

The Reading Naturalist

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THE READING NATURALIST

No. 7 for the Year 1954-55

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Editorial

In this issue of the Reading Naturalist, it has unfortunately been necessary to reduce the number of articles of general interest supporting the Recorders' Annual Reports to one. This has chiefly been for financial reasons, though there have been other contributory factors. However, the subject of the article offered is one that will appeal to most members, and Mr. Douglas's interesting and informative paper should provide both a source of enjoyment and a useful stimulus. To him and all our other contributors we offer our grateful thanks.

It is gratifying to learn that there has been a small but steady demand for earlier numbers of the Journal, from outside sources as well as from new members, as a result of which the first four are now out of print.

Enid M. Nelmes.

Editor.

Honorary Recorders

Botany: Miss J.I. Butler

Entomology: B. Baker

Geology: Prof. H.L. Hawkins, D.Sc., F.R.S., F.G.S.

Ornithology: E. V. Watson, B.Sc., Ph.D.

Ducks

By C.E. Douglas.

Reading naturalists have a reasonable chance of seeing fourteen species of duck in the course of the year without travelling more than ten miles from home. Yet excursions are made to distant waters in the hope of finding Smew (Mergus albellus), Goldeneye (Bucephala clangula), Scaup (Aythya marila) and the other rarer ducks, many of which could be sought on local waters with an almost equal chance of success. As it is not generally realised how regularly some of these rarer ducks visit us, this paper has been prepared with the object of making an up-to-date assessment of the status of each of the sixteen species which are reported from time to time in the Reading area.

The local countryside is interlaced with a complicated network of waterways formed by the River Thames and its tributaries. There are also many ponds, lakes and flooded gravel pits at least twenty of which are five acres or more in extent, the biggest, Burghfield Gravel Pit, occupying some eighty acres. It is not surprising then that ducks visit the Reading area, especially in winter, in such large numbers and in such variety. The gravel pits are perhaps the chief attraction, particularly those at Sonning Eye, Burghfield and Aldermaston, but the birds seem to find the lakes at Bulmershe and Englefield almost equally attractive. All these waters carry a large duck population in winter.

In assessing the status of the various species, the information which has resulted from the monthly Wildfowl Counts has proved of the greatest value. The counts, which are carried out on a national scale, are organised locally by the Reading Ornithological Club. Watchers undertake to visit selected waters on a specified date in certain months, usually August to April inclusive, and to count the numbers of each species of duck seen. In the Reading area, the selected waters are Bearwood, Bulmershe, Whiteknights and Sonning Eye Gravel Pit to the east of the town and Cranemoor Lake, Englefield, and Burghfield, Theale and Aldermaston Gravel Pits to the west. Where total counts are given in this paper, they are the totals for these selected waters only.

The main object of the Wildfowl Inquiry is to ascertain whether the numbers of the common species of wildfowl in the British Isles are increasing, diminishing or stationary. Much information of more local interest has been brought to light, however, and we know far more about our duck population now than we did before regular counting started in 1947. For example, it is now possible to estimate fairly accurately the local population of certain species at any season of the year. The counts have shown too, how the numbers of the various species fluctuate, not only from season to season, but from year to year. Interesting specific preferences for certain waters have also been clearly highlighted.

Ducks can be divided into two groups, the surface feeders such as Mallard (Anas platyrhynchos) and Teal (A. crecca), which obtain most of their food from shallow water, often up-ending in the process, and the diving ducks, such as Pochard (Aythya ferina) and Tufted Duck (A. fuligula), which get their food by diving and rarely up-end. The surface feeders dabbling about in the shallows and reed-beds are liable to be overlooked. Diving ducks, on the other hand, often keep to open water and are conspicuous, particularly so as they are fond of congregating in large compact flocks. This difference must not be forgotten when attempting to

estimate numbers. For example, a casual observer on an occasional winter excursion might see many Tufted Ducks and Pochard but few Teal and Wigeon (Anas penelope) and draw the erroneous conclusion that these two diving ducks are more plentiful locally than the two surface feeders.

Taking the species one by one, it is proper to deal first with our commonest duck, the Mallard, which frequents every water, large or small and breeds on most. Because it is so widespread, an attempt at any time to estimate the total number present in the area would be difficult; in the breeding season, when dispersal is complete, it would be impossible. Counts show that hundreds are already present on the larger waters by early autumn and that numbers remain high until February when there is a marked decline. The maximum number present on the waters covered by the counts averages just over one thousand. Counts reveal no marked migration peaks and although it is certain that migrant birds enter the area, the pattern of high autumn and winter numbers with a decline in late winter and spring can be partly explained by the flocking of resident birds after the breeding season on the larger waters covered by the counts and their dispersal to smaller waters after pairing.

The Teal, an abundant winter visitor, is only occasionally recorded in summer. It is not known to breed in the area now, although two pairs are reported to have nested near Reading in 1921. Counts show that the average maximum total in the peak period, which usually occurs between December and March, is about three hundred, the majority being at Bulmershe, Cranemoor Lake and Aldermaston Gravel Pits. This must be far short of the number actually present in the area, however, for Teal are widely dispersed about the smaller ponds and streams and on flood water not covered by the monthly counts. Numbers are liable to sudden fluctuations depending mainly on the weather and the presence or absence of flood water. One thousand and thirty were reported at Bulmershe North Lake on February 27th 1938 but this is exceptional and in recent years there have been very few records of flocks exceeding two hundred.

The Wigeon has bred in Berkshire, but there is no record of it having nested near Reading. With us it is almost exclusively a winter visitor, summer occurrences being quite rare. The first arrivals appear towards the end of September and numbers build up rather slowly to a maximum of about two hundred and fifty in the peak period which usually occurs as late as January or February. There are still a lot of Wigeon in the area at the end of March, but about this time the majority depart and all have gone by early April. Occasionally for larger numbers are present and on February 27th 1938 about one thousand were seen on the Bulmershe Lakes alone. A remarkable characteristic of this duck is its preference for the waters to the east of Reading, the Bulmershe Lakes in particular. On the Kennet Valley waters a flock of over a dozen is unusual.

The Shoveler (Spatula clypeata) is another species which, like the Teal, has bred in the Reading area in the past but, so far as is known, does not do so now. At least five pairs nested at the Sewage Farm in 1922 and breeding continued there until 1927.

They were present there in the summer, and may have bred, for a few years after this, but eventually conditions became unsuitable and they no longer appeared. It was thought that this local population of breeding birds might disperse to suitable waters nearby, but this did not prove to be the case. The only other breeding record is of a duck seen with young at Sonning Sewage Farm in 1946. It seems very probable, however, that conditions at one or more of the flooded gravel pits will soon be to their liking and we shall again be able to number the Shoveler among our breeding birds. Though a regular winter visitor in larger numbers now than formerly, the Shoveler is never abundant, the total number at the peak period being about fifty. These are almost equally divided between Cranemoor Lake and the Aldermaston Gravel Pits, for on all the other waters in the area it is little more than a straggler. Numbers build up fairly quickly in the autumn and remain almost stationary until March when there is a slow decline as the birds move away to their breeding grounds.

Both the Tufted Duck and the Pochard are common in winter and both breed with us in small numbers. The winter flocks of Pochard build up quite rapidly in November to a peak in January and February. A decline is apparent in March and by April most of the birds have left. Although the maximum total number present in the area averages about one hundred and fifty, considerably more may stay with us for short periods in mid-winter. On January 9th 1954 there were one hundred and sixty at Burghfield Gravel Pit alone. A few pairs of Pochard have nested intermittently in Berkshire since 1907 and in Oxfordshire since 1923. One or two pairs have bred successfully at Aldermaston Gravel Pit every year since 1952 at least, but this is the only known breeding site in the locality.

The winter flocks of Tufted Ducks are slow to build up in the autumn, but numbers having reached a maximum by the turn of the year, remain high until March. Even in April there is no rapid decline and it is not until the end of that month, or early May, that the winter flocks finally disintegrate. It is interesting to note in this connection that the Tufted Duck has a later breeding season than the Pochard. The maximum total number present in the area in winter averages about two hundred. Tufted Ducks first bred locally in 1921, when two pairs nested at Cranemoor Lake, Englefield. Since then breeding has taken place intermittently on several waters in the area and although a few pairs now nest annually at Aldermaston Gravel Pit and Cranemoor Lake, it is only in recent years that they have done so regularly.

The six species already dealt with are all common, at least in winter. Of the rarer species which follow, some are regular winter visitors in small numbers, others are irregular visitors and two are merely vagrants. Three, however, can be relied upon to appear almost every winter, namely the Pintail (Anas acuta), the Goldeneye and the Smew. Although a year rarely passes without at least one report of a Pintail, the numbers may fluctuate from a solitary individual in one year to flocks of up to a dozen in another. The bulk of the records have occurred in December, January and February, but Pintail have been reported in recent years in every month from October to April.

The Goldeneye, which is much more of a hard weather duck than the Pintail, but less so than the Smew, appears singly or in small parties of rarely more than three. There appears to be no marked predominance of adults over young or vice versa, or of one sex over the other. This is in marked contrast to the Smew, of which species adult males are decidedly rare. Brownheaded Smeus appear singly or in small parties and may be expected during any long spell of severe weather, often remaining for a week or so after the weather has broken.

The next five species are irregular visitors all of which have occurred several times in recent years. The Garganey (Anas querquedula) is unique in being a summer visitor although with us it is usually seen on spring passage. Summer and autumn records are few and it is not known to have bred locally. The only winter record is of one at Theale on December 5th 1898.

The first local record of the Gadwall (Anas strepera) and the first also for the County, was of a pair shot and another seen at Maiden Erlegh on January 6th 1915. From then until 1948 it was reported on very few occasions, yet it has been seen in five of the last seven years, always between November and March. Whether this is due to an increase in the number of Gadwall or in the number of observers is open to question. It is an in-conspicuous bird and may have been overlooked in the past. However, Witherby et alia suggest that it is increasing.

The Scaup is another rare winter visitor which is being recorded more regularly now than formerly, although not so regularly as the Gadwall. It usually appears singly or in very small parties in December and January, but there are a few records outside these months. It may be overlooked to some extent on account of its similarity in both sexes to the Tufted Duck, with which it often associates.

There were three local records of Common Scoter (Melanitta nigra) before 1947, but like the last two species it is being reported more frequently now, having appeared in five of the nine years from 1947 to 1955. Females are seen more often than males. It is interesting to find that as many birds have been reported in summer as in winter, and the earliest record of one shot at Shinfield in 1867 and the most recent of four females or immatures at Sonning Eye Gravel Pit in 1955 were both summer occurrences.

The Goosander (Mergus merganser) is a hard-weather duck appearing in most winters, usually in small parties. Twenty-one were seen together at Bulmershe on January 18th 1938. As with the Smew and the Common Scoter, although not quite to the same degree, adult males are rather rare.

Two vagrants remain to complete the list of sixteen species. A single Ferruginous Duck or White-eyed Pochard (Aythya nyroca) was seen at Burghfield Gravel Pit on October 25th 1950 and another, or the same, on November 30th of that year. A wild bird is thought to have joined the feral birds at Bulmershe in April and September 1938.

A pair of Red-breasted Merganser (Mergus serrator) were shot near Reading in 1795, three were shot at Bulmershe in 1883 and one was shot at the Sewage Farm some years before 1932. It is gratifying to be able to report that a male which spent two days at Burghfield Gravel Pit in February 1955 got away unharmed.

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WEATHER RECORDS FOR 1954

Data supplied by M. Parry.

As in previous years, the data refer to Reading University Meteorological Station, except those for sunshine, which were recorded at Sutton's Seed Trial Grounds. The differences between the records from the old site of the University Meteorological Station and the one to which it was transferred in 1953 are regarded as negligible. Runs of consecutive "rain" and "sun" days are included here for the second year in succession, and in this connection it should be noted that, statistically, a "rain" day is a day on which rainfall exceeds only 0.01 ins. The temperature and rainfall averages refer to the periods 1921-50 and 1800-1915, respectively.

STATION - READING UNIVERSITY. HEIGHT ABOVE SEA LEVEL - 148 ft. 1954.

		JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY.	JUN.	JUL.	AUG.	SEP.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.	YEAR
MEAN DAILY TEMPERATURES °F	MAX.	42.6	43.7	50.9	55.9	61.7	64.8	65.6	67.4	64.3	60.6	52.0	49.6	56.6
	MIN.	32.6	33.0	37.1	37.3	44.9	50.4	52.3	52.2	48.5	48.5	38.7	39.3	42.9
	MEAN	37.6	38.3	44.0	46.6	53.3	57.6	58.9	59.8	56.4	54.5	45.3	44.5	49.7
EXTREME TEMPERATURES °F	E. MAX DATE	57 15	55 22	62 11	62 30	80 12	73 4, 24	73 14, 20	78 31	82 1	68 2	59 6, 11	57 2	82 Sep. 1
	E. MIN. DATE	17 28	19 6	21 2	31 8	35 8	44 15, 30	44 7	45 17	36 23	29 26	27 18	26 11	17 Jan. 28
	E. GRASS MIN. DATE	7 28	11 7	20 8	19 20	25 8	37 30	35 7	37 17	29 23	21 26	23 15	14 11	7 Jan. 28
DAYS WITH " "	FROST	15	8	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	3	37
	GROUND FROST	20	18	14	22	6	0	0	0	2	3	13	13	111
SUNSHINE HRS. (SEED TRIAL) GROUNDS	SUM.	70.5	68.3	103.6	202.0	146.3	148.2	158.3	136.0	169.6	84.5	61.3	55.8	1404.4
	% POSS.	27	24	28	49	30	29	32	30	45	26	23	23	32
	DAILY MEAN	2.27	2.44	3.34	6.73	4.72	4.94	5.11	4.39	5.65	2.73	2.04	1.80	3.85
PRECIPITATION INS.	AMOUNT	1.28	2.37	2.17	0.24	2.83	3.82	2.40	2.93	1.51	1.89	4.82	2.69	28.95
	RAIN DAYS	11	17	17	3	16	14	13	16	20	15	18	11	171
	MAX. RAIN IN 1 DAY	0.58	0.47	0.51	0.17	0.59	1.08	0.95	0.59	0.23	0.42	0.93	1.70	1.70
	DATE	21	17	6	1	28	5	25	9	10	23	6	8	Dec. 8
	LONGEST RUN OF CONSECUTIVE RAIN DAYS	2	8	5	2	5	9	6	10	6	3	9	3	10
	LONGEST RUN OF CONSECUTIVE DRY DAYS	4	5	5	25	6	7	5	7	3	5	4	8	25
	SNOW OR SLEET DAYS	6	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
	DAYS SNOW LYING	5	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
THUNDERSTORM ACTIVITY	DAYS OF THUNDER	0	0	1	1	5	3	2	4	2	0	1	1	20
	DAYS OF HAIL	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	5
AVERAGES. MEAN DAILY TEMPERATURE °F	MAX.	45.2	46.3	51.8	56.9	63.7	69.2	72.3	71.5	66.8	58.8	50.2	45.7	58.2
	MIN.	34.3	34.5	36.1	40.1	44.8	50.5	54.1	53.4	49.9	43.8	38.3	35.3	42.9
	MEAN.	39.8	40.4	44.0	48.5	54.3	59.9	63.2	62.5	58.3	51.3	44.3	40.5	50.6
PRECIPITATION	AMOUNT	1.9	1.64	1.71	1.46	1.65	1.95	2.03	2.09	1.70	2.98	2.30	2.59	24.0
	RAIN DAYS	15	13	13	12	10	10	12	13	11	15	15	15	153

Extracts from the Recorder's Report for Botany 1953-54.

By Kathleen Butler

(Nomenclature as in "Flora of the British Isles" by Clapham, Tutin & Warburg.)

Owing to the exceptionally mild weather at the end of 1953, observations of late flowerings were made by several members, as many as 50 species being seen in bloom up to the New Year.

At the Society's Field Meetings during the year, one or two plants of special interest were seen. A wood at Emmer Green was visited on April 21st to see Lathraea squamaria (Toothwort), a parasite on elm, in full bloom and covering a large area. On the excursion to Silchester ruins on August 14th, a clump of Chenopodium bonus-henricus (All Good) was noted near the Church, where it has persisted for many years. On September 4th in the Streatley district, Adonis annua (Pheasant's Eye) was located by Miss S. Watson. Although Druce does not record it from Streatley, it is mentioned in the local Flora of 1900 and the Reading Museum has six records from (presumably) this area, so it is gratifying to know that this little annual still persists to brighten our cornfields. On the excursion to Collin's End and Hardwick Slopes on September 25th, members were shocked to find that the south slope overlooking the Thames, so well known to Reading Naturalists and the home of many interesting chalk plants, had fallen yet another victim to the plough. On another slope, Cuscuta epithymum (Common Dodder), and a large colony of Atropa belladonna (Deadly Nightshade) were seen.

Miss L. Cobb reports that, at the annual Fungus Foray on October 9th, fungi were scarce and in poor condition, and many species usually found were lacking. The genera Holetus and Coprinus were particularly scarce, but Cortinarius appeared more plentiful than usual. New records were:-

Claudopus variabilis; C. hemitrichus; Hygrophorus eburneus;
H. chlorophanus; and the Ascomycete; Leotia lubrica.

Members' Records.

Oxalis acetosella (Wood Sorrel). An unusual form with rich pink-purple flowers was found near Pamber Forest on April 20th by Dr. Gravely. This is probably the variety subpurpurascens, with flowers of rose-purple, lilac or lilac-blue, mentioned by Druce.

Convallaria majalis (Lily of the Valley). Extensive beds covering a large area in a wood near Brimpton, May 19th. (The Recorder).

Narcissus pseudonarcissus (Daffodil). Forming the ground flora of a small beech wood near Peppard, April 12th (The Recorder).

Astragalus glycyphyllos (Milk Vetch). A well established patch on the road-side near Twyford, and on waste ground nearby (Miss M. Holly).

Galium pumilum (Slender Bedstraw). Recorded from Sulham (Miss Towne).

Linaria x sepium (L. vulgaris x L. repens). Hybrid Toadflax). Between Upper and Lower Basildon (Mrs. Simmonds).

Picris hieracioides (Picris Hawkweed). Between Upper and Lower Basildon (Mrs. Simmonds).

Cirsium eriophorum (Wooly Thistle). Basildon Park (Miss Stone).

Ophioglossum vulgatum (Adder's Tongue). Growing among Fritillaria meleagris near Riseley (Mrs. Paul).

Silvaum silaus (Pepper Saxifrage). Recorded from Theale (Miss Cobb).

Melandrium rubrum (Red Campion). Along the canal bank near Aldermaston Station; Aldermaston wharf and main gravel pit (Mr. C.E. Douglas).

Erophila verna (Common Whitlow Grass). Abundant at Burghfield and Aldermaston gravel pits; sparingly at Cottage Lane gravel pit (Mr. Douglas).

Hypericum montanum (Mountain St. John's Wort). One small area in Sulham Wood (Mr. Douglas).

Sanguisorba officinalis (Great Burnet). Plentiful along railway line near Theale gravel pit (Mr. Douglas).

Drosera intermedia (Long-leaved Sundew). Hazeley Heath (Mrs. Simmonds).

Gentiana pneumonanthe (Marsh Gentian) and Serratula tinctoria (Sawwort). Both at Hook Common, September 10th (Mrs. Simmonds).

Frunella laciniata (Cut-leaved Self-heal). Found by Mrs. Paul on July 14th at Fawley, Bucks. - a welcome discovery as its other locality near Peppard was destroyed by the plough in 1946.

Pilularia globulifera (Pillwort) - near Peppard, May 21st (Mrs. Paul).

Senecio integrifolius (Field Fleawort). Two specimens of this rarity of chalk grassland were seen on the Berkshire Downs on June 20th by Mr. Douglas.

Salvia pratensis (Meadow Sage). One specimen in Unhill Bottom (Mr. Douglas).

ORCHIDS

One or two more uncommon species have been located during the year.

Platanthera bifolia (Lesser Butterfly Orchid). Two specimens in Unhill Wood (Mr. Douglas).

P. chlorantha (Greater Butterfly Orchid). One specimen in Unhill Wood (Mr. Douglas).

Coeloglossum viride (Frog Orchid). On the Fair Mile (Miss Stone).

Orchis insectifera (Fly Orchid). 24 fine specimens on a chalk slope near Mapledurham, June 1st (The Recorder).

Epigogium aphyllum (Spurred Coral Root). This orchid, the highlight of 1953, was not observed in Oxfordshire this year, although its site was visited on several occasions.

Garden Escapes and Alien Plants becoming naturalised in the district.

Garden Escapes.

Veronica filiformis (Slender Speedwell). Bank of Kennet and Avon Canal between Burghfield Bridge and Southcote Lock (Mrs. Simmonds). Peppard Chalk Pit (Mrs. Paul).

Aquilegia vulgaris (Columbine). A fine healthy plant at Bix Bottom (Mrs. Paul).

Doronicum pardalianches (Leopard's Bane). Mrs. Paul has watched this probable garden escape establish itself at Peppard over a period of ten years.

Alien Plants.

Sisymbrium orientale. By coal tip, Peppard (Mrs. Paul). Abundant on rubbish dump at Theale gravel pit (Mr. Douglas).

Galinsoga parviflora. Weed in streets at Henley (Mrs. Paul).

Impatiens parviflora. Large quantities in Lewis' Timber Yard, Caversham (Mrs. Paul).

I. capensis (Orange Balsam). Abundant at Theale and Aldermaston gravel pits and along canal bank at Aldermaston. (Mr. Douglas). Along the Kennet westwards to Theale, but absent between Aldermaston and Woolhampton (Miss Cobb).

Extracts from the Recorder's Report for Entomology for 1953-54.

By B. BAKER

I should first like to thank the following workers for supplying material for this report:- Miss Cobb; Miss Nelmes; Air-Marshall Sir Robert Saundby and Messrs. H.L. Dolton; P.W. Hanney; T.W. Harman and R.W. Parfitt. Thanks are also due to Mr. W.A. Smallcombe for again allowing full use of the Museum records for incorporation in the report.

Some comment has been made on the usefulness of recording long lists of scientific names, and wherever possible English names have been gleaned from the literature; many of our insects are known only by scientific names, however. The nomenclature here adopted is that of Kloet and Hincks.

Order Hemiptera (Bugs). Sub-order - Heteroptera.

Mr. Hanney records the following species of Corixa new to the district:- C. falleni and C. praeusta, Tilehurst light trap, August 3rd; C. panzeri and C. concinna, Aldermaston gravel pits, September 12th; C. germani, Burghfield gravel pits, August 21st.

Order Plecoptera (Stone-flies).

Nemoura variegata was abundant in marsh in Pamber Forest on May 15th, when adults were freely beaten from sallow. Isoperla grammatica, an attractive green species, was taken, also in some numbers, on grasses near a stream at Ridge Copse, Hants, on May 30th. Leuctra geniculata was beaten from willows by the Kennet in September.

Order Orthoptera (Grasshoppers and Crickets).

Miss Cobb reports a specimen of Meconema thalassina at light in Northcourt Avenue, Reading, on September 18th. This species, commonly known as the Mute Bush Cricket, since it has no stridulatory apparatus, often comes to light in autumn, and I have had it visit sugar patches on several occasions.

Order Ephemeroptera (May-flies).

On June 30th, multitudes of the small may-fly, Caenis horaria (sometimes known as the Angler's Curse and sometimes as the White Midge), came to our lamp on the Kennet near Burghfield Bridge.

Order Odonata (Dragon-flies).

On May 5th, a fine specimen of Gomphus vulgatissimus (the Club-tail Dragon-fly) was brought into the Museum from Woodley. The following day a number of cast nymphal skins were found in the Thames near Caversham Bridge, some floating in the water and others attached to reed stems. Another of these beautiful black-and-yellow dragon-flies was found at Pangbourne on May 23rd, when many more cast skins were evident. Agrion splendens (the Banded Agrion

Dragon-fly) was first noticed on May 23rd, at Pangbourne. It was flying near Caversham Bridge on May 27th, and on June 27th was out in swarms on the Kennet near Burghfield Bridge. Walking among the reeds one immediately became surrounded by a cloud of black-spotted wings and metallic blue-and-green bodies. Also present were many Platycnemis pennipes (the White-legged Damsel-fly). The Thames at Caversham produced the first Ischnura elegans (the Common Ischnura) on May 27th. This is a pretty little damsel-fly, about the size of the White-legged Damsel-fly, but easily recognised by the blue banding on the abdomen. Mr. Hanney reports taking Orthetrum cancellatum (the Black-lined Orthetrum) along the Kennet on June 19th. The following day, Anax imperator (the Emperor Dragon-fly) the largest and finest of our Odonata and one capable of very high, soaring flight, was taken on Burghfield Common. Aeshna cyanea (the Southern Aeshna) was seen on July 31st in the beech wood at Sulham and was later noticed several times in Reading streets, far from water. It was still on the wing as late as October 17th. Lestes sponsa (the Green Lestes) was common around the pond on Burghfield Common on August 7th, continuing until August 28th, when it was noticed along with the scarlet males of Sympetrum striolatum (the Common Sympetrum) and A. grandis (the Brown Aeshna). On August 24th, a specimen of A. mixta (the Scarce Aeshna) that had been found in Beecham Road, Reading, was brought into the Museum. In the early hours of the morning of August 31st, nymphs of A. imperator were abundant at the edge of Burghfield Pond, shooting away into the darker water in the centre as a lamp was slowly moved round the pond. An even greater abundance of dragon-fly nymphs was reported by Mr. Hanney from a pond at Grazely, where both A. cyanea and Libellula quadrimaculata (the Four-spotted Libellula) were present on October 24th. Sympetrum scoticum (the Black Sympetrum) was reported from Padworth Common on October 10th, also by Mr. Hanney.

Order Neuroptera (Lace-wing Flies).

At Ridge Copse, Hants., on May 30th, Osmylus fulvicephalus (the Giant Lace-wing) was numerous, flying slowly round alder bushes bordering a stream.

Order Trichoptera (Caddis flies).

Work on this order during the year resulted in over 20 new records for the district, bringing the local list up to 52 species. The new records are: Phryganea grandis, Kennet, near Burghfield Bridge, June 30th; P. varia, fairly common at light at Burghfield Pond on August 30th and also at Coleman's Moor, October 10th; Colpotaulius incisus, beaten from reeds by the Kennet, September 12th; Limnephilus decipiens, swarming on October 17th in a backwater of the Kennet, where eggs were obtained later in the month; Halesus digitatus, Tilehurst light trap, October 13th and 28th; Notidobia ciliaris, very common on rushes near Caversham Bridge on May 20th, but absent a few days later; Goera pilosa, Kennet, at light, July 7th; Silo pallipes, river Pang near Tidmarsh, June 19th; Leptocerus nigronervosus, common on the Thames on June 3rd, skimming the surface well out over deep water; L. cinereus, common on the Kennet, June 27th and 29th; L. dissimilis, at light on the Kennet, not common, June 27th and 30th, July 7th; Triaenodes bicolor, Coleman's Moor, June 30th; Burghfield Pond, flying in heavy rain, July 3rd; T. conspersa, 1 from the Kennet near Theale, August 22nd; Oecetis furva, adults flying in intermittent sunshine over the large pond in the

pine wood at Padworth, August 22nd; Hydropsyche instabilis, Kennet, June 30th; H. angustipennis, common on grasses by the Kennet at Theale, August 22nd; H. guttata, 1 at Tilehurst light trap, August 28th; Polycentropus flavomaculatus common crawling in cracks in the wooden bridge over the Kennet near Burghfield Mill, June 30th; Holocentropus dubius, swept from rushes at Coleman's Moor, June 28th; Cyrtus trimaculatus, Kennet, at light, July 29th; Tinodes waeneri, Thames at Caversham Bridge, June 3rd; Psychomyia pusilla, Kennet, common at light, June 30th; Agapetus fuscipes, Kennet, July 29th, at light but not common. Hydroptila sparsa, Kennet, June 30th, to light at the wooden bridge; Rhyacophila dorsalis, Kennet at Woolhampton, common at light, June 5th.

Order Lepidoptera (Butterflies and Moths).

Mr. Dolton has sent me a full list of his year's activities with this order, with particular reference to Microlepidoptera. Much of it was carried out at Hilltop Pit, Norcot Road, Tilehurst, by permission of Messrs. Colliers Ltd.

Microlepidoptera from Hilltop Pit. Several larvae of Platyptilia gonodactyla (the Triangle-marked Plume Moth) were found in the stems of colts-foot, which was particularly common. Mines of Stigmella aurella (the Golden Pigmy) were numerous in bramble leaves. Several cases of Coleophora gryphipennella (the Vulture-feather Case) were found on wild rose, from which many adults of Argyrotoxa bergmanniana (Bergmann's Button) were taken by beating. On April 29th, larvae of Gracillaria tringipennella (the Ribwort Slender) were found feeding on narrow-leaved plantain.

Other Records of Microlepidoptera. Larvae of Pyrausta aurata (the General Purple and Gold) were scarce this year and many were attacked by Ichneumon wasps. Larvae of Elachista cerusella (the Triple-spotted Dwarf) were more than usually plentiful in Scour's Lane, Little John's Lane and Wigmore Lane, feeding in the leaves of Arundo phragmites. The mines of Cosmopteryx eximia (the Nonpareil Cosmet) in hop leaves were scarce and Mr. Dolton found no pupae in dozens of stems that he cut open during the winter. He was also unsuccessful in rearing adults from larvae introduced into stems of which the cut ends were subsequently plugged. Several specimens of Ernarmonia pomonella (the Codlin Piercer) emerged from stored apples during the summer. On July 29th, 2 mines of Lithocolletis blancardella (Blancard's Apple-leaf Midget) were taken from an apple tree in Prospect Park. L. viminiella (the Obscure-wedged Midget) and L. viminetorum (the Osier Midget) were both unusually scarce in the autumn in the locality where they usually abound.

Macrolepidoptera. Mr. Dolton records Eupithecia venosata (Netted Pug) in capsules of Silene inflata from his garden. Eggs of Euchloe cardamines (Orange-tip Butterfly) were plentiful in Little John's Lane, Wigmore and Scour's Lane, and for the first time in 20 years, Mr. Dolton found two eggs on the same plant.

Moths recorded by Air-Marshal Sir Robert Saundby at a mercury-vapour lamp in his garden at Burghclere include Odontosia carmelita (Scarce Prominent), 2 each on April 23rd, 24th and 25th; Polia tinctoria (the Silvery Arches), for the first time at Burghclere, 2 on June 28th and 3 on the following night;

Mythimna turca (Double-line Wainscot), 1 on July 18th; Epirrhoe rivata (Wood Carpet), for the second time at Burghclere on July 13th; and Lithomia solidaginis (Golden-rod Brindle), 1 on August 28th. Several specimens of the last moth, undoubted migrants from the continent, were taken in south England in August and September, and its first recorded migrations to this country thus occurred in a year that was in general unfavourable for migrant Lepidoptera. During April and May, Mr. Parfitt noticed an unusual abundance of Lycia hirtaria (Brindle Beauty Moth) at Sandhurst, where he took Selenia lunaria (Lunar Thorn) for the first time on June 5th. From the Chiltern beechwoods, Mr. Harman reports Ptilophora plumigera (Plumed Prominent), a late species, appearing on foggy November nights. A record of some note is that of the capture of a male Apatura iris (Purple Emperor) near Cold Ash by Alan Walker on July 27th. At Tilehurst, the light trap has increased the garden list of Lepidoptera to 246. Notable arrivals this year were Eulia formosana (Beautiful Twist), 1 on August 1st; Tethea duplaris (Lesser Satin), 1 on August 3rd; and Plusia chryson (Scarce Burnished Brass), 1 on August 5th. As previously mentioned, 1954 was a bad year for migrant Lepidoptera, and during a week in Dorset in late September, I saw but one Colias croceus (Clouded Yellow) and one Macroglossa stellatarum (Humming-bird Hawk-moth). I believe a few C. croceus were seen around Reading, and certainly Vanessa atalanta (Red Admiral) was present on Buddleia and Michaelmas Daisies in late August and September.

Order Coleoptera (Beetles).

Miss Nelmes records Chilocorus renipustulatus on the towing path near Burghfield Bridge on August 1st and Strangalia maculata on the towing path south of the Kennet beyond Aldermaston on August 2nd.

Order Hymenoptera (Bees, Ants and Wasps).

Vespula vulgaris (the Common Wasp) was abundant and the trap at Tilehurst on many occasions contained over a score, showing that this wasp flies actively at night.

Order Diptera (True Flies).

Two tiny flies, Scatopse picea and S. flavicollis were so abundant on ivy leaves at Nuney Green after dark on October 16th that they gave a variegated appearance to the entire foliage. Mr. P. Freeman of the British Museum tells me that the larvae feed in decaying organic matter and the adults are commonly found swarming on leaves in woods in autumn, but the reason for this habit is unknown.

Extracts from the Recorder's Report for Ornithology for 1953-54.

By E.V. Watson, B.Sc., Ph.D.,

(Period covered: October 31st 1953 - October 31st 1954)

1. Winter Gulls. There was a single record of Greater Black-backed Gull at Sonning Eye on 8th November 1953. The Editors of the Reading Ornithological Club's Report for 1953 state that Black-headed Gulls feeding in the Kennet Valley return to roost at Staines each evening. A single Little Gull at Staines Reservoirs in September 1954 is of some local interest.

2. Winter Duck. Although winter was slow to set in in 1953, many interesting duck, and large numbers of some of the common species were seen before the year's end. Thus, Gadwall, Scaup, Smew and Goldeneye were all recorded in mid or late December, whilst one Shelduck at Sonning and three at Englefield were seen in November. After the turn of the year, Smew continued to be recorded from Theale, Burghfield and Aldermaston, and one was seen at Aldermaston as late as March 21st. Among the common species, there were 90 Wigeon at Bulmershe on December 13th, 25 Shoveler at Aldermaston on December 12th and Pochard reached figures of 75 at Aldermaston and 114 at Burghfield gravel pit during December. The numbers of Teal and Mallard were even higher on some waters.

3. Winter Finches and other Winter Records. There were Redpolls at Aldermaston in January and these were seen again at intervals until April. Bramblins appear to have been scarce. A small flock of Tree Sparrows at Burghfield on January 2nd is of some interest. Records of Golden Plover often accompany cold snaps, but a few birds were in the district in the mild December of 1953, associating with Lapwings in the fields. Small flocks were seen at Englefield on January 9th and 17th. Some observers noted Fieldfares in gardens in the cold spell of February 1954. According to the R.O.C. Report for 1953, both Fieldfare and Redwing arrived in the district in October of that year. At the time of giving his report (November 11th 1954), the Recorder had already seen Redwings of the current winter, but not Fieldfares.

4. Spring Arrival of Migrants. On March 21st, an early Swallow appeared at Aldermaston. On March 25th, Chiffchaff arrived at Burghfield and Redshank was also recorded. On March 27th, the Recorder noted his first Chiffchaff at Caversham. April 4th and April 10th were first dates for House Martin and Blackcap respectively, at Aldermaston. Few later first arrival dates were available, but the Recorder noted his first Cuckoo and Wryneck on April 23rd, and Lesser Whitethroat on April 30th. Miss Nelmes's record of a Turtle Dove at Padworth on April 11th represented a remarkably early date. Garden Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Nightingale, Yellow Wagtail and Swift were all observed by the Recorder on May 1st, but it seems probable that some members of the Society will have made earlier observations of some of these species. The fine but cold April was not on the whole conducive to early dates.

5. Spring Passage of Waders and Terns. The Recorder had no records of his own under this head. Wader records received through the kindness of Mr. C.E. Douglas were: Common Sandpiper and Green Sandpiper in late April; 1 Dunlin and 1 Sanderling on May 21st at Aldermaston. The local gravel pits are changing in character, Burghfield having declined in interest, whereas Aldermaston is now good. The new pit at Theale should be watched. The migration of the Black Tern was spread over a longer period than usual in the spring of 1954, from April 26th until the third week of May.

6. Breeding Records. There was little to report under this head, except that the usual celebrities of our area (Little Ringed Plover and Wryneck) bred successfully in 1954, but not without vicissitudes. Male Red-backed Shrikes were seen on waste ground, Kidmore Road, Caversham, on May 26th and May 27th, but it is not known whether they remained to find mates and nest in this promising site. The Stone Curlew nested, as usual, on the Berkshire Downs above Streatley.

7. Departure of Summer Visitors. These are always apt to elude the observer and few records were to hand. Mr. Bowden noted that Swifts were still about on August 14th, the Recorder heard a Chiffchaff in song on St. Peter's Hill, Caversham, on September 27th, and Mr. Douglas observed 2 late Swallows at Tilehurst on October 23rd.

8. Autumn Passage of Waders and Terns. So far as records indicated, the season was a quiet one. One Dunlin was at Burghfield on August 7th. The outstanding record received was of 70 Black Terns seen at Burghfield by Mr. J.E.G. Sutton on August 5th.

9. Various Passage Movements, Rare Visitors, etc. A Buzzard was seen several times during the summer over the Moulsoford Downs. There were records (made by Mr. H. Randolph) of the unobtrusive Water Rail from Aldermaston and Englefield during December 1953. One white-fronted Goose was seen by Mr. J.E.G. Sutton at Aldermaston on January 6th. Mr. W.A. Smallcombe reported a Bittern within two or three miles of Reading from 17th February - 3rd March. A Red-throated Diver was discovered by Mr. C.E. Bignal at Sonning Eye in late February but unfortunately it was eventually found dead (on February 28th); the bird was seriously oiled. In a letter to the Recorder, Mr. A.P. Balfour reported a pair of Golden Orioles which had been seen by Admiral Polard at Peppard during June and a Hoopoe seen by Dr. Somerville Hastings this summer. These were two records of great interest. Finally, on September 26th, an immature Puffin was picked up alive and apparently without injury by A.C. Hutchings at Woodley. Mr. Smallcombe, Mr. Douglas and the Recorder examined the bird the following day. It was then released at Sonning Eye gravel pit; a most remarkable record.

The Recorder wishes to thank Mr. Douglas for much help given him in the preparation of this Report, both by furnishing many of its records and by permitting him to draw freely on the material in the R.O.C. Report for 1953.