



Nettlebed and District Commons Conservators

Spotter Sheets – Teachers' notes

Please print off the seasonal spotter sheets – follow links on main page

SPRING - March to May

Pussy Willow

The blossom of Goat Willow, seen in early spring.

Herb Robert

A type of wild geranium with 5 pink petals, found in woods from April onwards.

Bluebells

Plentiful in woodlands from mid-April to mid-May.

Wild Cherry blossom

At its best for a short time during April.

Emerging bracken

A bracken frond unfurls from a tight ball as it emerges in spring.

Beech seedling

Look under beech trees to see young seedlings germinating, from mid-April onwards.

Silver birch catkins

The catkins of silver birch are similar to hazel catkins, but appear a month or two later in April or May.

Cuckoo Pint

A distinctive plant found commonly in woodland during April and May. It traps small insects (attracted by its smell) that can only escape by brushing against pollen which is then carried to another plant. **Warning:** Poisonous.

It is also known by several other names such as 'Lords and Ladies' and 'Wild Arum'.

Brimstone butterfly

On warm, sunny days in early spring this yellow butterfly can be seen flying over grassland or scrub.

Hawthorn blossom

Because hawthorn is such a widespread plant the blossom is very conspicuous. It appears in May, giving rise to its alternative name of 'May blossom'.

Primrose

Garden primroses come in many colours, but the wild or common primrose found in the woods usually has pale yellow flowers. Since 1981 it has been illegal to pick wild primroses in this country.

Germander Speedwell

There are several members of the speedwell family and this is one of the more distinctive. A commonly seen flower from April to early June with four bright blue petals and a thin white rim around each edge.

If you look closely you will notice two thin lines of hairs running up opposite sides of the stem.

SUMMER - June to August

Foxglove

A distinctive plant with long flower spikes, more often seen under shade.

It flowers in midsummer. **Warning:** Poisonous.

Meadow Grasshopper

They can be seen (and heard) in grassland and meadows throughout summer.

Bumblebee

This is the Buff-tailed Bumblebee, one of the seven main species of bumblebee in this country.

Cuckoo Spit

A harmless froth of small bubbles made by the juvenile frog hopper to protect it from both predators and dry winds. The insect can be found amongst it, feeding on the sap of the host plant.

Common Blue Damselfly

Damselflies differ from dragonflies in that they are smaller and fold their wings together by their sides at rest rather than apart, as with dragonflies. They are seen next to water or fairly close by.

Black Ant

The black ant nests under rocks and stones or in rotten wood.

Tormentil

A yellow flower with just four petals. It will only grow on acid soil such as a bog, a moor, or in the case of these commons, heathland.

Butterfly

This Speckled Wood is one of many species of butterfly to be found on the commons in summer. The patterns on the wings make excellent camouflage in dappled sunlight.

Marsh Thistle

The tallest thistle you'll find on the commons, often growing to 6 feet high or even more.

Snail

Snails prefer cool, damp conditions. Looking under large leaves or following a snail trail might be a good way to find them.

Ladybird

There are 27 recognisable species of ladybird in this country. Count the number of spots. The most common species has seven.

Honeysuckle flower

A climbing plant with distinctive sweet smelling flowers.

AUTUMN - September to November

Puffballs

A common type of fungus on woodland floors.

Acorns

The seed of the oak tree, and a vital source of food for many birds and animals. Pigs that were kept on commons were fattened on acorns, but in large amounts they are toxic to horses and cattle.

Rowan berries

Bright orange or red berries of the Rowan tree.

Blackberries

The edible black fruit of prickly bramble bushes. Can be used for jam or bramble jelly, or cooked with apple to make a pie or crumble.

Heather

Wild heather is usually mauve and thrives on acid soils. In late summer and early autumn, heathlands and moors can be ablaze with carpets of heather, where it is the dominant plant. Sprigs of heather, especially white heather, are often thought to bring good luck.

Spider in web

On cool, misty mornings of autumn the webs are made more noticeable by the formation of dew.

Common Lizard

This reptile can be seen basking on flat stones or logs on warm, sunny days.

Red Kite

Nowadays this is a common bird of the Chilterns, large with a long forked tail and a loud, shrill call.

Rose hips

The fruit of wild roses. During WW2, when food was rationed, children were paid 3d per lb for harvesting rosehips to be made into syrup with a high vitamin C content.

Sweet Chestnuts

The roasted seeds of the Sweet Chestnut tree make an edible treat. Look for the seeds within prickly casings on the ground below. Do not confuse with the larger (and slightly poisonous) Horse Chestnut seeds – the familiar conkers.

Crab Apples

A small, wild apple found in large numbers beneath the tree, sometimes gathered to make Crab Apple Jelly.

Hoverfly

An insect seen hovering over flowers and mimicking other insects, generally harmless.

WINTER - December to February

Wild Animal tracks

Look for tracks made after a snowfall in winter or throughout the year in soft mud. The photograph is of a track made by a muntjac, a small species of deer.

Common Gorse in flower

Gorse is a thorny heathland shrub with yellow flowers. The flowers are most numerous in springtime, but even in winter they will often be seen. You might notice they smell of coconut.

Snowdrops

A mostly white flower, one of the earliest of the year to be seen in the wild.

Robin

The bird with the familiar orange breast. They are not as wary of people as most birds, so they are often seen very close by.

Holly berries

A holly tree might be male or female, but never both. The bright red, **poisonous** berries will only be seen on a female tree and then only if there is a male tree nearby. The familiar thorny leaves will protect the tree from browsing animals, but if a tree is tall enough you will notice the upper leaves, where animals cannot reach, are not thorny.

Hazel catkins

After midwinter the familiar yellow flowers (catkins) of the hazel tree will open out.

Silver Birch trees

Mature trees are very easy to identify with their white, papery bark. Young saplings will quickly invade the heather areas if not controlled.

Lichen

Lichen is a small plant that often grows in clusters on rocks or tree trunks. Old trees, especially fallen trees, are good places to look.

Beech mast husks

The nuts of the beech tree, known as mast, fall from the tree inside husks. If you don't find them before the squirrels do, only the empty husks will remain.

Bracket Fungus

A type of fungus that grows only on trees, either living or dead. They are usually flat and semi-circular (but sometimes circular) and large, tough and sturdy.

Ivy berries

Purple-black ivy berries ripen in late winter and are an important food source for birds. **Poisonous.**

Cones

Conifer trees (e.g. fir, pine, larch) bear cones which drop to the ground full of seed.