Prestwood Nature
AUTUMN NEWS 2024

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

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

Working together with nature

Issue 68, 12th November 2024



Chair's Chat

It may be autumn now, but a lot is happening in Prestwood Nature.
On 5 November we held our 21st AGM (thanks to Karen for stepping in, to chair at short notice whilst I was having surgery on a broken foot). The annual report which was presented showcases the wonderful work done by our volunteers. If you haven't had a chance to read it yet, you can find it here.

We were very sorry that three of our Council members stood down at the AGM: Marieke Bosman (General Secretary), Anne Evans (Treasurer) and Christopher Black (Communications team). We thank them all for their hard work on behalf of Prestwood Nature. Anne will be continuing to co-ordinate the Butterfly Transect. As well as her role as Secretary, Marieke did a lot of work as part of the events team – if anyone would like to get involved in helping to organise events, do please get in touch.
We welcome Frances Rawle and Tony Marlow who were elected to the roles of General Secretary and Treasurer respectively.

Vanessa Rickett was presented with the Queen's Award in recognition of her years of dedicated service as Chair and continued involvement.

The week before the AGM saw the launch of the new Prestwood Community Association (PCA). I had the opportunity to say a few words about Prestwood Nature, what we do and how we hope to work constructively with the new Association. We also got several mentions during the main PCA presentation. It was very pleasing that several potential new volunteers/members came forward at the end.
We try to attend village events whenever we can to help get the message out about Prestwood Nature. We also once again had a stall at the Holy Trinity Bazaar on 9 November and will be decorating a tree for the Great Missenden Christmas Tree festival at St Peter and Paul's Church which is open to the public from 30th November-1st December. Hope to see you there!

Best wishes
Helen (chair@prestwoodnature.com)

Contents

Autumn Quick Quiz, p.2

Autumn Wildflower Walk, p.2

Calendar of Events, p.3-5

Fungi Walk, p.6

Orchard in October, p.7

Why is Ivy Brilliant for Wildlife? p.7-8

AGM talk by Nick Marriner, p.9-10

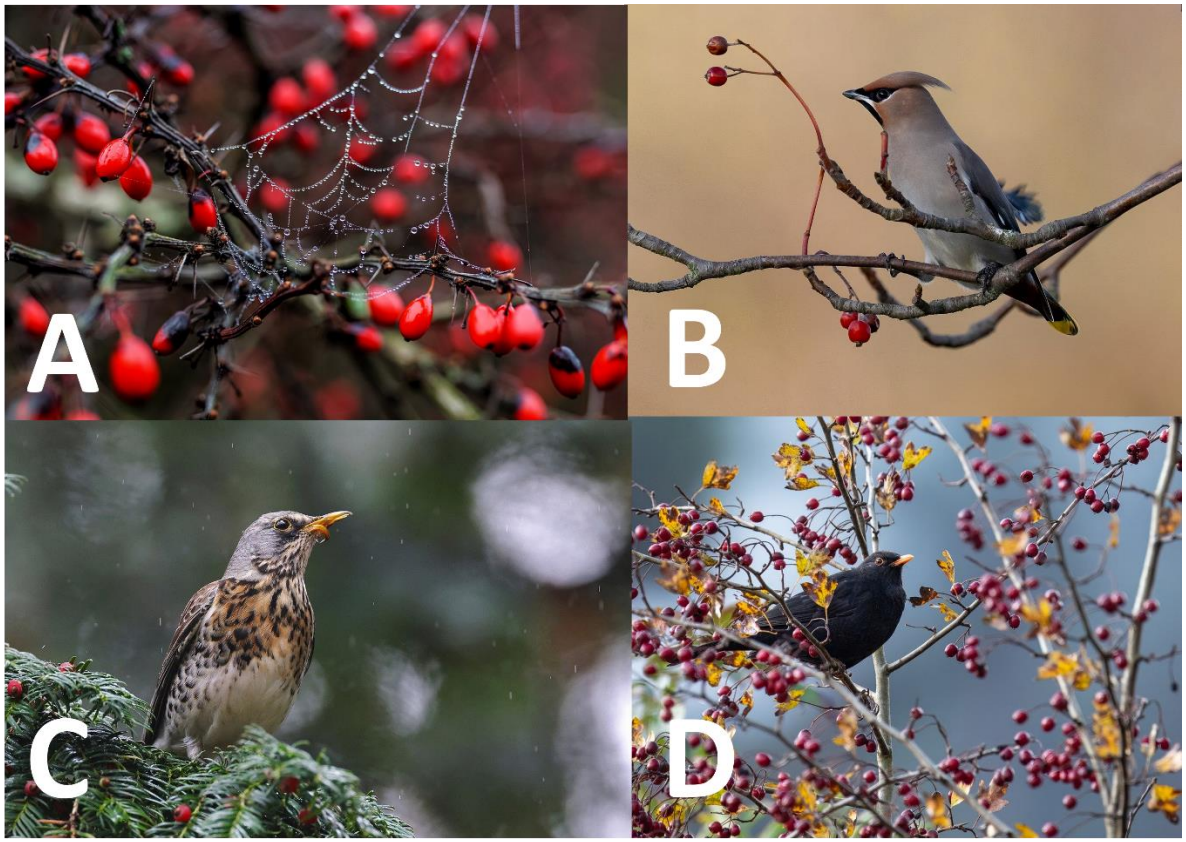
In Dulci Jubilo, p.11-12

PN's New Council Members, p.13

The New Year Plant Hunt 2025, p.14-15

A Good Job Well Done, p.15

Quick Quiz Answers, p15



Autumn Quick Quiz

1. Who is enjoying the autumn berries in each image A-D?
2. Are the fruits of the Yew tree poisonous to birds?

Autumn Wildflower Walk, Sunday 6th October 2024

This popular walk was the last of three this year: the paths used are the same each time so the differences in the seasons can be seen. It was led, as before, by our botanist Karen van Oostrum. We started at Bougs Meadow and noticed that the River Misbourne was flowing well and looked clean, probably due to the large amounts of rain in the past few weeks.

The drizzle might have reduced the numbers, but thirteen people did brave the elements, and we were rewarded with some interesting plants. Those included: the hips of the Dog Rose; the keys (helicopter type seeds) of the Ash,



Karen's 2024 autumn wildflower walk (T Marlow)

Sycamore and Field Maple; Ribwort and Greater Plantain; the Ivy-leaved Toadflax growing on a wall and the leaves and corky bark of the Elm.



Robin's Pincushion a gall on a dog rose (T Marlow)

We also spotted a fine example of a Robin's Pincushion (see photo) which is a gall, the result of a wasp laying eggs on a leaf bud of a Dog Rose.

Karen entertained us with her very extensive knowledge of the wildflowers and grasses, and we all had a very enjoyable couple of hours.

If you'd like to join Karen for her 2025 series of walks keep your eye on the PN website or our own Prestwood Nature page on Facebook.

Tony Marlow

Enjoying Autumn and Winter in Prestwood

The nights may be drawing in, and nature seems to be going into hibernation, but there are still useful ways you can help nature, and interesting things to see and experience out there, even in autumn and winter.

What You Can Do FOR Nature

You probably know the drill: it is Autumn – so **'leave the leaves'** in your garden so that invertebrates, amphibians and reptiles and small mammals (including hedgehogs) have somewhere to hide when the weather gets colder. No need to leave your entire garden full of leaves – just some patches here and there is already a great start!

Have a good **clear out of any nestboxes** in your garden – all you need to do is take them down and remove any stuff that has built up inside them. You then give them a good rinse with boiling water, to kill any parasites that might affect young birds, and then put them back up. Birds in your garden are likely to visit the boxes over winter, and may then nest in them come spring.



Clear out any nestboxes in your garden (Erich Westendarp via Pixabay)

Buckinghamshire Council is developing a Nature Recovery Strategy. The Council is holding a **consultation day for the public** to tell you what they are proposing; this will be held in Aylesbury

on 18 November from 10.00-15:00. Attendance is free and tickets can be booked here.

If you would like to **learn and get involved in hedgelaying** the 'Rough Around the Hedges' project is now part of the Chiltern Society and it will be holding further training over the coming year, and lay hedges in the Chilterns. For more information, contact Paul Heath at paulheathuk@me.com.

BBOWT runs Team Wilder, a **community network of nature volunteer** organisations such as Wild Amersham as well as individuals interested in supporting nature personally. Once a month on Wednesday from 7-8 they have a **community group network meeting** online to share experiences, swap ideas, chat and network.

If you would like to help our chalk rivers, the River Misbourne Action Group has regular volunteering work. Contact bob.older@me.com.

Other local volunteering opportunities can be found with the Chiltern Rangers, the Chalk Rivers Project, the Chiltern Society, the Chesham Environmental Group as well as BBOWT. You can search for volunteering opportunities through this hub: https://www.chilterns.org.uk/whats-on/volunteering/.

If you know a child or a young person who would like to volunteer in nature, BBOWT regularly holds **free nature conservation days for children and young people** can come and learn about nature and help out with conservation work together with other children on a weekend day (Young Rangers is age 8-11 and Teen Rangers is age 11-17). For more information, see the BBOWT website.

Local Nature Events this Autumn and Winter

Below is a list of free or low-cost nature events that will be held over the coming three months within a short distance from Prestwood; Prestwood Nature events are in **bold**. For more information, go to these links: BBOWT; Chilterns National Landscape; Prestwood Nature; for Chiltern Chalk Streams use Chilterns National Landscape; Chiltern Open Air Museum; Chiltern Society; Jordans Picture House; Mop End Field Studies Centre; Prestwood Nature; Priestfield Arboretum; Wild Cookham; Wild Marlow and Wycombe Wildlife Group. Enjoy!



Oak gall, PN Fungi walk (M Bosman)

November

12 November	Wellbeing walk 10.00 at College Lake Tring (BBOWT)
14 November	Walk for fungi and birds at 10.30 at Burnham Beeches (Wycombe Wildlife)

16 November	**Volunteer session at the Pollinator Friendly Garden at 10.00 (Prestwood Nature)**
17 November	Walk in Chalfont St Giles (Chiltern Society)

December

1 December	Walk in Ashley Green (Chiltern Society)
4 December	Walk in Aldbury (Chiltern Society)
7 December	Family winter woodland adventure at 10.30 at Mop End Amersham (Mop End FSC)
8 December	**Volunteer session at Boug's Meadow at 10.00 (Prestwood Nature)** Family winter woodland adventure at 10.30 at Mop End Amersham (Mop End FSC)
11 December	Walk and lunch in Lane End (Chiltern Society)
18 December	Walk in Penn Street Common (Chiltern Society)
26 December	Walk in Amersham (Chiltern Society)

January

1 January Walk in Aston Clinton (Chiltern Society)

10 January Wilding (the movie) at 7.30 pm in Jordans (Jordans Picture House)

12 January Walk in Chipperfield (Chiltern Society)

15 January Walk in Shardeloes (Chiltern Society)

19 January Walk in Wooburn (Chiltern Society)

The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI) is holding **an online botany education session**, on 12 November (Getting Started with Flower Anatomy). It is free to attend.



PN's fungi walk on a glorious autumn morning in October (Marieke Bosman)

Nature events compiled by M Bosman

Fungi Walk with John Tyler in Great Hampden Wood and Common

It was a glorious autumn morning on Hampden Common on Sunday 27 October. The reds and yellows of the trees were lit up by golden sunlight and contrasted beautifully against the azure sky. It was a very auspicious start to the Prestwood Nature fungi walk with John Tyler.

Our participants listened attentively as John started off on the Common talking about Wax Caps – the low-growing, round, shiny mushrooms that appear in grass in a variety of colours. They are indicators of ancient grassland (Hampden Common clearly being one of them, as we found Golden, Parrot, Butter and Snowy Waxcap and several others).

While initially it looked like there were very few fungi to be found, as a group we quickly got our eye in and started finding all sorts, both on the Common and in the woodland edging it. There were Yellow Clubs in the grass, tiny mushrooms the size of pinheads in leaf mould; sturdy Turkey Tails on fallen trees, a fungus that grows in Sycamore leaves. We found a huge Earthball and King Edwards's Cakes on Elder (which has wonderful concentric rings inside). John had very engaging and interesting information on all of them as well as about other finds made by the participants, such as Oak and Beech leaf galls.

The two hours went in a flash and we all went home feeling more knowledgeable about mushrooms but also impressed by how much more there is to learn and find in terms of the variety of colours, sizes, shapes and roles played by fungi.

Marieke Bosman



Golden Waxcap on Hampden Common (M Bosman)



John Tyler outlines the features of fungi (MB)

Orchard in October Day, Kiln Common Community Orchard

12th October: Prestwood Nature's Orchard in October day was a great success, with bird-feeder making, live apple juicing, hawthorn ketchup-making, orchard tours and apple cake. Thanks to everyone who attended. And, of course, many thanks to the Mid Shires Orchard Group and The Crafty Herbalist who taught us so much.



From top left: Karen leading tours of the Community Orchard; the Mid Shires Orchard Group provided an amazing display of local apples,and undertook juicing activities; the Craft Herbalist also led a tour and provided a tasty hawthorn ketchup-making demonstration (James Appleby)

Why is Ivy Brilliant for Wildlife?

English Ivy (*Hedera helix*) is native to the UK and found in woodland, hedgerows, scrub and wasteland. Often maligned and misunderstood, it is an important plant from a wildlife point of view providing food and shelter for a variety of species. Its dense evergreen foliage makes it an excellent early nesting site for birds such as Wrens, Blackbirds, House Sparrows and Robins.



Green Lacewing on ivy flower (AE)

The flowers are a great source of nectar and pollen in autumn for insects such as wasps, bees, hoverflies, and autumn-flying moths and butterflies such as Angle Shades and Red Admiral at a time when few other native plants are in flower. The Ivy Bee, *Colletes hederae,* times its emergence with the flowering of ivy. This bee is a recent arrival in Britain, with the first confirmed records from Dorset in 2001, but since then has spread rapidly across most of southern England with its spread being mapped by the Bees Wasps & Ants Recording Society (BWARS). If it has not made it to your garden yet, you can see it (often in large numbers) at the Prestwood Local Nature Reserve, where this photo (below) was taken. It is similar to a honey bee, but with distinctive orange-coloured bands on the abdomen and a gingery thorax. It is a solitary species but nests in the ground in loose colonies.



Noon Fly and wasp on ivy (A Evans)

Ivy is also a larval foodplant for the Holly Blue butterfly! The butterfly's spring brood uses holly as its primary foodplant as its name might suggest, but the second generation uses ivy, making it unique amongst butterflies of Britain in that its different broods use different plants.



Ivy Bee (A Evans)

Ivy berries finally ripen to a bluish-black in early spring, providing a nutritious food source just as other resources are exhausted. According to the RSPB, the pith of ivy berries contains as many calories as Mars Bars, gram for gram. They are eaten by a range of species including thrushes, blackcaps, blackbirds and woodpigeons. Who hasn't watched woodpigeons balancing precariously on a thin stem trying to get that last berry. Please don't try this at home though (both the balancing act and the consumption) as the berries are toxic to humans. They contain triterpenoid saponins which can cause vomiting, diarrhea and convulsions if ingested. Leave them for the wildlife!

Anne Evans



Woodpigeons feasting on ivy berries (AE))



Female Holly Blue – summer brood with prominent bands on its forewings (AE)

Protecting Wildlife Habitat on Local Farms and 'Tracking the Impact'



Local barn owls are the beneficiaries of boxes put up across farms in the central Chilterns cluster (Danny Moore)

Nick Marriner's AGM presentation about progress made to protect wildlife on eighteen farms within the 'Central Chilterns farming cluster' was positive and inspiring. Five years into this Chalk, Cherries and Chair project in the Chilterns National Landscape, funded by the National Lottery, there are tentative signs of recovery of some bird populations and encouraging numbers of indicator species of flowering plants being discovered on local grassland habitats.

Nick explained that the aim of the farmer cluster, chaired by Ian Waller (formerly of Hampden Bottom Farm), was to support a farmer-led approach to conservation. His role along with others has been to provide nature information and expert advice to farmers, seeking to stoke their interest in wildlife on their land and then support their efforts to put practical solutions in action; project managing and funding conservation work. This work has included hedge-laying (20km have been planted to date), coppicing, 'scrub-bashing' and the restoration of chalk grassland in locations where it had long since disappeared, such as at Old Callowdown Farm. He talked about the importance of the wildlife 'cafes' that have been established over winter on participating farms. Clearly, birds stand a much better chance of survival if they can find reliable sources of food over winter and the farming cluster has provided this, with the CCC project about to order the 60th tonne of bird food for farmers to scatter!

As many of the participating farms are adjacent to one another, they have the potential to form conservation 'belts' within the central Chilterns. This would mean that these farms might in future function as essential 'corridors for nature', a key focus of UK conservation efforts in recent years as the need to go beyond the protection of isolated nature reserves has become clearer.

Volunteer groups have been key to the success of the farm nature recovery project, Nick highlighted, listing the number of owl boxes that have been put up and monitored by volunteers (84), the large numbers of birds that have been ringed similarly, plus the many

fields (72 x 1km²) surveyed by almost 250 trained amateurs for birds, indicator plants and butterflies (with over 20,000 nature records uploaded over three years).

On butterflies, Nick said thirty three of the sixty species found in the UK have been identified across the farms taking part in this project, indicating what rich chalk hill landscape it provides.



The Yellowhammer has become a mascot for the efforts of farmer-led conservation (Erik Karits)

On birds, he spoke about how the Yellowhammer has become something of a mascot for the project as the numbers of Yellowhammers in the local bird population have shown signs of bucking the national trend (across the UK and in the south east this bird has been in decline over decades).

Farmers have also been buoyed by the finding that some of our more endangered birds (e.g. Corn bunting) caught for the purpose of ringing and monitoring have gained weight year-on-year, suggesting that the winter-feeding programme has been a success. Nick was clear that five years is not nearly long enough to witness significant habitat restoration, making it clear that this project is only just getting underway, but promised to return to report back in future.

Anyone wishing to help with 'tracking the impact' in 2025 can find out more about how to register here.

Alice Griffiths

In Dulci Jubilo



On the 19th October this year Prestwood Parish Church of Holy Trinity celebrated its 175th anniversary. At the time of its founding the new church stood over a kilometre from the main group of cottages that then comprised Prestwood, the village then lying just north of what is now the High Street. Development since then has brought the village much closer, but the churchyard remains a quiet rural spot, just sufficiently away from the thundering lorries of the busy A4128, cushioned from the noise by its surrounding hedge.



Despite a stormy morning, the sun came out in the afternoon when we visited to celebrate what was really the beginning of Prestwood – the church, and its associated school, providing the village with independence from Great Missenden, Great Hampden and Hughenden. Until 1849, these were the only churches available for the Anglican section of the population, all miles away – no mean concern when most residents had to walk to church; only the rich merchants and farmers having carriages and horses. Today the 'Art Expo' in the church itself provided space for a surprising number of skilled local artists to show their work, most celebrating the countryside and natural features of the area. Tea and cakes were available in the Old Schoolhouse.



But we were also attending another celebration, one completely overlooked by most of the other visitors that day, although a few stopped to ask why we were crouching, our backs to the church, studying the damp mossy turf so intently. We were glorying in the profusion of waxcaps that had just emerged, small but bright and colourful toadstools that are the special natural feature of this grassland. These rare and beautiful jewels had been celebrating the origins of life much longer than 175 years ago, not just the years within human understanding,











Images from top of article (left): Pink waxcap, Earthy waxcap, Glutinous waxcap, Norway maple, Holy Trinity Church (TM)

but millennia and even aeons over which they developed their profusion of shapes, colours and scents. But the fungi were, like us, also celebrating the founding of the church. For it was the building of the church in this very spot, on a piece of farmland that had never been ploughed, that preserved the habitat that these natural jewels needed to survive – damp acid moss-thick turf that never received artificial fertiliser and was preserved from becoming scrubbed over by regular mowing by church volunteers. Very rarely does such a habitat survive in the Chilterns, and then usually just in churchyards that are managed appropriately.

Over twenty species of waxcap can be seen here, although only a few at any one time. On the best occasions you may see half of them, or, as we counted on this special day, a full dozen. Take your minds off worldly worries and make an effort to look closely at the lowly things and you see a world that is a paradise, scintillating with red, gold, lemon-yellow, pink, grey, snowy white, orange, viridian green and humbler brown. You have to get really close to appreciate the scents – pinewood, honey, earthy, nitrous, or just plain foul (part of life's rich pattern!). Feel them and there are some that are dry, some coolly moist, others buttery or sticky, some thickly glutinous. This beauty is the product of long evolution. Its destruction would take less than a day, and they would never return.

May they still be there for the church's bicentenary in 2049. Perhaps someone will come then, as we did today, and search for them in the turf and they will raise their heads again *in dulci jubilo*.

Tony Marshall

(All pictures taken on the day by the author.)







Images from top of article on the right: Holy Trinity Church, Bitter waxcap, Parrot waxcap, Snowy waxcap, Norway maple (TM)

Meet Prestwood Nature's New Council Members (Elected November 2024)



Welcome PN's new General Secretary: Frances



Thanks for volunteering as PN's Treasurer: Tony

Frances Rawle

I have lived in Little Kingshill since 1996. I retired in 2021 having worked for 30 years for the Medical Research Council, a UK government research funding agency. I am enjoying having more time to watch and learn about nature, for instance by doing the Prestwood Nature butterfly transect and helping at Boug's Meadow. I also enjoy walking, playing tennis at Great Missenden LTC, travelling, and trying to manage our garden to encourage wildlife. I am currently Chair of Governors at Little Kingshill School and volunteer at the Prestwood Repair Café. I am delighted to be joining the PN Council as General Secretary.

Tony Marlow

I have lived in Prestwood for the past four years and am semi-retired, having worked as an engineering manager at a large fire protection company. I now work part-time for the industry's Certification Board responsible for approving contractors' fire sprinkler systems; and run my own design training operation. I volunteer for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Friends of Naphill Common and the Prestwood Nature Pollinator-friendly Garden. I have been a tour guide at the Battle of Britain Bunker in Uxbridge for the past 5 years. My hobbies are astronomy and keeping the garden tidy. I am pleased to be offered the chance of joining the PN council.

A Winter Activity: The New Year Plant Hunt 2025



The results of Karen's NY plant hunt 1st Jan 2024 (K v Oostrum)

Since 2012, the Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI) has run an annual hunt for plants in flower during a four-day period over New Year. It's a great way to shake off the winter blues and get outdoors with friends, family, or solo – or you could join a group hunt.

Participation has grown steadily over the years, with thousands of citizen scientists across Britain and Ireland taking part. Originally the main aim of the New Year Plant Hunt (NYPH) was to provide a fun and engaging project for wildflower enthusiasts during the winter months when few botanical activities typically take place. More than a decade on, it now also provides valuable insights into how many species normally flower during the winter and, along with initiatives such as the Woodland Trust's 'Nature's Calendar' project, it is helping to build up a picture of how our flora is responding to changing weather patterns as a consequence of climate change.

This year, the NYPH will run from 29 December 2024 to 1 January 2025, and you can take part at any time within these dates. You will find plenty of information and resources on the BSBI website, including ID tips to help you if you are just getting started with plant-spotting:

https://bsbi.org/new-year-plant-hunt

If you would like to take part with a local group for this event, you are welcome to join the 'Central Chilterns Botany Group', who will be doing the Plant Hunt on 1st January, in Hughenden Valley. More information from Tony Marshall: ecorocker@gmail.com

Happy hunting!

Karen van Oostrum

A Good Job Well Done!



The Rough Around the Hedges Project team came back together to complete the hedge-lay at Boug's Meadow on 10th November. We hope you'll agree the results of their work look fantastic ... and we think nature on site will appreciate it too!

Answers to Autumn Quick Quiz:

1. A: A spider, which has strung its web over the fruit like tinsel! B: Waxwing, C: Fieldfare, D: Blackbird. (Images: all via Pixabay.)
2. The fruit of the Yew tree are not poisonous; it is the seed inside which is toxic. Birds, including thrushes can eat the fruit with the seeds simply passing through these birds' digestive system intact, meaning the bird comes to no harm.



Children's bird feeder-making activity at Prestwood Nature's Orchard in October day (A Griffiths)

Prestwood Nature's ***Winter News 2025*** will be published in at the start of February 2025. If you would like to write an article or share an image to be included in this newsletter, the deadline will be Saturday 25th January. Email Editor Alice Griffiths using the email address newsletter@prestwoodnature.org

p.s Don't forget to join our Prestwood Nature Facebook Group to stay in touch and share your own nature finds in our local area in 2025.

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

p.s Don't forget to join our Prestwood Nature Facebook Group to stay in touch and share your own nature finds in our local area in 2025.

Working together with nature