

ECOLOGY IN SOMERSET 2012

EDITORIAL

Once again, we are pleased to be able to publish here a varied range of papers and reports; and, after their removal last year, there is sufficient space in the current issue to also include some book reviews. As last year, our intention is that any reviews not printed here will be posted on the Society's website.

Full-length papers are like buses – last year we had four, and were in danger of exceeding our allotted space, whereas this year it is all we can do to find one! As well as Tony Serjeant's excellent paper on the King Diving Beetle (*Dytiscus dimidiatus*), we have a short note on plant galls in Somerset, plus the now usual assortment of natural history reports, this year covering vascular plants, first flowering dates, moths, hoverflies, beetles and birds. A good selection, but it remains our hope that in future years we will also be able to report on a number of other taxonomic groups such as fungi, lichens, bryophytes, mammals, fish, butterflies, molluscs and seaweeds.

In truth, the list is endless: we are hardly scratching the surface, and we know about various surveys and mapping schemes 'on the go' that, as yet, have remained unreported in these pages. Members of our Society are involved in many of these recording schemes, and we hope that some will be moved to submit reports on the fruits of their activities for publication in this journal. As an example, since 2011 the charity Buglife has been coordinating a national survey of oil beetles (*Meloe* species), several of which occur in Somerset and neighbouring counties; indeed, the west country seems to be a real 'hot spot' for these

large and charismatic beetles, in particular *Meloe proscarabaeus* and *M. violaceus*, and it would be fascinating to see an analysis of our county's subset of this national dataset. Perhaps there's a SANHS member involved in this project who could be persuaded to write up the results of the survey in Somerset for publication in *Ecology in Somerset*?

We also hope that in future issues we can include reports of some of our own Society's activities. We run a full programme of summer field meetings, and increasingly these are being arranged with particular themes in mind. As reported here, we have been developing the Society's interest and involvement in plant galls, while in 2013 we are organising a series of weekend-long workshops with the Somerset Wildlife Trust on the geology, habitats and species to be found along the county's coastline. We are giving consideration to the possibility of holding a similar series of meetings next year based on the Mendips.

One feature of Mendip is its Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) woodlands; and there is rightly much concern at the moment about the spread of Ash dieback caused by the fungus *Chalara fraxinea*. In April of this year there was an excellent series of papers in the magazine *British Wildlife* (Vol. 24, pp 229-53) exploring the ecological importance of Ash and describing the rich and varied communities of lichens, bryophytes and invertebrates associated with it. If Ash dieback spreads to the extent predicted – and, at the time of writing, there is already a report of it from Somerset, plus several from adjoining counties – it could have a devastating impact on our wildlife.

As a Society, we are well placed with partner organisations like the Somerset Wildlife Trust to contribute locally to various national initiatives to monitor the spread of the disease and its ecological consequences; and hopefully our journal will provide a place where the results of such work can be reported and put on permanent record.

But we also need to be mindful of the fact that the full value of what is written in these pages may only become obvious in fifty years' time, when the world has 'moved on' and nature has adapted as best it can to changing circumstances. Back in the 1940s, Walter Watson's paper on first flowering dates must have seemed of limited interest and far too long to warrant printing in full – the Table of species and dates alone runs to more than eighteen pages – yet now it is an indispensable local baseline against which modern flowering dates can be compared. Neither Watson nor the Society could possibly have foreseen how useful this paper would be to ecologists in the next century

studying the biological effects of climate change. How fortunate that the editorial committee didn't decide against publishing it!

The Natural History Committee wishes to thank everyone who has contributed to this issue of *Ecology in Somerset*, as well as to those who have helped to review and edit the various submissions. We would like to record a special thanks to Philip Radford for his continuing input to the editorial committee, and for his splendid book reviews. He would doubtless modestly claim that his contribution is insignificant; but he's an inspiration to the rest of us, and his enthusiasm and encouragement helps to keep us going when we'd much rather give up! He also ensures, almost single-handedly, that 'natural history' continues to have a prominent place in the Society's newsletter, and for that too we are extremely grateful.

The Natural History Committee
May 2013