



# Weir Wood News

---

The Newsletter of the Friends of Weir Wood Society no 108

Spring 2025



## **Chairman's Notes**

Welcome to our spring newsletter. We hope that you have been enjoying the lovely weather of late. The reserve is looking well and is coming alive in the spring sunshine. Migratory birds are returning, wildflowers are starting to emerge and bloom and early butterflies are on the wing. It's a great time to come and pay a visit.

## Work Parties

The Tuesday work party has been busy as usual during the past three months. Much of our work has involved general "tidying up" and maintenance around the reserve taking advantage of a "quiet time" for nature generally. We spend the winter months tackling willow which grows all over the reserve and which will quickly get out of hand if not kept under control.

We have also recently carried out essential repairs to Meadow Pond and to the pondlet and scrape in the Study Area. Plenty of frogspawn has been recorded at both locations in the past month.

Winter / early spring also sees us getting our nest boxes ready for the breeding season and we already have one active Tawny Owl nest which is good news. We have also replaced a number of worn out “reptile tins” in readiness for the return of warm weather and hopefully reptiles – one Grass Snake has been seen recently!

As we move into the nesting season, our focus is on tasks that minimise any disturbance to wildlife.

### Fallow Deer

Members will be aware of the problems caused by deer, particularly Fallow Deer, on the reserve. In the past they have munched our wild flowers as soon as they emerge which is very frustrating. After the deer ate nearly all our Common Orchids in the Study Area in 2022, we experimented with sonic deterrents in 2023 and 2024 as it is not feasible to protect each plant with fencing. This appeared to work and whilst we lost a few flowers to nibbling, most flowers survived and flourished.

Consequently, we have recently acquired more sonic deterrents and placed them in Whillets Meadows to protect early emerging flowers there and our expanding patch of Snake’s Head Fritillaries in particular. This proved to be a success and is something we will repeat next year. We have recently moved the deterrents back into the Study Area to protect this year’s “crop” of orchids.

### Weir Wood Sailing Club.

The Chairman updated members at the recent AGM on the fate of the sailing club and proposals for the future use of the building and the surrounding area. We have been advised that a new café, located in the sailing club building, is now open and there is consequently public access to the areas in front of the sailing club building. We will monitor how that works out in practice *vis a vis* the reserve. A new barrier has been installed by the fishing club building to prevent members of the public from gaining access to the south bank of the reservoir. Members can still bird watch from green in front of the sailing club building. We will keep you posted if anything changes.

### Southern Water Works

A question was asked at the 2024 AGM about the seemingly never ending works at the water treatment plant at the Dam End. The Chairman gave an update on this to this year’s AGM. You can read his response in the AGM minutes – you probably will not be surprised to learn that it is not a particularly happy story. We had hoped with the extra demand created by all the new housing in the Crawley / Horsham area, the reservoir would be operational again fairly quickly. It appears we now have to wait until 2032 at the earliest.

## Reservoir Water Levels

Members will know that this is a topic we have been “banging on” about for a while now and with good reason. With Weir Wood only being a backup reservoir, water levels are artificially high as the reservoir is kept 100% full at all times. Water levels decrease a little in the summer as the result of evaporation, but if we have a summer like we had last year, then levels remain stubbornly high. As we reported last autumn, it was not until June that Whillets Meadows dried out last year which is not good news for our wildflower meadows.

When the reservoir was operational, the reserve was a great place to see waders in the summer and autumn as the muddy edges were exposed. With the reservoir full all year round now, wader sightings have decreased dramatically and the few that are seen are usually by the dam wall where there is a small “beach”.

We have asked Southern Water (SW) on more than one occasion if they could reduce the water levels just by a small amount in order to expose some mud, particularly at the west end of the reservoir. This has always been turned down by SW as not possible for a number of reasons. We now know that following a repair to the dam wall in 2022, it is perfectly possible to significantly reduce the water level in the reservoir without any adverse consequences – Tonbridge wasn’t flooded for example! It only took a couple of weeks of rain in the autumn that year for the reservoir to fill up again.

We had hoped that if the reservoir became operational again, the problem would be resolved. However as we have indicated above, this looks like a distant prospect. So we will continue to pester SW about the water levels. There is possibly some good news on the horizon. We have learned recently that SW are consulting with the Environment Agency (EA) on a Water Level Management Plan which will hopefully will satisfy our needs, SW’s operational needs and the EA’s requirements in respect of the reservoir’s SSSI status.

Our fingers are firmly crossed. When we had an expanse of mud in the summer / autumn of 2022, waders and other birds returned with a vengeance – birds seen then included Spoonbill, Purple Heron, Cattle Egret, Black-tailed Godwit and Wood Sandpiper. It would be great if this became an annual event.



When we last had lots of mud at Weir Wood – Black-tailed Godwits – July 2022  
Photo: David Williams

## Membership Renewal 2025

Thank you to all members who have renewed their membership for 2025, it is much appreciated. Thank you also to the many members who made an additional contribution to their membership fee, this too is most welcome. Membership fees for 2025 were due in January, so if you are planning to renew, now is the time to do so. The cost of membership has again been held at just £3 per person. Donations in addition to the fee will be gratefully received and put to good use in maintaining the reserve. For those who have yet to renew, you will have received a reminder e-mail from the Membership Secretary with this newsletter which sets out the ways to pay.

### Dates for your Diary:

As the Chairman reported at the AGM, the Committee has been looking at the programme of Friends' events for 2025. Our Open Days have been moderately attended in recent years with few non-members coming along. One of the aims of the Open Day was to attract new members and the Committee felt that we were not attracting sufficient new members on the day in order to justify the considerable amount of time and effort in laying on the event. Consequently we have decided to run a series of "members only" half day events during which we can showcase the reserve. As well as members, the events will be open to members' friends and family in the hope that they will become members too.

Our programme of events for this year is as follows:

### Members Early Spring (Bluebell) Walk – Saturday 26 April 2025

This will follow the usual format. Meet at the hide car park for **9.00am** for a quick look over the water and chat before leaving the hide car park at **9:15am** prompt.

We will start by going into our woodland study area for the woodland flowers and bluebells, plus we hope to see and hear some spring birds, before returning back to the car park for a short break. (Bring a flask) Hopefully the bluebells will still be in flower; the recent good weather means they are quite well advanced already!

The second part of the walk will be over to Whillet's to have a look at the meadows, pond and reed bed, returning back to the car park for around 12:45pm.

No need to book, just turn up. Please wear stout walking shoes or boots as the paths could be wet/muddy (depending on rainfall) and are uneven in places.



Bluebells and Wild Garlic – Weir Wood  
Photo: Ian Hodgson

### **Members Early Summer (Orchid) Walk – Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

This will be another half day walk – meet in the hide car park at **9.00am** for a **9.15am** start. Hopefully we should be able to view nesting Common Terns on the rafts before moving into the study area to look at our now established orchid glade (deer permitting!) and other wild flowers.

We will then go over to Whillets where the focus will be on flowers, butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies. We will go to a little visited part of the reserve which we opened up last year to create a sunny damp glade which we hope will be alive with interesting flowers and insects and who knows, possibly a small wader or two.

We will send a reminder about this event nearer the time.

### **Members Summer Event (Wildflower Meadows) – Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2025**

This will be another half day event – just turn up anytime between 9.00am and 1.00pm. We will be based in Whillets Meadows for the morning and the focus will be on the profusion of wildflowers and attendant butterflies. Members will be on hand to help you identify the various flowers and butterflies and anything else that might be around on the day.

We hope to be able to put on the usual beekeeping display (and honey for sale) and pond dipping in Meadow Pond during the morning too.

Further details will follow in our summer newsletter.

### **Members Autumn Walk (Birds and Fungi) – date tbc late Oct / early Nov 2025**

This will be the usual afternoon walk, heading into the Study Area and onto Pintail Bank to look for fungi. We will then walk over to Whillets Meadows and to the reed bed to observe Reed Buntings coming in to roost. We may be able to lay on some bird ringing, subject to availability of ringers and the weather. Further details will be issued nearer the time.

### **Annual General Meeting 2025 Report**

The AGM minutes have been attached to the e-mail with this newsletter and they cover the formal business conducted.

It is worth highlighting some changes to the Committee. Peter Johnson and Tom Howard-Jones stepped down from the Committee at the AGM and were suitably thanked by the meeting for their invaluable contributions to the Friends over the years. Linsey Gooding, who is a familiar face to many of us at the reserve, joined the Committee at the AGM. Linsey's IT background will be very welcome addition to Committee's membership.

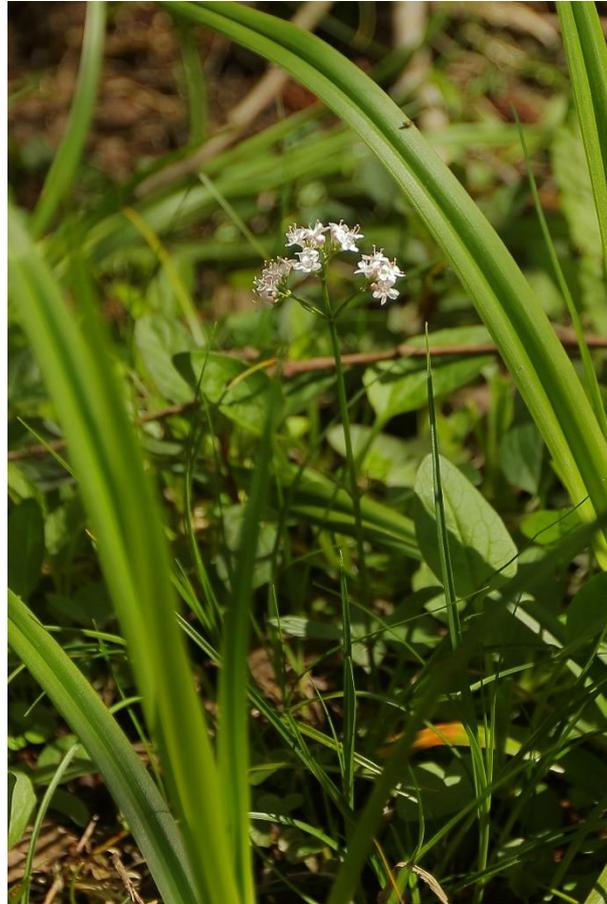
The guest speaker after the formal business was Susan Kynaston from the Wildwood Trust who is managing the project for the re-introduction of the Pine Marten to south east England. Susan gave an interesting and informative talk about this animal, its nature and habitat, its extinction in southern England, recent reintroductions in the Forest of Dean and the New Forest and plans to reintroduce it in Kent and Sussex. There are three proposed sites: Bedgebury, Rother Woods near Battle and the Ashdown Forest. Feasibility studies are underway but it may be some time before we see a Pine Marten in our part of the world! The talk was well received as evidenced by the number of questions at the end of the talk. There was a discussion on the impact of Pine Martens on local fauna and on Grey Squirrels in particular!

You can find out more about this project at: [South East Pine Marten Restoration Project | Kent Wildlife Trust](#)

### **The Flowers of Weir Wood – Marsh Valerian**

Our feature flower this quarter is the Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*). This is found in just one area on the reserve, in the Alder Carr where the Marsh Marigolds also grow. As the name suggests, this plant likes marshes, wet meadows and wet woodlands. Although it is widely distributed across England, it is not a common plant and it is declining as the result of habitat loss. We are very pleased to have it growing on the reserve. It typically flowers from May to June although we have regularly seen specimens in flower in April. It is a delicate plant with fine leaves and attractive small pink/white flowers as can be seen in the photo below.

The name *Valeriana* is derived from the Latin verb meaning “to be healthy”. *Dioica* means “two houses” because the plants have both male and female parts on separate plants. Sleeping potions known as Valerian were derived from this and other plants of the same genus. They were used not only as a treatment for insomnia but also reputedly by thieves who spiked the drinks of their intended victims. Valerian is still used as the source of sedatives for relaxing the central nervous system.



Marsh Valerian at Weir Wood  
Photo: Richard Allan

## Bird Sightings Report

### January

The weather for the month was typical for January, generally cold, damp and gloomy. There was a winter storm halfway through the month although we missed the worst of it in the south east. In spite of the grim weather, sightings at the reserve held up well.

The main news of the month was ducks, with those reported in December hanging around for the whole of January. Regulars on the reservoir included **Pochard**, **Wigeon**, **Gadwall**, **Tufted Duck**, **Teal**, **Mandarin** and **Mallard**. Numbers fluctuated daily with Pochard the most numerous with 21 recorded on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 22 on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Tufted Duck numbers increased as the month progressed with just two recorded on the 1<sup>st</sup> and then 22 on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

The **Goosanders** which were also a feature before Christmas continued to be so during the month. They were seen almost daily with the mix of male and female changing from day to day. Sometimes it was just one present as on the 1<sup>st</sup>, typically it was three (2m 1f). The maximum seen at one time was six – on the 12<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> (4m 2f).

The **Great White Egret** seen from time to time before Christmas has obviously taken a liking to Weir Wood and was seen on nearly every day during January. **Little Egret** was also seen more regularly, typically in the bushes near the heronry. Mostly the sightings were of ones and twos, but six were seen roosting on the 9<sup>th</sup> and five were seen on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. It would be nice to think that they might breed at Weir Wood one day .....**Grey Heron** numbers started to increase as the breeding season approached, with 12 seen on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 11 nests occupied. **Cormorant** numbers also increased with some seen occupying nests previously used by herons.

On the wildfowl front **Coot** and **Moorhen** were a regular feature. **Water Rail** was heard and occasionally seen both in the Whillets reed bed and in the reeds close to the hide. A pair of **Common Snipe** were seen at Pintail Point on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>. **Little Grebe** was a regular sighting too, mostly in twos, but three were seen on the 16<sup>th</sup>. **Great Crested Grebe** was ever present but in disappointingly low numbers, five appeared to be the maximum seen at any one time.

Large numbers of **Greylag** and **Canada Goose** were recorded in the month. Canada Geese typically numbered 20 to 30, but 92 Greylags were recorded on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and again on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Two to four **Egyptian Geese** were present on most days too. Two **Mute Swans** were recorded on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

It was pretty quiet on the raptor front although sightings became more frequent as the month progressed. **Sparrowhawk** was a frequent sighting, no doubt attracted by the activity at the feeders. **Kestrel** was a regular sighting too. A **Red Kite** was seen on the 16<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. **Buzzard** was seen sporadically. **Goshawk** was seen on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Black-headed Gulls** were seen, but mostly at the Dam End where they come into roost. 250 were recorded on the 10<sup>th</sup>. 17 **Common Gulls** were seen on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 3 on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

Other sightings of interest in the month were **Bullfinch**, **Kingfisher**, **Fieldfare**, **Redwing** and **Raven**. 11 **Reed Buntings** were recorded at Whillets reed bed on the 19<sup>th</sup>. A flyover of 34 **Lapwings** on the 14<sup>th</sup> was a pleasant surprise for the Tuesday Work Party.

The usual tits, finches and other small birds were at the feeders during the month. A little out of the ordinary perhaps, a **Siskin** was seen on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> and a **Redpoll** on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>.

## February

An anti-cyclone was in charge for the first half of the month. This brought very cold north easterly winds and day after day with only a fleeting glimpse of the sun. Then

halfway through the month the prevailing south-westerlies broke through and we had milder and unsettled weather through to the end of the month.

The star bird of the month was probably the **Avocet** seen briefly at the West End on the 5<sup>th</sup>. More surprisingly perhaps it was swimming in with the Pochards rather than wading. Sadly it did not stay and was not seen again.

January's ducks continued to hang around in varying numbers throughout the month. They were joined by two **Shovelers** on the 11<sup>th</sup> (which did not stay). The **Goosanders** stayed until the end of the month either in a group of two or three.

The **Great White Egret** continued to be spotted during the month, with two being seen on the 1<sup>st</sup>. **Little Egret** also continued to be seen regularly near the heronry, with four recorded on the 6<sup>th</sup> and on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Unusually, a **Cattle Egret** was reported in one of the fields at the Dam End on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Grey Heron** numbers continued to climb with 41 spotted on the 27<sup>th</sup>. A count on the 15<sup>th</sup> located 21 active nests. **Cormorant** numbers increased also during the month with 49 recorded on the 19<sup>th</sup>.

**Greylag** and **Canada Geese** were ever present throughout the month as were a handful of **Egyptian Geese**.

It was fairly quiet on the gull front, but a **Common Gull** was reported on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and most unusually a **Mediterranean Gull** was seen on the same day.

The winter thrushes begin their departure this month, but it was nice to note that 25 **Redwing** and 6 **Fieldfare** were seen on the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Water Rail** continue to feature both in Whillets reed bed and in front of the hide. Three were recorded on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and two were heard squealing from the reed bed on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Crested Grebes** started to pair up during the month with a pair seen displaying on the 26<sup>th</sup>. **Little Grebes** were seen, but not regularly.

**Sparrowhawk**, **Buzzard** and **Red Kite** continued to be regular sightings in the month, with **Kestrel** perhaps less so. A **Peregrine** was seen on the 21<sup>st</sup>. We are now getting many more sightings of **Goshawk** around the reserve and it looks like they will become a regular fixture. This powerful bird of prey is a great sight. One was seen on the 9<sup>th</sup> spooking the **Rooks** in the rookery at the Dam End. On the 11<sup>th</sup> the Work Party saw two interacting in flight. There were further sightings on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**Kingfisher** sightings were down on January, but two were seen near the nesting bank on the 26<sup>th</sup>. The Work Party flushed five **Common Snipe** on Pintail Bank on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

There was the usual selection of small birds at the feeders during the month.

## March

High pressure dominated, which meant many days of sunshine and very little rain. In fact it was the driest March since 1961 and one of the sunniest. Easterly winds blew for most of the month which took the edge of the temperature by day and resulted in cool nights.

March is an exciting month when our summer migrants start to return and many “first of the year” sightings were reported as you can read below.

Winter duck numbers gradually declined during the month, with ones and twos of all species being seen at the end of the month. **Shovelers** continued to come and go with 5 seen on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 4 on the 31<sup>st</sup>. **Mandarins** by contrast became more evident with eight seen on the 13<sup>th</sup> and on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The last **Goosander** sighting was on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

The **Great White Egret** continued its stay with us and was seen regularly during the month as were the **Little Egrets**. Over at the heronry, 37 **Grey Heron** and 11 **Cormorant** active nests were recorded on the 1<sup>st</sup> rising to 45 and 16 respectively on the 13<sup>th</sup>. A count on the 30<sup>th</sup> produced 41 confirmed Grey Heron active nests and 23 confirmed Cormorant active nests.

**Buzzard**, **Red Kite** and **Sparrowhawk** continued to be ever present; 13 Buzzards were seen in the thermals on the 1<sup>st</sup>. **Goshawk** sightings increased in frequency during the month with displaying pairs seen on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. A **Barn Owl** was seen in Whillets on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. The first **Osprey** of the year was reported via Bird Guides on the 14<sup>th</sup>. There were subsequent confirmed sightings on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

The usual geese were seen regularly and there was a flyover of 34 **Brent Geese** on the 12<sup>th</sup>.

**Stock Doves** are now becoming more common at the reserve, perhaps as the result of our nest boxes. They are an attractive bird and are seen most days, with 28 recorded on the 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Crested Grebes** continued to feature, often in pairs and starting to display. 11 were seen on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 12 on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

And what about our summer visitors? The first **Chiffchaffs** were heard on the 6<sup>th</sup> and then seen and heard regularly thereafter. Two **Sand Martins** were seen on the 9<sup>th</sup> and then again on the 28<sup>th</sup>. The first **Barn Swallow** was seen flying over the rafts on the 27<sup>th</sup>, and swallows were seen daily thereafter. A **Yellow Wagtail** was seen at the Dam End on the 30<sup>th</sup> as was a **Linnet**. A **Blackcap** was heard singing on the 29<sup>th</sup> and seen on the 31<sup>st</sup>. Two **Little Ringed Plovers** were seen at the Dam End on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

Gulls were ever present during the month, notable sightings included 7 **Common Gulls** on the 16<sup>th</sup>, a **Kittiwake** and 2 **Little Gulls** on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

2 **Common Snipe** were spotted flying from Pintail bank on the 9<sup>th</sup>. More unusually, 3 **Jack Snipe** were seen in Whilleys on the 16<sup>th</sup> during the monthly Wetland Bird Survey. This is quite a rare sighting for the reserve.

Other rare/unusual sightings for the month included: 6 **Bullfinches** on the 8<sup>th</sup>, a single **Hawfinch** on the 13<sup>th</sup>, 100+ **Jackdaws** on the 15<sup>th</sup>, 8 **Yellowhammers** on the 17<sup>th</sup>, 14 **Pied Wagtails** on the 18<sup>th</sup>, 45 **Fieldfares** on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 2 **White Storks** flying over on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

There was also one notable sighting at the feeders during the month when a female **Brambling** was spotted on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

The Report above just gives a “flavour” and a full list of sightings can be found on our website at: [www.weirwood.me.uk](http://www.weirwood.me.uk) – click on the “Recent Sightings” link. Remember to check our Facebook page too for regular sightings and photos.

**And finally ..... spring has arrived**

Take a look at our Facebook page for an excellent selection of photos of the latest flora and fauna at the reserve.

## Useful Information:

**Chairman:** Bob Johnson, 01892 661548  
**Membership Secretary:** John Edwards, 07905 546203  
**Treasurer:** Ian Hodgson, 07710 094755  
**Newsletter Editor:** John Edwards, 07905 546203  
**Website Editor:** Linsey Gooding 07802 154575

**E-Mail:** [info@weirwood.me.uk](mailto:info@weirwood.me.uk)  
**E-Mail:** [membership@weirwood.me.uk](mailto:membership@weirwood.me.uk)  
**E-Mail:** [treasurer@weirwood.me.uk](mailto:treasurer@weirwood.me.uk)  
**E-Mail:** [newsletter@weirwood.me.uk](mailto:newsletter@weirwood.me.uk)  
**E-Mail:** [sightings@weirwood.me.uk](mailto:sightings@weirwood.me.uk)

### Other Contact Information

**Tuesday Work Party Volunteers:** [work@weirwood.me.uk](mailto:work@weirwood.me.uk)

**Website Photos:** [photos@weirwood.me.uk](mailto:photos@weirwood.me.uk)

**Wildlife Sightings:** [sightings@weirwood.me.uk](mailto:sightings@weirwood.me.uk)

**Friends General E-Mail address:** [info@weirwood.me.uk](mailto:info@weirwood.me.uk)

**Website Address:** <https://www.weirwood.me.uk>

