

Natuur in en om bristol

**Avon** is de naam van een aantal verschillende rivieren in [Engeland](#), [Schotland](#) en [Wales](#). Ook in Canada, Nieuw-Zeeland en Australië liggen rivieren met dezelfde naam.

Het woord 'Avon' is van Keltische oorsprong: Afon, wat ook nu nog de Welshe benaming is voor een rivier. Het feit dat opvallend veel Britse rivieren zo heten wordt wel als volgt verklaard: als reizigers of nieuwkomers aan de plaatselijke bevolking vroegen wat de naam was van hun rivier, werd hun simpel verteld dat het "een" rivier was.

Dit artikel beperkt zich tot drie rivieren met deze naam in Engeland.

- De [East Avon](#) is 75 km lang. Hij ontspringt in het graafschap [Wiltshire](#) en stroomt vervolgens door [Hampshire](#). Hij passeert onder andere de stad [Salisbury](#) en mondt bij Christchurch in [Dorset](#) uit in [Het Kanaal](#).
- De [Upper Avon](#) is 154 km lang. De bron ligt in het noorden van [Northamptonshire](#) bij het dorp Naseby. Enkele kilometers lang vormt de stroom de grens tussen de graafschappen Northamptonshire en Leicestershire. Hij passeert onder andere Leamington Spa en de geboorteplaats van [William Shakespeare](#), [Stratford-upon-Avon](#). De rivier wordt daarom ook wel Shakespeares Avon genoemd. Bij Tewkesbury stroomt hij in de rivier de [Severn](#).
- De [Lower Avon](#) is 120 km lang. Hij ligt in het zuidwesten van het land. De rivier ontstaat bij Chipping Sodbury in [Gloucestershire](#) en stroomt vervolgens door Wiltshire. Hij passeert de steden [Bath](#) en [Bristol](#) (en wordt daardoor ter onderscheiding ook wel de Bristol Avon genoemd). Bij deze stad loopt de rivier uit in het estuarium van de Severn (Kanaal van Bristol).

Een opvallend verschijnsel in de benedenloop van de Severn is de [vloedbranding](#) (Engels: *tidal bore*). Het estuarium, deel van het Kanaal van Bristol, heeft het op een na grootste [getijdenverschil](#) ter wereld – ongeveer 15 meter (alleen in de [Fundybaai](#) in [Canada](#) is het groter) – en bij sommige getijden vormt zich een [golf](#) die zich snel tegen de stroom in verplaatst. Er zijn surfers die op deze golf proberen te [surfen](#), ook al raadt de havenautoriteit van Gloucester, die dit deel van de rivier beheert, dit uitdrukkelijk af. Deze *Severn Bore* is een voorbeeld in de natuur van een zichzelf versterkende solitaire golf, oftewel een [soliton](#).

Een **soliton** is een bijzonder golfverschijnsel. Het is een **eenlinggolf**, die over lange afstand zijn vorm behoudt. Dit verschijnsel kan optreden bij [golven](#) in vloeistoffen, maar ook in [optica](#), [magnetisme](#) en bij andere fysische systemen – zoals de [Josephson-junctie](#). In al deze gevallen gaat het om [niet-lineaire systemen](#). Waar in lineaire systemen een lokaal golfpakket al snel door [dispersie](#) uiteen zal vallen, wordt bij een soliton het effect van dispersie exact tenietgedaan door de effecten van niet-lineariteit.

## Wildlife to see in September 2019

## Chris Chappell advises you to drop in to Catcott to see the new developments.

As summer drifts into autumn, the countryside changes colour, and now is in many ways the most spectacular time of year. There is plenty to see in the natural world, just watching the season progress is a fascination in itself. You may see a great variety of birds, as migrants head south for the winter, and our winter visitors begin to arrive. This means you stand a chance of spotting pretty well any bird species recorded locally, and a time keenly anticipated by birders. Look for sandpipers on the muddy fringes around water. Wheatear, whinchat and yellow wagtails are on the move south. Osprey routinely stop over to build up their strength on the plentiful fish found on the Avalon Marshes. And wintering waders are starting to congregate on the shore.

Autumn starts on the 23 September, astronomically speaking, and this is a lovely time for a country walk. Horse chestnut trees have already turned yellow and brown, and others will follow, the autumn colours are developing early after the hot summer, and there will be some good displays of colour. Great opportunities for some dramatic photographs.

The hedgerows are full of bright red rose hips, hawthorn berries, blackberries and glistening black elder berries. The wild clematis flower heads are turning to seed, and the furry spiral heads will remain for the winter, and take on the mantle of 'Old Man's Beard' as it sprawls along the hedges.

Wasp and hornet numbers are growing, thriving on windfall apples, or feeding on the nectar rich ivy flowers. Fungi start to appear, as damp nights provide suitable conditions for their growth.

### SWT Catcott

Works have just been completed at the reserve to construct a new scrape, or area of shallow water and mud, in front of the main hide. This will attract wading birds in particular, and we would hope to see snipe, a good number of lapwing, and many other species. It will be an exciting time, as we wait to see what turns up.

A small flock of cattle egrets have been feeding at Catcott since the spring, but the number is growing, now amounting to forty plus birds, which is extraordinary. Cattle egrets are named from their habit of following cattle, and snapping up whatever is disturbed by the bovine foragers. However, they don't always depend on the cattle, and at Catcott they are already attracted to the new scrape, where they will find the fish, frogs and worms that they need to survive. The cattle egret is now breeding nearby, and juveniles (black beaks) may be seen with the flock. While common globally, it is still a rare bird in the UK, and this marks another stage in the colonisation of the UK by egrets, attracted by the climate changing and the wonderful habitat that the Avalon Marshes now provides.

Catcott is already well established as an important reserve on the levels, with the development of the fen area, and the construction of the tower hide, making it really worthwhile place to visit. The area of woodland has an attractive meandering boardwalk, and the mixed wood, with many mature alders, hosts a great many bird and animal species, and provides a refuge for roe deer.

### Stear Marshes

The Severn Estuary and the Bristol Channel, fed by the River Parrett estuary and the Huntspill Sluice, provide the perfect environment for many wading and dabbling birds. In addition to the reserve at Steart Point, there is now the new Steart Marshes project. This has become a key area in the Southwest for waders, something we are very lucky to have in the county. Huge flocks of small waders, can be seen on the extensive mudflats: oystercatcher, dunlin, ringed plover, grey plover, turnstone,



Wheatear at Stolford



Cattle Egret at Catcott

sanderling, along with larger birds, such as curlew and black tailed godwits. They make an impressive sight when they take flight, changing colour as they turn in the sun. Large numbers of shelduck can be seen on the shores and sandbanks, a bulky, distinctive duck in white with green neck and chestnut front, and a bright red bill. They probe the mud for small crustaceans, snails and invertebrates. Many rarer waders complete the mix, such as ruff, but you do require some good optics to see them. In addition, birds such as whinchat and wheatear may be found on the tide-line, feeding up on flies before they cross the Channel heading south. The best time to arrive at the reserve is just before high tide, as the birds are first forced to the shoreline, and will then move out as the mudflats are exposed by the receding water. The small birds and ducks in turn attract their predators; kestrel, buzzard, peregrine sparrowhawk and marsh harrier are all seen on a regular basis, plus our smallest falcon, the merlin, which will spend the winter here.

## Late butterflies and dragonflies

Plenty of butterflies and dragonflies are still on the wing in September. Look for common darters, an abundant small dragonfly, the male is bright red and the female olive green. Many of the damselfly species are on the wing now, as well as the various large hawkers, Southern, migrant, brown and common. These are spectacular brightly coloured creatures, and can be quite obliging, landing nearby, or even on your clothing. Brimstone, comma, common blue, red admiral and small copper butterflies may still be seen on warm September days..

The beautiful colours in butterflies are formed by an unusual use of the natural light, combined with pigments on the insects themselves. Butterfly wings are iridescent, so the appearance varies dependant on the angle of view. This is achieved by a complex interaction of fine films which filter the light to create the iridescent colours. Great for close up photography.

## Birds Flocking

As the breeding season ends, many small birds will gather in large mixed flocks. Greenfinches, goldfinches and chaffinches will chatter noisily in the tops of trees, relying on safety in numbers and many keen eyes to spot an approaching predator.

The goldfinches favourite food source is thistle seed. A group of goldfinches clustered on thistle heads makes a great image. On the coast, large flocks of linnets feed on grassland.

Starlings begin to assemble in the towns and villages each evening, then set off to roost en masse, performing their spectacular patterns in the sky, now known as murmurations. Strictly speaking the murmur is of course the sound, as thousands of birds wings whir across the landscape. If you are out on the levels when a flock passes overhead, you will hear something quite unique, a great whisper across the land. As the birds approach their roost, they will swirl and gyrate in amazing patterns, settling, rising again, and moving across the reedbeds like running water. Their movement in the air is often driven by the appearance of a sparrowhawk or other raptor, hoping to pick off an easy meal. Once settled they start to chatter, rising into a crescendo of calls that may last some long time. While this phenomenon has been filmed and recorded, this cannot convey the full sense of awe that this spectacle inspires if you are actually there.

Corvids also now flock and feed together, and a freshly turned field may attract a mixture of carrion crows, rooks, jackdaws and the occasional raven. They spend their day working their way across the fields, picking up worms and beetles as they go.



Long-tailed Tit



Spider on blackberries





# Wildlife to see in July 2019

**Chris Chappell's encounter with a stoat and his skill with a camera deserve a wide audience. Tell your friends.**

The joy of exploring the Somerset countryside is that you never know what you may find. Venturing out on the 1st July, to get a sense of what this month might offer, I came across three stoats chasing each other around on a drove track. As I watched, two more appeared, and joined in the game. And then another, on a very different mission, as she had a very small kit in her mouth. She ran straight toward me, dashed past my feet, on down the track, and into the vegetation to a new nest site. Guessing she would come back for more kits, I waited, and sure enough, the jill re-appeared, running in little spurts. At one point she stopped, sniffed at my boot, and looked up at me, her bright eyes looked up at me as if she was wondering what I was doing on her patch. She made at least eight more trips with tiny kits. I looked on in awe, trying to get some photos without disturbing them. Stoats move their young regularly as a measure against predation, as the nest site soon becomes fouled by the kits, which makes it easier for a fox to find. Fresh bedding in the new nest also reduces parasites and the risk of disease. These encounters don't happen very often, but if you are out in the wild, there is always a chance.

As summer arrives, the countryside may seem quieter, as the foliage provides cover for fledgling birds, and young mammals. Some birds are still singing, but with

less vigour. However, butterflies and dragonflies are abundant and many species can be found in the varied habitats in the county. Migrating painted lady butterflies have arrived from Africa, adding to the spectacle. They may be found clustering on buddleia or hemp-agrimony. July is the peak month for dragonflies and damselflies on the wing, when in theory all of the known Somerset species may be seen. They make excellent subjects for close-up photography.

Swifts, swallows and house martins will spend the days catching insects to feed their young. Swifts will collect a mixture of insects and airborne spiders, feeding high in the sky with the house martins. Swallows prefer to swoop low over fields and meadows, dashing after insects.

Most birds have raised a brood to fledglings, and may have started another. Smaller birds tend to raise two or three broods, and the largest species just one. This is related to survival rates and longevity. Therefore there are many fledglings skulking in hedges, trees and reedbeds, as their parents teach them to feed for themselves. The adult cuckoos are migrating south, heading back to Africa, leaving their chicks to be raised by their host species. Once the young cuckoos have built up their weight, and developed their wing muscles, they will follow on in the coming weeks. So there is just a chance of spotting a plump cuckoo chick, waiting to be fed by their diminutive adopted parents.

You may see the pretty spotted flycatcher, one of the last migrants to arrive, catching flies by repeatedly returning to the same branch, a distinguishing characteristic of the species. Sparrow sized, a delicate bird with a sharp bill, the breast is more flecked than spotted, they are sadly increasingly rare. Spotted flycatchers are very much at home in a small garden, all they need are the flies and a suitable perch. The spotted flycatcher has suffered a massive decline in numbers in the past 50 years, and a bird that was common is now rare, having declined by some 90% , almost certainly due to the decline in the large flying insects that they need to feed on.

## The Grass snake

There is nothing quite like the thrill felt when you spot a snake in the wild. The grass snake is the species you are most likely to see. Favouring damp marshland and meadows, they will also exist happily in a small garden, especially if you have a pond. Their diet consists of amphibians and occasionally mice and voles, hunting by stealth, and striking at their prey, which they swallow over a period of time. They are however completely harmless to humans, a large specimen may attempt to bite you, but they have no teeth, just a serrated jaw. Their first defence is to flee, but if you do pick one up, it will most likely wrap itself around your hand and deposit a foul smelling liquid from its vent. The grass snake is our biggest snake, reaching up to 150cms in length. Olive green in colour with yellow and black behind the head, and small black markings on the flank, a little research will distinguish the grass snake from an adder. Snakes shed their skins once or twice a year, if you find one with clouded eyes, this indicates it is about to slough the skin. The larger females are now carrying eggs, and will seek out a pile of rotting plant matter, where a mature adult will lay 30-40 eggs. The natural warmth of fermenting vegetation acts as an incubator, and about 10 weeks later, the fully formed but tiny young will emerge. Therefore, they are quite likely to choose your compost heap as a suitable place to deposit their eggs.

## Steart Marshes



Female stoat (a jill) moving the family



Four spot chaser dragonfly

The Steart Marshes project was commenced in 2012, after an extensive period of research and consultation, converting some 740 acres of grassland into saltmarsh by breaching the sea wall. This has the combined effect of managing the flood risks in the Bristol Channel and providing a major wildlife reserve for birds, mammals and invertebrates. The project was completed four years ago, and is now well on the way to becoming fully re-naturalised. Located adjacent to the Bridgwater Bay National Nature Reserve, the Steart Marshes now supports a breeding population of avocets, oystercatchers, little ringed plovers and more. Spoonbills are regular visitors, a bird of the egret family that has a growing presence in the UK. In July, you may see flocks of linnets, goldfinches and starlings, comprised of this year's fledging. Dragonflies and butterflies abound. Reed, sedge and Cetti's warblers are quieter now, as they have young to feed, but they may be spotted, and will make their rasping alarm call if you are close to the nest. As for raptors, buzzard, kestrel and marsh harrier are seen, and increasingly red kites, plus peregrine and merlin in winter months.

There are various walks on well constructed paths, enabling those of all abilities to explore the area. Ideally you would take a picnic, as you are a long way from the nearest cafe or pub, but there are toilet facilities at the main car park. Allow a day to explore the area, there are numerous hides for the quiet observance of the wildlife, and numerous benches for picnickers.

## The Avocet

And whilst at Steart, you may see avocets. This beautiful bird, which was driven to near extinction in the early 1800s, by hunting and egg collecting, is making a steady recovery in the UK, and Somerset is playing its part in this process. The area where you will find them is the Bridgwater Bay and the river Parrett Estuary. From the Quantocks hides at Steart you may see several pairs caring for young at different stages of growth, which may be seen with a good pair of binoculars. A large wader, the avocet is unmistakable, black and white, with long dull pink legs, and fine upturned bill. Avocets are extremely protective parents, and will quickly rise and attack any passing predator, calling loudly while chasing them off. Visitors may also attract a bit of attention if you are too close to the nest or young. They have an unusual bill, curved at the end, which is used to sweep through the mud to sift out small crustaceans and worms.

*All photographs by Chris Chappell*



Chiffchaff fledgling





Sloughed grass snake skin

## Wildlife to see in October 2018

### **As blooms fade, take a look at the flowering ivy attracting insects and birds, says Chris Chappell.**

The autumn colours are already looking glorious, and it seems that this year will be spectacular for wild berries. Hawthorn, spindle, elder and pyracantha have heavy crops, highly coloured and decorating hedges and gardens. These are all good food sources to help wild birds get through the winter. As many plants die back, ivy is in full flower, and buzzing with insects.

The last of our winter visitors are en route south, swallows and martins winging their way in large flocks, along with warblers, wheatear and whinchat. And as they leave, others arrive from the north and east. Goldcrests, mainly from Scandinavia join our resident population, trebling the number of birds from around one million to three. One has to marvel at a bird weighing 5-6gms crossing the North Sea, a few even travelling from Poland and western Russia. They feed on insects, larvae and spiders, favouring evergreens often in yew and cypress trees. The goldcrest feeds restlessly in order to maintain their tiny weight.

October also sees the arrival of the winter thrushes; redwing and fieldfare, both striking in different ways. They will soon be seen feeding on the berries. The redwing is a small thrush with a very strong supercilium, and a rufous patch under the wing. The fieldfare is a larger bird, with speckled front, grey head and rump, but most easily identified by a noisy cackle. They are accompanied by migrant blackbirds, a huge influx of blackbirds, doubling or trebling our summer residents numbers of 5 million to 10 - 15 million.

Mixed crows may be seen combing the fields for worms and insects, sometimes joined by buzzards, which are quite happy to eat worms if there are plenty to be found. Herring and black headed gulls may join them, often following the plough, a classic rural sight.

Most of the wintering ducks will appear this month, as wigeon, teal, shoveler and pintail settle in on the meres and lakes on the levels. They are joined by snipe, lapwing and golden plover. On the coast, large flocks of dunlin, knot, grey plover will gather.

### **Exploring the Woodlands**



Great white egret grabs a pair of damselflies

It is the perfect time to go for a woodland walk, and enjoy all that the Somerset countryside has to offer. Fungi will be sprouting from the base of trees, forcing its way through grass and leaves. Noisy nuthatches are feeding on acorns, hazel and beach mast. They will be heard high in the trees, a loud boyish whistle, or sometimes just the tapping as they break the shell of a hazel nut, having lodged it in a convenient crevice in the bark of a tree. The loud cackle of green woodpeckers echoes through the woodland, well hidden as they blend into the branches oaks and beeches, but perhaps they are more often seen making holes in your lawn, as they seek out their favourite meal of ants with their long sticky tongues. Great spotted woodpeckers are there too, their alarm call a sharp 'chip-chip'. Roe deer watch from the distance, feeding on shoots, always on the alert. [Check the SWT Reserves listings](#) for some ideas of possible places to explore.

## In The Garden

It is the time of year when you may feel the urge to tidy up the garden. While a neat garden may please some of your neighbours, it will inevitably support less wildlife. Hedgehogs, slow worms grass snakes, frogs, newts and toads all need suitable places to hibernate. A heap of grass cuttings or leaf rakings can make all the difference, and be crucial to the survival of these creatures over winter. Dead trees provide natural food for great spotted woodpeckers to find the insect larvae they feed on. Green woodpeckers are often seen in urban gardens, feeding on ant hills. Windfall apples provide a good source of food for birds, mammals insects and molluscs.

Ivy, not always the gardener's favourite plant, is a very valuable source of late nectar for insects. In bloom from September to November, ivy will attract wasps, hornets, hoverflies, and butterflies, red admiral in particular. Later in the winter the ivy berries are a good source of food, as they soften with time, many birds, from blackcaps to blackbirds and pigeons, will feast on them.

Autumn is a good time to plant new shrubs and bushes as they go into dormancy. Choose plants that will benefit wild creatures, be it flowering bushes such as buddleia for butterflies, or those producing a lot of berries, like cotoneaster. All these factors will determine how many wild creatures visit your garden.

## Spiders

Spiders abound in the autumn, and the garden spider is the species you are most likely to encounter. They are just one of the 650 plus species found in the UK. Spiders are arachnids, related to scorpions, ticks and mites. Their ability to spin beautiful and complex webs is extraordinary to see, and on a dewy morning the webs prevalence and beauty is revealed. At this time of year you may find large numbers of garden spiders spinning webs across paths and doorways hoping to catch their prey. The webs are extraordinarily strong, and rather unpleasant if you walk into one face first. Spiders moult as they grow, shedding their skin several times. The female will grow in size until mature, mate, and then build an egg sac containing 50-100 eggs, which she will guard assiduously, until eventually perishing of starvation, leaving the sac to overwinter and the spiderlings to hatch in late spring. Garden spiders will bite, as most spiders can, but this is quite harmless, but a fully grown one will clearly be felt if you were to pick it up. But best to leave them in peace if possible, spiders are wholly beneficial in their role of catching insects that we might consider pests. And they provide the spectacular webs for us to marvel at.

## Fill the feeders - watch the birds

This is the time of year to give your bird feeders a good clean before refilling them, as there is some evidence that diseases can be spread by mouldy or stale bird seeds and nuts. A surprising range of birds will use feeders and tables, great spotted woodpeckers, nuthatches, long-tailed-tits, and increasingly birds such as



Bryony



Small Copper

reed buntings and over-wintering blackcaps. You must expect the occasional visit from a sparrowhawk, which will attempt to take prey. In addition to hanging feeders, a table feeder with a roof will encourage more species, such as robin, as many birds struggle to cling on to a wire feeder. The roof will also add some security from predators. A supply of water in a bird bath will attract sparrows, blue tits, robins and blackbirds. Any surplus apples spread on the ground will encourage blackbirds, redwing and fieldfare.

*All photographs courtesy of Chris Chappell.*



Autumn Ash

