Prestwood Nature
SUMMER NEWS 2025

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

Issue 71 2 September 2025

Working together with nature



Chair's Chat

Summer may be ending, but there are still some Prestwood Nature activities to look forward to. We are once again holding an open day in Kiln Common Orchard on **Saturday 4 October**, in association with the Mid Shires Orchard Group, who will bring along a display of heritage apple varieties and an apple juicer. There will also be short tours of the orchard and nearby Pollinator-friendly garden as well as cakes and plants for sale. No need to book, just come along between 12.00 noon and 3.00 pm. On **Sunday 5th October**, Karen will be leading her final wildflower walk of the year. You can find more details and how to book on the Prestwood Nature website. On the morning of **27 September** we will be undertaking a one-off work party to tidy up the wildflower meadow at Holy Trinity Church, raking up and removing material that has been strimmed and cutting back brambles. Please bring gloves and secateurs and/or a rake if you have them.

This will be my last Chair's Chat. I am standing down at the AGM in November, having served four years on PN's Council before taking over as Chair from Vanessa in 2022. During my time as Chair, we have had to make some tough decisions about priorities in order not to spread ourselves too thin. We concluded with regret that the continued maintenance of Sheepwash Pond was beyond our capacity. but since then have been trying to find an alternative way forward. I am pleased that we are currently in discussions with the Prestwood Community Association about the future of Sheepwash pond. While it is too early to give details, I am hopeful that there might way to secure it for the future. Meanwhile, Boug's Meadow, the Pollinator-friendly Garden and Kiln Common Orchard are flourishing thanks to our hard-working volunteers. It has also been gratifying to see the sites being used and enjoyed by the local community, including the cubs.

The AGM will be held on **Monday 10 November** at Prestwood Village Hall. If you are interested in keeping Prestwood Nature running, and are happy to do some admin, please consider joining the PN Council. Contact admin@prestwoodnature.org or speak to any member of the PN Council. I hope you see you at the AGM. *Helen (Chair of Prestwood Nature)*

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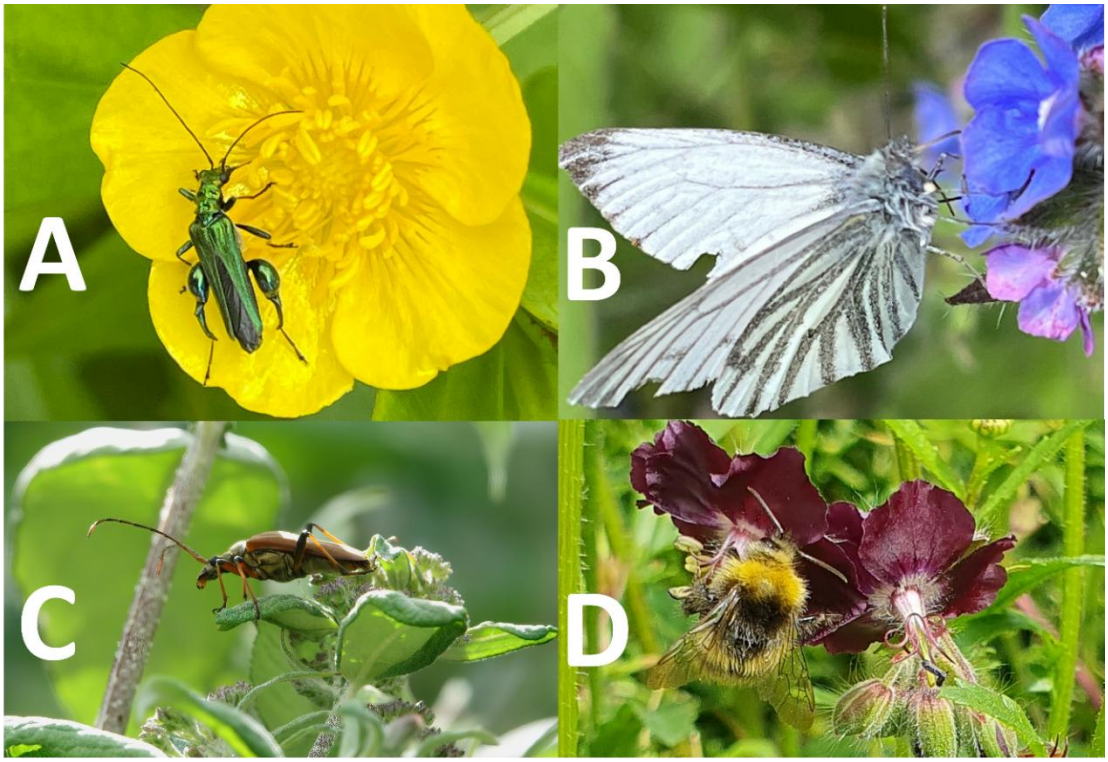
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Summer Quiz Quiz: Beetles, Bees and Butterflies

1. Name the two different ‘out-sized’ beetles (A and C).
2. B is a white butterfly. Hint: It’s not blue-bloodied.
3. Name the bee (D). Hint: It’s not wearing a jumper.
4. Was 2025 a good summer for butterflies or not? (Early indications show what?)

Dawn Chorus Walk



An early start for the dawn chorus (H Matthews)

At 5.00 a.m. on Sunday 4 May a group of 22 assembled in Link Road Car Park for a Dawn Chorus Walk, led by bird expert Simon Nichols. We started by immersing ourselves in the birdsong in Boug's Meadow, where we heard robin, song thrush, wren, blackcap, wood pigeon, chiffchaff – and a nearby cockerel! Some of us have the Merlin app on our phones and Simon pointed out some of the areas where it is not entirely reliable. For example, Merlin is not always able to distinguish between a song thrush and nuthatch – often it will come up with nuthatch when it is really a thrush.

We walked up through Angling Spring Wood, where we also heard a goldcrest and a firecrest as well as the knocking of a great spotted woodpecker.

It was a very enjoyable and informative way to work up an appetite for breakfast!

Helen Matthews

No Mow May, 2025





Little Kingshill received the most certificates of participation in No Mow May from Prestwood Nature this summer (A Griffiths)

Prestwood Village Walk

On Tuesday 17 June, Prestwood Community Association organised an evening 'Village Walk' following a circular route from the Guide Hut to the Hampden Monument. The route passed through Kiln Common, where Karen van Oostrum gave a brief explanation about the Pollinator-Friendly Garden and the Community Orchard, and Sheepwash, where Helen

Matthews spoke about the history of the site and explained that a further community effort was now needed to refurbish the site.

Midsummer in the Meadow



Hazel's tour of wildflowers in the meadow



Bumblebee Conservation Trust were among the organisations in attendance



Conversations about 'mending the Misbourne' at Boug's on a hot day



Keen photographers enjoyed the display of butterflies on the day

(A Griffiths)

Glow Worms at Prestwood Local Nature Reserve

On a balmy evening in mid-July, a small band of glow worm-hunters met at the Prestwood Local Nature Reserve (PLNR) as the sun was setting. Glow worms are actually a beetle species; the males fly but the females are flightless and glow to attract a mate. Philip Pratt, the volunteer site co-ordinator at PLNR, knew that they had been seen there in the past, but had not seen them himself and was not aware of them being recorded for many years. We enjoyed looking at interesting moths and other insects as dusk fell and we allowed our eyes to gradually adjust to the dark. When it was completely dark we split up and started searching in the grass, but it wasn't long before the first shout of "I've found one!". We were very excited

to find seven glow worms in total over the next half an hour or so – all now formally recorded as part of Prestwood Nature's activity on iRecord.

Most of us had never seen one before, and were surprised by how brightly they glowed, like little green LED fairy lights, with two distinct bands. The ones we found were buried quite deep in longer grass, in the shadier parts of the reserve, which was not what we had been led to expect. We had thought that they were supposed to climb up the longer grass to become more visible to the males.



Common glow worm (by Forza CC-BY-SA)

Their season will be over by the time you read this newsletter so you will have to wait until next summer if you want to go and look for yourselves. If you do go, please be careful - you can't use a torch and it's easy to trip on the rough ground in the dark.

Frances Rawle

Balsalm Bash!

On Friday 22nd August, a group of seven volunteers from Prestwood Nature and 'Mend the Misbourne' cleared all of the Himalayan Balsam in The Crown pub garden in Little Missenden. This plant is an invasive species and spreads very easily, despite being an annual, due to its explosive seed pods that distribute seeds up to seven metres away from the plant! Unfortunately, we were pulling up matured balsam with seed pods ready to burst so we had to remove the head of the plant containing the pods before uprooting the rest of the plant to avoid dispersal. Although this made the process more laborious, we managed to get the

job finished by noon, just in time for a refreshing drink in the pub garden. Thanks to the staff at the Crown for granting us access to the garden for this important project to help protect biodiversity in and around the River Misbourne.



Lizzie Griffiths

The challenge faced by local volunteers at the Crown pub, in Little Missenden last month (Trish Mallett)

Plentiful Pollinators

Given the awful time that our pollinators had last year, it has been wonderful to see such a great variety and abundance of them out this summer. As I walked through the Pollinator-Friendly Garden (PFG) today, I saw many species of bees, flies and butterflies. Of all our pollinators, it seems to be a particularly good year for butterflies.

We try to extend the flowering season for as long as possible down at the PFG, so that we provide nectar and pollen throughout much of the year. We do this by selecting plants that flower very early or very late in the year, as well as those such as geraniums, which help to fill the 'June gap'. Right now, the daisies are out, and it won't be long before the globe thistle (*Echinops*) and teasels (*Dipsacus*) are in full flower too. You can visit the garden any time, to see these plants and learn how they support our pollinators. If you are a regular visitor you might have seen our recent addition, a fabulous new composting area – thank you Steve!



Meadow browns on scabious (K v Oostrum)

The two wooden bays will really help our work down there looking after the garden. We generate a lot of green waste and this will make the job of returning all the goodness within it back to the garden a great deal easier.

Karen van Oostrum



The new compost area at the PFG with globe thistle in the foreground (K v Oostrum)

A Good Year for Fruit?

We all know that there are good years and bad years for fruit, and this year I've noticed that both the 'fruity fruits' (apples, plums etc) and the 'nutty fruits' (hazelnuts, acorns etc) seem to be doing rather well. But what is it that actually governs a good or a bad year for fruit?



Bazely apples in the community orchard (K v Oostrum)

As you might expect, a lot of it comes down to the weather at the time of flowering. The flower is the organ of sexual reproduction in the flowering plants, and within it a series of sophisticated events take place, culminating in the formation of a fruit that contains fertile seeds.

Pollination is the first step – the transfer of pollen to the stigma. After this, something quite mind-boggling happens.

If conditions are favourable, the pollen will germinate on top of the stigma. It will grow a tiny tube, which passes down the length of the style, and into the ovary of the flower, where the ovules are located. Then, the nuclei from the pollen travel down this tube, and fertilise the nuclei in the ovule. A fertilised ovule becomes a seed, and the ovary around it develops into the fruit. Pollen tube growth is a delicate process, and vulnerable to unfavourable weather conditions, such as being too cold or too wet. Conditions have to be right, so this particular stage of fruit set is one of the main factors that governs whether it will be a good or a bad year for fruit. So far, it's looking good…!

Karen van Oostrum

A Hot Summer Sets on Boug's Meadow

As Summer turns to Autumn, there are still many flowers in the meadow providing nectar for butterflies and bees. The entrance to the copse is blessed by a good stand of Devils bit scabious. Yellow toadflax and Musk mallow can be seen in the meadow proper. Commas, Peacock, various Whites and even a Small Copper are taking the last drops from Buddleia.



Left: Devil's bit scabious (Alan Murray-Rust)
Below: Musk mallow (H Tyler)



It's as if they realise the Autumn meadow cut takes place very soon. If you want a last visit to the wildflowers for this summer, then please enjoy them before next Sunday 7 September. In the week following, the grasses and wildflowers in the meadow will be cut by our contractor, left to drop seed and let invertebrates escape. This is a key day in ensuring next year's display of wildflowers and our biggest volunteer session of the year will rake the arisings to compost the following Sunday. The hottest summer of recent memory will have set on Boug's Meadow.

It has been dry too! The prolonged absence of rain and the temperatures have allowed the aquifer to deplete fast, and our local winterbourne, the River Misbourne, ceased to flow through the meadow just before our *Midsummer in the Meadow* Open Day at the end of June. With the blazing sun, our attendances for the day were a little down, but the meadow blazed with colour and our coterie of regular nature and conservation friends enjoyed meeting again.

An important initiative of importance to our nature site and the local community, the *Mend the Misbourne* project, was on prominent display. In early August we heard that this project was receiving initial funding to improve flows, water quality and nature recovery in the length of the river. Several Prestwood Nature members participated in workshops leading to this project proposal, to good effect.



The River Misbourne needs action to protect wildlife that depends on it (Image: Mend the Misbourne)

In relation to the upper catchment of the Misbourne, there is promised action on river restoration in Missenden Abbey park, and consideration of solutions to water run-off from both the HS2 North Portal and the Link Road. These will be important for Boug's Meadow and Great Missenden.

Finally, removal of invasive non-native species (INNS) from the river will receive attention. Himalayan Balsam is one of these, thankfully not a problem at Boug's, but (as reported elsewhere), some of our volunteers were pleased to make an early start on a huge stand of Himalayan Balsam in Little Missenden. Outside the Prestwood nature area, but a vital help to our neighbours and the health of the River Misbourne overall.

Paul Heath

Prestwood Nature Dates for your Diary



Prestwood Nature offers wildflower walks led by Karen van Oostrum (Frances Rawle)

September

Boug's Meadow Volunteer Session

Sunday 14 September 10 am -1 pm

Venue: Boug's Meadow, off Link Road Car Park, Link Road, Great Missenden HP16 9AE

Work Party: Holy Trinity Churchyard, Prestwood

Saturday 27 September from 9:30 am

We will be clearing arisings from cutting the meadow and cutting back brambles.

Pollinator Friendly Garden Work Party

Sunday 28 September 10 am - 12:30 pm

Venue: Greenlands Lane, Greenlands Ln, Prestwood, Great Missenden HP16, UK

October

The Orchard in October

Saturday 4 October 12-3 p.m.

Venue: Kiln Common Orchard, off Greenlands Lane, Prestwood

We are planning to hold another open day in Kiln Common Orchard, with help from the Mid-Shires Orchard Group.

Autumn Wildflower Walk:

Sunday 5 October at 2-4 p.m.

Venue: Meet at Great Hampden Cricket Ground HP16 9RF

A country walk around the lanes and woods of Great Hampden, led by Karen van Oostrum, looking at wild flowers and other interesting plants of the season. A free event, for anyone who enjoys a gentle stroll in the countryside - children welcome!



Orchard Day returns in October – join us!

Contact Karen for more information about the route and walking conditions: pfg@prestwoodnature.org. Please see EventBrite to book.

Boug's Meadow Volunteer Session

Sunday 12 October 10am – 1pm

Venue: Boug's Meadow, off Link Road Car Park, Link Road, Great Missenden HP16 9AE

Pollinator Friendly Garden Work Party

Sunday 26 October 10 am - 12:30 pm

Venue: Greenlands Lane, Greenlands Ln, Prestwood, Great Missenden HP16, UK



Himalayan Balsam is an invasive species (Ceridwen via geograph)

November

Boug's Meadow Volunteer Session

Sunday 9 November 10am – 1pm

Venue: Boug's Meadow, off Link Road Car Park, Link Road, Great Missenden HP16 9AE

Prestwood Nature's AGM

Monday 10 November from 7 pm

Venue: Prestwood Village Hall

Pollinator Friendly Garden Work Party

Sunday 23 November 10 am - 12:30 pm

Venue: Greenlands Lane, Greenlands Ln, Prestwood, Great Missenden HP16, UK

Interested in Volunteering for Prestwood Nature?

There are many different ways you can help Prestwood Nature protect and enhance the local environment. See our Volunteering Page for details. We will be looking for new Trustees to join us in the autumn – if you think you might be interested, have a chat with any member of our Council at an event, or email admin@prestwoodnature.org.



1st Great Missenden cubs visited Boug's Meadow ...in May and again in June as part of their Naturalist badge, (here) noticing 'bugs and butterflies' and the disappearance of the River Misbourne. They also picked litter and added to the dead hedges (A.G.)

Other Local Groups involved in Nature Conservation

Berkshire Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) www.bbowt.org.uk

Chilterns Conservation Board www.chilterns.org.uk

Field Studies Council Amersham at Mop End www.field-studies-council.org/locations/amersham/

Friends of Priestfield Arboretum https://priestfieldarboretum.org.uk/

Wild Amersham https://sustainableamersham.org/nature-and-biodiversity/

Tiger Moths

When I was a child, I was very familiar with caterpillars called "woolly bears" seen every year in the garden. These were the larvae of the Garden Tiger, a strikingly coloured moth that had no qualms about vaunting the fact that it was poisonous to any bird that might think of pecking it.



Garden tiger (image courtesy of Butterfly Conservation)



Garden tiger caterpillar in a defensive posture (T Marshall)

The caterpillars were equally unattractive to predators, having very long stiff hairs, grey on the back, and tawny along the sides. If interfered with they curled up into a ball. I would rear the caterpillars, admire the newly emerged adults and then let them fly free. They are one of our formerly common species that is in decline across the country. The last one I saw locally was in 1987, although George Lewis had one in 2004.

Their recent bad fortune seems to be indirectly linked to climate change, the milder wetter winters favouring parasites that kill the over-wintering caterpillars. But climate change can be favourable to some species from hotter regions. While the Garden Tiger is now unlikely to be found, two closely related species, both equally dramatic in coloration, have spread from southern parts of Britain and are now being found regularly in our area, where they are breeding. They like the hotter summers, while the caterpillars are used to surviving warmer winters and would previously have been killed off by a hard one. They are the Scarlet Tiger and the Jersey Tiger. Their caterpillars are also hairy, but not so thickly as the Garden Tiger – the Jersey's having tawny hairs and black, yellow and cream stripes, the Scarlet's black-haired, black with lines of yellow and grey or white spots. Like the Garden



Scarlet tiger moth (T M)

Tiger, both these caterpillars will feed on a wide variety of low herbaceous plants, so they are not short of resources.



Jersey Tigers on Windsor Lane (taken by Chris Carr)

Another similar moth is the Cream-spot Tiger, quite similar to the Scarlet, but it is more local and I have never heard of any observations around here. It could well occur, however, so well worth looking out for.

A further colourful relative of the Garden Tiger, although with a quite different pattern, is the Cinnabar, which is often seen because it flies in the daytime much more than the tiger moths. Its caterpillars are particularly well-known, being the yellow-and-black banded ones often found in large numbers on ragwort.

Tony Marshall



Cream-spot caterpillar (TM)



Cream-spot tiger moth (TM)





Right: Cinnabar caterpillars
Left: Cinnabar moth (images: T Marshall)

Swifts, Swallows and House Martins

Swallows and house martins gathering on wires and parties of swifts feeding high up ready for their long journeys back to Africa used to be a common sight in August. But these birds are in trouble; swifts and house martins are now both on the UK Red list, and swallow numbers have declined significantly in southern and eastern parts of Britain. The reasons are not fully understood, but reduced numbers of insects, changes in farming practices and loss of nesting sites are factors. Swifts like to nest in colonies in holes in buildings, with a preference for taller buildings like churches, swallows prefer to nest in farm buildings and outbuildings in the countryside, while house martins build their nests under the eaves of houses. The conversion of traditional farm buildings into houses and repairs to holes in eaves and soffits have removed many potential nesting sites.



A common swift in flight (Alexis Lours CC 4.0)

Screaming parties of swifts used to be seen regularly over Great Missenden High Street, and as late as 2016 it was estimated that about 5% of the housing stock in Berks, Bucks and Oxfordshire had house martin nests, but neither is common now. The last known nesting colony of swifts in Prestwood, at the corner of Lodge Lane and Wycombe Road, disappeared some years ago following repairs to the apartment building roof.

How can we help? It is important to ensure existing nesting sites are not disturbed, as they tend to get re-used year after year, and making our gardens more insect friendly and avoiding pesticide use helps all insectivorous birds. The RSPB website has a really excellent guide which tells you all you need to know about helping swifts, and there is a national project called Swiftmapper asking people to report sightings of swifts demonstrating nesting behaviour to help identify where to focus conservation efforts, such as installing swift bricks or nest boxes. The Bucks Bird Club would also welcome local information – parties of swifts are still seen flying high over Prestwood but it is not known where they are nesting. So if you know of a site in the PN area where

swifts have nested recently, or if you see large groups of swifts gathering near buildings, please let them know by e-mailing badgersinbucks@btinternet.com. The websites of Action for Swifts and Swift Conservation both have detailed information, including on what to do if you find a grounded swift (they cannot take off from the ground and specialist help is needed).

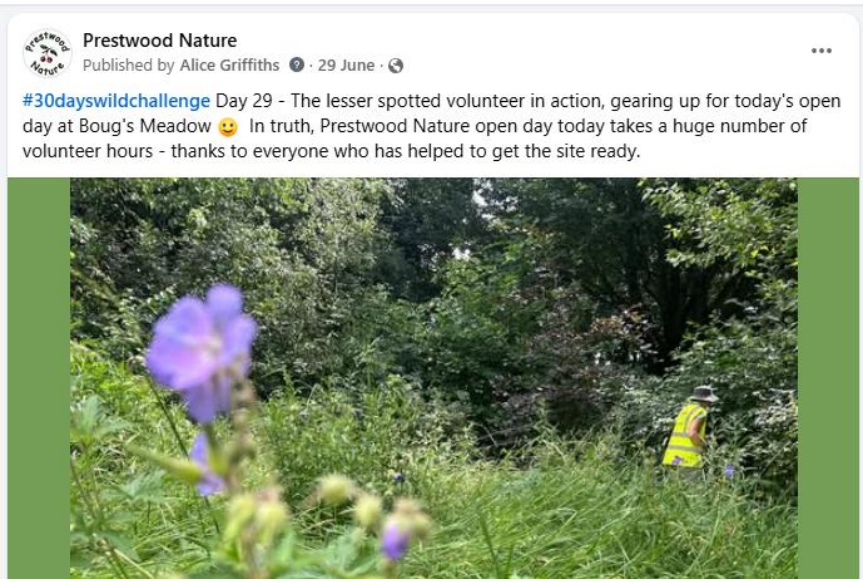
France Rawle, with thanks to Mike Collard of the Bucks Bird Club and John Obee for their advice

Summer Quick Quiz Answers:

1. A is the Thick-legged flower beetle (image: Colin Tyler). B is the Long-horned beetle (image: Keith Tyrrell).
2. B is a Green-veined white butterfly (image: Colin Tyler)
3. D is a Common carder bee (image: Karen van Oostrum)
4. Early indications from conservation sites e.g. Knepp in West Sussex (and anecdotal evidence) show that the summer of 2025 will have been a good summer for butterflies in comparison to 2024. But we await scientific data, following the Big Butterfly Count last month.

Prestwood Nature's *Autumn News 2025…* will be published in early November 2025. If you would like to write an article or share an image to be included in this newsletter, the deadline will be 20 October. Email the Editor, Alice Griffiths, using the email address newsletter@prestwoodnature.org

Ps. 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. This (overleaf) was our penultimate #30dayswild post in June.



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

Prestwood Nature

Working together with Nature