



Lye Valley Wildlife News –WINTER 2025

Judy Webb (Friends of Lye Valley)



A misty autumn view down the valley (Tony Gillie)

Volunteers have progressed well with the end of year scything and raking necessary to keep flower diversity in the fen areas; we thank them all, including Oxford Conservation volunteers and students from Oxford University Conservation Society. Approximately 1000 person hours per year now go into work year-round in the valley. After the spring and summer severe drought and heat (four heat-waves) it was a relief that significant rain started in August and continued to restore spring and seepage-flow. It is also great to report the City Council have done a very nice job of repairing the board-walk that was so damaged by arson in late summer.

Reflecting on the autumn, I remember that after the best ever late summer show of Grass of Parnassus (our logo flower) and Devil's Bit Scabious flowers, we saw **open flowers all the way through until the first week in October**, I was even able to show them to a visiting troop of Brookes Uni. students, who came to study our peat deposits and practise coring techniques (we learn something new about the history in the peat on-site every time they come). We are reversing biodiversity loss in the valley but both these wild flowers are now declining so quickly in the whole country that the Threat Status for both has been recently assessed as 'Vulnerable' by expert botanists. Both were on the verge of being lost in Lye Valley before we started conservation work in 2013.

This autumn the leaf colours and show of berries was spectacular. In the private South Fen section, the stunning luscious berries of Guelder Rose *Viburnum opulus* caught my eye and walking back up along the brook, so did the attractive leaves of the rare Wild Service trees *Sorbus torminalis* which originate from Shotover; planted originally by David Steel who started the City Council Countryside Service.



Guelder Rose berries and autumn leaves of Wild Service trees

I collected some of those abundant berries, rubbed the flesh off them to simulate going through a bird's digestion, and gave the seeds to a local volunteer who will grow them for us to install more of these Guelder Roses at the head of the valley. The panicles of white flowers are lovely in summer and berries excellent bird food.

We commissioned a survey of invertebrates (especially spiders) for a couple of days in spring and autumn by expert **Steve Gregory** and he is just reporting results – excellent news with **over 500 species on his list so far!**



Just two of the 500 - a smart Red Dock Weevil walking on the boardwalk and very hairy Ruby Tiger moth caterpillar

Winter is the time to see birds in the valley and this year so far a star performer has been a Kingfisher, seen by many people flying up and down along the Lye Brook in late autumn, here captured in a rare moment of rest. It's also a good place to see Long-tailed Tits, and some years ago I found a typical nest which was a perfect ball of grass and moss.



Kingfisher and Long-tailed Tit in Lye Valley

Don't forget to read more about the Valley birds in Tom Bedford's ebird observations. For Lye Valley and Warneford Meadow: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L8899589>

Thanks to you all for your support for another year and I hope 2026 will be better for the valley wildlife and for all of us. **Thanks always to the stalwart practical volunteers who are transforming the valley by much weekly hard work on Wednesdays.** We always welcome new helpers; there is so much to do and jobs for all abilities eg scything, raking, scrub-logging and sawing, seed collecting and spreading, or even growing on rare plants for us to put in new areas. Very important tasks are: helping with all the re-wetting of dried peat areas, helping defend the soft peat banks from erosion by hazel wicker woven revetments and slowing the flow of road run-off in the brook by leaky dams which reduces flooding in Cowley Marsh. Whatever Climate Change has in store next year, we hope we are helping valley wildlife to cope; all that we do in our volunteer work is helping increase resilience to current and future challenging weather conditions.

Do look at the group's website <http://www.friendsoflyevalley.org.uk/> where you can always see weekly news of the work of the volunteer group and more wildlife in our **Facebook** (<https://www.facebook.com/friendsoflyevalley/>) and on Blue Sky at: **@friendlyevalley.bsky.social**. All photographs here and on social media by Tony Gillie and Judy Webb