



Wild About Barrow

Summer 2024

Welcome to the summer nature notes! We have some exciting news about the development of a new nature area, good news for swifts and as we go to press are busy preparing, as part of Barrow in Bloom, to show off our village for our entry to Britain in Bloom 2024. Environmental responsibility accounts for one third of the judging, so we are putting our best foot forward in the coming weeks – although that’s what we always strive for!

Wild Celebration



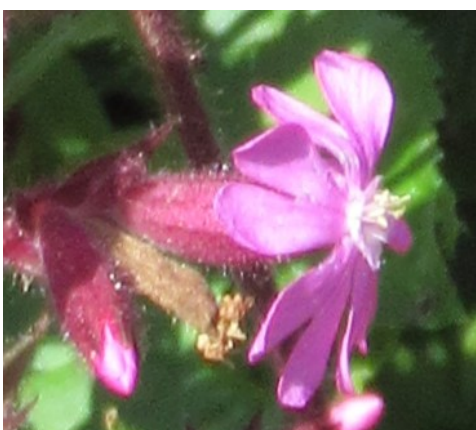
Rough hawkbit
(*Leontodon hispidus*)



Ox-eye daisies
(*Leucanthemum vulgare*)



Welsh poppy
(*Mecanopsis cambrica*)



Red campion
(*Silene dioica*)



Scarlet pimpernel
(*Anagallis arvensis*)



Dog rose
(*Rosa canina*)

All these beauties are to be found in the cemetery or the cemetery extension.

Red campion has a distinctive pink-red in colour with five petals that are fused at their base to form a tube surrounded by a purple-brown calyx (protective sheath). This plant is dioecious, meaning the male and female flowers grow on separate plants.

The scarlet pimpernel is an easily identifiable creeping plant with orange flowers that only open when the sun shines and close even in overcast conditions. This habit has led to names such as “shepherd’s weather glass.

The dog rose includes numerous similar hybrids that needs expert identification. It has strongly hooked or curved spines to climb up to 3m tall. It provides nectar for various insects and through the autumn and winter its hips are a welcome source of food for blackbirds, redwings and waxwings.

The hawkbit’s flowers are a valuable source of nectar for pollinators and the seeds provide food for birds such as gold finches and sparrows.

Each yellow flower is borne on a long, leafless stem and the leaves, stem and buds are all hairy. The leaves, which form a rosette, are long and bluntly lobed.

Hawkbit is an old name, given in medieval times when people thought hawks ate the plant to improve their eyesight. In fact, hawkbit, along with other dandelion species and many leafy greens, contains high amounts of vitamin C and bioflavonoids which are both antioxidants that help keep our eyes and body healthy. It also has anti-inflammatory and anti-tumour properties and contains several other proteins and vitamins. So a very useful plant to us and wildlife.

Have you spotted any nature delights around the village? Send your photos to Wildaboutbarow@gmail.com or just let us know where you saw it and we’ll take a snap.

Charnwood Championing Wildlife



There’s more to celebrate this month with an initiative by Charnwood BC. Walking along Branston Avenue, you may have spotted this sign. The council has chosen this as one of their 16 sites to increase biodiversity, something we desperately need to do as one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Another benefit is that living with nature reduces blood pressure and is great for our mental health.

Photograph by Anna Griffiths, Barrow Greener Living

Swift Success

I am delighted to report that swift boxes are now installed in the tower of Holy Trinity Church. I first wrote to Rev'd Clive over 3 years ago and handed my quest over to the church eco group after meeting them.

They have worked tirelessly in collaboration with staff at *idverde* and RSPB, had a lot of meetings, applied for permissions, a grant and training to install the boxes. Finally a grand total of 10 swift boxes were installed at the end of April.



A week later a swift caller was attached. This sounds for an hour after dawn and before dusk from May to July. This is essential to encourage swifts to occupy new nesting sites. Swifts prefer to nest close to one another in the safety of communal colonies. By playing calls, you are effectively broadcasting the sound of a colony so prospecting swifts will come along and investigate the possibility of a potential nesting space for themselves.

If you would like to view the video made of the swift boxes by Ross Bray, the consultant from RSPB on this project, follow this link: <https://vimeo.com/942364905>.



Ross Bray fixing a swift box
Photographs of swift and boxes: K Eastwood-Paramore



Swift flying over the church tower

These amazing birds spend their life on the wing, even sleeping in flight. They only land on terra firma to raise a family. They may fly 300,000 miles non-stop between fledging late one

summer and first landing at a potential nest site two summers later. These little avian high-speeders travel at almost 70mph and arrive in their winter destination of equatorial and southern Africa some 4 weeks later. They have one of the longest migration distances of any bird, passing through the airspace of around 25 different countries en-route.

Swifts are an endangered species, their numbers having declined by 58% in recent years. This is due to a number of reasons:

Better building techniques and insulation, resulting in a loss of nesting sites

Pesticide use across much of their migratory route reduces the amount of food, such as airborne like spiders

Little consideration or planning for swift nest sites in urban areas

All-year-round hunting of birds across EU countries reduces numbers of returning migratory swifts

Climate change causes increased fluctuations in weather, which can disrupt migration routes, food sources and migration timings

Modernisation of older housing stock. Nearly all swifts prefer nesting in pre-war housing

We hope these incredible little birds love our village and return year after year to raise their young.

New field for wildlife

If you take a walk right through the cemetery you will not only be able to appreciate a wonderful expanse of the Soar valley towards the Outwoods but also find a new sanctuary for wildlife. In addition to parking space at the end of the drive, a small pond area has been created and fenced off for safety. You will see beds with both native and non-native species. However, the most exciting news is that the council has also bought a large field to the right of this area which will be managed for wildlife.

What species live there?

At present, it is dominated by tussocky grasses such as cocksfoot with some purple vetch and yellow hawkbit flowers dancing in the wind. It is most likely an improved meadow as it seems to be species poor, having less than 8 species per square meter, including grasses. The total plant species count, done from the fence, is about 20 but no doubt this will be more accurate with access. In future years we hope it will be more than double this.

Does the field have any value for nature now?

The field does still have value from both a nature and climate perspective. Cocksfoot grass, for example, is important for wildlife. It is food for caterpillars like the gatekeeper and meadow brown butterflies, while the seeds are eaten by finches and game birds. Honeybees favour cocksfoot pollen over that of many wildflowers. Moreover, the grass provides cover and safety for small mammals.

Yorkshire fog grass, which is growing abundantly in the field and supports various butterflies, has the ability to improve soil quality. Its deep roots help to break up compacted soil and increase water infiltration. This can help to improve soil structure and alleviate flooding. Also, of course, there is much carbon sequestration going on.

It is so easy to dismiss common, seemingly disinteresting plants and those with small insignificant flowers as to have no value when, in fact, the exact opposite is true if you are a wild creature living in the UK. For many, like giant panda's who eat bamboo almost exclusively, if they cannot eat or lay eggs on 'their' plants, they would rather die. A range of insects, for instance, rely wholly on ragwort, whilst others depend on nettles to lay their eggs. If we want to see beautiful butterflies and really help nature, we have to look after their whole life cycle.

Did you know?

- ❖ Our new field soil sequesters almost the same amount of carbon as broadleaved woodland, which holds just 6 per cent more (Natural England Research Report NERR043).
- ❖ Cocksfoot grass is so named because the flower head resembles that of a cockerel's foot.
- ❖ Grasses are a flowering plant but they don't waste energy producing colourful petals because they are wind pollinated.

What to See/Hear

1. Listen out for the swift callers and look out for those incredible high flying birds while they visit us
2. Visit Barrow cemetery and enjoy the fabulous view down to the extension area and new wildlife field.

What to do

1. Attach a swift box to your house. They are a very clean bird and make little or no mess: you won't see any evidence of swifts nesting around the church tower.
2. **Let it bloom in June.** Congratulations if you adopted the increasingly popular 'No Mow May'. You've made a great difference to your garden wildlife!

Now let it '*bloom in June*'. Insects desperately need sources of nectar all summer long. If you do, birds will be able to feed their fledglings with insects and the plants will provide shelter for small mammals and amphibians. Insects will eat garden pests, frogs will eat slugs and snails: it's a win for everyone!

3. Make sure your prospective MP knows how important nature is to us. Check out WWF's website for suggested questions to ask them and 3 other actions we could take to help nature. Google: **ask candidates wwf uk** for their website page.

Alison Rushton

Think global: Act local

All unattributed photographs by A. Rushton