



BWGC

Registered Charity No.  
1169353



# Bishop's Waltham Gardening Club

*Call me odd if you like*

(my youngest does), but when I am gardening, I love seeing the creepy crawlies that are disturbed. When I took over my first half plot, in summer 2016, it was covered in all sorts. As we cleared it, I found a spider I have never seen before, a tiger spider, which we carefully removed to a hedgerow in the hope it would be equally happy there.



I didn't know the UK had such striking spiders.

This week I also found another first - not nearly so glamorous. It looked to me like a small leather jacket with a piece of rotting vegetation attached, but no, the long tail is part of it.



I wonder if any of you know what it is?  
The answer at the end of this newsletter.

Now we have had this wonderful spell of warmer weather, it is great to be able to get out onto our plots again. The ground has dried out so any late digging and ground clearance can be done. With the effect of lockdown making us appreciate our outdoor space even more, I think the allotments are showing the effects of our efforts last summer and autumn, so hopefully we can all be ready for whatever 2021's growing season throws at us. It is very easy to get lulled into anticipation of the good weather continuing, and planting out into cold soil. The soil can be warmed by covering with dark materials, but then there is a cost to pay. The extra protection this affords the mice and voles, enables them to escape owls, by being able to keep themselves confined under our kindly provided run coverings. I certainly have never seen as much evidence of small rodent activity as this year. Hopefully it won't mean an attack on the sweetcorn in the summer.

At least, I haven't seen any signs of rats. They are a little worry-some, with not only their greater ability to destroy a crop, but the fact that they carry the bacteria *Leptospira* spp which can enter our bodies through cuts on the skin, and can cause humans kidney and liver damage, and can even be fatal. This is also one of the reasons why dogs are not allowed on the allotments as even a dog vaccinated against *Leptospira* can become a carrier and can secrete the organisms when they urinate. This is not very safe when you think of a male dog's need to pee against elevated vegetation!



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The Club's planning ahead for the year is by necessity going to be different. Usually by now, apart from speakers in the hall the trustees have arranged coach trips, the Red Lion Street sale and the Summer Show.

Despite having new Government deadlines, uncertainty about the 'not before' proviso makes it difficult to confirm any bookings.

We hope to open the shop for manure sales only and access to lawnmowers, if dry enough in mid-March.

Subject to no change in government requirements we hope to open the shop fully in Mid-May, as more of our volunteers gain the protection of vaccination.

The Red Lion Street Sale will not take place there but will morph into a series of tabletop sales down at the shed from mid-May onwards, so pot on any extra seeds, cuttings and perennial divisions for us, please.

The Summer Show is unlikely to take place in its usual form. If the July date is cancelled, we hope to arrange for a show to take place in September, in a hall or possibly under a marquee. Await further news.

The talk by Mandy Bradshaw on Wednesday had some great ideas for gardening visits, once things open up again. Some of the best may become coach trips.

Nicole has worked hard to keep our speaker programme active so don't forget our future events.

24<sup>th</sup> March - a return of our very popular speaker Adam Pasco 'Spring into action'

28<sup>th</sup> April - Matthew Biggs 'The RHS - A Nation in Bloom'

26<sup>th</sup> May – Alan Edmondson 'The Shady Garden@'

Reminders to request the links will be sent out nearer the dates.

So how many of you could identify the critter over the page? It is a drone larva also known as the rat-tailed maggot.

They have a delightful natural history! Eggs are laid in stagnant water, manure heaps and even latrines. I have found articles, in the Sun newspaper, talking about them being found in the 'facilities' at music festivals.

The long tail is a syphon through which they breath in water while the front end consumes rotting material in the depths. I assume the one I found wandered from the manure on my plot to under a sack where I found it. Apparently, they look for drier spots to pupate.



*Eristalis tenax* a common drone fly in the UK

Have you found any unusual critters on your allotment? I would love to hear about them.

Annie Lowe