and later into feeding the young, is very impressive indeed!

I'm about to put up a Swift nesting box although I'm not sure how many Swifts we have around the village. If the Swifts don't show up (eta: May or June), it will at least provide nest space for Sparrows. Sadly Swifts, Swallows and House

Martins are all in decline here; some simply don't succeed in making the long and hazardous journey back from Africa.

We'd love to hear when and where you spotted your first Swallow, House Martin, Swift, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler of the year. And of our resident birds, we would particularly welcome sightings of Tawny Owls, Barn Owls, Willow Tits and Tree Sparrows; these are all birds which we hope to encourage locally. Do please also let us know if you spot something unusual – a resident on the outskirts of Longhirst was lucky enough to have a Wryneck in her garden a few months ago – what a treat that must have been! Garden birdwatchers might also consider joining the British Trust for Ornithology's Garden Birdwatch survey scheme. Visit www.bto.org/gbw to join.

Hedgehogs **Richard Tordoff**

As the spring warmth comes around and our ventures into the gardens become more regular, so indeed are the visits by the hedgehogs. After a few months of hibernating, they awake having lost up to 25% of their body weight.

Like us the first thing they look for once woken up is a drink. The only drink they need is water. Please do not think milk with its protein and fat is a good answer. Hedgehogs are lactose intolerant and after not eating for four months, milk will cause diarrhoea and gas which could lead to death.

If possible put out a feeding station with water, cat biscuits and cat tinned meat. There are certain tinned/wet foods that hedgehogs do not seem to like but I have found Whiskas chicken in jelly and Lidl's own brand do quite well.

Feeding stations are sometimes hard to get right. It seems as if we are feeding the neighbours' cats and, as we are near a water source, we have a problem

with rats in parts of the village. Unfortunately rats cannot be prevented going into the hog feed but please keep a look out for droppings. Usually very near the feed there are signs of hedgehog poo which is black, around two inches long and at one end it comes to a point. Rat droppings are around ¾ins and are oval.

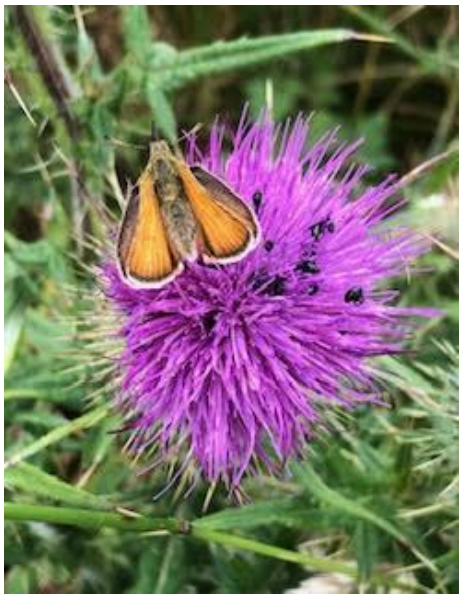
There are easily searchable websites that give valuable information. https://littlesilverhedgehog.com/hedgehog-information/ gives good information links on the right hand side. I have feeding stations just like these ones pictured. To prevent cats gaining access, I face the entrance about five inches from a wall or fence.

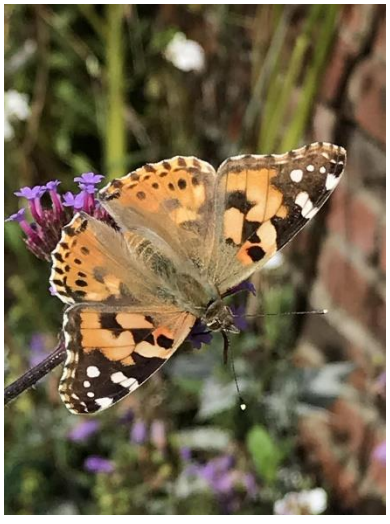
If you need any help setting one up or have any questions then please contact me on 07850066633. I am willing to call round and see you if you need me to have a look.

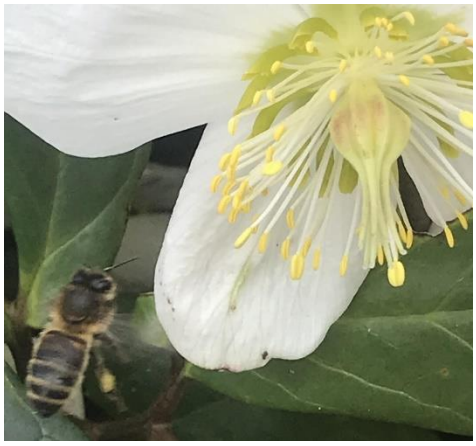
Garden habitat creation/management **Janet Quinn**

When people think of habitat creation/management they usually think of farmland, wild areas of moorland or woodland. Or on a global scale of places like the Amazon (not the online retailer) which are renowned for their biodiversity and beyond the reach of most people.

However the total area of gardens in the UK is estimated at about 728,900 hectares (a hectare is about 2.5 acres). For England, the garden area is more than four and a half times larger than that of our National Nature Reserves. Managing small areas in private gardens has significant benefits and will attract a wide variety of wildlife. Some examples would be leaving an area of grass uncut, sowing an area of wildflowers, planting nectar rich plants, creating a pond and log pile.







To thrive all species need a year round source of food and shelter, somewhere to breed and protection from predators. Choosing any (or all) of the following will help to encourage wildlife into your garden.

1 Plant a wide range of plants, with a mix of native and non-native, evergreen and deciduous. Non-native plants (popular garden plants) can be beneficial but choose varieties with open flowers where insects can easily access the nectar. Many popular garden plants are double headed (e.g. some petunias), making them difficult to access by insects. Try to have a succession of plants in flower for most of the year.

Examples: hellebores, snowdrops, crocus, daffodil, aquilegia, bedding plants, foxgloves, rudbeckia, Sunflowers, sedums, asters.

2 Provide as wide a range of habitats as possible, this will help encourage different interdependent species. Native plants including foxglove, meadow cranesbill, primrose, cowslip, hemp agrimony, knapweeds, teasel and red campion, can be incorporated into flower beds.

3 Allow plants to go to seed and leave seed heads and dead plant stems in the border for overwintering insects and birds.

4 Reduce or avoid using herbicides, fungicides and insecticides. Only 1% of insects are pests, the remainder either eat other insects (including the pests) or are food for birds and other wildlife.

5 Put out a source of shallow water for birds and other wildlife to use for drinking and bathing, ensure it has a sloping beach to enable creatures to climb out.

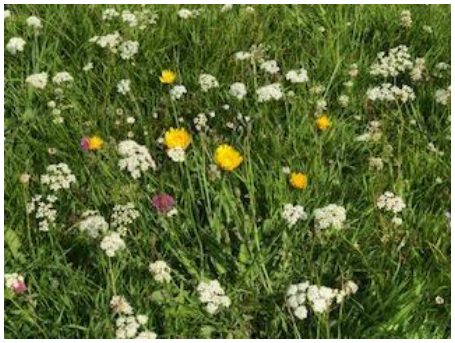
6 Consider putting up nest boxes for bats and birds. You can also install solitary bee nesting tubes and bug hotels although remember to clean out or replace every two years in late summer.

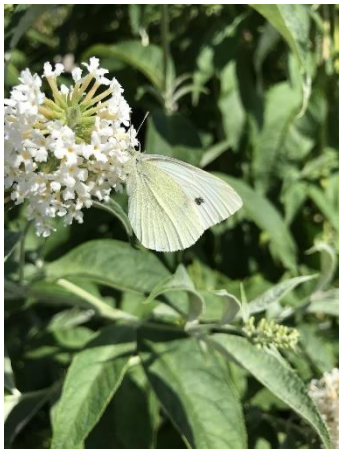
7 Make a log pile, log wall or dead hedge and don't clear leaves too early. Dead wood provides habitat for approximately 20% of Britain's woodland insect fauna. Logs and standing dead timber is food for wood-boring insects that in turn are eaten by woodpeckers and treecreepers. However, check wood for disease and remove if necessary.

8 A compost heap will also attract wildlife. Decaying plant material benefits springtails, worms, mites and other invertebrate animals. The heap will also be an important feeding area for birds and insectivorous mammals. The warmth of a heap can attract grass snakes as a cosy nest to incubate their eggs.

9 Keep garden lighting to a minimum as it can disturb the circadian rhythms of night flying insects e.g. moths.

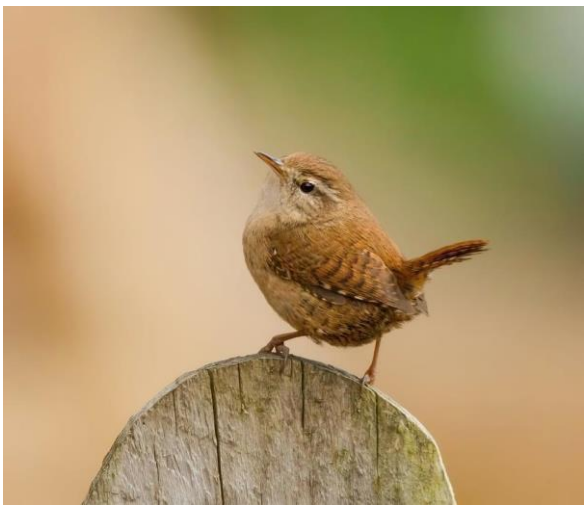
10 Leave an area of lawn uncut. The area can be left to grow long and then cut in the autumn (leave the cuttings for a few days to allow the seed to drop and then remove) or left to grow for a couple of weeks and then cut.



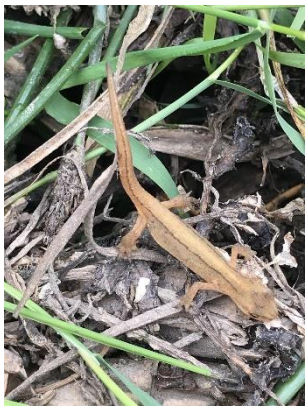


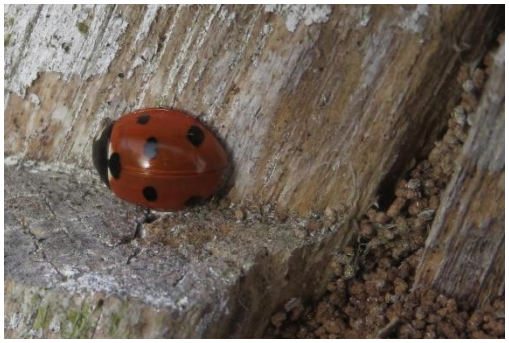
11 Pots and containers. A small space or lack of a garden doesn't mean you can't help wildlife. Ground beetles, centipedes and woodlice can make a home under a pot, a robin choose to nest in an undisturbed hanging basket and pollinators flock to container favourites such as lavender and nasturtium.

12 Climbers, walls and fences. Clothe fences and walls with climbing plants or wall shrubs. These provide shelter for spiders and insects. And good nesting spots for wrens, robins and blackbirds. Some plants have additional flower and berrying benefits for wildlife such as pyracantha, honeysuckle, ivy and hip-bearing roses such as 'Rambling Rector'.



However, whatever you do, the most important thing to remember when trying to create a wildlife friendly garden is not to worry too much about it, just enjoy it! Every little change you make will benefit wildlife.





Spring butterflies in Longhirst: a beginner's guide **Woodruff Wood**

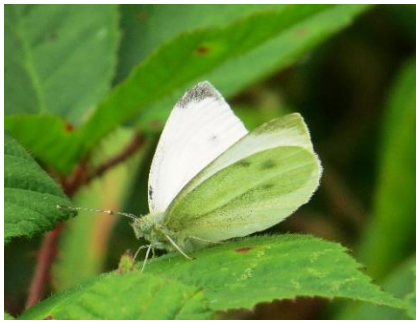
There is always something rather special in watching a butterfly flit past you on a sunny spring day. A moment or two in their company is a guaranteed way to lift your mood as their bejewelled colours dazzle in front of your eyes. But do you know what types of butterfly you are most likely to see in your gardens and around the village right now? Here we list the main Longhirst contenders beginning with four species of white butterflies:

Large White

The Large White, along with the Small White (see below) are labelled ‘Cabbage Whites' by gardeners for their habit of laying eggs on Brassicas.

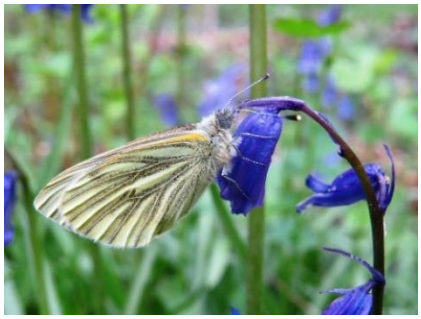
Both species have pale cream underwings.

Black wing markings tend to be darker on the Large White.



Small White

As its name suggests, the Small White tends to be smaller in size than the Large White. This is the key way to differentiate between the two.

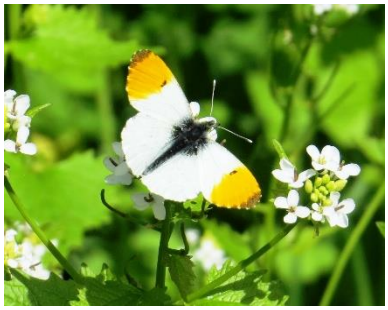


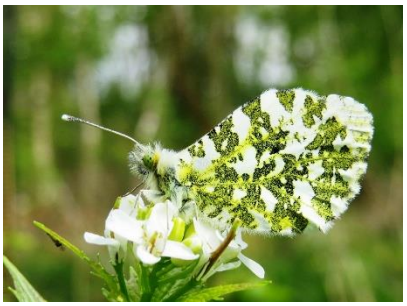
Green-veined White

This butterfly gets its name from the underside of its wings. The green veins are key to identification.

It is similar in size to the Small White but on average is a touch smaller.

The Green-veined White prefers damp grassland and woodland.





Orange-tip

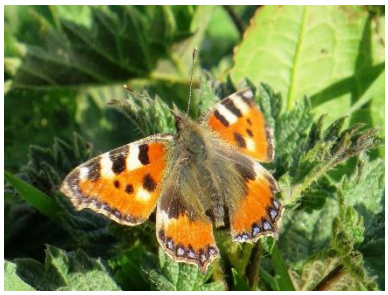
The orange wing tips of the male are unmistakable. However, the female lacks the orange. Both though, have beautiful mottled green underwings

Next up, here are four of the more colourful species that you will have a good chance of spotting:

Red Admiral

A large butterfly.

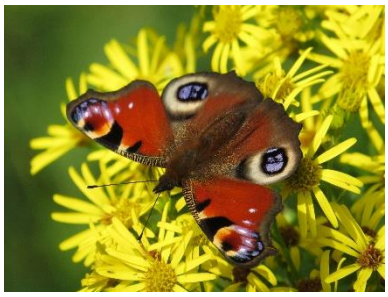
Upper wings are a distinctive black, red and white in colour.



Small Tortoiseshell

A medium sized butterfly.

Predominantly orange in colour with an iridescent blue trim along the wing edges.



Peacock

A large butterfly.

Easily identified by its pattern of spectacular eyespots on its upper wing tips.

Comma

A medium-sized butterfly.

Bright orange with black markings. Key to its identification are the scalloped edges to its wings – for camouflage purposes.

Other springtime butterflies you may well see include Speckled Wood, Painted Lady, Wall, Common Blue and Small Copper.

Recording Butterflies

One of the joys of butterflies is that they are fun to identify and all members of the family can learn. Today, many butterfly species are in decline whilst others are moving northwards. It is really important that we learn about these changes as butterflies are indicators of what is happening to our environment. If you want to do a little bit more to help, sending in your butterfly sightings to Butterfly Conservation (who collect records from across the UK) makes a real difference. You can choose to submit single sightings via the iRecord Butterflies smartphone (or tablet) app or sign up to the Garden Butterfly Survey if you plan to regularly submit sightings from your garden or allotment. It is quick and easy – and it matters!

For information on how to submit your butterfly sightings, please go to:

https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/recording-and-monitoring

Beekeeping **Peter Lovering**

During March we have had a couple of weeks of stunning weather and our winter flowering heather has been alive and buzzing with bees, with the odd bumble bee and butterfly sharing the flowers. Over the winter the honeybees will have stayed in the hive, clustered around the Queen, conserving energy and rotating between the warm centre and the chilly outer extremities.

Then the sun comes out, the temperature rises, and buds burst into flower, full of pollen and nectar. This stimulates the Queen to start laying – between a thousand and two thousand eggs a day. So within a month, the colony will double in size from the 10,000 or so bees that would have over-wintered, assuming the sun continues to shine.

It’s a good sign when we beekeepers see the bees returning to the hive with full pollen baskets, as this usually means the Queen is laying. The pollen has only a limited shelf life and is used to provide the larvae with protein. The forager bees will also return with nectar that is converted and stored as honey, which provides the larvae with carbohydrates. Contrary to popular belief, all larvae are given a small amount of royal jelly to start them off, but the Queen larvae continues to be fed royal jelly right up until her cell is sealed. More about that in the next newsletter as it will be a few weeks before the colonies start producing queen cells and reproducing. In the meantime enjoy watching the bees as they forage between the hive and flowers. See which flowers they prefer.

Many villagers will already be aware of the essential benefits that bees and other pollinators bring to the planet. The wildlife project will provide the opportunity for community beekeeping. There are two experienced and active beekeepers in the Village who are prepared to promote Honey Bees and beekeeping, and to assist in the establishment and running of a community apiary, if there is sufficient interest.