



What to see in the valley in SUMMER 2024

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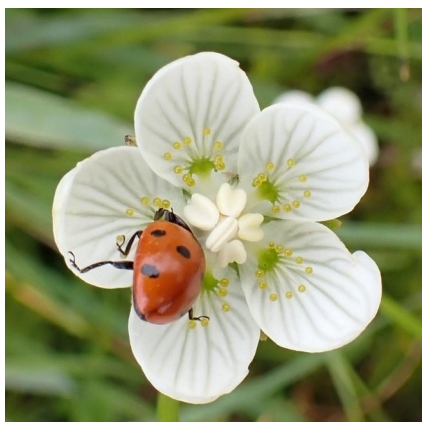
England's rainfall Sept 2022 - Feb 2024 has been the highest on record*. Consequently springs have appeared in the Lye Valley in unexpected places, making the path wetter than normal. The good news is that water levels in ponds, pools and runnels remained good for all invertebrates and fen plants, with no drying out as previous years. However, the long cold wet spring was not so good for butterflies. Along with all other sites it was a terrible year for butterflies in the valley. There has been only one sighting of a Small Tortoiseshell so far, despite our abundant nettles. Even Common Blues were very rare and we were lucky to capture this photo. Just a few Peacocks and Red Admirals were seen.



However the star moth find of this summer was this green caterpillar of the stunning Eyed Hawkmoth, found feeding on willow. Orchids continue to do well in the fen; there were plenty of pale pink Early Marsh Orchids in May and our special Marsh Helleborines in July. We counted 1,274 of these in the North Fen alone, a steady increase in numbers. All orchids really like the short fen vegetation produced by our scything and raking.



Grass of Parnassus (our logo flower and an Ice Age relic species) continued to flower in abundance due to targeted conservation work, probably now more than the **8,075 estimated last summer** (although we decided not to try and count this year). Plenty of insects were seen searching the flowers, but they are deceitful, promising lots of nectar (see yellow globules) but delivering very little. The globules are false nectaries. This is a clever flower, expending little energy but still getting pollinated.



Here are two good reasons for our log piles. One is a breeding site for these stunning Lesser Stag Beetles and the other a lovely sunning spot for our Viviparous lizards!



From early to late summer we do a great deal of seed collecting and spreading to enhance the fen flora. Seeds can be an important food source for insects and we usually find lots of life in the seed bags, such as this Common Green Shieldbug that had been enjoying Wild Angelica seeds and Long-winged Coneheads (crickets); just look at the length of those antenna!



All photographs by Judy Webb and Tony Gillie.

Don't forget to look at our website

<http://www.friendsoflyealley.org.uk/>. You can see more regular updates on wildlife in our **Facebook** page and **Twitter** (X) feed.

* www.gov.uk: Water situation: February 2024 summary