

56p

Plants and Animals
of
Wotton-under-Edge
(Gloucestershire)

By

G. B. Masefield, M.A., D.Sc.

1985

To be obtained from
Cotswold Book Room,
26, Long Street, Wotton-under-Edge,
Gloucestershire, GL12 7BT.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the wildlife of Wotton-under-Edge, whether you are a new resident or an old one who has not yet had the leisure to explore our countryside! This brief account, which has been compiled with the help of many Wotton naturalists who generously agreed to share their local knowledge, is meant to help you to enjoy these delights. It is intended for the beginner, not for the already expert biologist, and so will stick to the common names and not bother you with Latin ones except where no other names exist. Plants and animals so small that they can only be seen under a microscope will be ignored. Because the area described must have boundaries, they will be those of Wotton civil parish; but this is a large parish of 1,895 hectares (4,683 acres), and being on the varied terrain of the Cotswold escarpment, it has a particularly rich spread of plants and animals.

If we enjoy the local wildlife ourselves, we should do nothing to destroy it but should try to conserve it so that others can enjoy it too. There are many parishes in England where primroses or cowslips cannot now be found because people have picked them so much; many birds have become scarcer because people used to take their eggs.

In these matters we have to obey the laws, which have lately been much tightened up and especially by the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981. It is now illegal for anyone to uproot any wild plant without the permission of the landowner or occupier. A number of extremely rare plants (62 at the time of writing) are specially protected and must not be picked, cut, or their seed collected without a licence; these include one plant, the limestone woundwort, which is found in Wotton. It is illegal intentionally to kill, injure or capture any wild bird (except certain pest or sporting species) or to damage their nests or eggs or to take the eggs. There is again a list of specially protected birds which may not be disturbed (e.g. by photographing without a licence) while at or near the nest. Certain other animals are on specially protected lists: badgers may not be intentionally killed, injured, or captured, and hedgehogs and shrews may not without a licence be trapped, snared or killed by certain cruel means. Bats enjoy very special protection and even a householder who has them in the roof must consult the Nature Conservancy Council before taking any strong measures against them! No reptiles or amphibians (such as frogs and toads) may be sold.

The law places some further restraints, chiefly affecting the landowner or occupier, on areas designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. There is one such area in Wotton parish. This covers the upper part of Wotton Hill, the adjacent area of escarpment beechwood owned by the National Trust, and Conygre Wood (owned by Wotton parish council). It includes much of the area over which the limestone woundwort has at different times been found growing, and the quarry beside the Old London Road which is valued by geologists for its fossil beds.