

**FAST
FALCONS**

Take flight with the
dragonfly-hunting hobby



**EGG-CITING
FINDS**

Spot the eggs of
sea creatures

ISSUE 118
Summer 2026

Wildlife Watch

MAGAZINE

Sounds of Summer

Discover the season's
greatest hits!

FREE!

Beaver
poster

The 
Wildlife
Trusts



Editor's corner

TOM HIBBERT
Editor, Wildlife Watch

Each season has its own sounds. Summer is famous for birdsong and chirping grasshoppers, but it has other sounds too. Find out what they are on page eight! Summer also brings new birds, migrating from Africa to raise their young here. One of them is a super-fast falcon that snatches dragonflies from the air – head to page 18 to discover this brilliant bird. Whether you're listening to wild sounds or scanning the skies, I hope you have a wild summer!

Tom



GET IN TOUCH
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WILD THINGS

NEWS from our Wildlife Watchers



STUDENT OF SPRING

Ten-year-old Amelie from Durham made this nature collage, using flowers found on the ground. She used it to teach people the signs of spring.



BIRD BOOST

Seven-year-old Joseph from Lancashire made an apple bird feeder with his dad, using the guide in our autumn issue. They hung it up over winter to feed the local birds. New research from the RSPB has found that we should feed birds seasonally – find out more in this issue's Science Section!

ANIMAL ART

Willa (aged 6) from Lancashire was excited to share her amazing artwork, showing a fox and badger, with earthworms and tree roots visible around them.



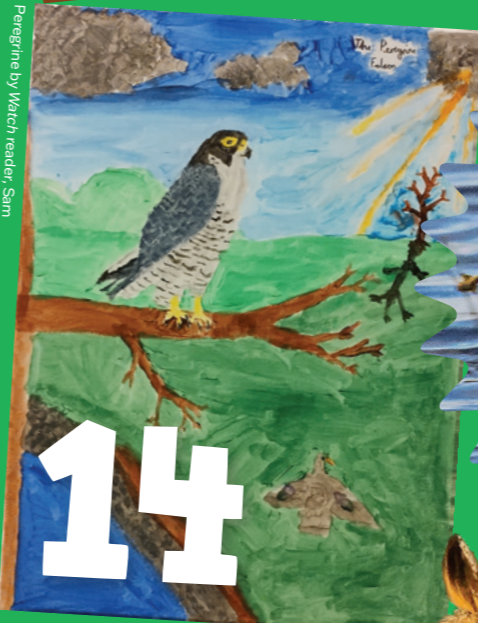
ROAMING READER

Miles (aged 4) from East Sussex loves reading Wildlife Watch and being outside in nature – sometimes he does both at once!



06

Peregrine by Watch reader Sam



14



18

Art © Jon Hawkins - Surrey Hills Photography

Hobby © Andy Moffatt

Long-eared owl © Jon Hawkins - Surrey Hills Photography



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WILDLIFE WATCH 118

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What's Wildlife Watch?

Wildlife Watch is the junior branch of The Wildlife Trusts. Join Wildlife Watch and start your nature adventure. Prices range from £10-£24 per year for child-only membership and £30-£60 for family membership. You'll receive a starter pack and four issues of Wildlife Watch magazine a year. This is

packed full of amazing pictures, posters and competitions. We also have a really wild website and e-newsletter full of wild ideas and nature-spotting tips. Plus you get access to local events and groups. Go to wildlifewatch.org.uk to find out more.

Keep watching!

Cover pic of meadow grasshopper © Guy Edwards / 2020VISION

The Science Section

Ever wondered what that weird-sounding word meant or desperate to know what the latest wonderful wildlife discovery is? Well, here we bring you a fact-packed science section so you can impress your friends with your knowledge!



Wild Words

Wow your friends with new words from the world of wildlife science!

Integument (in-teg-yuh-muhnt)

A tough, outer layer. Usually used for animals and plants. Our skin is an integument. Our skin, hair and other bits combined form an integumentary system.

Thanatosis (than-uh-toh-sis)

This is the scientific word for when an animal plays dead. Find out more on page 23!

Tomium (toh-mee-uhm)

The sharp, cutting edge of a bird's beak. Some birds, like falcons, have a sharp point just before the end of the upper beak, called a tomial tooth.



Peregrine falcon © Bertie Gregory / 2020VISION



Tree sparrow © Amy Lewis



Feeding birds safely

The RSPB have recently given some new advice for feeding birds at home. Their research has shown that feeders can spread diseases from one bird to another, but the risk is highest in summer and autumn. To help keep birds safe, you should stop filling your feeders with seeds or peanuts between 1 May and 31 October. However, it's okay to offer small amounts of mealworms, fat balls or suet. From 1 November to 30 April, you can offer all the foods, including seeds and peanuts. Flat feeders, like bird tables, are the worst for spreading disease, so we should stop using them. We also need to clean our feeders and birdbaths every week and swap the water in birdbaths every day.



Butt brained

Scientists studying mosquitoes have discovered that the insects' bums tell them when to stop biting! Female mosquitoes feed on blood to get enough nutrients to make their eggs. When a mosquito's belly is full, it loses its appetite and doesn't try to bite anything. The scientists discovered that special cells in the mosquito's bum react and tell the mosquito when it's full. Our stomach and gut do a similar thing for us, sending messages to our brain when we've had enough food.



Mosquito © Brian Everstam



YOUR PHOTOS



Green Woodpecker

by Jonathan, aged 10

It's not easy to get a photograph of a green woodpecker. They can be very nervous birds, flying away long before you get close enough to photograph them. You often hear them but don't see them! They have a loud, laugh-like call known as 'yaffling'. Jonathan has done a great job photographing this one. Here's the story of how he managed: "It was around midday when I found a little beady eye staring at me through a big window looking out to our garden, I then saw it was actually a green woodpecker taking a stroll in our garden. It was one of the first times I had ever seen one because there aren't many in our area and it was surprisingly relaxed, allowing me to take a clear picture of it. As well as being green it had a 'little red hat' at the top of its head."



Photos

by Aamina, aged 8

Robins may be much more common than green woodpeckers, but they are always a delight to see!

Aamina spotted this one and snapped a photo on her way to school one morning. Aamina also shared this beautiful photograph of the sky. Look at those colours – it's like a work of art!



Do you want to be featured in the magazine? Send your stories, ideas or photos to watch@wildlifetrusts.org!



THE WILD WAYS ANIMALS COVER THEIR BODIES

SKIN DEEP

HOW OFTEN DO YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR SKIN?

It's easy to forget, but skin does a really important job of protecting your body. Animals need an outer layer to keep their insides inside! It also helps keep out diseases and infections, control the temperature of the body and so much more. Let's look at some of the different types of outer layers in the animal kingdom.



Adder © Darryl Green / 2020VISION



© Matthew Roberts

BARE SKIN

Our skin is made up of three different layers. The top layer that we can see is called the epidermis, which protects us from the outside world. The middle layer is called the dermis and there's lots going on in there. Hairs grow from it; there are nerves there to sense heat, touch and pain; it produces oils to keep our skin healthy; and it's where sweat is made to help us cool down. The bottom layer is called the hypodermis. It joins our skin to our muscles and bones. It's also full of fat to act as a cushion, store energy and help us control our temperature.

Did you know our skin is our largest organ?

FUR

Many mammals have their bare skin covered by fur. This dense coat of hair adds an extra layer of protection. It helps animals control their body temperature, protects their skin from the sun's radiation and keeps them dry. It can also be coloured to help them camouflage or show off to attract mates

Feathers, fur, human hair (and fingernails) and many types of scale are all made from a material called keratin.



Fox © Logan Walker

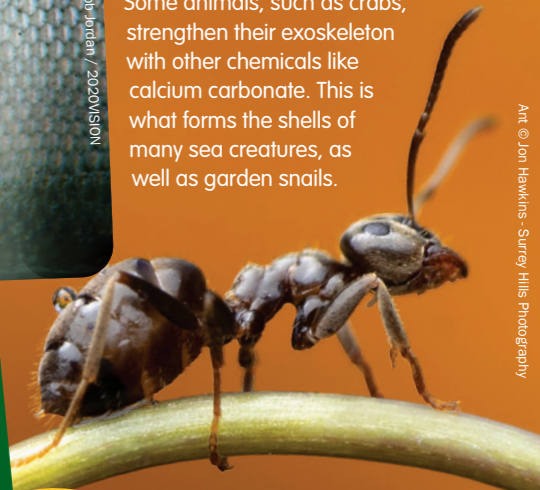


Salmon © Rob Jordan / 2020VISION

SCALES

Some animals toughen up their skin with hard scales. You might see these on reptiles, fish, birds' legs or even some mammals, like the pangolin. Scales come in many different shapes and sizes, bringing different benefits. Large, thick scales offer protection, whilst smaller scales allow more flexibility. The scales on a snake's belly help create friction, allowing the snake to move and climb.

The scales of sharks, rays and skates have a similar structure to our teeth! They're sometimes called 'skin teeth'.



Ant © Jon Hawkins - Surrey Hills Photography

FEATHERS

Birds have evolved their own special skin covering. They are the only living animals with feathers. Feathers do a lot of the same things as fur, adding a layer of protection, warmth and waterproofing. They're also used for camouflage and showing off. Some birds have incredible crests of feathers that they can raise when they are displaying. Of course, the really special thing about feathers is they help birds to fly!



Great Skua feathers © Peter Cairns / 2020VISION

EXOSKELETON

Not all animals have skin like we do. Some, like insects, spiders and crabs, have something called an exoskeleton. It works a bit like our skin and our skeleton combined. It gives the animal's body some structure and shape, as our skeleton does for us. It also protects their insides, just like our skin does.

These exoskeletons are usually made from a chemical called chitin (pronounced kai-tin). It's tough but flexible. Some animals, such as crabs, strengthen their exoskeleton with other chemicals like calcium carbonate. This is what forms the shells of many sea creatures, as well as garden snails.



FROM BIRDSONG TO BUZZING BEES, DISCOVER SUMMER'S GREATEST HITS!

THE SUMMER SOUNDTRACK



ROBERT is a conservation officer for Norfolk Wildlife Trust and enjoys listening to all the delightful sounds of summer.

by Robert Morgan



If you stop for a moment and listen carefully, you will notice that summer has its own special sounds and noises. Step outside, close your eyes and listen. You will discover that summer is not just something you see, feel and smell, but something you can hear too!



BUZZING BEES

Bees make a familiar humming buzz because of the vibrations of their powerful flight muscles. They cause their wings to beat so quickly it makes the air vibrate. They are like tiny helicopters flying from flower to flower. The sound rises and fades as they zoom closer, then wander away again. It's a busy but friendly hum that makes a garden feel alive and full of summer.

You can also hear bumblebees buzzing on plants to shake pollen loose.



RUSTLING TREES

When wind moves through trees, the leaves rustle and swish together. Because every species of tree has different leaves, each one makes a different sound. Sometimes it's soft and sleepy, and other times it whooshes loudly. Every woodland sounds different depending on the trees that are within it.

The swish of leaves on a poplar tree has fooled people into thinking rain is approaching.



GORSE PODS

On warm sunny days, dry gorse pods suddenly pop! This is how they spread their seeds. The sound is a tiny crack or snap, like little bubble wrap bursting in the bushes. If you listen carefully, you might hear lots of small pops coming out of the tangle of prickly green branches.



SWAYING REEDS

In winter, reeds are dry as a bone. When the wind blows through them, they sound hollow and brittle. In summer they are lush and green. When a light warm breeze flows past each leafy stem, they gently stroke one another. As this soft rattling noise travels through the swaying reeds, it sounds like a whispered secret is being shared.

Reeds are grasses, but some reeds can grow up to five metres tall. Imagine mowing that lawn!



BIRD SOUNDS

Birdsong is a wonderful sound of summer. Every species has its own particular song or calls. In early summer, the morning or evening is the best time to listen to birdsong. Can you find a favourite? Maybe it's the repetitive cuckoo, the tuneful blackbird or the sweet song of the skylark. Whether you're in a garden, park or nature reserve, birdsong is everywhere in summer.



DRAGONFLY WINGS

If you sit quietly by a pond, you may hear the fizz and crackle of dragonfly wings as one flits past. Their wings are like tiny pieces of tracing paper, softly flicking together in the air. Sometimes a dragonfly may hover near you, or land on a pondside plant. With a sudden sizzle of its wings, it is gone in a blink as it darts away.

Dragonflies are some of the oldest insects. Their relatives were on Earth before the dinosaurs!



CRICKETS AND GRASSHOPPERS

Crickets and grasshoppers make chirping sounds by rubbing their legs or wings together. It's a rhythmic chirp-chirp, sometimes fast, sometimes slow. On warm evenings the grass can feel full of music, like an orchestra of hundreds of tiny fiddle players.



RATTLING PLANTS

Yellow-rattle plants make a gentle, rattling sound when the wind shakes their dry seed pods. The loose seeds inside tap and tick like tiny maracas. When many plants move together, the meadow softly rattles and whispers in the breeze.

Yellow-rattle is a very important plant for meadows, as it stops grass growing too long and crowding out delicate flowers.





BE A CLIMATE CHAMPION!



Four-spotted chaser © Ross Hoddinott / 2020VISION

The climate crisis can be scary. The world is getting hotter and it's having an impact on wildlife, wild places and people. But there are lots of people working hard to make things better and we can all help do our bit. In each issue this year, we'll be sharing tips and ideas for fighting the climate crisis this season. Together, we can make a difference!

SUMMER TIPS

SLOWING THE CHANGE

Lots of the things we do depend on burning fossil fuels like coal and oil. These release gases that increase climate change.

TRY THE TRAIN

If you're going for a day out this summer, is it possible to take a train instead of using a car? A car journey can be nearly five times more polluting than a train journey. See if there's a railcard that can save you money on journeys throughout the year.



AIR DRY YOUR LAUNDRY

Tumble dryers use lots of energy, so it's better to let nature dry your clothes! Hang them outside on a sunny or windy day – just make sure they're well pegged if it's windy! If you don't have outdoor space, clothes can still air-dry inside. Open a window to let the air move through.



COMPOST FOOD WASTE

We should all try to waste less food, but there are usually still some kitchen scraps to deal with. Composting some of the food waste we don't eat creates plant food we can use in our gardens. You can make an open heap or use a compost bin. Find out how at: wtru.st/watch-compost



ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Climate change is already having an impact on nature, but we can help wildlife cope.

SAVE WATER

As our climate changes, we're getting hotter, drier summers. This means there's less water available for us and for wildlife. We can help by saving as much water as possible. Turn off taps whilst brushing your teeth and put a bottle of tap water in the fridge, so you don't have to run the tap until it gets cold. Get more tips at: wtru.st/watch-save-water



VERTICAL GARDENING

You could make the most of your outdoor space by growing climbing plants on walls and fences. They provide shade and shelter for wildlife, but they also make things a bit cooler for us, too. Plants reduce the amount of sunlight hitting the wall, so the house doesn't get quite as hot.



LOG PILE LOVE

A log pile in your garden is a great way to help wildlife. It will provide shade and shelter for lots of different minibeasts, giving them somewhere to escape from the heat of the summer sun.



Flying thorns

The purple thorn is an unusual moth as it rests with its wings half-raised. It likes woodlands and other places with trees, including gardens. They're called thorns because their caterpillars look like a bit of twig, complete with a little thorn.



© Vealpin Matthews

Meet **EIGHT** animals with a very late bedtime

Night life!

by Pete Dommett

Are you allowed to stay up a bit longer in the summer? Well, these creatures take going to bed later to another level – they're out and about all night long!

Long-eared owl

© Jon Hawkins - Surrey Hills Photography



A long-eared owl's long 'ears' aren't ears at all – they're actually tufts of feathers!

Being busy after bedtime is an absolute hoot for the UK's most nocturnal owl! These forest-living birds spend summer nights catching small mammals and delivering them to their hungry chicks. The owlets carry on calling for more food once they've left the nest. Their strange cries sound like squeaky gates!

Natterjack toad

© Edwin Giesbers / naturepl.com



Male natterjacks gather together on warm evenings in spring and early summer to sing and attract mates. Their croaky calls can be heard a mile away! The female toads lay strings of eggs in shallow pools of water in sand dunes and marshes. Sadly, these pools sometimes dry out before the tadpoles have finished growing.

Gold swift



© Frank Pojeh

These energetic insects are very active on summer evenings. After sunset, male moths perform spectacular display flights to impress females. They also give off a scent which smells like pineapples... apparently. Gold swift caterpillars munch the leaves of bracken, but the adult moths don't eat anything at all because they don't have any mouthparts!

Nightjar

© David Tipling / 2020VISION



Male nightjars make a curious 'churring' call in the evening – it sounds a bit like a mini-motorbike miles away!

As its name suggests, this bird hunts at night over heaths and moors. It catches moths, flies and beetles in its wide mouth. Nightjars nest on the ground, relying on clever camouflage to avoid predators. At the end of summer, they fly all the way to Africa...but don't worry, they'll be back next year!



wildlifewatch.org.uk



Pine marten



© Terry Whitaker / 2020VISION

Pine martens might look cute and cuddly, but they're actually deadly predators! They hunt at night, searching woods for small mammals, birds and insects. These rare mammals are usually quiet and secretive animals, but during the summer breeding season they make loud yowling calls like cats!

Pine martens eat a lot of bilberries in summer, which turns their poo blue!

Woodcock



© Margaret Holland

A wading bird that lives in woodland, not by water! Woodcocks feed at night by poking their mega-long bills into soft soil as they search for worms and beetles. On spring and summer evenings, male woodcocks try to attract females by squeaking and grunting as they fly above the treetops. This strange display is called roding.

Daubenton's bat



© Dale Sutton / 2020VISION

Some bats flit about at dusk, but Daubenton's bats don't get airborne until well after dark. They're also known as 'water bats' because they fly low over rivers and canals in search of insect prey. These acrobatic bats can snatch flies off the water's surface with their feet or scoop them up with their tails!

Oak bush-cricket



© Brian Earsham

This is one unusual insect! Most crickets are found in grassy places, but the oak bush-cricket lives, feeds and breeds at the tops of tall trees. And instead of singing at night by rubbing its wings together, this cricket drums on leaves with its back feet. Don't worry, this sound won't keep you awake because humans can hardly hear it.

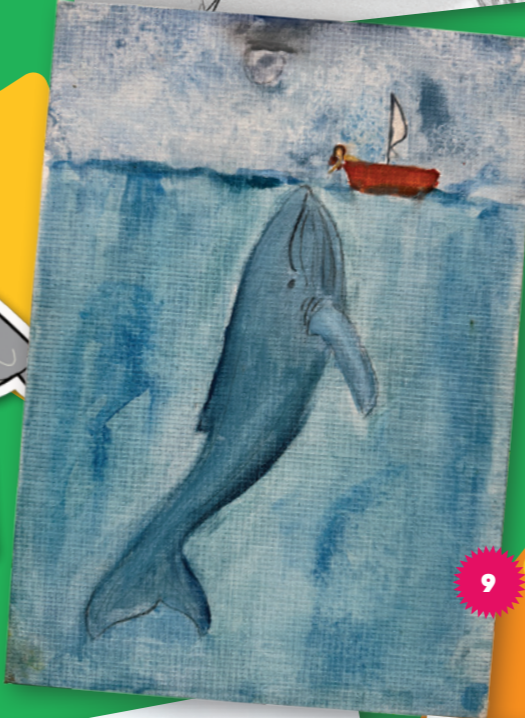
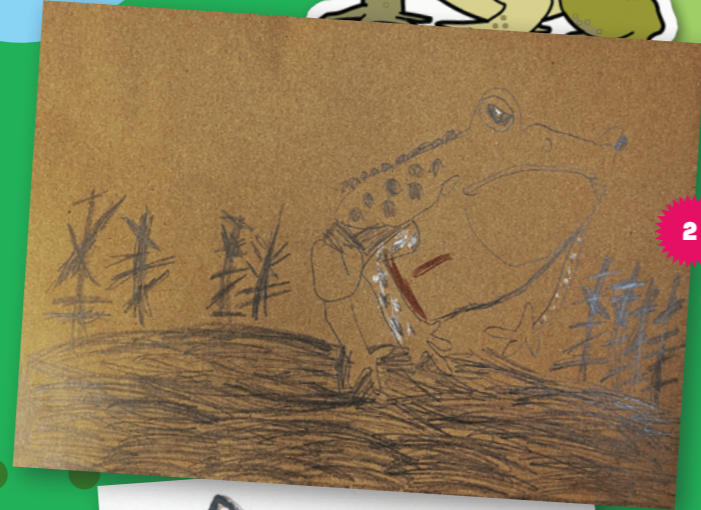
Unlike other bush-crickets, the oak bush-cricket is almost completely carnivorous! It feeds on small invertebrates, such as caterpillars.



PETE is a wildlife writer. He likes looking for other night-loving wildlife, such as badgers, barn owls and glow-worms!

Gallery

Send in your photos and artwork of UK wildlife for your chance to feature in the gallery. If your artwork is picked as the star entry you'll win your very own drawing kit! The perfect starter set for any budding wildlife artist.



- 1 Rockpool by Isabelle, aged 5** There's so much to enjoy here. Limpets, seaweeds, crabs, fish... everything you want in a rockpool!
- 2 Toad by Edward, aged 5** We love how much personality this toad has!
- 3 Sand lizard by Arjun, aged 9** Arjun loves nature, especially reptiles, amphibians and insects.
- 4 Fox by Iyla, aged 11** The posture of this fox is great, but the shadowing is even better!
- 5 Pigeon by Toby, aged 7** Toby's use of texture to bring his pigeon to life is fantastic.
- 6 Woodland scene by Hollie, aged 8** We love the 3D element to this scene, including pine martens and a robin.
- 7 Raven by Jasmine, aged 13** We can almost feel the feathers on this striking raven portrait.
- 8 Peregrine by Sam, aged 10** Just look at this fantastic falcon! Sam has done a great job on the plumage.
- 9 Whale by Tildie, aged 10** This is a beautiful moment of nature connection with a majestic whale.
- 10 Horse chestnut by Eleanor, aged 9** It's wonderful to see such a great and detailed study of a tree's leaves.
- 11 Tansy beetle by Alice, aged 6** Alice is from York, one of the few places this rare beetle can be found.
- 12 Mushrooms by Yasmin, aged 7** This is a fabulous collection of fungi.



How to enter

Email watch@wildlifetrusts.org with the subject line 'Gallery entry' or write to us at:
Wildlife Watch Gallery
The Wildlife Trusts
The Kiln, Mather Road
Newark
Notts NG24 1WT

Don't forget to include your first name, age and a way of contacting you if you get star entry! We might also share it on our website and social media.



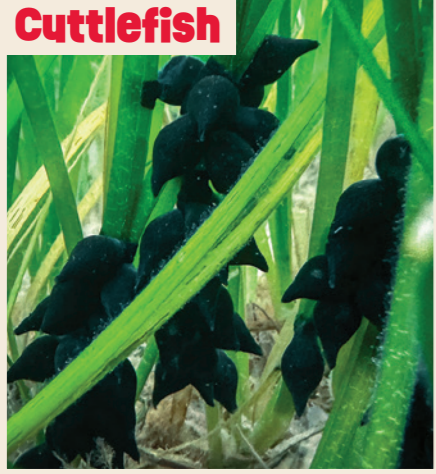
by Jake Taylor-Bruce



THIS ISSUE:

EGGS OF THE SEA

Cuttlefish



Also known as "sea grapes", cuttlefish eggs look like bunches of black grapes or olives bundled together. Females lay these eggs in spring, usually attaching them to seagrass, kelp or other underwater structures. The eggs hatch around two months later to release masses of tiny cuttlefish, each no bigger than your thumbnail!

Green leaf worm



Few people have heard of the green leaf worm, but these intertidal predators have really distinctive eggs. They look like bright green balls of snot! They are laid on seaweed and can be seen in spring and summer. The adults are a bold green colour and can be found patrolling rocky shores, searching for prey.

Sharks and rays



Commonly called mermaids' purses, these are actually the eggs of sharks and rays. While many sharks give birth to live young, there are plenty that lay eggs. They attach these tough eggs to seaweed or stick them to the sea floor, where they take up to nine months to hatch! Search the strandline to see if you can find any.

Common whelk



Sea snails come in all shapes and sizes and so do their eggs! The common whelk is the UK's largest snail, reaching up to 10 centimetres long and laying some seriously impressive eggs. Their egg cases look like huge bundles of dried out rice crispies and are often found (after hatching) along the strandline.

Fish



Many rockpool fish lay eggs tucked underneath rocks. Some males even make elaborate nests. The eggs resemble tiny balls stuck in sheets or clumps to the underside of a rock. One of the parents will often be close at hand, keeping a watchful eye and may defend them with a strong bite!

Sea slug



Sea slugs are distant marine cousins of the slugs you might find on land, but they have very different lifestyles. Many of them are brightly coloured predators. Their eggs often look like tall spirals of white or yellow, or sometimes like long colourful strands of spaghetti!



Make a night-time nectar bar



You will need

- A large container or pot (at least 30cm wide)
- Peat-free compost
- Watering can
- Mulch or leaf litter (optional)
- A mix of night-scented, nectar-rich plants

1 Pick a large pot that has some drainage holes.



2 Use peat-free compost to fill your container.



3 Arrange your chosen plants so that the taller varieties are at the back or centre. Mix spring, summer and autumn blooms to keep moths fed throughout the seasons.



4

Give your plants a good water after planting. Make sure to keep your compost moist, especially during dry spells.

Aim for a fine spray.



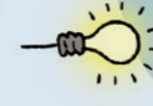
5

Scatter some leaf litter or mulch around the base of the container.



6

Position your nectar bar in a sheltered spot away from bright artificial lights.



If you use outdoor lighting, opt for warm-coloured bulbs and switch them off when not needed.

Some suggested plants

- Sweet rocket
- Evening primrose
- Night-scented stock
- Cornflower
- Borage



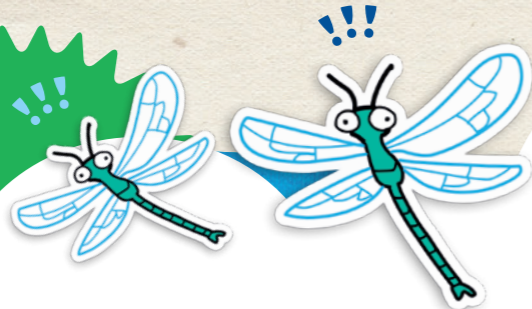
Meet the **HOB**BY, the bird that snatches insects from the air!



DRAGON HUNTERS

by Jenny Shelton

A powerful shape darts through the sky, pointed wings folded, sharp eyes locked onto its prey. It's a deadly, high-speed chase: like something from the plains of Africa. Talons flex and the prey – a dragonfly – is snatched from the sky. The able hunter devours its insect meal right there in mid-air. Soon all that's left are silvery bits of scaly wing, floating down to the ground below.



JENNY works for The Wildlife Trusts and has always been fascinated by birds. Her favourite bird changes daily, but she has a soft spot for birds of prey.

Hobbies can reach speeds of 100mph.

SMALL BUT MIGHTY

Hobbies are one of our smallest birds of prey but underestimate them at your peril. Quick and agile, they rely on speed when hunting. If hobbies were an African big cat, they'd be a cheetah.

PRETTY PREDATORS

Hobbies are deadly but pretty. They're dark blue-grey on top and white with black streaks below. They have a black 'moustache' either side of their beak – a bit like the black markings beneath a cheetah's eyes. Adults have brick-red feathers on their legs and bright yellow claws.

SUMMER VISITORS

In fact, hobbies arrive in the UK each year from Africa, where they spend the winter. Each spring they cross the mighty Sahara Desert to reach us in late April and May. Look for them in the southern half of Britain, zooming over wetlands and open countryside, hot on the tail of a dragonfly, swallow or house martin. Hobbies can also hunt bats, catching them in flight. Even swifts, which can fly at an incredible 60mph, are no match for the most accomplished hobby.

The creator of Subbuteo (ask your parents... or grandparents) named the game after his favourite bird. He'd wanted to call it 'Hobby', but wasn't allowed, so he used the hobby's scientific name 'Falco subbuteo' instead.

Hobbies can fly over 700 miles in just two days. That's like us going from London to the far north of Scotland.

HOBBY SPOTTING

Luckily, there are other ways to recognise a hobby. When birdwatching, look for these three things: size, shape and situation. A hobby is about the size of a kestrel. Their shape is sleek and pointy, with a straight tail and long wings that are often folded back. They can look like a gigantic swift, which must be terrifying for a swift. Can you imagine being chased by what seems to be a giant version of yourself?

Next look at what the bird is doing. If it's hovering, it's not a hobby but probably a kestrel. If it's catching dragonflies with its feet and eating them in the air, it's a hobby! Also think about where you are and what time of year it is. If it's the middle of December and you're deep in a forest in Scotland, it's not a hobby, because they don't live in those places.

OFF TO AFRICA

Hobbies spend the summer sitting on eggs and rearing chicks. Then, as the new school year begins, they go into hunting overdrive as they fuel up, ready to fly south. A few weeks later, that bird you've been watching will be zooming around above giraffes and elephants. Maybe even cheetahs, too.

© Jon Hawkins - Surrey Hills Photography



© Terry Whittaker / 2020VISION

© Andy Morfiew

Discover a festival of spiny spider crabs!

THE GREAT CRAB GATHERING

by Matt Slater



Spider crabs are surprisingly big and surprisingly common in waters around the southwest of England. In recent years, more and more people have been witnessing their spectacular gatherings in sheltered, shallow bays!



MATT is a crustacean enthusiast and marine conservation officer for Cornwall Wildlife Trust. He coordinates the Seasearch programme in Cornwall and is a keen surfer.



Spider crabs © Matt Slater

WHAT IS A SPINY SPIDER CRAB?

Spiny spider crabs are harmless to humans, but they are impressive creatures. They're the second largest crab in the UK, with a claw-span of up to 80 centimetres and a shell width of 22 centimetres! They have a spiky orange-red shell and very long, hairy legs. Male spider crabs have long, thin claws with scissor-like cutting tips. Females have smaller claws and a wide tail tucked beneath their body, which forms a container that can hold her eggs. Unlike most crabs, spider crabs don't only walk sideways, they can also walk forwards and backwards. They can even climb up rockfaces, hanging on with the pointed black tips of their eight long legs. They are literally like spiderman!

Spider crabs are eaten by seals, rays, conger eels, octopus and people.

CRABS ON THE MOVE

Spider crabs migrate in large numbers, but they don't walk together in a line – they prefer to travel independently over the seabed. Fishermen call this migration 'creeping'. They migrate to shallower waters in summer to graze on seaweed, eat invertebrates, scavenge for dead food, enjoy warmer sea temperatures and shed their shells. They do this whilst gathering in huge numbers in sheltered bays in July and August – it's an incredible sight.

After a crab sheds its shell, it stretches its new shell by inflating itself with water – expanding every section of its exoskeleton by approximately one third! The shell will harden up in a few days and the crab will have plenty of room to grow into!

DEEP DWELLERS

Spider crabs spend winter in deeper waters, from 30 to 100 metres deep. They migrate into shallower coastal waters in the spring and summer. In England they are most common in the southwest around Cornwall and Devon, but they are also found in the English Channel, through the Irish sea and in Western Scotland. They are moving further north and east with climate change.

SHELLING OUT

A crab has to shed its shell to grow. This is called moulting. When it does this, its new shell is soft for a few days while it hardens. They are extremely vulnerable at this time, so by moulting while they gather in large numbers they reduce the chance that they will be eaten by

Spider crabs can taste using the hairs on their legs!

SHELL SEARCH

Sheltered bays are the best places to spot a crab gathering, but it's hard to predict exactly where they will occur. The timing and location depend on many different things and we need to do more research into how they choose the right spot. After a crab get-together, thousands of empty shells can get washed ashore by the waves – this looks like a crab graveyard, but it is actually a good sign. If you find a crab gathering or you see lots of shells washed up, please tell your local Wildlife Trust!

Young spider crabs cover their shells with seaweed. Specially adapted hairs on their spiky shells act like Velcro, helping the crabs with this decorating!



Moulting crab shell © Nick Upson



Camouflaged crab © Matt Slater

Feature Creature



ROSIE is fascinated by bees and other insects, working for Kent Wildlife Trust to survey wildlife and help others to do so too.

WOOL CARDER BEE

by Rosie Bleet

SEE THE BEES

In summer you may see big, chunky bees with yellow spots on their bodies. These wool carder bees are found all over England, Wales and into southern Scotland. Gardens and parks are good places to look for them. Their favourite place to hang out is around certain flowers. Lamb's ear is their top choice, but they love woundwort and trefoil plants too.

WHAT'S THEIR NAME ABOUT?

The females collect hairs from the leaves of fluffy plants like lamb's ear and mullein. This is called "carding" and they bundle the hairs up into a little ball that looks like wool. The balls of fluff are taken back to the nest and used to line it. Nests are in places like hollow plant stems, holes that beetles have made in wood, and even gaps in garden chairs! The female lays an egg in each fluff-lined nest "cell", adding pollen and nectar she's collected from nearby flowers. Each cell is closed with more plant fluff and then she moves onto the next one.

Essential Facts

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Anthidium manicatum

SIZE

1.5 cm long

AMAZING FACT

Males have spikes at the end of their tails to defend their territory from each other and other insects.



WRESTLING BEES

Male wool carder bees are bigger than the females. This isn't very common in solitary bees. They patrol their patch of flowers, waiting for females to arrive. If other males enter their territory they chase them away. It helps that they are great at hovering and are super speedy fliers. Sometimes, chasing doesn't work and they may headbutt or even wrestle with the other bee to try and keep them out of their patch! They also do this to other insects like hoverflies and butterflies that come too close. If that doesn't work, as a last resort the spiky spines on their tail can be used to crush intruders who don't get the message.

All pics © Wendy Carter

The Big Questions

Which animals play dead?

Grass snake © Stephen Dalton / naturepl.com

Possoms are famous for playing dead, but they aren't the only animals that do it!

Why do animals play dead?

Animals normally play dead to escape from a predator. It's usually their back-up plan, which they use when everything else has failed and the predator has caught them. If the predator thinks the animal is already dead, it may stop attacking and let its guard down, giving the animal a chance to escape. This is even more likely to work if there are other prey animals nearby, which the predator might choose to chase instead. Some predators don't like to eat prey that has been dead for a while, so if an animal plays dead they might leave it alone completely.

But staying alive isn't the only reason animals play dead. Some female frogs, robberflies, butterflies and dragonflies have been seen playing dead to stop males from pestering them. Some fish from other parts of the world even play dead as a hunting strategy. They lie on their side, then pounce on the smaller fish that come to feed on them!

Which animals do it?

Many different animals play dead, including some mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish. These are all vertebrates (animals with a backbone), but lots of invertebrates (animals without a backbone) do it too. This includes butterflies, moths, beetles, spiders, wasps and crabs.

Animals can play dead for a few seconds or for hours at a time.

How to play dead

Some animals are excellent actors. When they play dead, they might roll onto their back with their legs in the air. Others might just go limp. In many cases, they might slow their breathing and their heart rate to really sell the act. Some even poo or wee to put on a more convincing performance! One of the animals you're most likely to see play dead is the grass snake. When they feel like they've been caught by a predator, they go limp, tilt their head and lie still with their mouth wide open.

Some animals release stinky chemicals when they play dead, to make themselves less appealing to predators.



Cramp-ball fungus weevil © Tom Hibbert

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Don't forget to include your name, age and a way of contacting you about your entry. DEADLINE: 31 August 2026

Competition entries may be used on our website and social media channels.