

MEDLOCK & TAME VALLEY CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Winter 2013



Pond in Winter at Burlinson House



"Burlinson House
5 Oaken Clough Terrace, Ashton under Lyne
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Registered Charity No. 504558

MEDLOCK & TAME VALLEY CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

CHAIRMAN: Bryan Stringer

VICE-CHAIRMAN: Paul Lythgoe

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TREASURER: Jean Lythgoe

NEWSLETTER:
Susan Stewart **thepliedes@yahoo.co.uk**

WEBMASTER: Lee Borrell

OTHER COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Katie Caine

Address of the Headquarters of MTVCA:

"Burlinson House" 5 Oaken Clough Terrace, Ashton under Lyne, OL7 9NY



MEMBERSHIP FEES 2012

Individual Adult: £10.00 per annum

Family: £15 per annum

Concessionary: £7.50 per annum



Welcome to the 2013 Winter Newsletter!

A very "Happy New Year to you all" and thank you for all of your Christmas greetings!

Thank you too to all who have renewed their membership subscriptions for another year. We look forward to 2013 as we seek to improve the interest of conservation in both the Medlock and Tame Valleys and to improving and maintaining the land bequeathed to us as a habitat for wildlife at 5 Oaken Clough Terrace.

Frosty days and snow laden boughs are a really lovely site in our woodland garden, with spider webs outlined in frosted jewels and a white carpet of un-trodden snow crisp and dry covering the ground. Perfect for painters and photographers! If you are a member and wish to use the wildlife hide to photograph or paint birds, then please contact one of the committee members and we will arrange this with you.

Winter is a very interesting time of year in the garden (it's not just all about hibernation!) when tracks of animals using the grounds to nest in or just tramp through, are clearly seen and identified. Together with our infra red motion sensor camera, we hope to uncover some very interesting facts about what lurks in our garden.

As far as internal work to Burlinson House is concerned, we are waiting to have the chimney pots capped as there appears to be rain falling down and causing damp to the chimney breasts meaning that we cannot wallpaper both of the main rooms downstairs. We are also going to have the front and back doors in the house replaced with PVC doors - and not before time as they have given us quite a few problems over the last few years!

The cellar is showing some signs of damp in the walls and this will need treatment. We will have to take advice regarding this. If anyone can help or advise us in this respect, please let us know.

So all in all, the work progresses, not as fast as we may like, but we going forward nonetheless into 2013 in good spirits, ready for the challenges as they present themselves. We aren't gaining as many new members as we would like and so we would like you to help us spread the word about our events so that other people will be informed about what is going in and hopefully take an interest. Why not invite your friends, neighbours and family to our next event? Our membership numbers though are generally staying around the same, given that one or two forget to renew each year until 'hugged'!

In January (some time) we hope to arrange our winter walk so keep checking your emails for details about that. It will probably be around Delph and Denshaw and we hope we have a lovely dry, cold and bright day to do that.

Should anyone be changing address, email or telephone details, please be sure and update us.

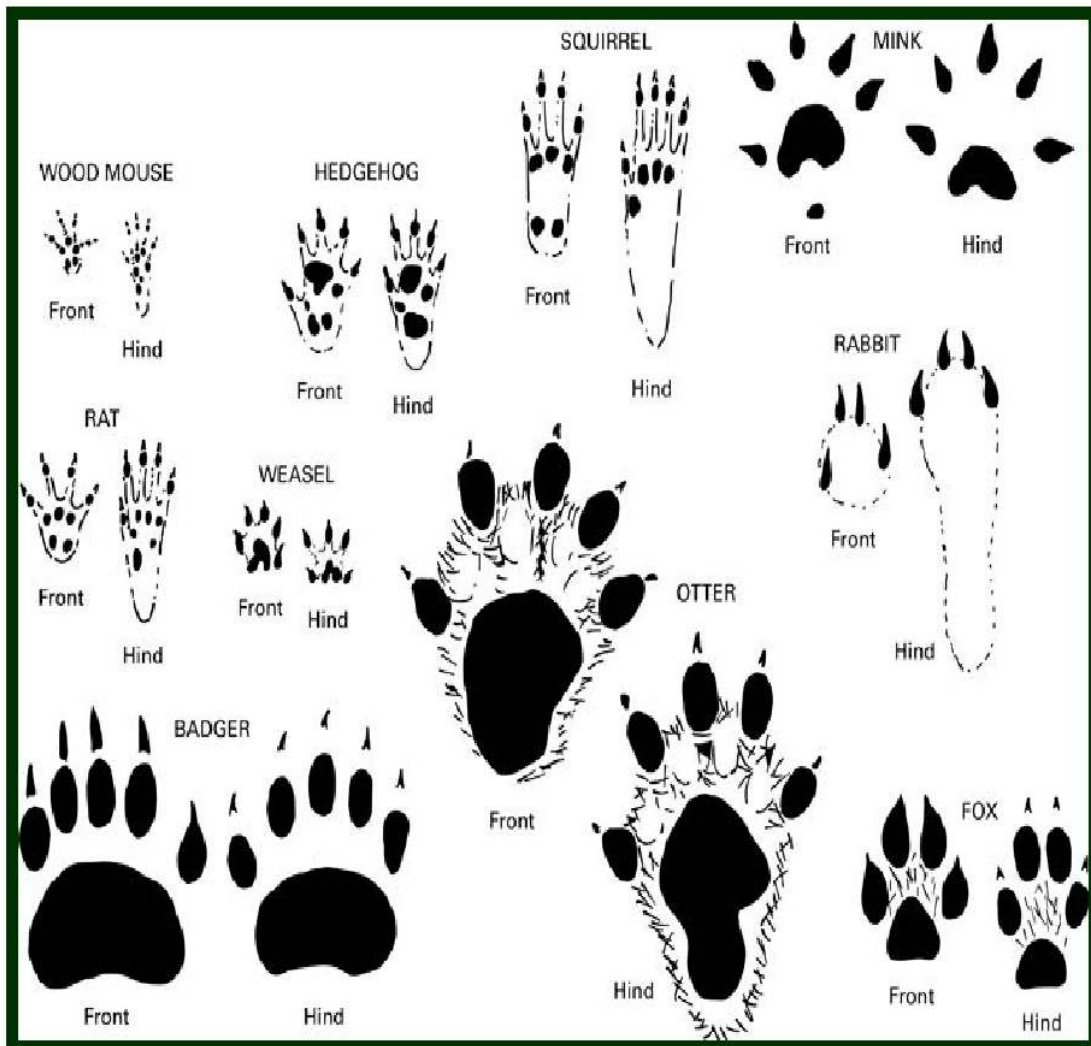
Susan (Secretary/Editor of Newsletter)

PLEASE DON'T FORGET to visit our website!
There are all sorts of interesting items, videos and pieces of news added daily by our Webmaster.

www.medlockandtame.org.uk

Feel free to contribute to the guestbook. It is very simple to use. We want to hear of YOUR wildlife sightings and YOUR nature news!

TRACK IDENTIFICATION - look out for these in your own garden



HOW HONEY BEES KEEP WARM IN WINTER



As you aware we have a number of beehives in the garden and I am regularly asked how the bees are faring. I thought it would be of interest to include a seasonal beekeeping article in the newsletter; so in this issue we look at how bees survive the winter with some thoughts from Debbie Hadley's "Insect Guide".

Most bees and wasps hibernate during the colder months. In many species, only the queen survives the winter, emerging in spring to re-establish a colony. But honey bees remain active all winter long, despite the freezing temperatures and lack of flowers on which to forage.

The honey bee colony's ability to survive the winter depends on their food stores. Keeping warm takes energy in the form of honey. If the colony runs short of honey, it will freeze to death before spring. The worker bees force the now useless drones from the hive, leaving them to starve. It's a harsh sentence, but one that's necessary for the colony's survival. Drones would eat too much of the precious honey, and put the hive in peril.

Once sources of forage disappear, the honey bees settle in for the winter. As temperatures fall below 8° C, the workers cluster near their cache of honey. The queen stops laying eggs in late autumn and early winter since food stores are limited and the workers must focus on insulating the colony.

If there has not been enough honey stored or if the bees use their stores, the beekeeper can help feed the bees with fondant to sustain them. The beekeeper can tell if there are insufficient food stores by slightly lifting the hive (known as hefting) at one side. See the photograph below.



The honey bee workers form a cluster around the queen and brood, keeping them warm. They keep their heads pointed inward. Bees on the inside of the cluster can feed on the stored honey. The outer layer of workers insulates their sisters inside the sphere of honey bees. As ambient temperatures rise, the bees on the outside of the group separate a bit, to allow more air flow. As temperatures fall, the cluster tightens, and the outer workers pull together.

As it gets colder, the worker bees actively generate heat within the hive. First, they feed on honey for energy. Then, the honey bees shiver. They vibrate their flight muscles but keep their wings still, raising their body temperatures. With thousands of bees shivering constantly, the temperature at the centre of the cluster will warm up considerably, to about 34° C! When the workers on the outer edge of the cluster get cold, they push to the centre of the group, and other bees take a turn shielding the group from the winter weather.

During warmer spells, the entire sphere of bees will move within the hive, positioning themselves around fresh honey stores. During long spells of extreme cold, the bees may be unable to move within the hive. If they run out of honey within the cluster, the bees can starve to death just inches from additional honey reserves.

Article submitted by Paul Lythgoe (Vice-Chairman of MTVCA and Beekeeper)

AUTUMN/WINTER PROGRAMME 2012/2013

January - (keep an eye on your emails to find out where and when)

Spot the Ladybird - Monday 11 February 2013 - 7.15 pm - Susan Stewart

Ponds and Pondlife (including a pond dip) - Saturday 18th May 2013 - 2pm

Please ensure if you are coming to the events by car that you park at the Oldham Road End of Oaken Clough, as parking is strictly limited. Alternatively, a bus from Ashton bus station runs regularly and stops almost at the end of Oaken Clough.

THE COMMEDIA BUTTERFLY

Scientific classification:

Kingdom: Animalia Phylum:
Arthropoda
Class: Insecta
Order: Lepidoptera
Family: Nymphalidae
Tribe: Nymphalini



Genus: Polygonia
Species: P. c-album
Binomial name
Polygonia c-album
(Linnaeus, 1758)

Continuing with our series on butterflies, we come to another favourite - the Comma butterfly.

This species was first defined by Linnaeus (1758) as described here (type locality: Sweden). Looking like a tatty Small Tortoiseshell, the Comma is now a familiar sight throughout most of England and Wales and is one of the few species that is bucking the trend by considerably expanding its range. The butterfly gets its name from the only white marking on its underside, which resembles a comma.

When resting with wings closed this butterfly has excellent camouflage, the jagged outline of the wings giving the appearance of a withered leaf, making the butterfly inconspicuous when resting on a tree trunk or when hibernating.

Distribution

This butterfly was once widespread over most of England and Wales, and parts of southern Scotland, but by the middle of the 1800s had suffered a severe decline that left it confined to the Welsh border counties, especially West Gloucestershire, East Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Monmouthshire. It is thought that the decline may have been due to a reduction in Hop farming, a key larval food plant at the time. Since the 1960s this butterfly has made a spectacular comeback, with a preference for Common Nettle as the larval food plant, and it is now found throughout England, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands and has recently reached Scotland. There have also been a few records from Ireland.

Annual Cycle

The butterfly can be seen at any time of the year, occasionally awakening on warm winter days. The butterfly emerges from hibernation in March, giving rise to the next generation which appear at the end of June and start of July. The majority of the offspring have dark undersides and these go on to hibernate. However, the remainder of the offspring have quite light undersides and brighter uppersides.



Photo of Hutchinsoni form showing light coloured wing undersides.

There is another peak emergence in late summer, at the end of August and start of September. The trigger for the development of this form is the changing day length as the larva develops. If day length is increasing (before midsummer's day) as the larva develops, then the majority of adults will go on to produce another generation, whereas if day length is decreasing, then the majority of adults will be the regular dark form that enter hibernation. The assumption, therefore, is that a good spring will

allow for an earlier emergence and more-rapid larval development, resulting in a high proportion of adults which can then comfortably fit in another brood.

Habitat

This is primarily a woodland butterfly, where it can be seen along woodland rides and country lanes. However, especially in late summer, the butterfly is frequently seen in gardens where it feeds in on nectar sources to build up its fat reserves before entering hibernation.

Larval Foodplants

The primary larval foodplant is Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), of which we have plenty in and around Oaken Clough. Currants (various) (*Ribes* spp.), Elms (various) (*Ulmus* spp.), Hop (*Humulus lupulus*) and Willows (various) (*Salix* spp.) are also used.

ectar Sources

Adults feed primarily on Thistles (*Cirsium* spp. and *Carduus* spp.). Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Knapweeds (*Centaurea* spp.) and Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*) are also used.

Imago (the fully developed adult insect)

After emerging from hibernation, both sexes search out nectar sources, such as Sallow flowers or Blackthorn blossom. They also spend a good amount of time basking, favourite surfaces being tree trunks, wood piles, dead bracken and fence posts.

The male butterfly sets up a territory, often on the sunny side of a woodland margin or at the junction of two woodland rides. Here he will sit on a favourite perch awaiting a passing female and will fly up to investigate any passing insect. The male will also make short flights - always returning to the same perch. Even when disturbed, the male will fly off for several metres or so before predictably returning to exactly the same leaf. When egg-laying the female makes short fluttering flights over the food plant, stopping every few feet, landing on the food plant and, if suitable, laying a single green egg.

Those adults that hibernate take a good deal of nectar, building up essential fat reserves that will see them through the winter. They are often seen feeding from garden flowers or fruit, such as blackberries or fallen plums. They eventually search out woodland where they find a suitable location in which to hibernate such as a tree trunk, branch, hollow tree or log pile.

The Comma is one of the few species that is thriving which is believed to be linked to global warming. Its range has been continually expanding and it has recently reached Scotland where it hasn't been seen since around 1870. As such, this is not a species of conservation concern.

(Extracts taken from <http://www.ukbutterflies.co.uk/species.php?species=c-album>)





Please don't forget our wildlife garden birds.

They would appreciate any seed you could give them!

**If you can donate any food/bird baths/bird tables/bird
feeders**

**Please let us know and we can collect
or you can leave it at the
door of No. 5 Oaken Clough Terrace.**

All donations appreciated.



Winter-Time

Robert Louis Stevenson (from A Child's Garden of Verses, 1885)

Late lies the wintry sun a-bed,
A frosty, fiery sleepy-head;
Blinks but an hour or two; and then,
A blood-red orange, sets again.

Before the stars have left the skies,
At morning in the dark I rise; And
shivering in my nakedness,
By the cold candle, bathe and dress.

Close by the jolly fire I sit
To warm my frozen bones a bit; Or
with a reindeer-sled, explore
The colder countries round the door.

When to go out, my nurse doth wrap
Me in my comforter and cap;
The cold wind burns my face, and blows
Its frosty pepper up my nose.

Black are my steps on silver sod;
Thick blows my frosty breath abroad; And
tree and house, and hill and lake,
Are frosted like a wedding-cake.

