Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group Events Programme

2025 – 2026

The Shropshire Hills Conservation Fund enabled the Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group (RVCWG) to deliver a total of 8 successful species-specific events as part of RVCWG Events Programme 2025-2026 as well as the annual public meeting. A total of 136 people from the local community attended these events and a summary of each event is provided below. The RVCWG were also able to purchase a display board and display resources with the funding which enabled the group to attend local community events. The RVCWG was also able to use the funds to buy event equipment such as bat detectors, wildlife ID cards and hand lenses which were all used by event participants and these will continue to be used at future RVCWG events.

RVCWG Wildflower Walk

Saturday 26th April

This event was led by Kat Edwards-White, local botanist and RVCWG Secretary

A group of 15 gathered on a sunny morning in the Pontesford Hill Car Park ready to explore and learn about the wildflowers growing locally around the hill. Kat led the group around the site, stopping to show everyone the range of wildflowers that filled the woodland floor, talking through the identifying features of each wildflower. Bluebells, Wild garlic, Wood Forget-me-not, Lesser Celandine to name just a few. We looked at the range of ferns growing on the hill, with Male Fern, Lady Fern, Broad Buckler Fern and Soft Shield Fern.

As we walked from the woodland towards the grassland, we spotted some small speedwells, Ivy-leaved Speedwell and Thyme-leaved Speedwell with their tiny flowers. The grassland was full of ant hills which is a sign that it hasn't been ploughed or had any nutrients added-making it a great place for wildflowers to flourish. Looking closely at the anthills the group spotted a lot of tiny wildflowers including the beautiful changing colour forget-me-not. This is a lovely spring ephemeral, whose flowers are different colours.

©Laura Edwards-White

As we continued through the woodland, we spotted a few ancient woodland indicators including some 'less common' species such as Goldilocks Buttercup, Moschatel and Wood Speedwell. It wasn't all about the wildflowers though, as the Peregrines were calling around the crags, the blackcaps were singing loudly, and redstarts were flitting through the scrub. There were also a few lizards on the rocks that were making the most of the afternoon sunshine. It was an enjoyable session that was well

balanced between supporting beginners with general interest and giving enough botanical specialism for those with a keen interest. It was a lovely area to explore.

RVCWG Bat Walk – Minsterley Meadows

Friday 9th May

On Friday 9th May RVCWG ran a bat walk at Minsterley Meadows open to members of the local community, a group of 16 made their way around the meadows with eyes on the skies scanning for bat activity. Attendee and RVCWG committee member, Julian Livsey kindly provided the following write up after the event.

” Friday evening, as the sun was dropping behind Long Mountain, my family and I headed for Minsterley Meadows to meet up with the Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group. The first of their free guided bat walks drew a good crowd of us, hoping to learn more about these amazing creatures. Our only experience of bats is one that visits the garden each summer, but we never really knew much about them.

We met up and were handed a detailed laminated sheet about the UK’s various bat species, and an electronic bat detector that we were advised to set to a frequency between 45 and 55 kHz. This would pick up our most common bats, the common and soprano pipistrelle.

As we set off on our loop of the Meadows SSSI site there was still just enough light to see the amazing Green-winged orchids that helped save this site from development. There were also plenty of moths and flies in the meadow, a feast for a hungry bat.

©Sarah Wallace-Johnson

As we walked towards the far hedgerow, Ben, who was leading the walk gave us more information about the creatures we were here to see. Able to stay inactive for up to a week in poor weather, they are often most active about half an hour after sunset, each eating up to 3,000 bugs and insects every night. We learned about how their behaviour is changing due to street lighting. Their food source has moved out of its natural habitat towards our artificial lights, and the debate around how that might affect bat populations.

As the light levels dropped, along with the temperature, we saw our first bat. A noctule. Our largest bat species, we were told they fly quite high up to 18 metres but often have a distinctive up and down pattern to their flight. For a moment we misheard this as them having a wingspan of 18 metres and a lot of incredulous and slightly terrified faces quickly turned to laughter.

A couple of people had their own detectors that heard the noctule bat before the rest of us saw it against the pale sky. This species communicates at more like 25 kHz so we retuned our detectors and picked up a few faint clicks as it raced off in the direction of the smoke from corned beef factory (probably not where it was actually going!)

At the top of the meadow we had a close encounter with a pipistrelle. Quite dark by now and coming towards the end of the walk, everyone’s glowing orange detectors suddenly lit up with a series of strong clicks and a black silhouette raced directly over our heads.

We were told bats use echo location, emitting a series of sound waves. These can be for helping them navigate, for finding food, or for communicating with other bats. Ben had a special detector attached to a tablet computer that showed the bat's sound as a sonogram. The strong signals as a series of hockey stick shapes but a secondary set of sounds at a higher frequency. Apparently, some species can do this, allowing them to communicate and navigate at the same time, perhaps trying to find a juicy moth while calling to its young pups to keep up."

RVCWG Bat Walk – Snailbeach

Friday 30th May

On a still, dry and mild evening after a week of windy and rainy nights a group of 19 gathered at Snailbeach Village Hall with hopes of seeing some bats!

The evening started off with an introduction at the village hall to walk leaders Ben and Julian as well as the handing out of bat detectors among the group. Heading up the hill to the main mine workings, the group paused on the 'dressing floor' to hear an introduction to bats and their ecology. Not long after our first bats made themselves known. The Locomotive Shed is known for its Lesser Horseshoe bat roost and did not disappoint. Several bats were 'warming up' flying around within the roost but also popping out for us to see every so often to check the conditions outside. As time went on, we saw several emerge and began getting our first Common and Soprano Pipistrelle activity.

After watching bats at the Locomotive Shed we moved further up Lordshill towards the former Reservoir and Perkins' Beach shaft. At this point the group split, with half going with Ben to the reservoir edge and the other half with Julian to the mineshaft entrance. At the shaft entrance the group were treated to high levels of Lesser Horseshoe activity as the bats emerged from their day roosting. Common and Soprano Pipistrelles were also detected foraging in the area.

©Ben Holloway

At the waters edge it did not take long before the first Daubenton's bats were seen. These are commonly named the 'water bat' and while known to be present at Snailbeach, they do not always make an appearance. Treated to watching the graceful hunting activity of Daubentons' over the water the group were enthralled how close the bats were flying with up to three at once just a few feet in front of us at the waters edge.

The groups switched and activity continued, after another 20 minutes of watching activity began to reduce as bats moved further afield hunting for more food. At this point it was getting late, so the group began the journey back to the car park. On the way back a juvenile and adult female tawny owl were heard, with the female later seen swooping through the trees. With a small detour into the centre of the mine buildings, some final pipistrelle activity was detected.

Overall, seven bat species were detected: Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long Eared, Lesser Horseshoe, Daubenton's bat, noctule and another Myotis sp. A successful evening's survey with some excellent activity and behaviours seen – but now it was definitely time for bed! The group disbanded around 23:00 and headed for home, while the bats were still out foraging above our heads.

RVCWG Butterfly Walk – Stapley and Black Marsh

Sunday 29th June

Butterflies were the focus of 10 keen walkers at Stapeley Common on a rather muggy summers Sunday. After some introductions and briefing on the methodology of butterfly surveying (following UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (UK BMS) Welcome to the UKBMS | UKBMSUKBMShttps://ukbms.org) the group set off. Very soon the first butterfly was spotted, a Small Heath. Further up the hill several individuals were observed fluttering around a patch of rushes near a stone wall.

The walk continued up to the first peak of Stapeley Hill, Large White and Small White were spotted on route; with Stonechat and Skylarks heard all around. A rest point at the cairn that marks the peak led to discussions around the mythology of Mitchell's Fold and the area more generally. From there the group headed down, skirting along the edge of the hill, the sound of Curlews heard in the wind. With the sun peaking out, and into the bracken the first Ringlets were spotted. Further down on a rock face a Comma was resting and a shower of drizzle passed over.

Reaching the recently cleared woodland at Black Marsh, Ringlets were all around! Meadow Brown and Spotted Wood were also spied fluttering among the vegetation in the area. Common Spotted Orchids at the side of the access road attracted attention, standing tall and proud among the grasses. A Broad Bodied Chaser dragonfly was also seen basking in the sunlight. Blighted by horseflies the group moved swiftly back up onto Stapley Common from Black Marsh. On the way up two Orange Tips were spotted fluttering beside the path in the sunshine. With that the group made their way along the path back to the car park, with Large White and Ringlets spotted along the way.

All in all, a pretty successful survey with eight species recorded. Ringlets were by far the most numerous, mainly through the lower slopes of the hill and into Black Marsh. RVCWG extend their thanks to our former secretary, Steve Oats for leading the walk and lending his knowledge!

©Ben Holloway

RVCWG Swift Walks – Ford and Hanwood

Monday 7th July and Friday 11th July

One of our most recognisable and iconic summer visitors – swifts spend just three months of the year in Britain, they arrive in early May and depart again in August. They generally spend their winters in sub-Saharan Africa or West Asia and, apart from their nesting period, spend their whole lives on the wing – covering a flying distance of approximately 14000 miles per year.

In the last 25years swift numbers have declined by over 65 percent and are now on the UK's Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern. To put it into context – for every 10 swifts that we saw flying 25 years ago – there are now only 3. Over the last few years, the RVCWG have been trying to monitor local population hot-spots and understand their nesting behaviours and trying to capture vital information that will aid in the protection and conservation of this important species. This year the group visited Hanwood and Ford villages where over 25 people took part in the engaging and informative walks led by Siobhan, Carol (swift champion), Kat and Laura. At each location there were several nests found, with Ford providing a particularly impressive display of swift screaming parties flying low over attendees' heads. We were also lucky enough at Ford to see a fantastic amount of house martin nests too.

©Laura Edwards-White

The information that we gather is submitted onto the 'SwiftMapper' App and sent to the Shropshire Council to help inform levels of protection from future development.

RVCWG Pond Dipping – Habberley

Thursday 4th September

On Thursday 4th September after a rather wet day a small group assembled just outside Habberley to go pond dipping! A beautiful clear evening provided the perfect conditions for gazing into the water and seeing what we could find. Armed with sweep nets, trays and ID cards the group made their way around the pond seeing what we could find. The evening finished up with some bat watching, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-Eared and Noctules were seen and detected around the pond, with a pair of Soprano Pipistrelles putting on quite the show swooping above the pond.
Below is a write up of pond finds provided by group member and RVCWG committee member, Julian Livsey.

Following our Pond Dipping evening, a sample of water was looked at under the microscope. A single drop contained more species than I could possibly hope to identify so this is more of an overview of dominant species.

The organisms inhabiting the pond revealed a diverse ecosystem. The filamentous algae primarily consisted of Oedogonium species. Other algae strands included the occasional Spirogyra, Bulbochaete and Chaetophora. Diatoms are a group of silica-shelled algae, and while there weren't huge numbers in the sample, there were a fair few different types. Most were from the Orders Naviculales and Cymbellales. These little glass organisms are part of the pond's phytoplankton and play crucial roles in the aquatic food web. Desmids are green algae with two symmetrical half cells. They prefer nutrient poor water. Closterium gracile was by far the most abundant species – hundreds in each droplet of water. Other desmids present included Staurastrum, Cosmarium, and Pleurotaenium. Cyanobacteria are often referred to as blue-green algae. Harmful, like bacteria, but they are able to photosynthesise. They are one of the earliest forms of life and were found in the pond in a variety of forms: Microcystis colonies, strings of Oscillatoria, and Chroococcus. From such a small sample, this means they are capable of thriving within the pond.


©Laura Edwards-White

A few other interesting organisms were recorded, including ostracods (seed shrimps), busy spinning Volvox colonies, and a large form of Heliozoa – which are protozoa related to amoeba, with characteristic sun-like axopodia. There was also a strong colony of Thuricola – a ciliate protozoa belonging to the family Vaginicolidae. Finally, we recorded the cnidarian species Hydra viridissima – related to corals and jellyfish, they can only tolerate low levels of pollution.

During the evening, we had lots of fun looking at diving beetles, dragonfly nymphs, water snails and newts, but peering at the pond through a lens reveals another aquatic environment every bit as complex and fragile.

RVCWG Annual Public Meeting

Thursday 22nd January 2026

Hosted at Habberley Village Hall, the Rea Valley Community Wildlife Group shared a round-up of 2025 activities, potential volunteering opportunities and information on walks and events taking place in 2026.

Kat Edwards-White provided a welcome to 32 attendees and Ben Holloway led the official RVCWG APM business. RVCWG members agreed on the updated RVCWG constitution which was signed by Kat Edwards-White, Ben Holloway and Julian Bromhead. The official APM business also saw nominations and re-election of all 10 committee members. Julian provided a treasurer report for the last year, and more details are included in the annual report for 2025.

Kat Edwards-White delivered a presentation showing the success of the group's monthly walks and specialised events in 2025 thanks to additional support from the Shropshire Hills Conservation Fund. Julian Livsey summarised the iRecord results for 2025 detailing how RVCWG members have contributed to recording their wildlife sightings in the Rea Valley Area. This doesn't include bird records as it's recommended that all bird sightings are added to the BTO Bird Track App. Julian produces quarterly iRecord reports and these can be found on the RVCWG website. Kat gave a report on some of the species-specific survey results that the RVCWG members support. This included the successful season for pied flycatcher at the Resting Hill nestbox scheme as well as the Habberley nestbox scheme. Leo Smiths Curlew and Lapwing survey results were reported showing 7 pair of Curlew in the Rea Valley in 2025 with no Lapwing. A detailed report on the Curlew and lapwing results can be found on our website. A video was shown showing that 2025 was a good season for Curlew Country who recorded 5 wild Curlew fledglings and released the highest number of head started birds since the project began. The results of the willow tit surveys were also presented with a total of 4 willow tit territories were recorded in 2025 and endoscope footage of a willow tit nest was shown, only the third nest to be found and observed in Shropshire. Finally, the Swift results were shared from 2025 and RVCWG members were encouraged to use Swift Mapper either online or as the App to record Swift nests and screaming parties in the Rea Valley area in 2026.

©Laura Edwards-White

Throughout the presentations details were given on how to get involved in attending walks and events as well as volunteering opportunities whether its nestbox checking, Willow Tit surveys or Curlew and Lapwing Surveys. More information on everything that was presented at the APM can be found in the RVCWG Annual Report 2025 which is available on the website.

The break provided an opportunity for members to meet each other, share wildlife stories and view the range of displays available around the room.
After the break Julie Cowley, SOS Swift Species Champion, presented an engaging presentation all about Swifts. Sharing with the group her passion for Swifts, highlighting their decline and providing ways RVCWG members can support them.

A big thank-you to all the presenters and all the RVCWG members for their continuing support.

RVCWG Marvellous Mosses – Pontesford Hill

Saturday 7th February

Led by a local bryologist, Dan Wrench.

A group of 15 gathered on a damp morning in the Pontesford Hill Car Park armed with hand lenses and ready to learn more from Dan about the bryophytes growing locally around the hill. We started by learning about the differences between mosses and liverworts as well as the differences between acrocarp and pleurocarp mosses. The group marvelled at the complexities and differences between species as we paused at a rock on the way out of the car park which was covered in mosses and liverworts. We used our hand lenses to take a closer look at the different intricate leaf structures and sporophytes. Growing on the rock was the beautiful Ciliated Fringewort (*Ptilidium ciliare*) with its distinctive fringed leaf margins. Other species included Capillary Thread Moss (*Bryum capillare*), Broom Fork Moss (*Dicranum scoparium*) and Bank Haircap (*Polytrichastrum formosum*).

Having seen so many species without moving far from the car park, we continued along the path battling through the muddy conditions towards the ant hill meadows. We explored the woodland species along the way, such as the Common Tamarisk-moss (*Thuidium tamariscinum*) with its fern like tri-pinnate flattened branches covering the woodland floor. We also looked at the Hart's-tongue Thyme-moss (*Plagiomnium undulatum*) with it's striking and unmistakeable tongue-shaped, undulate leaves.

As we carried on our walk, Dan spotted Bluish Veilwort (*Metzgeria violcaea*), a liverwort which is sensitive to air pollution and is often found in places where the air quality is good. This liverwort had not been recorded on the site before, so Dan added the sighting to iRecord. In the ant meadow we found plenty of Springy Turf-moss (*Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*) which is a common moss species in lawns.

©Katherine Edwards-White

We made our way to the star moss of the day, Rose-moss (*Rhodobryum roseum*) which forms a distinctive rosette of large leaves and favours habitat on or around the large nests of yellow ants. This species has a limited distribution in the UK and Pontesford Hill is the only place in Shropshire where you can see it.

In total, the group discovered around 28 different species, and we were all enthused and thankful to Dan for introducing us to the wonderful world of mosses and liverworts.

Community Events

The funding allowed the RVCWG to purchase display boards and print display materials. This enabled the group to accept invitations to attend several community events within the Rea Valley.

These included the Worthen Wildlife Event, Pontesbury Festival, Minsterley School Fete and the Worthen Community Day.

All these events enabled the RVCWG to showcase local wildlife and engage with the local community.

©Laura Edwards-White

The RVCWG would like to thank the Shropshire Hills Conservation Fund for supporting the Events Programme 2025-2026 and enabling the RVCWG to welcome new members of the local community to learn more about wildlife in the Rea Valley area.

The RVCWG would also like to thank the organisations that supported the delivery of the RVCWG Events Programme 2025-2026, including the Severn Rivers Trust and Friends of Pontesford Hill, as well as all the event leaders who delivered fantastic events engaging people with the incredible wildlife in the Rea Valley area.