

Worcestershire Wildlife Sightings: 2023 Update.

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01. Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Worcester May 2023. Phil Ruler.



“See What’s Been Spotted” Interactive Map from the Wildlife Sightings webpage (map data© Google 2023).

Introduction

The Wildlife Sightings Project (WSP) is now at the end of its fourth year and continues to attract records from all over the county. More than 500 records have been submitted this year by about 200 people; more than in any previous year. The number of target species remained at 15 this year, but Batman Hoverfly *Myathropa florea* (02) was introduced to replace Marmalade Hoverfly *Episyrphus balteatus*. Hoverfly identification remains a challenge for WSP spotters, and the number of records received was small. Common Carder Bees *Bombus pascuorum* can also present an identification challenge, but the other target species are consistently, correctly identified.



02. Batman Hoverfly, Claines, May 2023. Lesley France.

Interactive Map

This year WSP has established an interactive map on its webpage, where under the heading “See What’s Been Spotted”, each validated record is shown by a “pin” coded to show the wildlife group (e.g. beetle, mammal, bird etc). Clicking on the pin gives the species, date, and a comment as appropriate.



Key to Interactive Map.

Data from the current year has already been uploaded and previous years’ records are in progress. Visitors to the site can find their own records and check which species have been recorded from their local area, as well as getting an idea of the distribution of records submitted across the county. Recently the map pins have been “clustered”, so its overall appearance is not swamped by the sheer number of records. Records of rare and/or vulnerable species are not included on the map.



Interactive map showing clustered pins. The city of Worcester is the source of more than 100 records this year. (map data© Google 2023).

Drop-in Sessions.

For the first time, this year people who submit records to WSP were invited to three “drop-in” sessions at Lower Smite Farm for an introduction to wildlife recording. Informal walks around the site were guided by Worcester Recorders and staff from WWT, helping people to look for wildlife and to identify what they find. Despite rather miserable weather these sessions (with tea and cake) were successful and will be repeated next year.



03. Wildlife Sightings “Drop-in session” at Lower Smite Farm, July 2023. Wendy Carter.

Wildlife Sightings 2023.

The Wildlife Sightings form “Have You Seen Me?” on the Trust’s website is largely unchanged this year and most submitted records arrived on this form. Records submitted via Facebook, Twitter (now X), and direct email were however happily accepted if there was an accompanying photograph, and observations from these sources made up about 10% of the total in 2023.

As well as publicity in Worcestershire Wildlife Trust’s membership magazine, two press releases were also issued during 2023 to generate more records. In January a plea was made for sightings of early bumblebees <https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/news/have-you-spotted-bumblebee-winter>. In late July, on the back of a mini report from Craig Reed about how 2022’s Wildlife Sightings records of House Martins *Delichon urbicum* helped to increase our knowledge of these birds in Worcestershire, a press release generated over a dozen new records of nesting birds: <https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/news/reports-local-house-martins-needed>.

In addition, the Trust plugged Wildlife Sightings in other media comments and stories. Two of these received nationwide coverage and resulted a flurry of submissions of spider sightings from across the UK and a number of out-of-county sightings of the rare *Convolvulus* Hawk-moth caterpillars *Agrius convolvuli* that were sent on to relevant county moth recorders.



04. Nesting House Martins, Droitwich, June 2023. Phil Evans.

Garden Wildlife.

Having noticed previously that many records are submitted by people observing wildlife in their own gardens, this year we identified and included these records. As there is no specific question about gardens on the WSP form, information was gleaned from free text in the comments section. Unless the comment specifically mentioned that the observation was made in a garden it was not included, so the count is probably an under-estimate. The data showed that at least fifty percent of Wildlife Sightings were made in the gardens of Worcestershire. Our gardens are most definitely a huge resource for local wildlife, and this is something that the Wildlife Sightings project is well suited to explore further in the future.



05. Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus* Worcester, July 2023. Judy Young.



06. Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* Evesham, June 2023. David Hamling.

Non-Target Species and Queries.

Another trend in Wildlife Sightings recording is the increased proportion of submissions of non-target species. Records of “Other” species have always been accepted, if only gently encouraged. Concern that this would lead to an overwhelming number of requests for ID help proved unwarranted and interesting observations continue to arrive in the Wildlife Sightings inbox from members of the public who have seen something unusual. Sometimes the identification is no problem (e.g. a Muntjac Deer in the vegetable patch) but often the person submitting the record has done so out of curiosity to know what they have seen.



07. Adder *Vipera berus* Nr Malvern, May 2023. Conrad Heald.

Because Wildlife Sightings has always tried to reply to all queries within a day or so, the project is helping to improve wildlife identification skills in casual recorders and hopefully some of these will become regular recorders in future. With the wide range of skills generously supplied by experts from the Trust and Worcestershire Recorders, there have been very few records which cannot be identified for the spotter, notwithstanding sometimes blurry, distant photographs!

Trends in recording.

Reassuringly, records submitted to WSP seem to reflect trends seen by other recording groups in Worcestershire.

For example, from June 2022 onwards, the increase in the number of Wildlife Sightings of Hummingbird Hawk-moths *Macroglossum stellatarum* was reflected in the number of records submitted to WBRC from other local moth recorders. Interestingly, some of these must have successfully over-wintered locally as WSP received two records in March 2023 showing Hummingbird Hawk-moths feeding on daffodils (08) and Red Dead-nettle *Lamium purpureum*.



08. Hummingbird Hawk-moth Worcester, March 2023. Mark Nash.

Another example of the WSP spotting a local trend was the number of records this year of Box Tree Moth *Cydalima perspectalis* (09 & 10), particularly its caterpillars. This species was introduced as a target in 2021, when a single record was submitted. In 2022 there were eight records and in 2023 there were 32 validated records received, some showing the devastation caused in gardens by this invasive species.

Wildlife Sightings recorded damage to Holly *Ilex aquifolium* caused by Box Moth (Carter 2023) and observations of birds (Blue Tits *Cyanistes caeruleus* especially) feeding with gusto on these handsome but troublesome caterpillars!

The local explosion of the species has been noticed by everyone watching wildlife in the county this year and it is gratifying to see Wildlife Sightings, an open-ended citizen science project, easily picking up the phenomenon.



Box Tree Moth: 09. Caterpillar, Bewdley, August 2023. Brett Westwood: 10. Adult moth, Bewdley, October 2023. Peter Bate.

There was a noticeable flurry of WS reports of Elephant Hawk-moth caterpillars *Deilephila elpenor* (16) in August and September. We will be interested to know if this is also a trend noticed by other recorders.

In late October WS received a report of an Otter *Lutra lutra* with two cubs seen on the flooded River Sever in central Worcester and over the following days and weeks these three animals became local celebrities, appearing on social media and in the local press. Again, Wildlife Sightings had quite quickly picked up an unusual local wildlife event.



11. Otters at Worcester, October 2023. Cameron Beasley.

As in previous years records of insects contributed most to the Wildlife Sightings database, and among the common species there were a few rarities. In May an unusual colour form of a longhorn beetle *Anaglyptus mysticus* (12) was submitted and in June a first record for the country of a wood wasp *Xiphydria longicollis* (13). Congratulations to those members of the public who not only appreciated that they were looking at something unusual, but also took the trouble to photograph it and send in their record for identification!



12. *Anaglyptus mysticus*. Droitwich, May 2023. Peter Marrs.



13. *Xiphidria longicollis* Upton on Severn, June 2023.
Robert Brown.

This was a good year for dragon and damselfly records. Over 50 validated records from 19 species were received: about half were of the target species Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa* and Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrosoma nymphula* and half were of 'other' species (13 & 14). Many of these sightings included additional information about previously unrecorded breeding sites in the county.

Birds are popular with Wildlife Sightings spotters. In addition to House Martins (03) and House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*, other species included Ring-necked Parakeets *Psittacula krameri* in winter, a Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* in the grounds of Worcester Cathedral, and a Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* investigating a nest box made from an old coffee table!



14. Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator* exuviae Wickhamford, May 2023. Chris Williams.

Conclusion.

Since 2020 Worcester Wildlife Sightings has gone from strength to strength with more people joining the project each year. Everyone who submits a record is invited to subscribe to the monthly e-newsletter which now has over 350 regular readers. Very much a collaboration between Worcester Wildlife Trust, Worcestershire Recorders and Worcester Biological Record Centre, the project has depended on the hard work and commitment of folk in each organisation and with their help we hope to continue and develop Wildlife Sightings in 2024.



15. Beautiful Demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo* Collett's Green, June 2023. Cathryn Dhonau.



16. Elephant hawkmoth Inkberrow, September 2023.
Ken Greatbatch.

Reference

Carter, W. 2023. A record of the larvae of Box-tree Moth *Cydalima perspectalis* feeding on Holly *Ilex aquifolium*.
Worcestershire Record 52.

Images

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10. Box Tree Moth adult moth, Bewdley, October 2023. Peter Bate.
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