

Wild about summer

by Nigel Jackman

For us, summer is a time for leisurely indulgences. For the wildlife of the Park, however, it is a time of frantic reproduction, birth and growth – a brief, but vital time of warmth, long hours of daylight, and plenty.

There is so much to see in this special season. Newly born deer will start to emerge from the safety of the bracken, while the stags and bucks will be gaining in vitality, putting on fat and body weight, and growing new antlers prior to the autumn rut. Linger at dusk to look for pipistrelle and daubenton bats as they sweep the Pen Ponds for insects. Listen and look out for diminutive little owls, flitting from perch to ground as they feed their fast-growing fledglings in close attendance.

Amongst the many species of birds breeding in the Park, kestrels, green woodpeckers and stonechats with young families are well worth watching. Not surprisingly, though, late summer can be somewhat quiet for many birds as they retire to safety whilst undergoing their moult.



Each a little gem, and active at this time of the year, look out for any of the Park's numerous species of dragonflies, including hawkers, emperor, chaser, skimmer and darter, a variety of damselflies, and banded demoiselles on Beverley Brook. Over Pen Ponds you may be lucky enough to see kestrel-sized hobbies as they hawk the skies in search of dragonflies



and other large insects on the wing, feeding up before they leave to over-winter in Africa. Other visitors from Africa include swallows, swifts and martins; also common terns skimming over the Pen Ponds where they nest on man-made tern rafts.

Everywhere the Park is draped in greenery, the trees resplendent in full leaf, and building up their autumn fruits. Bracken reaches its peak, while swathes of tall, sun-dried grasses give a hint of the African savanna.

Spot colonies of wild bees and hornets nesting in tree holes. Look closely at the grasslands, brambles and ragwort for gatekeeper, meadow brown and ringlet (see back cover image), small heath and small copper, just some of our butterfly jewels. Dainty purple hairstreaks flutter amongst the oak canopies.

Enjoy all this, and more!