



Where have all our frogs gone?

Our ponds in Twindle Beer have been used as breeding sites for frogs for more than 30 years. Historically there have been up to 100 frogs busy spawning - a wonderful event to watch! Numbers visiting our ponds have remained high for many years but declined more recently. Last year only one frog ventured forth and so far this year we haven't had a single visitor. Maybe you have experienced this too?

It could be the result of a population decline locally. Ponds form 'stepping stones' for amphibians across a landscape and if ponds

disappear, so can local populations of frogs and newts. Their terrestrial habitats are just as important, as they spend most of their life on land, foraging, sheltering, hibernating and colonising new areas; if these areas or 'corridors' have been blocked (by a new road or a wall) or destroyed (through development), the route to your garden may have been lost.

Many of us have made sure that local wildlife, such as Hedgehogs, can move through our gardens by introducing 'Hedgehog Highways'. These don't just work for Hedgehogs, as frogs and newts will use them too. In the same way, we know that planting pollen- and nectar-rich plants helps our bees, butterflies and other insects to pass from garden to garden to feed.

What can we do to help?

The disappearance of garden ponds and pools, important habitat for amphibians, is putting pressure on frogs and toads, conservationists say. The RSPB is urging people to get outside and create simple ponds and pools in their outdoor spaces this summer. Most people remember seeing tadpoles at the local pond or a toad emerging from under a rock while they were growing up - "these first experiences with nature stay with us forever," says Dr Daniel Hayhow, an RSPB conservation scientist. "Creating a small pond in your garden, or a pool using a washing-up bowl, is so simple to do and could make all the difference".

I only know the joy that Dave and I get from watching the newts displaying in the spring, dragonflies and damselflies emerging and egg laying in the spring and summer and with any luck we will experience the first frogs arriving to croak, mate and spawn in our pond once again.

Sue Smallshire



Open Gardens

Saturday 17th & Sunday 18th June 2023

Chudleigh Wild is once again organising the Open Gardens event as part of Chudfest and this year we have 14 beautiful gardens opening on one or both days. Gardens will be open 10am to 4pm, unless otherwise stated. There will be a range of refreshments available including hot and cold drinks, cakes, cream teas and a BBQ available at one or more gardens. Some gardens will also be offering children's activities, including brook dipping, and/or selling plants and homemade items. Full details will be printed on the tickets.

Gardens confirmed as taking part at time of printing:

Biddlecombe House, Ugbrooke, TQ13 0AD. Open Sat & Sun

Parkway Mill, TQ13 0JL. Open Sun

Brook Cottage (access through Parkway Mill garden), TQ13 0JL. Open Sun

16 Clifford Street, TQ13 0LE. Open Sat & Sun

Overhills, TQ13 0JG. Open Sat & Sun

No. 1 The Square, Town Centre, TQ13 0LD. Open Sat

4 Clifford Street, TQ13 0LE. Open Sat & Sun

Strangeways, TQ13 0LT. Open Sat & Sun

Orchard Cottage, TQ13 0DB. Open Sat

Smoothways, Ugbrooke, TQ13 0AD. Open Sun

Hurst House, TQ13 0LF. Open Sun 12:00 – 4:00 pm

8 Twindle Beer, TQ13 0JP. Open Sat

Greenfields, Highland Park, TQ13 0JZ. Open Sat

24th & 25th of June, Chudleigh Primary School, Lawn Drive, TQ13 0LS. (ticket still valid for this event)

29th & 30th July. The Church, Heathfield Hill, TQ13 0DR. (entry £2)

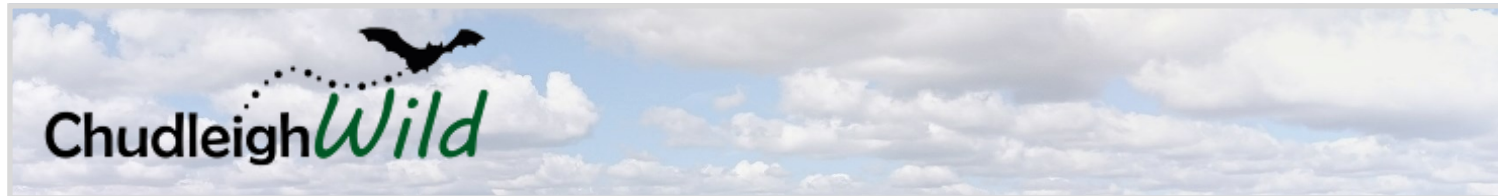
Tickets (£6) are available in advance from Dandelion, Sangers and Gills, or online from www.chudfest.co.uk.

Final details of all participating gardens will be printed on the tickets, along with a map.

Charities and good causes supported include Chudleigh Wild, Chudfest, Rowcroft Hospice, RDE's Kidney Development Fund, The Alzheimer's Society, Guide Dogs for the Blind and FORCE.

Parking is limited at all venues. Please avoid driving whenever possible. If you have limited mobility and would like to know more about the accessibility of the gardens, please email e.smith33@sky.com or viccicamm@gmail.com. If you are unable to email, please call Vicci on 07511 619331.

Please note these are all private gardens. It is the responsibility of all visitors to look after their own safety and that of any children in their care. *No dogs permitted, except assistance dogs*. Please adhere to all signs in the gardens for your own safety.



Chudleigh Nature Trail

After a while in its conception, we can finally announce that the Chudleigh Nature Trail is finally being installed. We aim to launch it officially in June. Our thanks go to Chudleigh Wild committee member Peter Warn, who has taken on the mammoth task of erecting all the rubbing posts around town.

An amazing map and artwork, the work of Bobby Hughes and her daughter Amy, will show the route and 12 carefully selected points of interest. A large version of the map will be displayed at the start of the trail, by the Town Hall. You will find a QR code on the map and on each of the rubbing posts: these link to our website, where you will be able to download further information about each stage of the trail.

The empty telephone box nearby is being restored by Chudleigh Wild members and will contain copies of the map, sheets for the rubbings and worksheets for the enthusiastic. These will also be available from the Town Hall. The telephone box will also act as an information hub for Chudleigh Wild, where unwanted wildlife books can be donated, wildlife pamphlets can be displayed and free wildflower plants and seed will be available.

The trail starts under the Swift nestboxes on the back of the Town Hall and follows a circular route of around one and a half miles. Each of the 12 points of interest will be marked by a rubbing post.

The points we have chosen are:

1. **Town Hall** – Swift nest-sites: boxes on the back of the building and traditional nest entrances above the boxes and in the gable end; Swifts with us from May to early August. (**Brass rubbing: Swift**)



2. **1 The Square** – a good example of gardening for wildlife, with plenty of flowers that provide nectar for bees and other pollinating insects. (**Brass rubbing: Butterfly**)



3. **Culver Park** – here is a grotto made from a wide range of local rocks, including some containing fossils; this public open space is a good haunt for Hedgehogs; the attractive pink flowers of Winter Heliotrope can be seen here in winter—unfortunately, it is an invasive non-native species). (**Brass rubbing: Hedgehog**)



4. **The Twin Oaks** – two old trees with associated ground flora and shrubs. Oak trees support more species of wildlife than any other trees in Britain; these include bacteria, fungi, lichens, algae, mosses, plants, invertebrates, birds and mammals. Old trees are the most valuable for wildlife. (**Brass rubbing: Acorns**)



5. **Kate Brook** – Fish including Trout, Eels, Minnows and Bullheads swim in the Brook, attracting Otter and Kingfisher at times; the larvae of insects such as damselflies, dragonflies, caddis-flies and alder-flies live in the water, where Dippers jump swim to catch them. (**Brass rubbing: Trout**)



6. **Community Orchard** – the different species of fruit trees here benefit birds and other wildlife. (**Brass rubbing: Bumble-bee**)

Then via Lawn Drive and Parkway Road, the latter with its species-rich hedgerows, to ...

7. **Bat Garden** – moth-friendly plants that attract bats at night, a bug house and a Greater Horseshoe Bat seat overlooking Palace Quarry, where Peregrines, Jackdaws and Ravens breed among the rocks. (**Brass rubbing: Greater Horseshoe Bat**)



8. **Palace Meadow** – a public green space and proposed wildlife area in creation. (**Brass rubbing: Ox-eye daisy**)

9. **Lawn Drive** (north side) – flower beds with insect-friendly plants; some areas are left unmown to benefit invertebrates. (**Brass rubbing: Ladybird**)



10. **Lawn Drive** (south side) – managed with a relaxed mowing regime to produce a wildflower meadow, using Yellow Rattle plants to suppress the grass growth. (**Brass rubbing: Grasshopper**)

11. **Top of Oldway** – Ivy and Ivy Broomrape: the broomrape has no green leaves and parasitizes the roots of the Ivy; Ivy flowers provide a wonderful autumn nectar source for insects and its berries are relished by birds during the winter. (**Brass rubbing: Ivy**)



12. **Churchyard** – unmown areas have allowed anthills, made by the Yellow Meadow Ant, to develop; a good variety of grasses and wildflowers grow on them as well as on and around the graves; the limestone walls have various mosses, lichens and invertebrates living on them; there are two Yew trees, a characteristic feature of churchyards. (**Brass rubbing: Ant**)

The wonderful illustrations above are the work of Amy Hughes and will feature on the map, which will be positioned outside the Town Hall, at the start of the trail.

Watch out for the date of the Nature Trail launch and join us to celebrate the wonderful tapestry that is Chudleigh.





Anglers around the UK have been aware of the worrying decline in Atlantic Salmon for a while. Every year fewer and fewer Salmon return to their home rivers and, in response to this, on the River Teign, a group of anglers decided they needed to do something about it, and the River Teign Restoration Project was born.

Members of Chudleigh Wild and some of the Teignbridge Wildlife Wardens attended a number of training days last year to equip them to carry out 'Riverflies' surveys. This is the second year of our involvement in the project and, apart from having a lot of fun wading in the Kate Brook and River Teign, we feed our results back to the project leaders.

Riverflies surveys are an excellent way of not just determining long term trends in water quality and invertebrate populations, but also act as an early warning system for serious issues in watercourses.

There has been very little information on the Kate Brook: electrofishing surveys in summer have found good numbers of Brown Trout, but no Salmon, due to a concrete barrier at the bottom of the Brook. There are plans for this barrier to be removed in the future, which we hope may encourage future fish movement upstream. Chudleigh Wild volunteers have also been out over the last few months surveying the entire length of the Brook, identifying any barriers, pollution and erosion, amongst other things. As well as Riverflies surveys, we are shortly to start water quality testing, so we are beginning to build up a really good picture of the state of the Brook. It may be under increasing pressure over the next few years, with further proposed housing developments around Chudleigh, so this gives us a useful baseline.

A series of temperature loggers have been installed in the Teign and Kate Brook and, over the past year, these loggers have been recording water temperature every hour of every day, from the headwaters to the lower reaches. This data has helped to better understand what is going on beneath the surface. There are many things that affect the water temperature of the river: the heat from the sun (solar radiation) is the most obvious, but flow, depth of water and of course what the water flows over and through.

For example, the data has shown how the exposed granite boulders of the upper Teign continue to retain their heat and in turn dissipate this into the water that flows around them, particularly during periods of low flow. It seems obvious, but great to see this backed up by the data.

There may be more training sessions planned, so if you fancy getting involved in this project, contact:

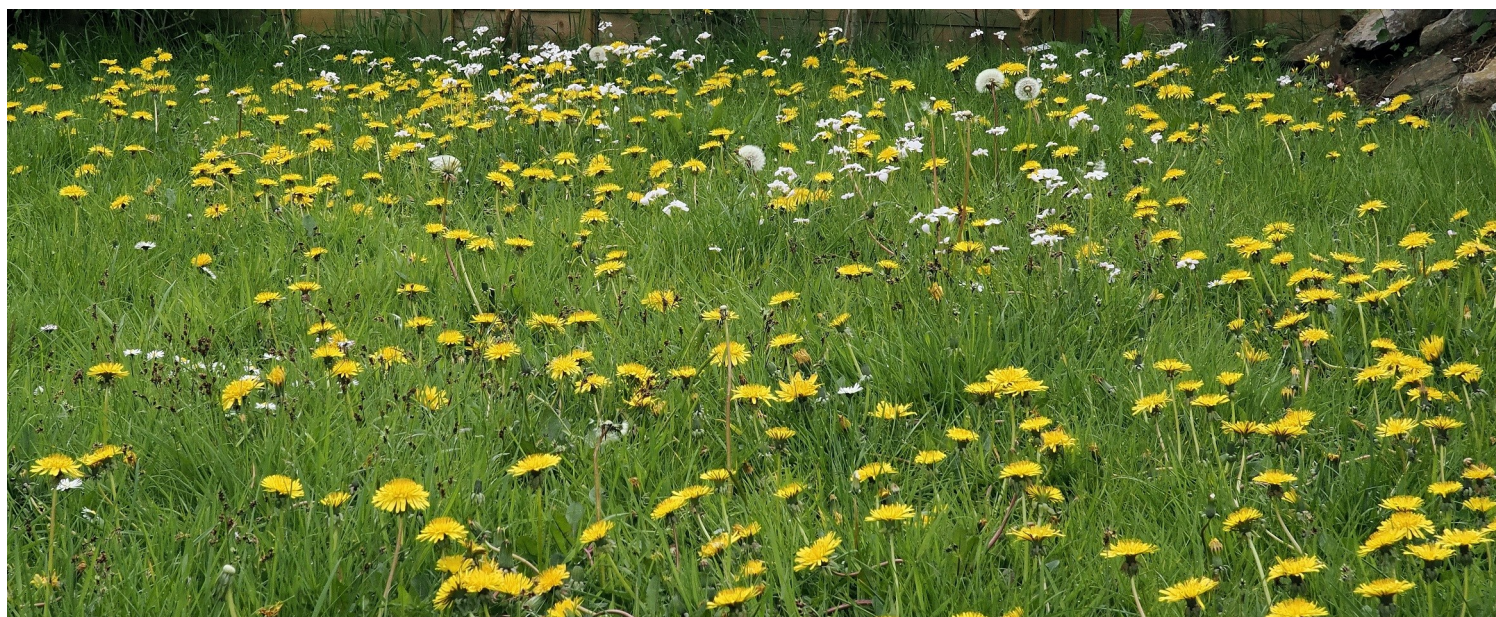
info.chudleighwild@gmail.com



Why not take part in ...

During April and May you may notice how bumblebees, hoverflies, butterflies and other insects have appeared in the garden. They are desperate for pollen and nectar at this time of year, so the early wild flowers like Dandelions, Daisies and Lesser Celandine are an essential source of food for them. All of these plants provide an amazing display of colour in an otherwise rather dull landscape. This is why bodies like the Wildlife Trusts, Plantlife and the RSPB are asking people not to mow their lawns:

At the time of writing, our lawn is a mass of flowers - about 730 Dandelions and 140 Lady's Smock, to be precise (pictured below). And the bees were loving it! As in the last two years, we will leave most of the lawn uncut through the summer. Trimming the edges gives us access to the 'less wild' flower beds and we'll practice a bit of 'drunken mowing' to give some variety in vegetation height. We'll cut the last bits in August.



So how about leaving your mower in the garden shed for a little longer, or even leave a patch unmown for the whole summer?

Dave & Sue Smallshire



In praise of Dandelions

One of the best of nature's free gifts to garden wildlife is all around us, hiding in plain sight. Much maligned by those seeking a uniform (i.e. boring!) billiard-table-like surface to their lawn, Dandelions provide us with spectacular floral displays to kick off spring and later teach children how to tell the time (OK, not really).

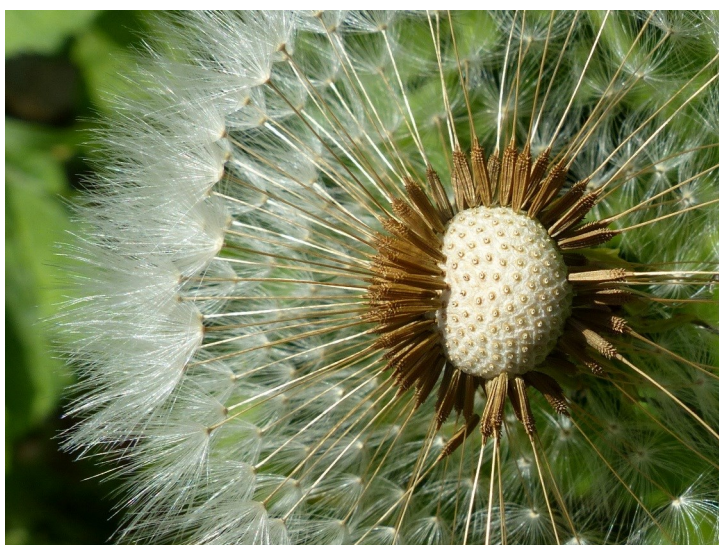
Their composite flowers provide a prolonged source of energy for many species of insects, including those all-important pollinators. When they go to seed, the tiny seeds attached hidden within their 'clocks' provide forage for birds such as Goldfinch – a free alternative to the sunflower seeds that we buy for them. But many Dandelion seeds are dispersed by the wind on their umbrella-like pappus – so they are easy to establish: just do nothing and they will find you!

Having established in a small niche of bare ground (e.g. a worm cast), a deep tap root develops and allows the plant to survive droughts: it's future-proofed against climate change! It's also a perennial, so each plant may survive for many years.

The leaves, flowers and roots are sometimes used in herbal medicine and as food, but with care: the leaves have diuretic qualities. The French name for Dandelion is "pissenlit", meaning "wet the bed", and with good reason, and there are many other local names across its wide geographical range. The flowers are used to make wine and pop (who remembers Dandelion and Burdock?), the leaves can be used in salads and the roots, when baked and ground into powder, have been used to make a coffee substitute. To French-speakers, Dandelion is a corruption of 'dent de lion': lion's teeth; this refers to the serrated edges of the leaves that resemble the teeth of a lion. To botanists, Dandelion is known as '*Taraxacum officinale* agg.'. The 'agg.' is an abbreviation for 'aggregatum', or aggregate, and describes an apparently common and widespread species with many subtle forms. A few nerdy botanists try to identify these different forms, from the subtle variations in shape that are found across its range. Many forms have been described and named as microspecies.

In a recent experiment to come up with the best seed mix to sow for pollinators, Dandelion proved to be the most attractive nectar source – and it wasn't even sown! So leave your mower in the shed and enjoy the spring glory of Dandelion flowers. Never mind 'No Mow May', please consider 'No Mow Spring and Summer'!

Dave Smallshire



Cirl Buntings

Thirty or so years ago, the Cirl Bunting almost disappeared from Britain as a breeding bird. Formerly present over much of southern England, it was reduced to just over 100 breeding pairs in the coastal fringe of South Devon between Exeter and Plymouth. It was found that the loss of arable crop rotations had removed cereal stubbles from most farmland; rich in weed seeds and spilt grain, these stubbles were critical to the overwinter survival of many farmland bird species, including Cirl Buntings. In addition, in the post-war era of agricultural intensification, breeding sites in hedgerows and scrub had been lost and areas of long grass and herbage, where grasshoppers and bush-crickets – important chick food – can be plentiful, had been lost. Urgent action, led by RSPB, led to the identification of remedial measures, which were implemented through targeted agri-environment schemes and even supplementary feeding of seed.



Cirl Buntings responded well to these changes in land management, although their very sedentary behaviour has meant that their spread to former haunts has been painfully slow. Although it is likely that Chudleigh Parish had Cirl Buntings breeding before the population decline, it is only in the last decade that they have been seen here for certain.

A pair has been present in or near the west of the Parish, with up to five (suggesting successful breeding) seen at Deer Park Farm/Ruggadon during 2017-22; these are linked to a tiny population in the Teign Valley. There have also been recent reports from Riddon, on the south-west fringe of town near Great Hill and on the eastern side of town around Garden Spot Lane. This last area held a pair (with a singing male) in a hedge near Mount Pleasant allotments in 2021; a male heard singing near Parkway Road on occasions since then could well have been the same. Just outside the Parish, a pair were seen with Yellowhammers at Gappah in March 2021 and others have been seen on the fringes of Chudleigh Knighton in recent years.



Female Cirl Bunting

Cirl Buntings will come to seed on bird tables around the edges of towns, they are generally elusive and hard to find. They are found typically in hedgerows or feeding on the ground close by, but are most easily located by their song. Unfortunately, the song and calls are very easily overlooked! The song is a rattled trill: it varies a bit between individuals and can be confused with the trills of a singing Greenfinch or perhaps a Yellowhammer, if it leaves the end off its 'little bit of bread and no cheese' song. That said, the numbers of both Greenfinches and Yellowhammers have declined greatly in recent years, so even finding these is notable! Male Yellowhammers have a bright yellow head and a few pairs still frequent the cereal fields (and, importantly, the stubbles) to the north-east of town.

So what does a Cirl Bunting look like? The most obvious feature of the male is its black-and-yellow head pattern: its yellow face is crossed by a bold black line through its eye and a large black chin patch. Females and young birds are browner and streakier; all of them lack the bright chestnut rump shown by Yellowhammers.



If you have a garden fringing the eastern edge of town and like to feed the birds, please keep an eye open for Cirl Buntings. They will take seed from an open bird table or from the ground – barley, yellow millet and canary seed are preferred.

As part of the RSPB's annual monitoring of Cirl Buntings, I'm signed up to surveying the area around Chudleigh. My focus will be the swathe of land extending north-east from Parkway Lane through Garden Spot Lane, Mount Pleasant and the allotments, Brimley Corner and Hams Barton.



Male Cirl Bunting

Male Yellowhammer



It would help enormously if you could let me know of any Cirl Bunting sightings you make, or indeed any of the other farmland birds the RSPB are interested in, such as Yellowhammer, Skylark and Linnet.

You can listen to the song and find out more about where to see Cirl buntings in the South West via the RSPB link below.

[Cirl Bunting Bird Facts | Emberiza Cirlus - The RSPB](#)

Dave Smallshire

davesmall@btinternet.com

WhatsApp groups

Currently we have WhatsApp groups for bird and bat enthusiasts and for litter pickers, but we think there may be a need for a general Wildlife Group to tell each other about recent sightings. These could include unusual events in the Parish as well as requests for help in identifying species, with photos or descriptions being circulated. If you would like join, please text your name and mobile phone number to 07853 216239. I will respond with a code of good practice and we'll see how it goes.



Dave Smallshire

Community Bat evenings - advance warning

Watch out for further information about our very popular evening events in the Oldway Batfields. This year they will take place on:

Friday 25 August and 1 September



What to feed Hedgehogs in you garden



It is important to only feed hedgehogs nutritious foods that have a high ratio of calcium and phosphorus, are a good source of protein and are low in sugar.

CAT OR KITTEN BISCUITS

These are nutritionally balanced and are ideal for hedgehogs. The smaller size of kitten biscuits makes them ideal for hoglets and younger Hedgehogs. Cat and kitten biscuits also help to keep their teeth clean.

TINNED CAT OR DOG FOOD

Hedgehogs will eat any flavour of meat or poultry-based cat or dog food. Younger Hedgehogs may prefer kitten or puppy food, as the smaller pieces are easier to manage.

SPECIALIST HEDGEHOG FOOD

There are a variety of specialist Hedgehog foods available, but avoid those that contain mealworms, nuts and seeds, as these are low in calcium and phosphorus, while those with berries, raisins and other fruit are high in sugar and can result in dental problems.

ALWAYS PROVIDE A DISH OF WATER!



Chair's Chat

Spring is an exciting time, as plant growth really starts to kick off and everything turns a fresh, bright green. The Early Purple Orchids in the 'special' verges at Harcombe Cross were looking great today. Early flowers are good news for the increasing numbers of insects that become active, which of course help to feed all of those newly-arrived migrant birds, like the Swallows and House Martins, and even the Cuckoo. Once a common bird in the English lowlands, but not so now, there have been a few notable 'hearings' of that iconic 'cuck-oo' song around Chudleigh in recent days.

It's taken so long to put this newsletter together, that the Swifts have now returned! They're a few days earlier than usual. I always associate their punctual return with election day, in the first week of May. Four flew together over my garden on Mayday, screaming as they went, and filled me with joy! Oh to have seen some of the aerial delights they encountered during the two-thirds of the year that they roam the Afro-European skies in search of flying insects. Anyway, welcome back and good luck with your nesting attempts in the rooftops of our town. We'll be having our annual Swift Watch on 4 July, in National Swift Week, so hope to see you then (readers and Swifts, of course!).

Dave Smallshire

