

Shutford Nature Hub



*Tawny Owl
Jane King*

The days are getting longer, the local fields are full of lambs and as the trees burst into blossom and the daffodils come into bloom, it looks at last as though spring has arrived. Hooray!

There have also been other signs of the changing seasons around Shutford; the greater spotted woodpecker has been heard "drumming". Woodpeckers don't sing like many birds so the drumming which can be heard at this time of year is their way of advertising their territory. The birds choose a hollow piece of wood that magnifies the sound and they have been noted on telegraph posts around the village. They make the sound by banging their long beaks onto the wood, which one would assume would cause an almighty headache, but their skulls are particularly constructed to allow for this with air pockets in the structure working as shock absorbers.

Tawny owls have also been heard calling mid morning. These birds are nocturnal, and the too-whit-too-who call associated with them is actually made by two birds. The female calls ke wick and is answered by the male who calls hoo-hoo-hooooo. It is the male bird heard calling during the day and for many years it was thought this daytime calling was associated with the breeding season but now new studies are trying to understand why it occurs as it has also been recorded at other times of the year. If you hear the Tawny owls do record it in the Nature Hub so we can share our recordings with these studies.

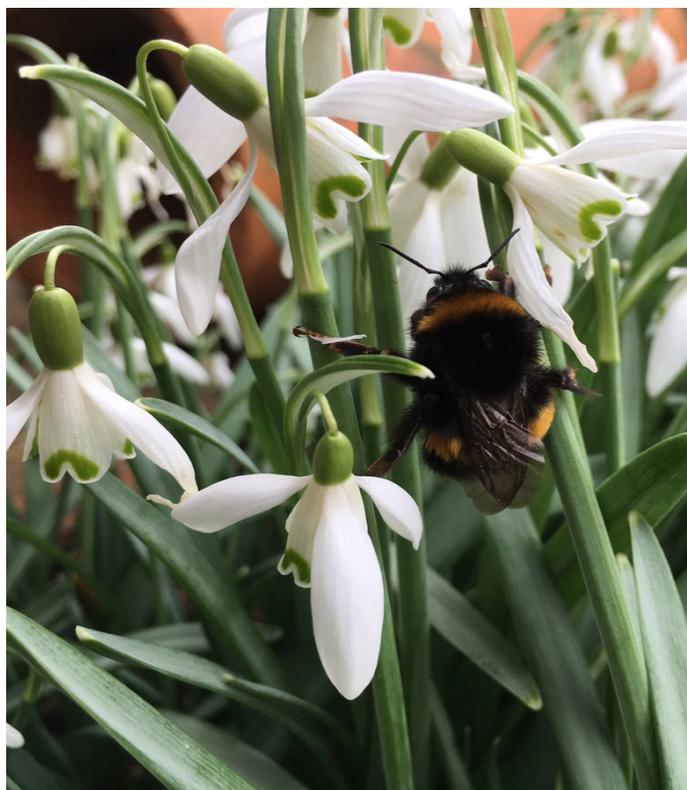


*Great Spotted Woodpecker
Maurice Baker*

The buzzing sound of large bumble bees flying around on a sunny spring day is one of the defining sounds of spring for many of us and at this time of year when there are so few insects around, bumble bees are an invaluable pollinator. Typically the queen will emerge from her winter hibernation, which she will have spent alone underground, as the temperatures rise in spring. She is the lone survivor of last year's colony. She will need to replenish her reserves of energy so she can be spotted feeding on spring flowers.

She also looks for a nest site that might be in a bird box, under a shed, in a hole in a wall or underground. The nest site is stocked with pollen and nectar and when it is ready she will lay her eggs, and perhaps surprisingly, incubate them herself. This will be the start of a new colony, and so the lifecycle starts again.

On a sunny day at the end of February a beautiful Black Sexton beetle was spotted in Church Lane field. These beetles are actually widespread throughout the country and as their name suggests they are nature's undertakers and do an important job in the wild, burying small mammals such as mice and voles and small birds. These insects have amazing special antennae that allow them to smell a rotting corpse from up to a mile away. The male and female will pair up by a corpse and fight off

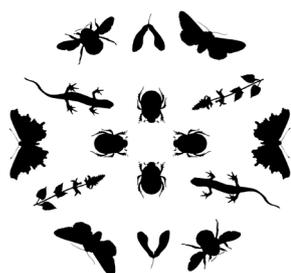


Buff-tailed Bumblebee
Carolyn Rann

rivals; they then set about burying it by digging out the earth underneath. They lay their eggs in the soil near the carrion and use it to feed their larvae until they are fully grown. They pupate into the soil from which they will emerge the following year completing their lifecycle. This might all sound a little gruesome but it's nature's wonderful way of using resources, enriching soil and removing potential disease from the countryside.

We live in such a beautiful part of the country and a lot of this 'wild activity' goes on unseen but we rely on nature for many basic services such as absorbing carbon, providing us with healthy soil, clean air and water, natural pest control, pollination, and a great deal of pleasure. If you spot anything interesting around Shutford please do keep recording on the sheets in the Nature Hub.

This spring we will be using the records to create an illustrated 'food web' to help us understand the network of local wildlife and how the various plants and animals depend on each other and on us.



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Black Sexton Beetle
Carolyn Rann