

Wild Ashford

You may have noticed some recent changes to the Ashford Parish website. If you now go to the Home Page and click on the 'more' tab (at the top right-hand side), you will find 'Wild Ashford', the new home for wildlife news.

I will be posting items of interest there and I encourage you to do the same. If you have any interesting news or unusual sightings of wildlife around and about the parish, or better still photographs, send them to me and I will get them added.

To see what's new, go to www.ashfordparishnorthdevon.com

Blackcaps and bullfinches

Over the past couple of weeks I have been enjoying regular sightings of both blackcaps and bullfinches in our garden. The blackcaps, members of the warbler family, have been feeding on the small white berries of a cordyline australis (cabbage tree). I have noticed this recurring over a number of winters and now deliberately leave the old flower spikes on the trees until early spring, rather than cut them off in the autumn.

The bullfinches, up to six at a time, both male and female, have been feeding on the dried seeds of herbaceous plants, mostly rudbeckia (black-eyed Susan). The males in particular make a splendid sight. A great advert not to cut everything back in the Autumn garden tidy up.

Tree Planting on the 'village green'

The parish council has been pursuing the acquisition of a free 'landmark' tree, available through a project being run by the Devon Wildlife Trust to help counteract Ash dieback. The intention was to plant the tree in the 'village green', outside the church hall. Unfortunately, we have had to withdraw from this as we came to learn that most of the trees on offer were far too large for the proposed site and no alternative location was easily available in the time frame. The council will review other options for a planting, following further discussions.

Planting on Meadowside

The parish council is also trying to obtain permission to undertake a wildlife planting on the strip of rough grass on the South side of

Meadowside, towards the East end (previously considered as a possible play area). The envisaged planting would be of native shrubs, a couple of additional small trees and an area of long grass, aimed at enhancing the habitat for wildlife but also for the pleasure of passers-by. More details of the plan will be communicated once we have the required permissions to go-ahead.

Ashford and the climate emergency

Ashford has now signed the Devon Climate Emergency Declaration, thus signifying a willingness to take action to try to limit global warming. The main intention of the declaration is to become 'carbon neutral' by 2050. Becoming carbon neutral means both reducing carbon emissions and increasing carbon absorption, so that by 2050 no further carbon dioxide is added to the atmosphere. It is calculated that this will limit average global temperature increases to 1,5 degrees C (compared to pre-industrial levels). Nationally and at county level, a huge amount of tree planting is planned over the next few years, to help with both carbon absorption and to protect biodiversity. The Woodland Trust alone, through their various outlets, expects to have planted 3 million trees during this current winter.

Reducing carbon emissions is going to be a massive challenge. The first step most local authorities are taking is to map their 'carbon footprint'. This will provide visibility of the problem, so that preventative measures can be prioritised and taken. Ashford's footprint is very low, but as signatories of the declaration, the parish council will follow this process.

Non-paying guests!

This morning I went into the garden to give both our nesting boxes a clean out, prior to the new nesting season. I was delighted to find in one of them, on a tree and 10 ft above the ground, lots of dried leaves and a pair of wood mice, obviously taking advantage of a nice snug place to spend the winter. I left them to it, the spring clean in that box can wait!

If you have any questions or comments on any of the above, please feel free to email.

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