

Action Update 18

Winter 2011

Foreword

As the summer draws to a close it is an opportunity to reflect on the wonderful bugs we have seen and enjoyed this year, but also how they are perceived and valued by people more generally.

The end of the summer is marked in the bug media calendar by three notable events, usually in this order: what a lot of wasps; what a lot of big spiders; what a lot of Harlequin ladybirds. As a barometer of bug numbers and peoples' attitudes national papers are a crude measure to say the least. However, they are not without some merit; late August with no wasp stories is probably a poor wasp year. Spiders featured strongly in the September headlines. According to the media there were vast numbers of bigger than usual spiders running around peoples' homes, but this may be just hype. The summer was, while not disastrous, not a particularly good one for flying insects. It was generally cool with moderate numbers of flies and low numbers of butterflies.



Seven-spot ladybird
(*Coccinella 7-punctata*) © Jon Mold

But, this summer was definitely a good one for Seven-spot ladybirds and a poor one for Harlequin ladybirds. When the Harlequin first invaded the UK in 2004 there were fears that the Seven-spot and other ladybird species would be eaten and out-competed by the aggressive invader. These concerns remain, particularly regarding the little Two-spot which seems to be seen much less frequently now. However, this year saw a reversal in the trends of our two common big red ladybirds. Let's hope it continues.

At Buglife we take greatest pleasure when we get media coverage for stories that highlight important conservation issues and what is being done, or could be done, to remedy them; such as our discovery of the very rare Bog sun-jumper spider on a new site in Scotland or rescuing populations of endangered crayfish.

However, Buglife also has an important role in reacting to the negative stories. I hope we succeed in fostering a little more tolerance for wasps, spiders and other maligned animals; a bit more understanding of the environmental impacts of invasive species; and hopefully more people will remember that, although we may not always find the company of bugs pleasurable, they all have an important part to play in the ecology of this small planet

Matt Shardlow, Chief Executive Officer

Fitting bugs into the National Planning Policy Framework

Buglife has responded to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation, highlighting the most significant and serious concerns for invertebrates. The NPPF is a key part of the Government reforms intended to make the planning system less complex and more accessible, and to promote sustainable growth.



Shrilc carder bee (*Bombus sylvarum*) © MJ CLark

Buglife along with many other organisations is concerned about the underlying principles and content of the framework. Greg Clark, Minister for Planning, wrote 'warm words' in the NPPF foreword suggesting a recognition of environment conservation and biodiversity; however, this is not reinforced within the text of the NPPF. The July 2011 draft NPPF provided a framework almost solely focused on economic and business growth with little regard or respect for the needs of the natural environment. Another concern is the lack of reference to the Natural Environment White Paper which outlines the Government's vision for the natural environment over the next 50 years. The most notable concern for invertebrates is the necessity to redefine 'previously developed land' to exclude high value wildlife sites.

Buglife and twenty other wildlife and countryside charities joined forces to submit a Wildlife & Countryside Link response that incorporated the major concerns for invertebrates. In addition, Buglife submitted a solo response detailing the threats to brownfield biodiversity and the danger that at a local level there is insufficient expertise to look after endangered invertebrates in the planning process. The NPPF consultation period has now closed. The Government expects to publish the final National Planning Policy Framework by April 2012. Buglife will continue to work to ensure that bugs are not forgotten and that brownfield wildlife is better protected.

Ragwort persecution – Buglife helps set the record straight

Ragwort is a native plant that supports more than 30 species of invertebrate. It contains toxins that can damage the livers of horses, but the risk is often wildly exaggerated.

There has been an active campaign to eradicate the plant for many years, but Buglife and other wildlife charities have tried to make sure that the response is proportional to the risk and that wildlife is not destroyed unnecessarily. Buglife has been working to ensure that facts are respected and myths and misinformation are tackled – with considerable success.



Common ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*) and Cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobaeae*) © Helena

Buglife member Neil Jones successfully involved the Advertising Standards Authority in getting misleading information about ragwort removed from company and council websites. In September Richard Benyon MP, Biodiversity Minister, posted on Facebook that - 'I hate ragwort'. There were more than 30 objections posted in response. Subsequently Benyon took down his Facebook post.



Longitarsus dorsalis, a flea beetle that lives on Ragwort © Roger Key

Prof. Derek Knottenbelt has long been the figurehead of the anti-ragwort campaign claiming at least 1,000 horses die each year from ragwort poisoning. John Robertson, who runs the 'Poison Garden Website' made Freedom of Information requests to Prof. Knottenbelt and the University of Liverpool. Following a recent claim by Prof. Knottenbelt that ten horses die from ragwort at the University of Liverpool veterinary clinic every year, the University's statistics revealed that there were six suspected cases of liver poisoning at the clinic in the last five years, but none were confirmed and Ragwort was not directly implicated in any of the cases. Buglife is working to ensure that Ragwort facts are respected and myths and misinformation are tackled.

Halting biodiversity loss by 2020?

In response to the Government's new Biodiversity strategy for England Buglife, Plantlife, Butterfly Conservation and the RSPB went public to emphasise that the plans were insufficient to save threatened species. 'Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife

and ecosystem services' sets out the Government's vision of how it will conserve habitats and species in England over the next ten years, and relates these priorities to existing commitments agreed through the global Convention on Biological Diversity and the European Union's Biodiversity Strategy.



Sunset cup coral (*Leptopsammia pruvoti*) © Yoruno

However, Buglife is concerned that while the emphasis on landscape action, habitat conservation and creating a more sustainable network of wildlife sites is to be welcomed, the strategy does not set out a clear vision for saving threatened species. How the new Biodiversity 2020 strategy will be delivered is still being thought out with a plan scheduled for spring 2012.

Buglife is distressed that it has taken so long for Government to formulate action to conserve the endangered species that were added to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority list in 2007, and is trying to ensure that a meaningful Government delivery plan is produced that gives people the opportunity to contribute to saving species from extinction.

New habitat management sheets for bugs in grazing marsh ditches

Following a four year project on the importance of grazing marsh ditches for invertebrates Buglife has produced five management advice sheets for ditch habitat landowners.



Ditch habitat © Roger Key

Grazing marsh ditches are important habitat for invertebrates such as the Great silver water beetle (*Hydrophilus piceus*) and Fen raft spider (*Dolomedes plantarius*). The sheets contain advice on how to manage, create and protect ditch habitat for invertebrates and other wildlife. The advice sheets are part of Britain's biggest Grazing marsh ditch conservation project funded by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Environment Agency and others. Last year the Buglife grazing marsh ditches project produced a report from 533 ditch surveys. The work found that saltwater ditches with special wildlife are threatened by sea level rise. To download the five advice sheets on creation and restoration, management, Agri-environment schemes and coastal realignment visit

<http://www.buglife.org.uk/conservation/currentprojects/Habitats+Action/Freshwater/ecologicalstatesofditchsystems>

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Join the Rugged oil beetle hunt

Buglife has been overwhelmed by the fantastic response to the oil beetle survey. Thanks to the hundreds of people who have taken part we have found oil beetles in new places, confirmed oil beetles in existing sites, involved hundreds of people in beetle hunting and started mapping and analysing the oil beetle results. But, we still need your help.



Rugged oil beetle (*Meloe rugosus*) © John Walters

The Rugged oil beetle (*Meloe rugosus*) is one of UK's rarest oil beetle species. It is about 18mm in length and active in the autumn. It can be found in central and southern England and south Wales. Particular hotspots for this beetle seem to be Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, but the beetle has also been found along the south coast from South Devon to Brighton. Please keep a look out for this beetle when walking in meadows and grasslands. Please submit any sightings and photos here

<http://www.buglife.org.uk/getinvolved/surveys/Oil+Beetle+Hunt/>

Sowing the seeds for B-Lines

Buglife is working on a project to create permanent networks of wildflower-rich habitat across the British countryside.



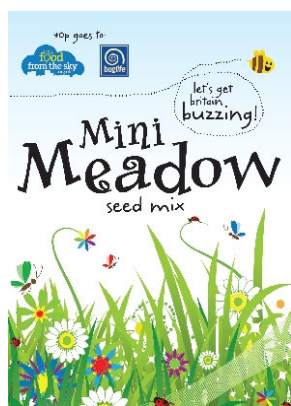
Example of a B-Line © Richard Smith

Buglife's pilot B-Line project in Yorkshire has celebrated its first two areas of wildflower creation in Yorkshire this August. The first wildflower creation is in the Wolds to link together small fragments of chalk grassland. The second, chalk grassland creation incorporated some bare ground – great for basking and burrowing bugs as well as pollinators. Buglife hopes to create three more wildflower habitats in Yorkshire next year including hay meadow and floodplain grassland.

<http://www.buglife.org.uk/conservation/currentprojects/Habitats+Action/B-Lines>

Buglife's first 'Mini meadows' wildflower mix goes on sale

Buglife in collaboration with Thornton's Budgens and Habitat Aid has launched a bug friendly wildflower mix to help tackle the decline of pollinating insects. 'Mini meadows' seed mix is a blend of vibrant native wildflowers.



The seed packs are now available from Budgens supermarkets in Crouch End and Belsize Park, London. The 'Mini meadows' seed mix contains nectar and pollen rich plants such as Greater knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*) and Cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*) which are ideal for pollinators. With massive declines in pollinators in recent years Buglife and Thornton's Budgens hope to increase the number of urban wildflower gardens and support populations of wild pollinators in London. 40p per pack will go to Buglife and Food from the Sky, a project which grows organic fruit and vegetables on the Crouch End supermarket roof.

Buglife welcomes new staff

Buglife is pleased to introduce to you two new members of the Buglife team. Rebecca Shepherd joins Buglife as Brownfield Conservation Assistant. She is reviewing brownfield plants and associated invertebrates. The information from this review will be used to develop a method of assessing the quality of brownfield sites for invertebrates based on the plant species recorded there. Scott Shanks, Project Officer, joins the Buglife team in Stirling. He will be helping to deliver conservation advice to Scottish land owners, organise workshops, meet the public at events and help with the new Glasgow's Buzzing project.

Black zipper spiders, coneheads and a Gold-striped tortoise beetle

Buglife has made some notable bug discoveries during surveys of the Solway Firth in Dumfries and Galloway. While surveying for bees, ants and wasps Buglife and Keith Kirk, Site Ranger, found a Short-winged conehead (*Conocephalus dorsalis*) only the second ever seen in Scotland.



Short-winged conehead (*Conocephalus dorsalis*) © Keith Kirk

Other finds include the scarce Gold-striped tortoise beetle (*Cassida nobilis*), a ground beetle *Philorhizus notatus*, the Blind agate snail (*Ceciliodes acicula*), Bloody-nosed beetles (*Timarcha tenebricosa*), a Copper sun jumper (*Heliophanus cupreus*) and the Black zipper spider (*Zelotes apricorum*). The Solway Firth survey findings will be used to monitor this fragile habitat.

Creating homes for the Sea aster mining bee

This summer Buglife created homes for the rare Sea aster mining bee (*Colletes halophilus*) in Essex. A south-facing 100 metre sandbank has been created at RSPB Vange Marsh North nature reserve.



Sea aster mining bee (*Colletes halophilus*) © Nicolas Vereecken

The sowing of Sea aster (*Aster tripolium*) and the creation of the sandbank should provide home for the rare Sea aster mining bee. As part of a wider project to create Stepping Stones for wildlife in South Essex, Buglife and Basildon Council have created a 'bee bowl' at Wat Tyler Country Park. The bee bowl will provide homes for burrowing bees and wasps. Buglife has more habitat creation planned for this autumn at Canvey Heights Country Park.

Wildflower meadow created in city centre

Buglife has been working with The Green Backyard community garden to create a wildflower meadow for pollinating insects, thanks to funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

In the last 65 years the UK has lost 97% of wildflower meadows and has seen dramatic declines in many insect pollinators. The creation of wildflower habitat is vital for the survival of pollinating insects that rely on nectar and pollen-rich plants.



Volunteers sowing seed © Richard Smith

Creating a wildflower meadow in an urban environment like Peterborough can provide a life-line for pollinating insects. The meadow includes nectar and pollen-rich flowers such as Greater knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*) and Bird's foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*). As

pollinating insects often need suitable nesting areas a bank of soil where solitary bees can dig their burrows during the summer months has been created. The wildflower meadow at The Green Backyard is part of a bigger Peterborough-based project, funded by Heritage Lottery Fund, to address the 'Lost Science of Entomology' – the study of insects. Buglife is working with Vivacity's Peterborough Museum to create an exhibition to launch next summer.

Hoovering up the Horrid ground-weaver

Buglife is developing new survey techniques to help find the Horrid ground-weaver (*Nothophantes horridus*) - one of the rarest invertebrates in the UK. The spider is so rare it has only been found in two places globally – both old limestone quarries in the Plymouth area.



The bug Hoover in action © Duncan Allen

The pioneering survey techniques being used to find this tiny spider include drinking straw crevice traps, platform pitfall traps and a bug hoover! The project aims to investigate the ecology of the spider to help understand how best to conserve it. This is a partnership project with the University of Plymouth, supported by the People's Trust for Endangered Species and The Whitley Conservation Trust.

<http://www.buglife.org.uk/conservation/currentprojects/Species+Action/Horrid+ground+weaver>

Winter bug hunting – don't hang up your net

As we move through the autumn and into winter we will see fewer invertebrates. While a few species choose to leave the country and fly south to warmer climates, the majority stay put and hibernate in small spaces, under bark or moss or in some other quiet spot; some may even rest up in your garden shed.

Traditionally this is the time of year when entomologists hang up their nets, but although invertebrates are less obvious they have not completely gone. Some groups are easier to find in winter, such as the appropriately named November moth (*Epirrita dilutata*) and the Winter moth (*Operophtera brumata*).



Winter moth (*Operophtera brumata*) © Stig Masden

Both of these moths are widespread and found close to trees and shrubs. The Winter moth females have tiny wings, cannot fly and don't really look like a moth at all. They walk up tree trunks and release chemicals (pheromones) to attract males. Another insect you are likely to see in the coming months is the winter gnat (*Trichoceridae*); delicate grey flies, related to crane flies, that dance in small swarms.

The Shaggy sedge (*Chaetopteryx villosa*) is a widespread caddisfly that spends the winter as an adult and can even be seen basking on snow, using the reflected sunlight to warm itself up. Most freshwater insects overwinter as aquatic larvae so pond dipping for these is still a productive activity. If you live near the coast, rock-pooling for crabs, periwinkles and other marine invertebrates is also something that can be done over the winter.

The “non-insect” groups of invertebrates are generally easier to find and seem to be less affected by the cold. Slugs, snails, woodlice, spiders, centipedes, millipedes and harvestmen are all worth looking for over the winter. Some of these invertebrates come closer to the soil surface during the winter as they like the damp conditions, and are easier to see at this time of year.



Brown-lipped snail (*Cepea nemoralis*) © Peter Tropley

When you are turning over logs and stones you may find hibernating insects such as beetles or queen bees. Please be careful to replace logs and stones as you found them so these insects can continue with their winter sleep.

Shimmering ruby-tail, Gangly lancer and Neptune's heart – new common names for bugs

Matt Shardlow, Buglife Chief Executive Officer, was one of a panel of judges for the Guardian's 'Name a species' competition. The Guardian and Natural England asked the public to give common names to ten rare UK species.



Shimmering ruby-tail (*Chrysis fulgida*) © Libor Hudík/Natural England

The winning names include Gangly lancer (*Nymphon gracile*) a smooth bodied sea spider, Neptune's heart (*Phallusia mammillata*) Britain's largest sea squirt and, the Shimmering ruby-tail (*Chrysis fulgida*), a brightly coloured wasp.

Photo of jellyfish wins award



Winner of the British Wildlife Photography Awards, 2011. Mauve stinger jellyfish (*Pelagia noctiluca*) © Richard Shucksmith

For the third consecutive year Buglife sponsored the British Wildlife Photography Awards 2011. A photograph of a jellyfish taken by Richard Shucksmith won the overall competition. The bug category was won by Leslie Holburn with a photo of a scorpionfly.

Thank you!

Buglife simply couldn't exist without you and the support of:

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