



Wild About Barrow

January/February 2022

Happy New Year!

Despite the cold, short winter days we can delight in the fact that nature does not stop. Many species continue to keep busy, feeding, maintaining their territory as in the case of robins, and an increasing birdsong from mid January heralds the start of the mating season. Flowers take a competitive advantage attracting insects to complete their reproduction before leaves appear.

Wild Celebration January/February



Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*)



White Dead Nettle
(*Lamium album*)



Bracket fungus (*Phellinus igniarius?*)



Ivy (*Hedera helix*)



Ivy leaved toadflax
(*Cymbalaria muralis*)



Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*)

Photos by A Rushton

There must have been almost 20 in the flock of goldfinches that settled for a while in a rowan: delightful! Although some, especially males, stay here throughout the winter, others migrate to Europe and even as far as North Africa. Their populations are now recovering well from a low in the '70s and 80s.

The ivy fruiting dome has now ripened since shown in the Nature Notes of December and will feed a variety of birds and insects in this lean season.

Seed heads of the ivy-leaved toadflax ingeniously bend towards darkness to deposit their seed into a crevice where germination is possible. Also, the seed heads are heavily ridged to ensure they remain locked in place as the first roots take hold.

The Beating Heart of the Biosphere

I was surprised to find this little fella (2.5cm long) in my planter recently. It looked, at first glance, like a hazelnut but was in fact a cockchafer, busily trying to disappear back into the soil. Soil is home to a whole world of creatures we rarely see, or are unable to see due to their size. The trenches dug by Cadent last December revealed this hidden world of soil that we walk over every day. But what is soil? Where does it come from? And what lives in it?



Common Cockchafer
(*Melolontha melolontha*)
A Rushton

Soil is formed from the breaking down and dissolving of the rocks that cover the earth. Weathering and plants, lichen and microbes all play their part in this.

Did you know it takes 1000 years to create 3cms of topsoil? Huge glaciers pushed millions of tonnes of sand, gravel and pebbles over the Midlands in the last ice age. Since then, soils have developed on top of this making a mix of minerals, decaying plant material, air and water. Yet in 2014 a senior UN official said that at the current rates of soil degradation all the world's top soil could be gone within 60 years



Earthworms
(*Lumbricus terrestris*)

A myriad of creatures wriggle, crawl, dig and throb here: worms, insects, molluscs mammals, miniscule parasites and in just a pinch of garden soil millions of bacteria and fungi live, most unknown to science. Scientists now think that these creatures make up the beating heart of the biosphere and that the fate of all life may depend on the wellbeing of their fragile world. After all, it's where recycling goes on and is a great store of carbon dioxide.

Progress is, however, being made in improving and protecting soils: organic farming is giving us an opportunity

to support soil health and wildlife; 40 villages, towns and entire cities across the UK are going pesticide-free, also the Government's new farming subsidy aims to reward farmers for sustainable farming.

What to see

1. Who can **spot the largest spider's web**? In the damp and misty weather at this time of year it's amazing how many spiders' webs there are - and some are pretty big.
2. We are more aware than ever of the **health benefits of being in nature so get out** every day, no matter what the weather, and feel alive in the refreshing wind and rain.
3. Wrap up, go outside **be part of nature**: listen and absorb at what is going on, breath it in!

What to do

1. **Garden organically** and improve the health of your soil and all that lives in it.
2. **Take part in the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch**. Spend just an hour over 28th – 30th January observing your garden bird visitors. Visit [rspb.org.uk](https://www.rspb.org.uk) for more details.
3. In this year of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, everyone is being invited to **plant trees**. For more information on the Queen's Green Canopy, Google the Woodland Trust.

Alison Rushton

Think global:Act local