

## Chillerton and Gatcombe parish verge survey 2020

### White dead-nettle

#### The Unexpected Flower of the Month – April



It would have been easier to choose something more associated with spring and Easter such as the primrose, but it's the white dead-nettle that has caught the eye this April. It can be found on most verges and in large dense clumps, with square stems one to two feet high. Its expansion is aided by the way it spreads by creeping suckers. This spring we are seeing explosions of the flower and as in the past, children might be tempted to suck sweet nectar from its white flowers. It tastes a bit like honey.

The ring of white flowers around the stem contains plenty of nectar, an important food for bumble bees, especially early in the year before many other nectar-producing plants are in flower. When the bee lands on the bottom lip of the flower, the flower tube is too long for other bees to reach the nectar, luckily bumble bees have very long tongues. Even more annoying for small insects that like nectar, a ring of hairs inside the flower tube blocks their entry. While it is feeding, the bee's body brushes the stamens concealed in the top lip of the flower. The pollen that gets stuck on its body is taken away to other flowers, which is how the dead-nettle gets pollinated.

Before it flowers the white deadnettle can be confused with the stinging nettle as it has very similar leaves. However, it doesn't have any stinging hairs. Its name of 'dead' or 'blind' nettle refers to it not being able to cause injury.

The flowers and young leaves are edible. They can be used in salads or cooked as a vegetable.