

## Nature Notes

From the Altrincham and District Natural History Society

*30<sup>th</sup> April 2020*

### **Liz Blackman 07/04/20**

A joint email to wish you Happy Easter! I'm sending a picture or two of my sister Cam(illa)'s back garden. It is very small and steep. It looks much as in the photo today, but actually I am cheating and sending photos from some time in the past, not dated!

Occasional small birds are seen in the Abelia tree and there is good cover in the brambles of the wall behind. We are currently thinking we may have seen a blackcap.

I hope you are well and coping with the isolation. Today we received the Prime Minister's letter, hopefully he will pull through.

All good wishes, Liz

PS These photos are not of the best quality! Those are primroses you can see, and if anything they have extended further down into the grass. To the left is a fuchsia which has that (very disfiguring) gall on it - Norman, MFC, knows what it is.



### **Margaret McCormick 08/04/20**

I've been busy in the garden again, not weeded for ages so awash with nettles. However I've put them to good use & made a big pan of nettle soup! It's delicious!

Orange tip & Peacock butterflies today. Blackcaps (m&f), wren, dunnock, 12-15 Goldfinches, Blackbirds(m&f). Woodpigeons++++! Not forgetting my nightly visitor the hedgehog. A few bats around, small, probably Pipistrelles.

Right! Now I'm going to have my tea!

### **Alan Hill 12/04/20**

Down by the river Mersey I've been watching the sand martins return. Their main activity at first is feeding up after their long migration, then down to some serious nest building in the sand bank opposite Burnage Rugby Club. No sign yet of any activity in the artificial nest bank opposite the Galleon Leisure Centre.

In the garden: we've had ravens flying over, and buzzards high up. But the absolute highlight was our two regular bullfinches in the act of mating, without shame, on the willow tree. A real treat

#### **Liz Blackman 14/04**

More news from the far south:

Primroses are still in flower in Cam's garden, though they didn't like yesterday's fierce drying winds. A few years ago when here about this time I saw a bee-fly on the primroses or forget-me-nots. It was a fluffy ball with skinny fly-like legs and going about with its straight proboscis sticking out. Fascinating!

This year I was scanning with binocs, which can do quite a short focus, and I saw something similar. This time a gingery beige colour and elongated tho' not more than 15 mm long at a guess. Also in evidence was a bee, all dressed in black, with the abdomen a bit shiny, not so fluffy there. It had pollen sacs filled with orange pollen. These two interacted a bit, aggressively. I found out that the bee-flies are not so charming as they look, they parasitise solitary bees!

Couple of days later, on my fast walk, how delighted was I to see, in a sunlit dry stone wall, several, 6 - 8, of the black bees, buzzing around and looking into the cracks and going in. Mason bees! On line it implies they are very highly sought after as pollinators. I guess this was a brood of siblings which had just emerged. They spaced themselves out along the wall.

All for now, Cheers and keep well, to all, Liz

#### **Margaret McCormick 24/04**

In the garden today...Speckled wood, Orange tip, Holly blue & Small White butterflies & pairs of Blue & Great tits, a Blackbird, Dunnock & House sparrow. Not forgetting the 2 ubiquitous Wood pigeons!

Considering my garden is little more than a 16x20ft plot behind my terraced house, I suppose being within half a mile of Carrington Moss helps, or maybe they smell the sunflower hearts etc. that I fill the feeders with! Oh! & I mustn't forget the hedgehog who snuffles round my back door around 10 pm for his nightly feed of hog nibbles & sunflower hearts. I tried cat food but the local cats soon got on to that & were always there waiting!

Missing the walks & meetings but trying to keep busy. Potato & tomato plants are growing fast & the Apple trees are full of blossom....Some things stay normal!! Miss you all!

#### **Alan Hill 27/04**

I've been trying to keep an eye on what's going on around the Mersey near our house. The sand martins are the biggest delight for me. They are now around in considerable numbers, more than I have seen for some years, but all their activity is concentrated on the sandy banks of the river near Burnage Rugby Club – in and out of the nest holes and feeding along the river. But a few hundred yards down river is the artificial nest bank installed a couple of years ago to mitigate the destruction of a natural sandbank when the gas board were renewing the pipeline under the river, and it is completely ignored. Last year about a quarter of the nest holes were used, but no takers this time round. It does indeed look very 'artificial' to me, not attempt to blend it in with the surrounding landscape. I worry a bit about the nest holes in the river bank which are being used: (1) if the river levels rise rapidly they could become submerged; (2) there are quite a few mink about which find it relatively easy to get into the natural holes in the bank, whereas the artificial nest bank would be much safer from predation. (*Pictures below.*)

My other 'star' birds on the river are the goosanders, which are now present, in varying numbers, all year round. I had a report the day before yesterday of a female with ten ducklings in tow, but I couldn't see them when I went down yesterday.





The completely unused artificial sand martin nest bank.

**Hilary Hampar:** 27<sup>th</sup> April - Mersey Vally  
Probably an orange poppy.



**Julie Samuels:** at King George V Pool, 9<sup>th</sup> April  
Captions, please!



The river bank. Sand Martin on approach. Right hand hole occupied.

Fine specimens of Chicken in the Woods.



16<sup>th</sup> April. "Don't know who was more surprised, me or the squirrel!"





Julie: Chaffinches were two a penny when I was a kid. I rarely seem to spot them nowadays, but maybe I'm going to the wrong places. Jacky: They have all moved to Scotland. Julie, sensible birds.



20<sup>th</sup> April - This delightful little fella was living up to his name [Chiffchaff] yesterday, alongside the brook between the municipal golf course and the fishing pond



19<sup>th</sup> April: I keep promising myself that I won't take any more pictures of ducklings ... but these were just too darned cute to ignore



29<sup>th</sup> April: And they're off! 👍 About a dozen teneral Large Red damselflies emerging from the pond at Denzell Gardens this afternoon. LRDs are the first damsel of the Spring and, I believe, males tend to be first on the scene (possibly because they take longer to mature than their female counterparts?). This beauty was resting in the floral border whilst his wings hardened off. Love seeing them when they're all new and shiny like this one





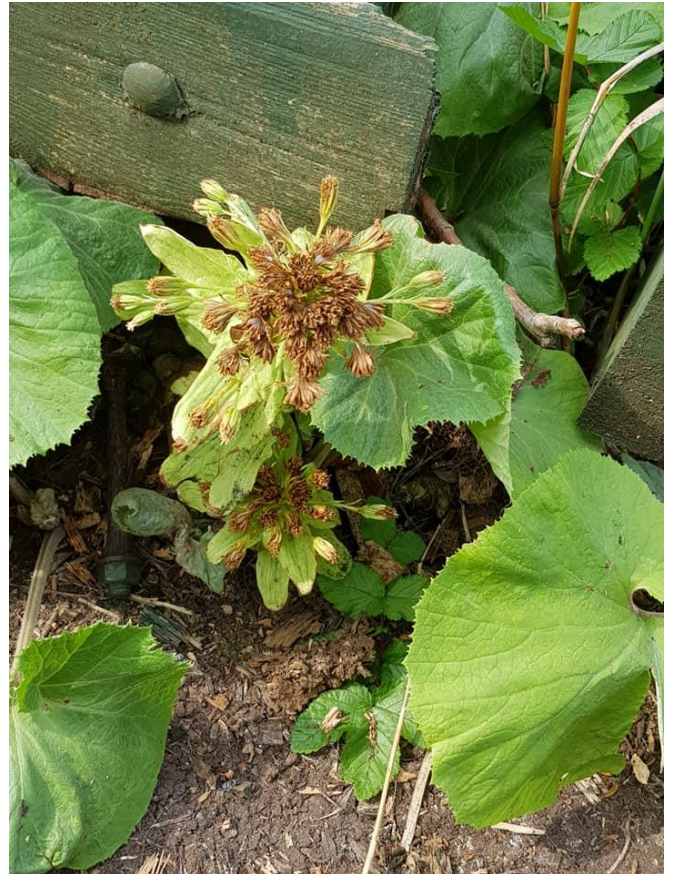
**Jacky:** at King George V Pool, 9<sup>th</sup> April. Parasitic Toothwort there was quit a large amount around this tree.



Coot on nest.



Butterbur

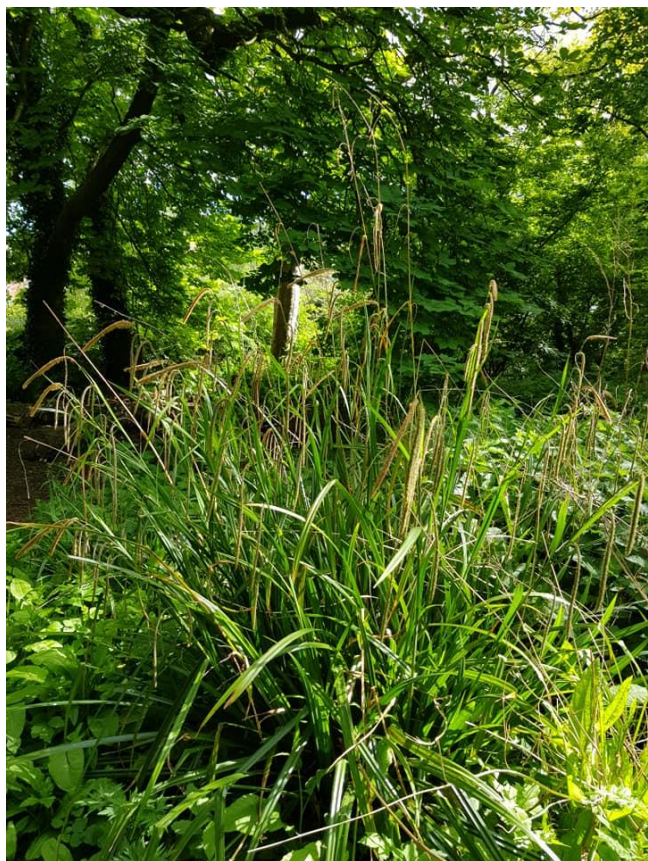


Stamford Park, 28<sup>th</sup> April. We now have full candles on the Horsechestnut.





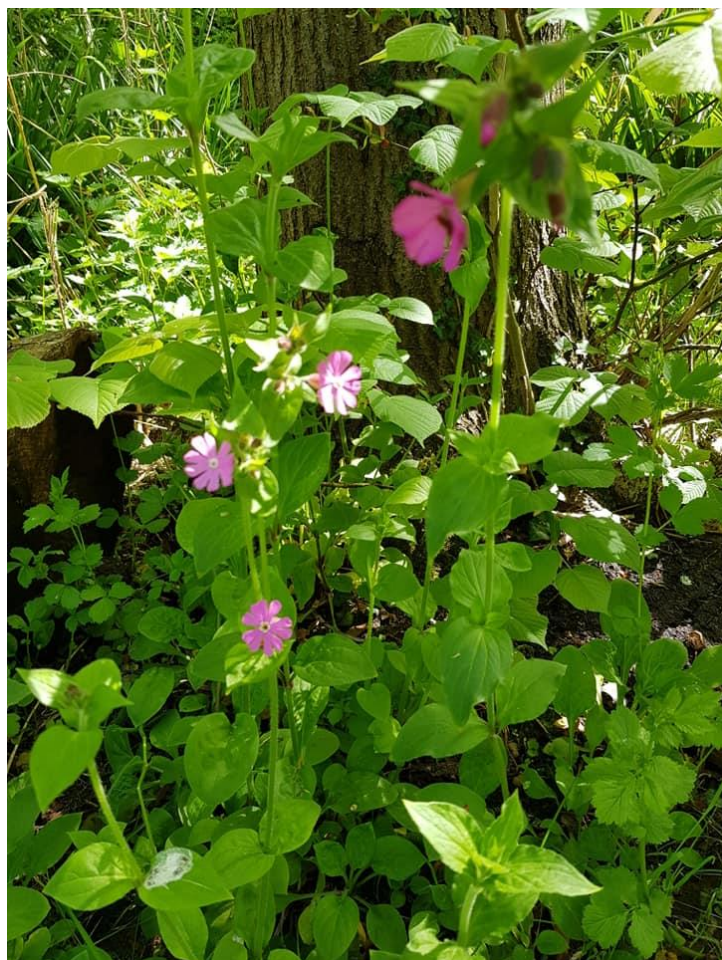
Pendulous sedge looking good now.



Ransomes in flower here now.



First Red Campion in flower



Catkins on the big weeping willow





Colin: 20<sup>th</sup> April



Imaged this afternoon in Bowdon on South Downs Road. Probably Japanese Wisteria, *Wisteria floribunda*. Never seen it before.



Stretford Garden: 22<sup>nd</sup> April.  
First swift returning in April?  
In the swift box of my neighbours Jane and David. The female has also been seen entering the box.



24<sup>th</sup> April. A beech tree is not ideal for a small garden, so I have been climbing and trimming this tree for many years – until the neighbour behind planted this clematis. As can be seen, the clematis is now covering the whole crown of the tree. While the tree may be unhappy and struggling to reach the light, it requires far less effort for me to keep under control – and looks attractive at this time of year.





19<sup>th</sup> April, We have had hoverflies visiting the pond for a couple of weeks. Until a couple of days ago they seemed mostly of the genus *Eristalis*. This has suddenly changed and now we see mostly the species *Helophilus pendulus*.



Caught this pair mating – on the same day that Mike Ashworth found the same in Somerset (and produced better photos).



Mersey Valley: 23<sup>rd</sup> April  
Common Comfrey



Common Comfrey. Note the winged stems.





27<sup>th</sup> April: The heronry. Had previously wondered whether there were any chicks. Had heard much chattering and commotion prior to an adult flying off, but until this occasion had not seen anything as convincing as this. There appeared to be two chicks in this nest. Subsequently saw two others in another nest.



Adult resting before flying off.

