



Wild About Barrow

September 2021

Autumn has arrived. Or has it?

Well, that really depends on whether you use the astrological or meteorological definition. For the meteorological seasons, months are split into four, with three months in each season. Autumn has the months of September, October and November. This makes it easier for observing and forecasting weather and to compare monthly data. The first day of autumn is set as 1st September and ends on 30th November.

However, for those of us who would like to have a longer summer, the astrological definition is preferable as that puts the start of autumn at 22nd September this year.

Nature, though, has its own seasons. The study of these signs of natural changes through the year, phenology, began in 1736 and now shows changes due to climate change.

A walk around the King George V Playing Field (KGV) already reveals some signs of autumn and its rich fruitfulness is shown in this month's Wild Celebration. A crab apple at the Wycliffe entrance is dripping with fruit, as is The Tree of the Month, a splendid crab apple growing in the Millennium Park, and will provide a source of food for birds and mammals throughout the season.

A growing trend

Wild About Barrow is wild about the number of front gardens (and maybe many more back gardens?) seen to be managed for wildlife. We are part of a growing national trend of folk wanting to be near nature and do our bit to help the biodiversity crisis the world faces. Nature is under attack from so many sides – climate change, habitat loss, herbicides, pesticides, invasive species, exploitation...

So Very Many Congratulations!

Wild Celebration September



Rowan (*Sorbus acuparia*)



Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*)



White bryony (*Bryonia dioica*)



Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)



Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)



Hoverfly on Hedge bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*)



A special mention for this beauty found on the corner of Beaumont Road /North Street. It's the Nettle Leaved Mullein (*Verbascum chaixxi*) which is a casual escape from cultivation. As it is a perennial we can look forward to seeing it flower next May.

What have you seen? Send your pictures to wildaboutbarrow@gmail.com for inclusion next month. There's no need to identify, we'll try to do that. Just tell us where you saw it so we can look first hand.

Nettles and Butterflies

Nettles are probably not at the top of your favourite plants but they enrich our summers with the beautiful butterflies they support. If you stopped to look more carefully at the nettles in the King George V Playing Fields earlier this summer you would have seen that they were hosting many caterpillars of the Red Admiral butterfly amongst others and who would want to be without them in your garden?



Small tortoiseshell and Red Admiral caterpillars in KGV



Red Admiral butterfly



Small Tortoiseshell butterfly
Kate Nightingale, NatureSpot

In fact, nettles play a crucial role in the lifecycle of many butterflies as they are food for the caterpillars of Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Painted Lady and Comma as well as the Red Admiral. The adult butterflies feed on the nectar of flowers but their caterpillars depend entirely on nettles. Stinging nettles are one of the most important plants that British butterfly caterpillars depend on. There is also a non stinging variety for gardens with small children.

What to see

1. **How many signs of autumn** can you spot? Look out for fruit ripening, first autumn leaves tinting and leaf fall.
2. Watch out for **House Martins and Swallows** beginning their long migration south to the warmer weather of Africa. If you visit North Norfolk or Lindisfarne and other coastal areas, you may see Gannets, Terns and Manx Shearwaters leaving for their winter home in warmer climes too.
3. September also brings some migrating birds which could visit **your garden including the Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler.**

What to do

1. **Grow your own wildflower patch** whether it is a window box, plant pot, raised bed, lawn or section of your garden. Autumn is a good time to sow seeds as they establish roots ready for a quicker start next spring. Make sure you buy *British native* wildflower seeds from a reputable source so as not to dilute our wildflower stock through interbreeding, as has happened with our native bluebells.
2. **Cut back short any wildflowers or lawns** that have been managed for nature over the summer. Leave the cuttings for a few days to allow seeds to fall out, then remove cuttings to keep fertility low as this benefits wildflowers.

Think global: Act local