

My favourite wildlife place 2



Part 2 to last month's column – members of the Plumpton Wildlife & Habitat Group committee write about their favourite wildlife places in the parish.

I WANT TO KEEP my very favourite place a secret. But the northern end of the old drove road on the western boundary of the parish, while often deep in mud and sometimes hard to negotiate, is a good second, especially for interesting plants. Ancient woodland indicator plant species grow there, such as butcher's broom, wild service tree and sessile oak. This summer there was a spectacular patch of another ancient woodland indicator, the common cow-wheat, on one of the steep banks. I hadn't seen this semi-parasitic plant there before and wonder whether the weather of the last two years has been good for this annual species. Further south on the drove road (but just outside the parish boundary) the carmine flowered grass vetchling – another annual species – was a lot more abundant than usual. It grows alongside two plants that are more commonly found near the coast, the strawberry clover and the spiny restharrow. *JH*

ONE OF MY favourite places in the parish is on the eastern railway bridge at Plumpton Station. It gives you a real sense of Sussex, looking over towards the South Downs, with the famous V landmark, and the cross cut out in the downland turf commemorating the Battle of Lewes in 1262. You can get a good idea of impending weather from the large amount of sky visible from the high vantage point, and it's a really good place to spot wildlife. Foxes are frequent – one vixen raised cubs for quote a number of years adjacent to the railway line among the brambles. I have also seen brown hare. The bird life is varied – whitethroat and yellowhammers in the hedges, a snipe out in the open area and buzzard flying high above. Many other birds can be seen at different times of the year, including nightingales. Reptiles – newts, grass snakes and adders – all like the warmth of the station platform. In fact, it is never boring waiting for a train. *DH*

SITTING UP ON the grass at the Half Moon, at about midday on a warm late spring or summer day. With a pint of Harvey's. You get a good view of the Downs and there can be interesting birds drifting along the north-facing

escarpment. In particular, it's an excellent place to see our scarce relative of the kestrel, the hobby. This is a spectacular aerobat as it chases small birds and dragonflies and often gives good enough views to see its red trousers and distinct black moustache. Its wings are more uniform grey above than the kestrel's and have a characteristic swept-back appearance. At the back of the field behind the pub is an area that is being managed to encourage a wildflower meadow, with a number of bee hives. There is also a badger's sett nearby, so a return in the evening might be fruitful. (Of course, it might take a second pint to get the hobby, but the walk back via Novington Manor and Stanton's Farm is very pleasant and varied.) *AMH*

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