

What's new in the garden this month?

Swifts



The Swift is a medium-sized bird known for its exceptional flying abilities, spending nearly all its life in the air, including sleeping, mating and eating. In the Cool border, you can witness a spectacular display of their feeding habits as a flock of Swifts take turns swooping down to hunt insects over the pond. This spectacle generally occurs in the afternoon, on a daily basis. Swifts can reach speeds of 69 mph, making it the fastest bird in level flight. They are mostly sooty brown with a white throat, appearing black when in flight. They have distinctive curved wings and a forked tail.

Swifts are summer visitors in the UK, primarily in the south and east, and migrate to Africa for winter, traveling 3,400 miles twice a year. They mate for life and return annually to the same nesting sites, often in buildings, but their nesting opportunities are decreasing due to building renovations. This decline led to their addition to the UK's red list in 2021, indicating a need for urgent conservation efforts. To help, people can install Swift bricks or nest boxes to provide nesting sites. At Whatley, we are fortunate to welcome the same flock back year after year and will continue to strive to maintain a friendly and welcoming environment for them.

Damselflies



Damselflies captivate us with their delicate bodies and graceful flight, standing out as enchanting creatures. These slender insects, belonging to the order Odonata, draw our attention with their vibrant colours and intricate wing patterns.

Damselflies have been on Earth for over 300 million years, making them an incredibly successful group of insects. They appeared long before birds, highlighting their ancient and enduring presence.

Not only are these remarkable insects talented aerial acrobats, and powerful predators, they are indicators of water quality. Their presence in the segment of the river Avon, which runs through the bottom of the meadow is incredibly valuable and highlights the care given to the environment.

In many species of damselflies, the female goes underwater to lay her eggs. She descends down the stem of submerged vegetation, cuts small holes in the plant stem, and lays her eggs. She breathes thanks to the oxygen surrounding her body and wings. After laying her eggs, she resurfaces and takes off into the air.

The eggs hatch in 1-3 weeks, and the nymphs remain in the water for 4 - 6 weeks, depending on the species. They undergo 15 molts before crawling up a plant stem or rock to emerge from their nymphal skin as winged adults. These graceful insects can be easily spotted in our meadow, feeding on the diverse range of insects that call Whatley's meadow, their home.

Peacock Butterfly



The peacock butterfly is unmistakable, with its big and bold markings. This widespread butterfly can be easily identified by its azure 'eyes' and orange brown wings. The striking markings on the butterfly serve to safeguard it from predators. For example, the azure 'eyes', help it ward off predators and the underneath of its wings are dull and dark, which resemble leaves, providing, much needed camouflage.

Adult peacock butterflies feed on nectar from dandelions, thistle, teasel and betony. However, the most favoured nectar is the Buddleia. Whatley's collection of Buddleia plants, including *Buddleia alternifolia*, located in the Grand Lawn borders, provide a feast for our winged friends.

However, they are not confined to the Grand Lawn borders, as they have been spotted frequently in our meadow and along our Back Track, which is managed for biodiversity.

Wildlife Ramp



A wildlife ramp in a pond is a structure designed to help animals, especially small or young wildlife, safely enter and exit the water. These ramps provide an easy and gentle incline that enables creatures like amphibians, reptiles, small mammals, and birds to climb in and out of the pond without difficulty. Wildlife ramps are especially important in artificial or steep-sided ponds where natural egress points might be lacking.

Pictured above is Whatley's wildlife ramp, located in the bubble pond, in our Cool borders. Our bees and other insects can regularly be seen utilising this vital structure.

In keeping with the honesty and integrity implemented by the Arts and Crafts style gardening and linking in with our ethos of sustainability, the gardening team utilised *Salix* and *Cornus*, that was cut back in the winter to construct the ramp. *Cornus* provided strength and structure and *Salix* was woven in between, to create a ramp.