

Dear Friends,

I have a lot of catching up to do with wildlife happenings in our area – it has been a busy and interesting summer.

I should firstly let you know about our “creatures of the night” event at the beginning of August. Well – the bats didn’t co-operate and only 2 appeared from the maternity roost in my roof. The warm summer days has meant that there has been a plentiful supply of insects to feed the bats and the females have raised their babies in record time, so they had left the roost early. I always presume that as soon as the babies are strong enough, the bats disperse to a variety of other roosts in the area, partly because it is probably safer for them to be spread around, and also because it must be pretty smelly and horrible in the roost at the end of the breeding season!

However, the moths were very interesting and numerous. We had 30 different species identified and over 100 individuals. I find moths really attractive, especially when you can see them close up and admire the delicate patterns and colours on their wings. And they have lovely names, many of them a lot longer and bigger than the moth itself. How about a Large Broad-Banded Yellow Underwing! We had one which was probably a new record for Fife – a Buff Wainscot. And who wouldn’t want to be a July High-Flyer! We will be repeating this event in 2023, slightly earlier in the year to make sure that we can see some bats, and as we will get a variety of different moths at a different time of year.

Still on an insect theme, I got a new species of butterfly in the garden yesterday – a Speckled Wood. These are attractive dark brown butterflies completely covered with white spots, and they have been moving north over the years, due to climate change. I saw one in Kinghorn earlier this year so I’m not surprised they are in our area now.

Another interesting record which some of you may have spotted on the grass verge next to the pond in Kettlehill was a giant puffball. Looking like a big white football, this species of toadstool is edible and very good. Unfortunately, it had been dislodged so it would not have been able to mature and produce spores, so it was shared out between several families to provide a delicious tea! This is the second time a giant puffball has been found on that verge, the last time being a few years ago when it was also picked and eaten. The ground must be full of the fungus individual, which grows as thread like mycelium, and will cover a huge area. The fungi and toadstools we see are really equivalent to its flowers. However, if it fruits again, I think we should make a big effort to protect it and let it produce its spores to let new giant puffballs grow elsewhere.

The final broods of swallows are just beginning to fly. The ones in the stables flew about 3 days ago, and tonight the ones in my garage had their first flight. Unfortunately, one of the babies flew right out the garage door and onto the ground instead of landing in the rafters as it no doubt intended. I hurriedly got the dogs inside, by which time it had flown a little bit further, but with the aid of a net I was able to catch it and put it back in the garage, as it was really far too young to be venturing outside. It, and its 4 brothers and sisters will probably spend tomorrow flying round the rafters and then be able to venture outside for short flights while their wings strengthen. They will come back to the garage to roost for about 4 or 5 nights and then they will leave to join large flocks of swallows and martins and set off on the long journey to sub-Saharan Africa. Quite incredible to think of anything so small and young making that amazing journey.

I think that is quite enough for one wildlife note, so I will try to have a shorter gap before the next one appears. As usual, please let me know of your wildlife sightings – recent ones have included red squirrels, hares and rabbits making a come back!

Alison