

Tatton Wildlife Newsletter – Summer

The summer months are a wonderful time to enjoy the parkland. With better weather, longer daylight hours and a plentiful supply of food, animals, plants and birds capitalize by using this time to reproduce. Now is the time to allow our senses to connect with nature and to experience the benefits of the summer months.

Deer

The deer now look at their best having moulted into their summer coats: the russet colouration of the red deer contrasting with the speckled coat of the fallow deer. The males are now “in-velvet”, growing their antlers over the summer months in preparation for the autumn rut. The antlers are fed by blood vessels and are soft to the touch. Any damage now would cause a deformity, putting them at a disadvantage whilst rutting.



The females will also be calving, and it is important that visitors leave them well alone. The mother will drop the calf or fawn by a fallen branch or clump of vegetation and leave it. She will come back to it to feed it at night. It has no scent so is therefore harder for predators to locate. After a few days it will follow its mother and visitors to the park can enjoy seeing them from a safe distance.

Birds

Our summer visitors have now arrived and along with our resident birds they are busy nesting. Sand martins were, as expected, the first to arrive over Tatton Mere and have now been joined by swallows, house martins and swifts. Many warbler species can be seen here. Chiffchaff and blackcap are common, but whitethroats and willow warblers can be seen too. Woodland and scrub areas are the best places to look, and Dog Wood is a favourite. Some interesting species were seen recently including a redstart at the scout camp and an osprey passing over during migration.

Trees

The trees in the parkland are finally bursting into leaf. One of the first species to impress is the Horse Chestnut. This veteran horse chestnut tree located off Knutsford drive is one of our most spectacular and is in fact one of the largest specimens in Cheshire. This time of year, Horse chestnuts produce many pink and white flowers that are often referred to as ‘candles’. The flowers, once pollinated, will give rise to the spiked fruits containing conkers that will eventually drop in the autumn.



Summer Amphibians

Several amphibian species, including the common frog, the common toad, the smooth newt and the great crested newt are found in Tatton’s ponds and woodlands. As adults they can live both in water and on land. Unlike fish, they breathe oxygen in the air through lungs and unlike reptiles, they must breed in water.

The damp, decaying dead wood deliberately left in our woodlands provides excellent habitat for amphibians to both hibernate in the winter and to hunt for invertebrate prey in the warmer months. Locations such as Millennium Wood and Harrison’s Croft provide ideal conditions, with a proximity to fresh water and plenty of places to shelter during the day and hide from predators.

Amphibians lay eggs covered in jelly (spawn) usually in still, fresh water and often among plants. The emerging young (tadpoles) are aquatic and have gills, but they soon leave the water after developing lungs. As adults, most of their life is spent on land in damp habitats, returning to the water to breed in spring.

Insects and other invertebrates such as slugs, snails and worms are a common food source for Tatton’s amphibians – found in abundance in our damp woodland habitat. Much of their hunting is done on warm, damp evenings. Frogs and toads catch most of their prey with their long, sticky tongues, whereas newts grab their prey and swallow it whole.

Compiled by Tatton’s Ranger Team