

## St Matthew's churchyard, Lightcliffe

### June/July wildlife snapshot 2022

The focus for this early summer report is on insects and flowers. The birds are hard to spot at this time of the year amongst the dense tree canopy but the nuthatch youngsters seem to have fledged successfully again this year. Hurray!



June saw a mass of beautiful flowers in the churchyard which in turn attracted the insects.

The carpet of pink cranesbill near Till Carr Cottage was popular with bees. I spotted tree, white and buff tailed bumblebees and common carder bees enjoying the nectar-rich flowers.



The Common carder bee, pictured above right is a long-tongued species which enables it to live from early spring to late autumn, visiting a wide range of flowers throughout the seasons. Its name comes from the textile industry: common carder bees use their legs to comb together moss and grass to cover their eggs, in a similar manner to the way "carding" prepares textile fibres before spinning and weaving.



The tree bumblebee, pictured on the left has a clear white tail as well as a ginger thorax.

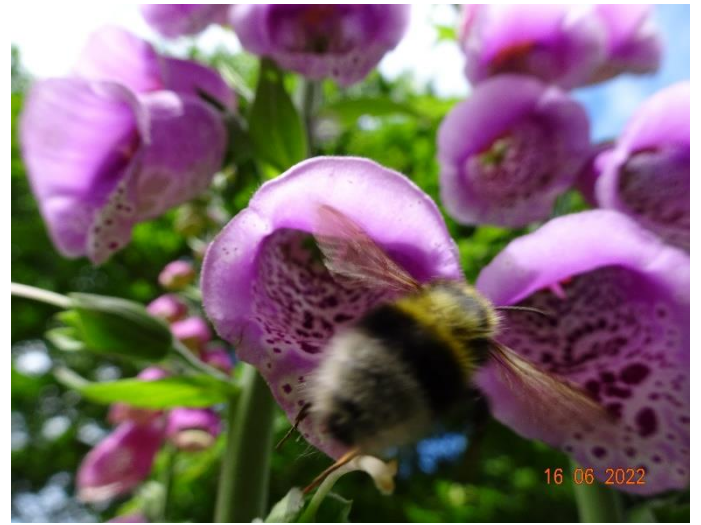
Bumblebees are messy creatures compared with the house-proud honeybee. They store their honey in small wax cups which are scattered randomly around their untidy nests!





The foxgloves were magnificent this year, including a few white ones.

There are several ideas as to where the name foxglove comes from: some say it derives from an old belief that the flowers were worn on the paws of foxes, enabling them to soundlessly creep up on their prey! Others say it comes from "folksgloves" believing that fairies wear or live inside the flowers. Regional names for foxgloves include fairybells, witches' thimbles and dead man's bells.



Foxgloves are an important source of nectar for bees, especially long-tongued species like the Garden bumblebee, pictured above right. The protruding lower lip provides a landing pad for the bee and then the spots inside the flower guide the bee up to the nectar. On the way, pollen collects on its hairs, ensuring fertilisation of the next flower the bee visits.



Selfheal is a common sight among short grasses and the flowers are loved by bees.

The ancient Greeks used it to cure tonsil and throat inflammation and its botanical name *Prunella* or *Brunella* derives from the German for sore throat!





This stunning Small Tortoiseshell butterfly posed for me on thistles just outside the churchyard. Sadly, numbers of this species have collapsed by 75% since the 1970s, according to Butterfly Conservation, with climate change, pollution and parasite being suspected culprits. I have certainly noticed them becoming rarer in my garden.



Not far away from the thistles, I spotted a Large Skipper butterfly feeding on Hogweed. I think this is a male due to the dark scent stripes on each wing, which release pheromones to attract a female. Males will perch in a prominent sunny position, on the lookout for any passing females! Skippers prefer tall, uncut grassland, often in damp areas. Despite their name, they are a small, moth-like butterfly, with a wingspan of only 3.4 cm

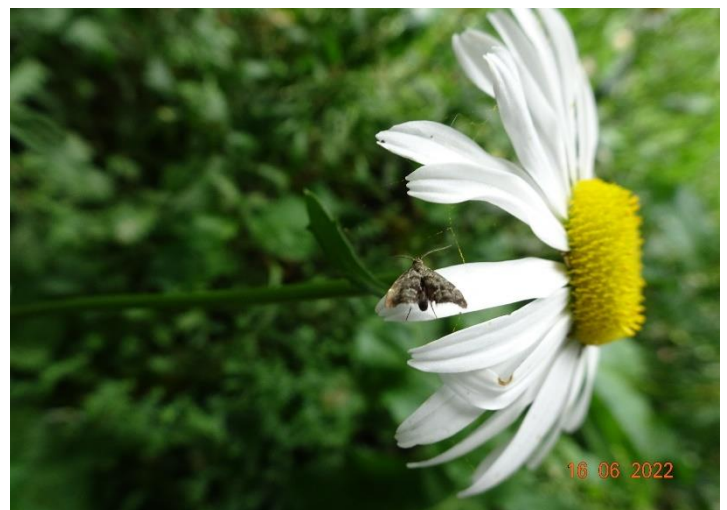
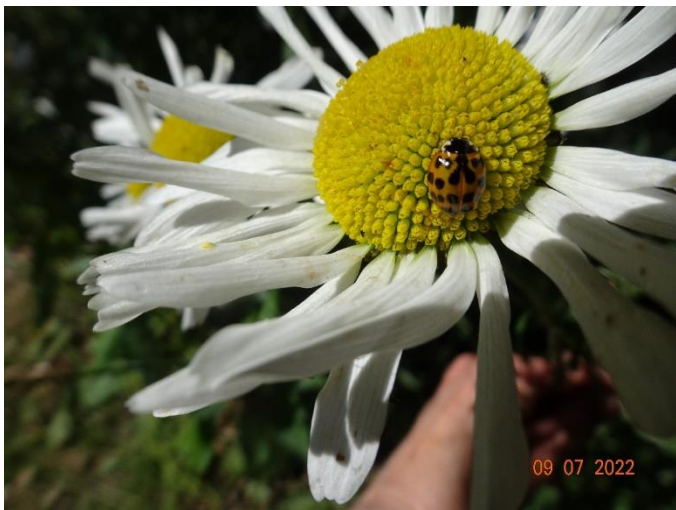
A clearer image by Graham Calow of a male large skipper.







The thistles also attracted this beautiful Ringlet butterfly, named after the prominent rings on its hindwings. The upperside of its wings are a chocolate brown colour which absorbs heat easily and means that this butterfly is one of the few that can be seen flying on cloudy days. The female ringlet lays her eggs by perching on a grass stem and ejecting them into the air so that they land on nearby vegetation!



In June, ox-eye daisies were a magnet for insects including this Harlequin ladybird. Harlequins are an invasive species with a voracious appetite. They can out-compete our native ladybirds for food and also eat their eggs and larvae.



The micro moth in the photo above right is a Nettle-tap moth, I think. They are - unsurprisingly - seen near clumps of nettles which are their larval food plant. The caterpillars live in webs on nettle leaves with the edges of the leaf drawn together - see photo on the left, taken last year.

**Marjorie Middleton July 2022**