# Prestwood Nature
# SUMMER NEWS 2024

*Conservation group for the Prestwood region including Great Missenden, the Hampdens, the Kingshills, North Dean and Speen.*

***Working together with nature***

*Issue 67, 15th August 2024*




## Chair's Chat

I hope you are having a good summer. It was wonderful to have a fully flowing Misbourne for the Midsummer in the Meadow event organised by our Boug's volunteers, at the end of June. However, the downside of the wet weather earlier in the year has been a dearth of insects. Butterfly Conservation reported that numbers were only just over half those that had been spotted at the same time last year, with one week of the count to go. It was only on the last weekend of the Big Butterfly Count that I finally saw my first Peacock and Red Admiral of the year.



*Red Admiral (H Matthews)*

We are starting to plan our programme of events for next year. If you have any ideas for event or talks that you would like to see, or can recommend any good speakers, please get in touch. On the subject of events, our Annual General Meeting is less than three months away. We have several vacancies for Council members. We need people who can lead projects, people who can help with administrative tasks and others who can organise events, so whatever your talents are, don't be shy! Get in touch with me at chair@prestwoodnature.org or any other member of the Council.

Helen Matthews

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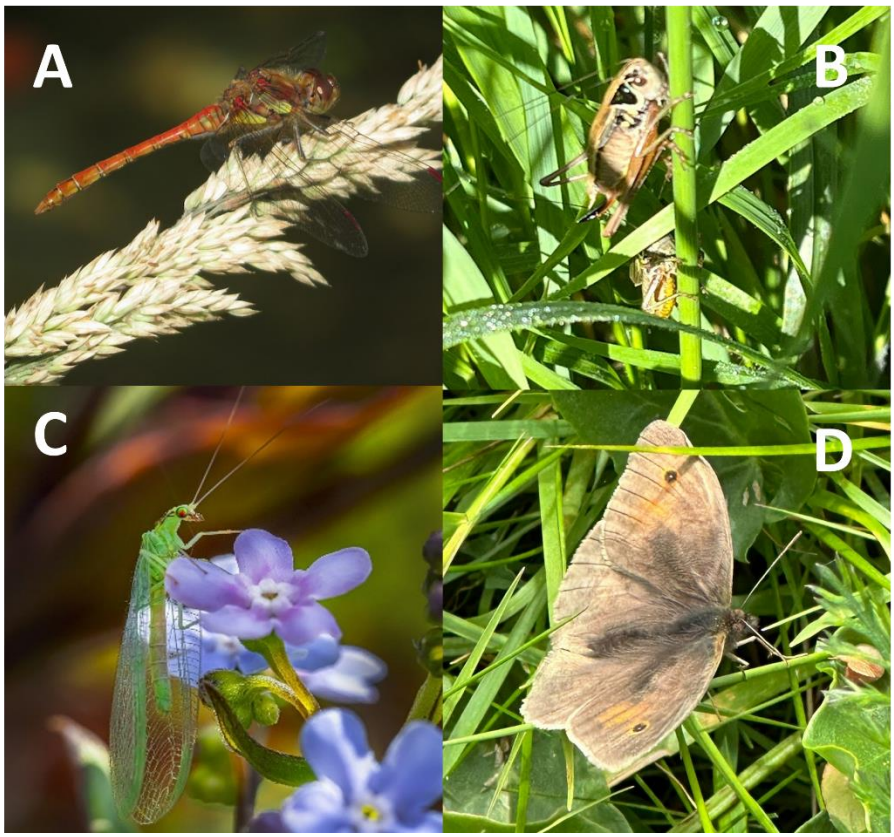
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**Summer Quick Quiz**

1. Can you name each of these meadow creatures above?
2. Which of these are you more likely to hear before you spot it?

## *Wildflower Walk with a Botanist in Great Missenden, 30th June*





*Karen explains the differences between Common Hogweed and Giant Hogweed (M Bosman); Small Skipper (A Porter)*

## ***Midsummer in the Meadow (Boug's Meadow), 30th June*** by Colin Tyler

Thank you to all the volunteers for your hard meadow preparation work. It all paid off. Our visitors loved the open day in Boug's Meadow. The displays from the Butterfly Conservation, Priestfield Arboretum, Bumblebee Trust, Leather Lane Bat Group, Clean River Misbourne and our very own Prestwood Nature were all very colourful, engaging and informative. As were the activities - which got our young and old, colouring, investigating, spotting and magnifying. Thank you to everyone who made the day such a success.



*What can I find? (C Tyler)*



*Shield bug eggs spotted by a 6-year-old (C Tyler)*

Special mention and thanks must go to Tansy who went above and beyond in helping clear the river of excess grass to aid river flow- and for making sure the Tansy plant thrived in the meadow and did not become swamped by the Cow parsley and Giant Hogweed. And what a

Misbourne flow we have had this year- faster, wider, deeper and flowing longer into August, indeed since the beginning of the year.



*Tansy helping to clear the Misbourne to aid river flow (C Tyler)*



*Tansy's Tansy (C Tyler)*

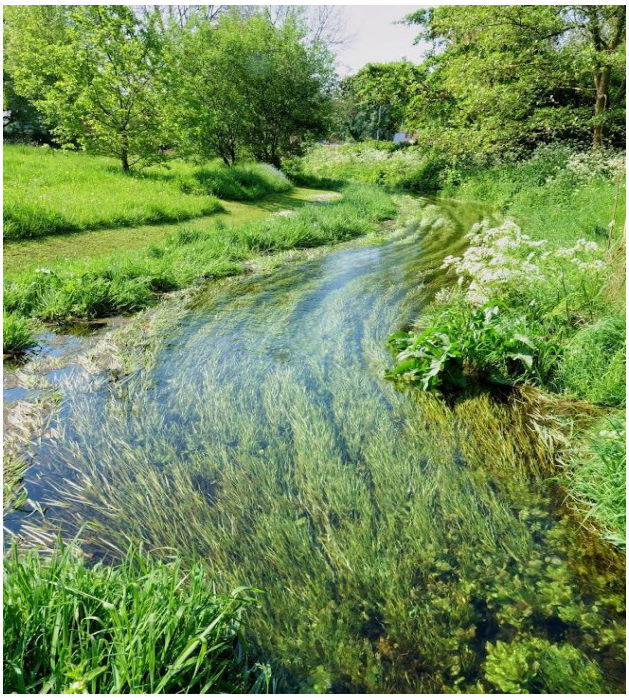
Invertebrates this year have suffered badly with bees, hoverflies, butterflies, ladybirds, and spiders all down on usual numbers. This year's 'save our slug' PR campaign budget could have been saved though. But, when the sun shines, we have seen some wonderful displays of crickets, butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies. Both 'Wildman' blue tit boxes have seen young. Moorhen, mallard, wren and robin have also delighted us with their young families.



*Baby moorhen (C Tyler)*

The superbly-laid car park hedge has greened up well and instantly become a wildlife and local resident favourite.

Sadly, the better weather has also brought with it occasional vandalism to the picnic bench, noticeboard and copse trail in Boug's Meadow. These however have been isolated incidents and dwarfed by the overwhelmingly positive comments from Meadow visitors who have been extremely complimentary. One elderly lady told me recently 'I always make sure I visit four or five times a week. I love it here' ……as she rode off on her BMX bike!



*River Misbourne in full force (K Tyrrell)*



*Water-speedwell in the Misbourne (H Tyler)*

## **Summertime!** By Marieke Bosman

The weather finally seems to be improving so here are some things to do for and in local nature between August and October. Don't forget to check the Prestwood Nature events page online to check for fun activities for adults and children as we regularly update it; in the list below, our activities are highlighted in green.

**THINGS TO DO FOR NATURE THIS SUMMER**

**Outdoor volunteering with Prestwood Nature**

Prestwood Nature manages several sites for nature, and we regularly hold conservation volunteering sessions. Volunteers (members and non-members) come for an hour or longer to help look after our pretty Pollinator Friendly Garden, our fruit-filled Community Orchard and the charming Boug's (wildflower) Meadow in Great Missenden. There is usually cake on offer and a friendly group of people to welcome you. You don't need to book and you don't

need any experience. The following work parties are planned for summer and autumn. For more information see our Prestwood Nature website.

- 17 August 10.00 to 12.30 Volunteer Work Party at the Pollinator Friendly Garden at Greenlands Lane.
- 15 September 10.00 to 13.00 Volunteer Work Party at Boug's wildflower meadow in Great Missenden.
- 21 September 10.00 to 12.30 Volunteer Work Party at the Pollinator Friendly Garden at Greenlands Lane.
- 13 October 10.00 - 13.00 Volunteer Work Party at Boug's wildflower meadow in Great Missenden.
- 19 October 10.00 to 12.30 Volunteer Work Party at the Pollinator Friendly Garden at Greenlands Lane.
- 10 November 10.00 - 13.00 Volunteer Work Party at Boug's wildflower meadow in Great Missenden.
- 16 November 10.00 to 12.30 Volunteer Work Party at the Pollinator Friendly Garden at Greenlands Lane.

Other volunteering opportunities can be found with the Chiltern Rangers, Chiltern Chalk Streams (via ChilternsAONB), Misbourne River Action and the Chesham Environmental Group. Search for volunteering opportunities via this hub: https://www.chilterns.org.uk/whats-on/volunteering/.

If you know a child or a young person who would like to volunteer, BBOWT regularly holds nature conservation days where children and young people can come and learn about nature and help with conservation work together with other children. For more information, see the BBOWT website.

If you'd like to meet other people involved in working for and with nature, BBOWT runs Team Wilder, a community network of nature volunteer organisations such as Prestwood Nature as well as individuals interested in supporting nature personally. Once a month they meet online to share experiences, swap ideas about nature projects, chat and network. Usually one member gives a presentation about their work. These meetings are held on a Wednesday evening once a month from 7pm to 8pm. For more info and to sign up, go to BBOWT.

## NATURE EVENTS, WALKS AND TALKS IN THE LOCAL AREA

Here is a calendar of free or low-cost outdoor nature events organised by Prestwood Nature and other local nature organisations within easy reach of Prestwood over the next three months. To find out more about a particular event, click these links:

- Berkshire Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)
- Chilterns AONB
- Chiltern Chalk Streams: use Chilterns AONB

- Chiltern Open Air Museum
- Chiltern Society
- Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- Mop End Field Studies Centre
- Prestwood Nature
- Priestfield Arboretum
- Wild Amersham
- Wild Cookham
- Wild Marlow
- Wycombe Wildlife Group

**August**

- 15 August: **Riverside walk at Henley** with Wycombe Wildlife
- 18 August: **Walk at Aldbury** with the Chiltern Society
- 18 August: **Nature art workshop** with Prestwood Nature
- 21 August: **Mad meadows and bug hunt family activities** at College Lake with BBOWT
- 22 August: **Nature explorer day camp for children** at College Lake with BBOWT
- 24 August: **Moth trapping** at Seer Green with Wycombe Wildlife
- 28 August**: Pond explorers children's activity** at College Lake with BBOWT
- 29 August: **Nature explorer day camp for children** at College Lake with BBOWT

**September**

- 1 September: **Late summer flowers at Dancersend** with BBOWT
- 1 September: **Walk at Knotty Green** with the Chiltern Society
- 4 September: **Walk at Latimer** with the Chiltern Society
- 6 September: **Creatures of the Night event for children** with Prestwood Nature
- 7 September: **Nature writing course at Cassiobury Park** Watford with HMWT
- 11 September: **Walk at Lacey Green** with the Chiltern Society
- 12 September: **Wonders of the Dark Sky evening** with the Chiltern Society
- 14 September: **Adult course on plants** at Mop End FSC (free to attend)
- 14 September: **Eco-fair** at the Free Church in Amersham
- 14 September: **Wild Marlow green stall** at Marlow Carnival
- 15 September: **Walk at Sarrat** with the Chiltern Society
- 17 September: **Chilterns Landscape walk at Princes Risborough** with the Chiltern Society
- 21 September: **Lindengate private tour** with the Chiltern Society
- 24 September: **Supper and a walk at College Lake** with the Chiltern Society
- 28 September: **Harvest festival on farming** and crafts at COAM
- 29 September: **Harvest festival on farming** and crafts at COAM

- 29 September: **Flowers and fungi walk at Aston Clinton Ragpits** with BBOWT
- 29 September: **Walk at Cadmore End** with the Chiltern Society

**October**

- 2 October: **Walk in Old Amersham** with the Chiltern Society
- 2 October: **Adult course on animals** at Mop End FSC (free to attend)
- 5 October: **Riverfly open day** with Chiltern Chalk Streams
- 6 October: **Walk at West Wycombe** with the Chiltern Society
- 6 October: **Autumn wildflower walk** in Great Missenden with Prestwood Nature
- 12 October: **Riverfly training day** with Chiltern Chalk Streams
- 12 October: **Orchard Event** with Prestwood Nature (details TBC)
- 16 October: **Walk at Tring** with the Chiltern Society
- 19 October: **Free family nature day** at Mop End FSC
- 20 October: **Open Day at Priestfield Arboretum** (TBC)
- 23 October: **Hedgerow Walk** with Wild Amersham
- 30 October: **Walk at Whiteleaf Cross** with the Chiltern Society

**November**

- 3 November: **Walk in Wendover** with the Chiltern Society
- 5 November: **Talk about Tracking the Impact** at Prestwood Nature AGM
- 6 November: **Walk in Radnage** with the Chiltern Society
- 10 November: **Walk at Chenies** with the Chiltern Society
- 17 November: **Walk at Chalfont St Giles** with the Chiltern Society



*Meadow Cranesbill enjoying the sun (Colin Tyler)*

## ***Summer at the Pollinator Friendly Garden*** By Karen van Oostrum

The Pollinator Friendly Garden (PFG) continues to establish well, and the variety of plants mean that we have seen flowers in bloom from February until now without a break, and this will continue until late October. Despite all that is on offer, the pollinators have been sadly lacking – nowhere near their normal numbers. So, what is going on this year? You may have noticed that 2024 has been unusually wet – the UK had its wettest spring since 1986, with rainfall up by a third more than usual, making this the 6th wettest spring on record. The changing climate is more complex than 'global warming' alone – the UK is more likely to experience weather extremes in future, so 'unusually wet' seasons may become more common. All this is bad news for many of our pollinators, which have evolved with the natural rhythms of the seasons in this part of the world, such that their life-cycles are now potentially mis-matched with these new weather patterns. Many pollinators, butterflies especially, need warm, dry conditions to fly around and mate, so this noticeable lack of pollinators is most probably the consequence of the cold, wet spring and early summer.





*From left: bee on geranium; geraniums; Ox-eye Daisies at the PFG in June (K van Oostrum)*

## ***Gardening for Wildlife*** By Karen van Oostrum

Our pollinators have had a rough ride with the weather in 2024, but you can do your bit to help them out. If you're helping the pollinators, you're also supporting wildlife higher up the food chain – benefitting birds, amphibians and small mammals, and then in turn the larger mammals and birds.

Celebrate your weeds! The flowering heads of thistles and teasels are loved by bees and butterflies. Later in the season, when these flowers are over, still don't tidy them away because the seeds are valuable food for goldfinches and other birds.

When it comes to sorting out your garden this autumn, try not to be too tidy! You can offer winter shelter by leaving the hollow stems of plants (like cow parsley), which are favoured by ladybirds and lacewings. If you tidy up leaves later in year, store them in a heap in a corner of your garden, where they will provide a safe winter home for caterpillars and pupae. Try to provide a little damp shade for beetles, woodlice, centipedes and newts to shelter under through the year. This could take the form of a few old logs left in a heap, or a pile of flints cleared from your soil. And finally, the flowers of ivy are relatively inconspicuous, but are a major source of nectar late in the year, when bees are stocking up for the winter. So if you have ivy growing in your garden, embrace it!



*Goldfinches are among the birds that benefit from 'teasing' the seeds from teasel heads (ZenAga, Pixabay)*

## ***The Ruin of the Woods*** By Tony Marshall

There was a small wood where I often used to go. Sunny glades in spring were full of primroses, moschatel, wood anemone and wood sorrel (including the only local colony of the uncommon pink form of the latter). It was one of the least spoiled of our local woodlands and showed how beautiful and brimming with life they could be.

I visited this wood the other day only to find the ground over the whole length of the wood chewed up into hummocks and ruts over a metre deep. Foresters had chosen to use the wood as a route to the nearest road for removing felled trees from other neighbouring woods. They used huge machines with tyres that devastated everything along a strip several metres across, made even worse this year, of course, by the saturated soil. They dragged huge trees that brought down or damaged saplings and young trees in their path. It looked like a scene from a warzone. There is no chance the vegetation could have survived, but the real damage has been done to the complex ecosystem within the soil itself, the delicate mycorrhizal web connecting trees, plants and fungi on which all of them depend, plus all the other micro-organisms doing essential jobs in maintaining life. I shall never be able to walk through that wood with pleasure ever again.



*The uncommon pink form of wood sorrel (T Marshall)*

I walked from there to other woods in the region and witnessed the same devastation in many of the others too, nothing short of an all-out war on nature, on the environment, on life itself. The careful efforts of Prestwood Nature volunteers with their hand-tools at a few small sites to protect and enhance natural habitats are eclipsed by this wholesale destruction. Thank goodness that PN, the Wildlife Trust and other conservation bodies *are* protecting a few choice

areas, but the priorities and tactics of a few companies could lead to the destruction of a natural wealth that belongs to us all.

Why is this devastation occurring now? Talking with some people concerned I have found that the primary cause lies with certain forestry firms jumping on the bandwagon of ash dieback to make a quick buck. They are persuading woodland owners, some of whom may be ignorant of woodland management and of natural ecosystems, that they need to remove their ash trees because of the disease, or they would be liable if injury were to be caused by falling trees or branches. They offer to take out the trees for no payment as long as they are allowed to sell the timber themselves, which can seem a bargain to landowners only too willing to have the 'problem' go away.



*Are actions to reduce the impact of Chalara (ash dieback) having wider consequences? (FERA Crown Copyright)*

The official advice for woodland managers with respect to ash dieback is to remove any major trees that are affected adjacent to public areas like footpaths, but to leave most standing to run their natural course, especially as some 10% of ash trees have natural immunity and it is important to preserve these to ensure the survival of the species. I took a look at some of the stockpiles of timber that these rogue firms (which include some well-known names) have made ready for collection. The numbers of trees cut down far exceed the number of mature ashes in the woods concerned. (I know because I have been cataloguing and measuring all the important accessible trees in our area.) The timber being cut out is in fact mostly beech. They use the excuse that sometimes they have to remove another tree in order to obtain access to an ash-tree they think needs felling. But the numbers removed are far more than could be justified in that way, even more so when such secluded ash-trees, well away from public access, do not need to be removed at all.

The decline in the value of native timber, over many decades now, has created a difficult situation for many forestry firms. This has led to some of them touting for business by spreading scare stories, approaching house-owners, for instance, to tell them that a tree in their garden needs to be taken down because it is 'diseased' and could be a danger. But in the process our beautiful and life-supporting environment is being trashed. Plants and creatures are being destroyed.

This is not the place to plug any particular commercial company, but if I have tree work that needs doing, I search for a recommended firm from an independent source such as *Which? Trusted Traders*. I certainly do not listen to cowboys knocking speculatively on my door.

It is sad, is it not, that the profits of individuals are so often based on the destruction of that natural wealth that should belong to us all?

## Review of *Birds: Brilliant and Bizarre* at the Natural History Museum

by James Appleby

The National History Museum's newest exhibition *Birds: Brilliant and Bizarre* is organised into three areas of interest: the past, present and future.

**Birds in the past**

Birds didn't evolve from dinosaurs; in fact, birds are a fully integrated part of the dinosaur clade. The exhibition shows how many avian features are shared with other dinosaurs; for instance, a cast of the air-sacks of a Mallard duck is displayed alongside the vertebra of the sauropod *Xenoposeidon*, showing evidence of similar structures.



*Air sacks of a Mallard duck alongside vertebrae of sauropod Xenoposeidon (J Appleby)*

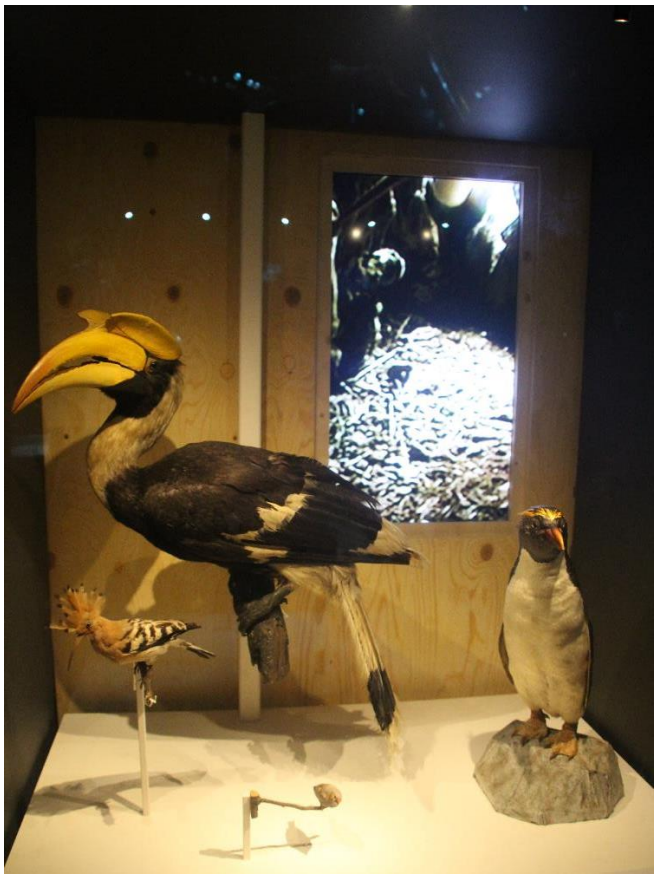
A dark corridor represents the Cretaceous mass-extinction. The exhibition explains that the ancestors of modern birds, such as the *Asteriornis*, were mostly ground-dwelling. This meant that when the asteroid impact widely thought to have destroyed the world's forests occurred, they were better suited to surviving the aftermath.



Asteriornis *reconstruction (J Appleby)*

**Birds in present times**

In common with much of the Museum's exhibits, *Birds: Brilliant and Bizarre* features numerous stuffed specimens, as well as eggs and nests, but some are accompanied by videos, such as an X-ray view of a snake full of eggs and footage of a Hornbill daubing up the entrance of its nest in a tree. Video is an essential illustration tool, after all, stuffed birds tell you little about the animal's complex behaviours. There are things to touch; and even an exhibit to smell, which replicates the scent of Hoopoe preen oil – it's a lot like smoked meat!



*Hoopoe, Hornbill and Penguin specimens (JA)*

Birds are famous for their song, and the most impressive songsmith is that accomplished mimic, the Lyre bird. There's an interactive game, at the exhibition, where you are asked to guess which sounds are from the suggested source, and which are the Lyre bird – most are the latter! The Lyre bird also has flamboyant plumage, a trait shared with other species such as Bustards, Ruffs, and of course Birds of Paradise.

The exhibition also focuses on the intelligence of birds. The Einsteins of the bird world are the corvids. There's an interactive game in which you play a Jay, surviving the winter by hiding acorns and trying to remember where you put them! Other smart birds featured include Great Tits, who have worked out how to hunt hibernating Pipistrelle Bats.

Birds' most famous attribute is, of course, flight. One striking display looks at the murmuration patterns of Starlings using computer simulation to generate bird movements. You can put this to the test by sending in a Peregrine Falcon, causing the flock to shift out of the way. Migration is a big focus featuring the Arctic Tern, the bird with the longest migration path of all, travelling from the Arctic to the Antarctic and back every year.



*Red kite in flight at the Natural History Museum (JA)*

**Birds in future**

The exhibition concludes by considering birds under threat, along with conservation efforts. The whole exhibition highlights threats to birds, but this area has a greater emphasis on solutions. There is a focus on the work of the RSPB, such as the organisation's successfully lobbying to ban the import of plumage to the UK in 1921 and the recent ban of sand eel fishing in the North Sea. Extinction often feels like a foreign concept, but the UK is already one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth, and species continue to decline. Labels in this area are accompanied with a call to action for individuals. There is a specificity to the instructions, such as which insecticides to take care with in flea treatment of pets.

The last part of the exhibition looks to birdlife in 2050, assuming we meet our all important Net Zero targets and make more space for nature. The Museum's display uses three huge projections, with birds and other animals portrayed as shadows. I appreciated the realism of the scenario. There are masses of wind turbines and electricity pylons to keep up with our demand for renewable energy. Invasive Parakeets are present, and Pelicans are seen too, likely migrants from the south, showing that climate change will be ongoing.

**Would I recommend visiting the exhibition?**

Absolutely! It targets an older audience, with many text panels, but is still accessible to younger children with its interactive games and sensory engagement. As an ecologist, I appreciated the exhibition's vision for a brighter future in which birds and other wildlife are able to thrive alongside human populations.

*Birds: Brilliant and Bizarre* runs until January 2025, at the Natural History Museum.

## *Answers to Summer Quick Quiz:*

*1. A: Common darter dragonfly B: Roesel's bush-cricket, C: Common green lacewing, D: Meadow brown butterfly.* *(Images: Colin Tyler, Hazel Tyler, Erik Karits via Pixabay and A Porter.)*
*2. Roesel's bush-cricket has a long, monotonous song that sounds rather like a mechanical noise. You'll definitely hear it before you spot it.*



*Gazebo-building fun at Midsummer in the Meadow! (Colin Tyler)*

Prestwood Nature's ***Autumn News 2024*** will be published in mid-November. If you would like to write an article or share an image to be included in this newsletter, the deadline will be 31st October. Email Editor Alice Griffiths using the email address newsletter@prestwoodnature.org

*All views expressed in this newsletter are those of individual contributors and do not necessary represent those of Prestwood Nature or its Council members.*

Working together with nature