

Wildlife sightings in Barcombe Parish during 2021

Barcombe Community Wildlife Group



Beautiful poster of local wildlife by Anne Livesey; photo by Therri Lahood

Compiled by Simon Linington

During 2021, the Barcombe Community Wildlife Group (BCWG):

- Continued its role in highlighting, documenting and learning about the wildlife around Barcombe Parish with the aim of conserving it for future generations.
- Posted daily wildlife sightings from around the parish that helped its documentation.
- Drew attention to the potential damage to wildlife regarding developments around the parish. This included emphasis on the value of the old railway track running north and south of the village as a 'wildlife corridor' and the potential damage of a proposed infill to the railway bridge at Church Lane.
- Surveyed House Sparrow, Song Thrush, Nightingale and Turtle Dove around the parish though, sadly, drew a blank with the latter species.
- Took part in the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch.
- Collected money for the Wild About Barcombe area and provided refreshments and cakes at the White-throated Sparrow 'twitch' in April.
- Members assisted: the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust (OART) with local water sampling; with conservation work at Spithurst Churchyard; with the toad patrol on local roads; and with the monthly Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) counts at Barcombe Reservoir.
- Increased membership numbers of its Facebook pages to 127 by year end. Most of the membership resides either in the parish or nearby or has a particular interest in the area.



Toad patrol photos (Anne Livesey)

Thanks to data supplied by the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre (SxBRC) we have a baseline of records up to July 2019 that shows the coverage for different taxonomic groups (see Appendix 1). There is a *caveat* with this data in that it contains some records from map squares that include adjacent parishes. The largest number of taxa (not necessarily equating to species) are to be found within birds, flowering plants, beetles and moths. At over 2000 taxa, this is a good parish for wildlife due to its varied range of habitats from reservoirs to bluebell woodlands. It would be interesting to know how it compared to other inland areas of comparable size in Sussex.



Bee 'photobombing' photo of Small Tortoiseshell butterfly on a bramble flower

We now have a reasonably clear picture of the status of birds, butterflies and dragonflies within the parish though we continue to learn all of the time. All three groups are good environmental indicators. Thanks to previous trap and release work by Clive & Janet Dickson and others, we have a good idea of the moths in this area though further trapping would no doubt reveal further exciting finds. Due to the limited number of species involved, there is reasonable knowledge about mammals (very good knowledge in the case of bats), reptiles and amphibians though more information would help in establishing their true status. Work is underway to further document the seed-bearing flora of the parish though this will take time. The biggest gaps in our knowledge are likely to relate to lower plants, liverworts, fungi and certain insect groups but this will require a steep learning curve or specialist help.

Great thanks to all of our BCWG members for their contributions to wildlife sightings & conservation and the general interest shown. Particular thanks to Therri Lahood for leading the group so well and moderating the Facebook site. Also, thanks to SxBRC for supplying baseline data and Clare Blencowe of SxBRC for advising on some of the fungal identifications. Thanks to South East Water (and particularly their ecologists, Patrick Austin and Sam Pottier) regarding the monthly WeBS counts at Barcombe Reservoir, and also to John Gowers and Clive Dickson for their assistance.

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Tony Horth's wonderful collage of Barcombe's wildlife



Breeding success in 2021 – a family of Garden Warblers at Knowlands Farm, 20 June

A. Birds

A total of 115 bird species were noted in Barcombe Parish during 2021 (see Table 1). One new species was added to the bird list for the parish (see below). Particular interest also came from a sighting of Siberian Chiffchaff (a race of the Common Chiffchaff) and two sightings of Woodlark (the first for many years in the parish).

The obvious highlight was a **White-throated Sparrow** found on 3 February by Catherine & Robert Anscombe in their garden near the recreation ground during the House Sparrow survey carried out by the Barcombe Community Wildlife Group (BCWG). This North American species most probably travelled across the Atlantic on a ship but it is possible that it flew all the way. The sparrow remained in the area until 18 April spending much of its time during the latter part of its stay in the Wild About Barcombe (WAB) site when it also started to sing indicating it was a male. The record was accepted by the British Birds Rarities Committee and is the second for Sussex (the first being in 1968) and although yet to be confirmed, it was about the 57th for the UK. Not surprisingly this really rare and photogenic bird attracted a lot of attention and it is estimated that in excess of 500 birders travelled to see it, some from as far afield as Anglesey and Cheshire. This could have presented more problems than it eventually did during the pandemic lockdown. After initial release of news about the sighting, information was suppressed until national bird information services resumed their postings about it on 9 April at about the time lockdown restrictions were eased. Fortunately, this coincided with the Easter school holidays otherwise parking might have been more of a problem in the village. Although the 'twitch' was not universally popular in Barcombe, with a few notable exceptions, the visiting birders were both well behaved and generally well received by the community. Towards the end of the bird's stay, the BCWG made a collection from the birders in support of improvements to the WAB area. As a mark of their gratitude, birders contributed about £290 which will be used to produce bird information boards for the site.



White-throated Sparrow, The Grange, 14 February 2021 (Robert Anscombe)



White-throated Sparrow in song, WAB site, 16 April



The socially-distanced 'twitch', WAB site, 17 April

Illustrated selection of other exciting bird sightings in the parish during 2021

Barn Owl. This species breeds in the parish but one particular individual put on some great afternoon viewing as it hunted over the south end of Knowlands Farm during late February and early March.



Black-necked Grebe. This is an unusual visitor to Barcombe Reservoir and was present there on the monthly Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) of 11 October. The reservoir which is on the edge of the parish (but not open to the public), provides important habitat for a wide variety of resident, migrant and wintering birds. Thanks to the work of the late David Lang, there is a record of birds using this reservoir that goes back to 1966.



Firecrest. This and the Goldcrest are Britain's smallest birds. It is a good deal rarer than the Goldcrest with only a handful of authenticated records in the parish. This individual flew inside Emma Burnett's kitchen on 27 October and she managed to take this super photo before it recovered and flew off.



(Emma Burnett)

Fieldfare. This thrush is a winter visitor to Britain and numbers vary around Barcombe year-to-year. This one was photographed visiting a garden pond in Barcombe on 14 February.



Hobby. This Kestrel-sized falcon is a regular but scarce summer visitor to the parish. This adult was perched in trees between Barcombe Reservoir and the River Ouse on 24 May but then took off showing its characteristic red 'trousers'.



Kingfisher. There has been a recent encouraging increase in sightings within the parish of this electric blue species. A male (sexed by its all black bill) was at Knowlands Farm on both 20 June and 3 August.



Grey Wagtail. This attractive resident species breeds in several locations within the parish. This one was at Knowlands Farm on 18 December.



Hawfinch. This very large, shy finch with a powerful bill (capable of cracking cherry stones) is a rare visitor to the parish. There was a large invasion from the Continent during the winter of 2017/18 and there appears to have been a smaller arrival in 2021. This bird was one of nine in Knowlands Wood on 24 December.



House Sparrow. It was on a BCWG survey of House Sparrows around Barcombe that the White-throated Sparrow was found. The survey carried out in February showed that House Sparrows are doing reasonably well here and appear to have made a bit of a recovery since their numbers plummeted some years back. The survey map can be found in Figure 1. This female or immature was photographed at Knowlands Farm on 26 July.



Little Grebe. This is a scarce species in the parish but it sometimes breeds. This was a juvenile that turned up at Knowlands Farm on 28 August, after the breeding season.



Little Owl. This ferocious-looking small owl is rapidly disappearing from its previous haunts across the parish. Among its food sources are earthworms and a succession of dry summers may be behind its demise. This one is well-camouflaged and was seen on 30 October.



Marsh Harrier. Although increasing in Sussex, this raptor is a rare visitor to the parish. It was seen on 24 August at Barcombe Mills. Its dark plumage indicates that it is a juvenile. A male Hen Harrier was also seen near Knowlands Wood on 7 March which is another unusual sighting.



Nightingale. Barcombe Parish hosts one of the most important Sussex populations of this summer visitor with fabled voice. In 2021, the BCWG recorded 11 males holding territory in the parish with most along the old railway track (wildlife corridor) that runs north and south from the village. Birds turned up early this year with singing birds from the very start of April. The photos show one unusually out in the open on 21 April and another carrying oak leaves for nest building on 5 May.



Raven. This large member of the Crow family is now a scarce but well-established part of our local avifauna. These three flew low over the village making a lot of noise on 20 September.



Red Kite. Following a national reintroduction programme several decades ago, this beautiful raptor with a reddish forked tail has become increasingly frequent over the parish with many reports during 2021 from the BCWG. This individual was over the village on 24 September.



Rook. This species has rookeries within Barcombe village and at Barcombe Mills. It is often one of the first welcome signs of spring when they start to make a lot of noise during nest building. This one visited a garden pond in the village on 24 March.



Song Thrush. One of the earliest species to start singing each year, Song Thrushes were surveyed by the BCWG around the parish in February 2021 and a map of their findings can be found in Figure 2. This individual was on Knowlands Farm on 11 January.



Sparrowhawk. This accipiter is a scarce resident in the parish. This juvenile female had killed a Woodpigeon on 1 October in the garden of Tim & Elaine Parsons who invited in SL to photograph it.



Stonechat. This chat is a close relative of the Robin but is a scarce autumn or winter visitor to the parish. This male was at Barcombe Mills on 30 October.



Swallow. Numbers of Swallows visiting from Africa each year and staying in the parish to breed have reduced considerably compared to a couple of decades ago. Trish Taylor took this lovely picture of one collecting mud for its nest soon after it arrived on 1 May.



(Trish Taylor)

Tawny Owl. Although regularly heard around Barcombe, they are not seen that frequently. The one in the picture was being mobbed by smaller birds in Knowlands Wood on 17 April.



Siberian Chiffchaff. This was one of the ornithological highlights of 2021. It is a race of the Common Chiffchaff and very small numbers visit Sussex each winter. They're often in the company of their commoner relatives and regularly found at water treatment works where there are plenty of insects even on frosty days. The Siberian Chiffchaff is a very brown and white bird unlike the greener Common Chiffchaff. Due to their coloration, the dark eye stands out well on the face. This individual was at Barcombe (New) Water Treatment Works in cold weather on 3, 5 & 10 January. As its name implies, it is a visitor from east of the Urals. It usually winters in India.



Swift. The number of Swifts breeding each year around Barcombe has reduced considerably over the past couple of decades but thankfully two pairs were found to be nesting in Barcombe High Street (by Donzi Donovan). The bird in the photo was one of 250 feeding low over Barcombe Reservoir during the Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) count on 24 May.



White-fronted Goose. Most of the geese seen around Barcombe have not travelled very far to be with us. Just occasionally we get wild swans that have travelled a great distance to escape the cold such as 13 Russian White-fronted Geese that spent December 2020 and January 2021 at Barcombe Mills. This photo was taken on 25 January and shows some of them behind part of the feral Barnacle Goose flock that spends each winter in the area.



Yellow Wagtail. Often confused with the Grey Wagtail, this species is a summer visitor to this country from Africa. Around Barcombe, it is a scarce passage migrant usually seen in April – May and again in August – September. These two brightly coloured males were part of a small ‘fall’ of birds at Barcombe Reservoir on 12 April and seen during a Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) count.



Table 1. Bird species recorded in Barcombe Parish during 2021

Barn Owl	Common Cuckoo
Barn Swallow	Common Gull
Barnacle Goose	Common Nightingale
Blackbird	Common Pheasant
Blackcap	Common Redstart
Black-headed Gull	Common Sandpiper
Black-necked Grebe	Common Snipe
Blue Tit	Common Starling
Brambling	Common Swift
Bullfinch	Common Whitethroat
Canada Goose	Coot
Carrion Crow	Cormorant
Chaffinch	Dunnock
Chiffchaff	Egyptian Goose
Coal Tit	Eurasian Stonechat
Collared Dove	Fieldfare
Common Buzzard	Firecrest

Gadwall
Garden Warbler
Goldcrest
Goldfinch
Great Black-backed Gull
Great Crested Grebe
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Great Tit
Green Sandpiper
Green Woodpecker
Greenfinch
Grey Heron
Grey Wagtail
Greylag Goose
Hawfinch
Hen Harrier
Herring Gull
Hobby
House Martin
House Sparrow
Jackdaw
Jay
Kestrel
Kingfisher
Lapwing
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Lesser Redpoll
Lesser Whitethroat
Linnet
Little Egret
Little Grebe
Little Owl
Long-tailed Tit
Magpie
Mallard
Mandarin Duck
Marsh Harrier
Meadow Pipit
Merlin
Mistle Thrush
Moorhen

Mute Swan
Northern Wheatear
Nuthatch
Peregrine
Pheasant
Pied Wagtail
Pochard
Raven
Red Kite
Red-legged Partridge
Redwing
Reed Bunting
Reed Warbler
Ring-necked Parakeet
Robin
Rook
Sand Martin
Shoveler
Siskin
Skylark
Song Thrush
Sparrowhawk
Spotted Flycatcher
Stock Dove
Tawny Owl
Teal
Trecreeper
Tufted Duck
Water Rail
Whinchat
White-fronted Goose
White-throated Sparrow
Wigeon
Willow Warbler
Woodcock
Woodlark
Woodpigeon
Wren
Yellow Wagtail
Yellowhammer

Figure 1. House Sparrow sightings around Barcombe in 2021

Sites recorded are shown and, where noted, maximum numbers

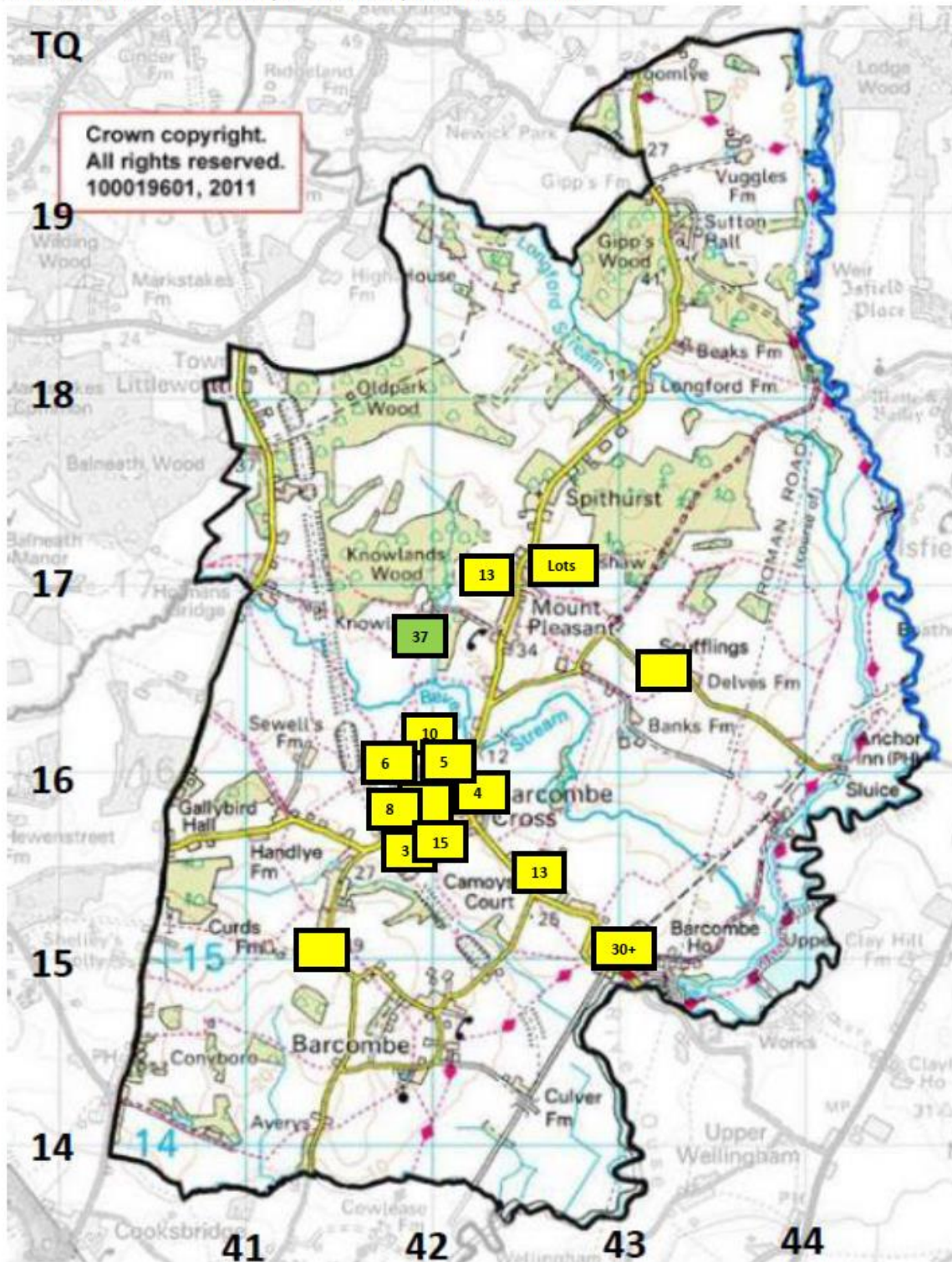
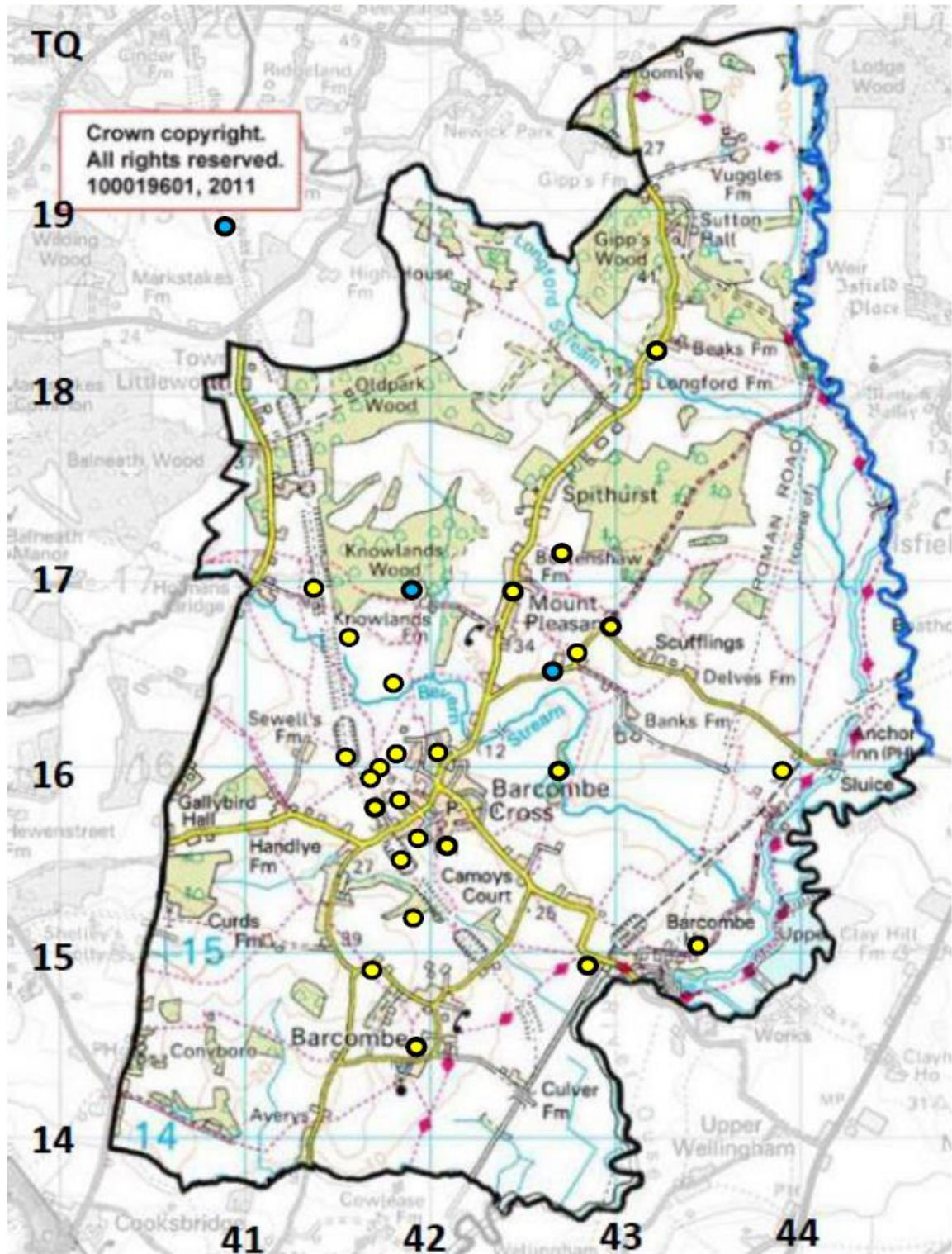


Figure 2. Song and Mistle Thrushes in Barcombe Parish during February 2021 recorded by the BCWG

Song Thrushes (yellow) and Mistle Thrushes (blue) in song – Barcombe Parish – February 2021



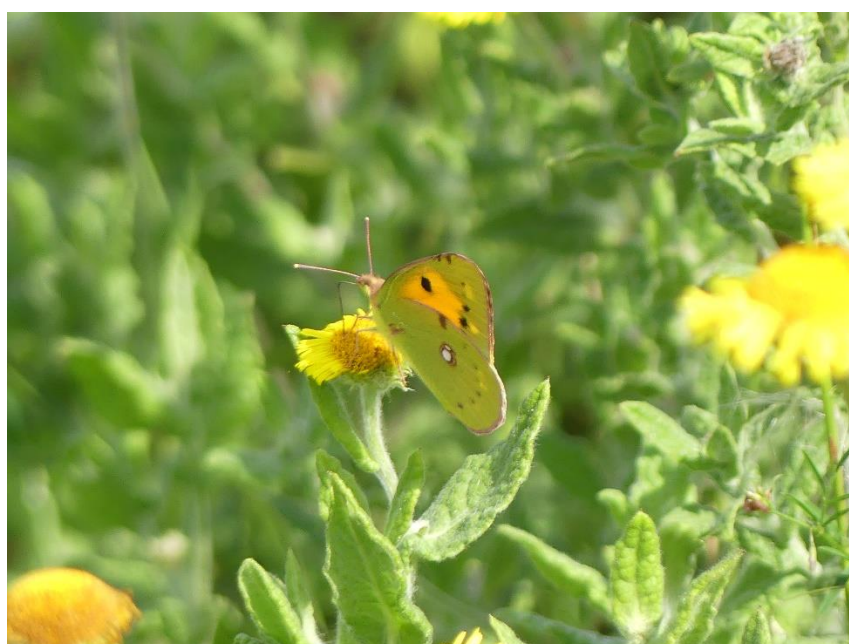
B. Butterflies

A total of 32 species were recorded in the parish during 2021. Species are listed in Table 2. A few highlights are illustrated below.

Brown Hairstreak. This species is gradually expanding its range eastward in Sussex. The first one for the parish was seen in a blackthorn hedge at Knowlands Farm as recently as 2018. Three years later, two females were seen egg-laying in the same hedge on 5 September with at least one next day.



Clouded Yellow. This migratory butterfly was seen at Knowlands Farm on 6 September.



Dingy Skipper. It was a good year for this species along the north part of the old railway track adjacent to Knowlands Wood. This individual was seen on 30 May perched on Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*. Sadly, no Grizzled Skippers were recorded in 2021.



Green Hairstreak. Just one individual was recorded during the year. This one was on the old railway track next to Knowlands Wood on 31 May perched on Dogwood, a larval food plant.



Purple Emperor. Perhaps the butterfly highlight of the year was two male Purple Emperors jousting high up in the canopy of Knowlands Wood on 16 July.



White Admiral. This is one of our woodland specialist butterflies and July in Knowlands Wood is the best bet to see one. Robin Denison-Pender took this excellent picture there on 9 July.



(Robin Denison-Pender)

Table 2. Butterflies recorded in Barcombe Parish in 2021

Brimstone	Orange-tip
Brown Argus	Painted Lady
Brown Hairstreak	Peacock
Clouded Yellow	Purple Emperor
Comma	Purple Hairstreak
Common Blue	Red Admiral
Dingy Skipper	Ringlet
Essex Skipper	Silver-washed Fritillary
Gatekeeper	Small Copper
Green Hairstreak	Small Heath
Green-veined White	Small Skipper
Holly Blue	Small Tortoiseshell
Large Skipper	Small White
Large White	Speckled Wood
Marbled White	Wall
Meadow Brown	White Admiral

C. Damselflies and Dragonflies (Odonata)

A total of 24 species were recorded in the parish during 2021 and are shown in Table 3. A few highlights are illustrated below.

Golden-ringed Dragonfly. A single male of this magnificent species was at Knowlands on 26 July and is only the second record for the parish. It moved around the site being seen in several spots. This is a species that is more usually at home on Ashdown Forest.



Small Red-eyed Damselfly. This species has established itself in the UK in a little over 20 years so eight (including two pairs in tandem) on a small garden pond in Barcombe on 29 July is of interest.



Southern Migrant Hawker. After the first records for the parish in 2020 in Knowlands Wood, four were seen there during 15-16 July. Although many dragonflies disperse widely after emergence, and often to drier habitats, that the species has chosen this woodland is of interest. It would be good to find where they breed locally. The photo shows a male – also known as a Blue-eyed Hawker.



Willow Emerald Damselfly. The arrival of this species into several locations within the parish was a significant highlight. In 2016, this damselfly was only known at one Sussex location (Woods Mill) but it has since spread rapidly, perhaps as a result of climate change. A male photographed near the Anchor on 24 August is shown and the inset shows egg-laying scars on willow found at Knowlands Farm on 13 October.



Common Darter. Two photos of this common dragonfly species are shown – one on a Barcombe garden pond on 18 July and an extremely late one at Knowlands Farm on 2 December (the last dragonfly reported in Sussex for the year).



Table 3. Dragonflies / Damselflies recorded in Barcombe Parish in 2021

Azure Damselfly	Golden-ringed Dragonfly
Banded Demoiselle	Hairy Dragonfly
Beautiful Demoiselle	Large Red Damselfly
Black-tailed Skimmer	Migrant Hawker
Blue-tailed Damselfly	Red-eyed Damselfly
Broad-bodied Chaser	Ruddy Darter
Brown Hawker	Scarce Chaser
Common Blue Damselfly	Small Red-eyed Damselfly
Common Darter	Southern Hawker
Downy Emerald	Southern Migrant Hawker
Emperor Dragonfly	White-legged Damselfly
Four-spotted Chaser	Willow Emerald Damselfly

D. Miscellaneous flora, fungi and fauna

Illustrations of some of the huge variety of other wildlife recorded during the year in the parish:



Butcher's Broom (Ruscus aculeatus),
Knowlands Wood, 1 January



Wood Dog Violet (Viola reichenbachiana),
Knowlands Wood, 1 April



Early Purple Orchid (Orchis mascula), Old
railway track north of Barcombe, 21 April



Bluebell (Endymion non-scriptus), Knowlands
Wood, 5 May



Common Spotted Orchid (Dactylorhiza fuchsii), Old railway track north of Barcombe, 3 June



Grass Vetchling (Lathyrus nissolia), Knowlands Farm, 3 June



Common Cow-wheat (Melampyrum pratense), Knowlands Wood, 5 June



Moth Mullein (Verbascum blattaria), Knowlands Wood, 11 July



Pyramidal Orchid (Anacamptis pyramidalis), Old railway track north of Barcombe, 26 June



Spear Thistle (Cirsium vulgare), near Village Hall, 13 Aug (Nick Gant)



Fungus (Tremella probably mesenterica), near Water Treatment Works, 7 January



Fungus (probably Velvet Shank Flammulina velutipes), Knowlands Wood, 23 January



Puffball (Lycoperdon probably perlatum), Barcombe area, 18 October (Clare Stewart)



Candlesnuff Fungus (Xylaria hypoxylon), Barcombe area, 26 November (Therri Lahood)



Fly Agaric (Amanita muscaria), Barcombe area (Alison Akehurst)



Scarlet Waxcap (Hygrocybe coccinea), Spithurst Churchyard, 6 November



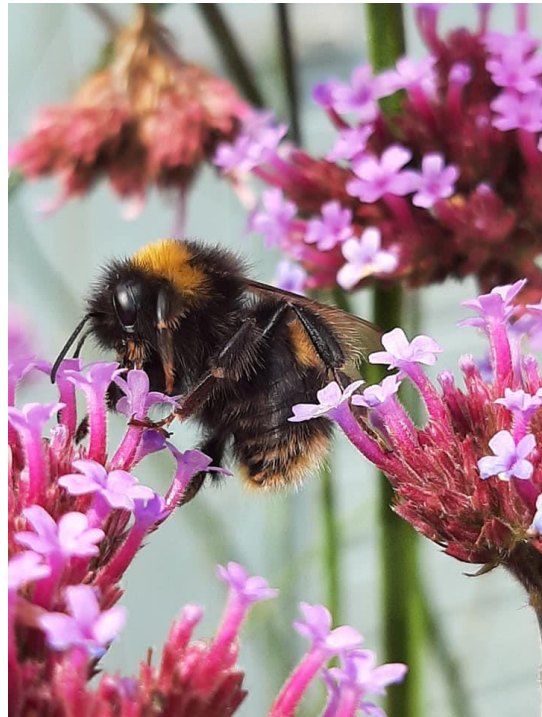
*Great Crested Newt, Barcombe area, 17 June
(Anne Livesey)*



*Common Frog, Barcombe area, 8 September
(Robin St. Clair Jones)*



*Honey Bee, Barcombe area, 20 May (Trish
Taylor)*



*Bumblebee, Barcombe area, 9 August (Debbie
Moore)*



Dark-edged Bee-fly, Old railway track north of Barcombe, 27 March



Semaphore Flies, Knowlands Farm, 11 July



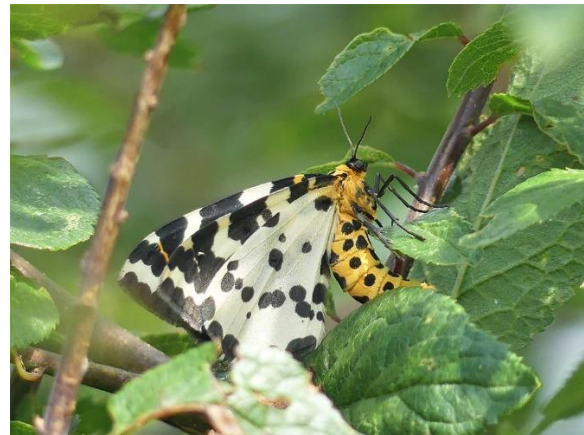
Hummingbird Hawkmoth, Barcombe, 24 June



Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar, Barcombe, 8 August



Leopard Moth, Barcombe area, 15 August (Andrew Chapman)



Magpie Moth, Knowlands Farm, 23 August



Lesser Stag Beetle, Barcombe, 1 July



Fox, Barcombe, 31 January



Fox cub, Barcombe, 23 June (Paul Trower)

E. Some examples of habitat around the parish



Knowlands Farm (in hoar-frost), 10 January



Wild About Barcombe, 15 March



Sidehills, 4 April



Old railway track north of Barcombe, 4 April



Knowlands Wood, 5 May



Knowlands Farm, 30 May



Old railway track north of Barcombe, 19 May



Barcombe Reservoir (no public access), 14 June



The Bevern at Barcombe Mills, 24 August



Spithurst Churchyard, 10 October



Knowlands Farm pond, 22 December



Barcombe Mills, 31 December

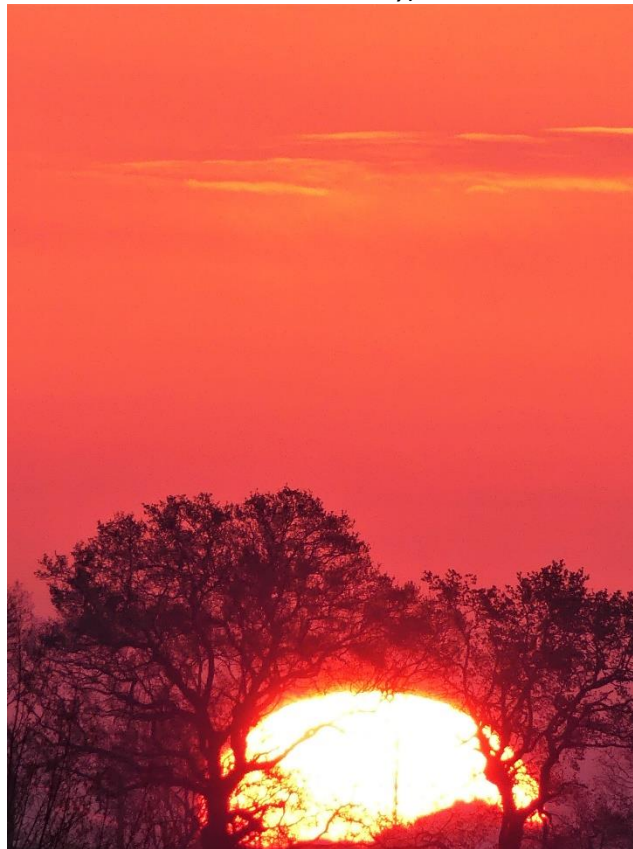
And some dramatic skies!



Sunrise, Barcombe, 24 January (Therri Lahood)



Dramatic sky, Barcombe area, 22 May (Kate Carey)



Sunrise over Barcombe, 2 May

Appendix 1. Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre – Barcombe Parish taxa as of July 2019

- Note that taxa doesn't equate to species (e.g., taxa includes sub-species).
- Some caution should be applied as total of taxa includes some where ID is generic e.g. "A Reptile" or "An Amphibian".
- Some data relates to records just outside parish.
- More updated assessments in October 2020 found Butterflies = 36 species (with one historic record added since); Dragonflies & Damselflies = 26 species (with one added since) and Birds = 205 species (with one added since).

Taxon Group	Taxa
Amphibians	7
Birds	214
Fish - Bony	18
Fish - Jawless	1
Fungi	62
Higher Plants - Conifers	7
Higher Plants - Ferns	13
Higher Plants - Flowering Plants	708
Higher Plants - Horsetails	5
Invertebrates - Alderflies	1
Invertebrates - Ants, Bees, Sawflies & Wasps	24
Invertebrates - Beetles	218
Invertebrates - Booklice	1
Invertebrates - Butterflies	33
Invertebrates - Caddis Flies	58
Invertebrates - Crustaceans	9
Invertebrates - Dragonflies & Damselflies	27
Invertebrates - Flatworms	6
Invertebrates - Grasshoppers & Crickets	7
Invertebrates - Mayflies	22
Invertebrates - Molluscs	30
Invertebrates - Moths	339
Invertebrates - Scorpionflies	1
Invertebrates - Sea Anemones, Jellyfish & Corals	1
Invertebrates - Segmented Worms	16
Invertebrates - Spiders	6
Invertebrates - Springtails	1
Invertebrates - Stoneflies	5
Invertebrates - Ticks & Mites	2
Invertebrates - True Bugs	37
Invertebrates - True Flies	34
Lichens	56
Lower Plants - Algae	1
Lower Plants - Liverworts	14
Lower Plants - Mosses	115
Lower Plants - Stoneworts	1
Mammals - Terrestrial (bats)	11
Mammals - Terrestrial (excl. bats)	26
Reptiles	5
Slime Moulds	1
	2,143